

# Massive Input Through *Eiga Shosetsu*: A Pilot Study with Japanese Learners

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This paper introduces a new yet natural way of providing massive amounts of comprehensible input to learners of English as a Foreign Language (EFL). Learners watch popular contemporary movies in order to internalize the meanings presented in sounds and images. Then they read the accompanying *eiga shosetsu* (movie tie-in novels) in order to convert meaning into the target language. In the pilot program using *eiga shosetsu* described here, college learners made significant gains in listening, reading and vocabulary measures through reading the novels and seeing the movies.

本論では、英語学習者に多量の「理解可能な入力情報 (comprehensible input)」を与えることができる、全く新しくかつ自然な外国語学習・教授法を紹介する。この学習・教授法は、まず学習者が興味を持てる映画を鑑賞して音声情報と映像情報に支えられた英語の意味を学習し、その後、その映画小説を読むことで、すでに学習した英語を確かな知識として定着させる試みである。本論で紹介するパイロット研究では、リスニング、読解、語彙のそれぞれの学習において、この学習・教授法の教育的・統計的効果が確認された。

It has been suggested that a major reason for the relative failure of the English educational system in Japan to produce more communicatively competent learners is lack of exposure to significant amounts of meaningful input in the target language (see Koike, 1991, for a discussion of the problems facing English education). My own research has shown that typical Japanese college EFL students usually cannot read English with proficiency (Redfield, 1992b, 1994a; 1994b; 1995), often do not have grammatical accuracy (Redfield, 1990, 1991a, 1991c, 1992a) or good listening skills (Redfield, 1991b), although they can learn to listen (Redfield & Campbell, 1996), and often do not improve significantly from one year to the next (Redfield, 1994c), even after spending up to 800 classroom hours studying EFL (Redfield, 1992b).

Other researchers have suggested that EFL writing instruction may not necessarily improve learners' writing skills (Robb, Ross & Shortreed, 1986). As one way of addressing this problem, the following report introduces methodology for delivering massive amounts of authentic, thematically interesting, comprehensible input into the Japanese college curriculum in order to provide students with more exposure to meaning-focused use of English.

### The Role of Comprehensible Input in Promoting Language Acquisition

A number of language acquisition specialists have advocated the use of what has come to be known as the Comprehension Approach (Nord, 1974, 1975, 1980, 1981; Redfield, 1991b). At the base of the approach lies the idea that comprehension is a requisite for learning. Simply phrased, if learners do not in some way or another understand the meaning of what they encounter in their learning environment, be it in written or oral form, then the learners do not learn. Regardless of whether one is inclined to support the strong version of the Interaction Hypothesis (Ellis, 1991; Long, 1981, 1983, 1985), asserting that comprehensible input leads directly to language acquisition (Krashen, 1981, 1982, 1985; Pienemann, 1984, 1989), or the weaker version of the hypothesis, that comprehensible input under certain restraints can, but does not necessarily, lead to acquisition (Ellis, 1986, 1988, 1990; Fotos, 1993; Fotos & Ellis, 1991; Schmidt, 1990, 1992; Sharwood Smith, 1981; White, 1987), both researchers and classroom practitioners would agree that without comprehensible input no meaningful language acquisition is likely to take place. A corollary is that more input is probably better for learning than less input. The amount of comprehensible input matters. Once these fundamental ideas behind foreign language acquisition are understood and accepted, it then becomes a matter of applying this knowledge to classroom practice.

If what the leading researchers such as Long, Krashen and Ellis suggest is correct—that learners need massive amounts of comprehensible input in order to acquire foreign languages and since such massive input is not automatically available in the English as a foreign language environment—then we as classroom instructors should attempt to provide such input. The study described below presents one such effort.

#### *Extensive Reading to Provide Meaningful Input*

Krashen claims that one of the most effective ways to provide input is through reading (1982, 1985, 1989). Mason and Krashen (1997) present evidence from Japan suggesting that the use of graded readers in an

extensive reading program can improve reading scores. Today most scholars recommend using authentic reading materials, and I have a related suggestion. Students should read what is known in Japan as “*eiga shosetsu*,” the script-based English-language novel about an English-language movie that is published at the same time as the movie so that viewers can preview the movie or read about the theme in more detail after viewing it. Unlike novels upon which movies are based, where the two different versions, print and celluloid, clash more often than not, *eiga shosetsu* have the advantage of following the plot accurately right down to the dialogue. Unlike screenplays or tape scripts, *eiga shosetsu* have narrative and descriptions as well as dialogue. Making no pretensions towards literature, they are eminently easy to read. A particularly significant point is that if the EFL learner sees the film first, she/he already has absorbed the meaning of the story. As a pre-viewing activity *eiga shosetsu* are equally as good. Here, the learner reads the book first, which facilitates processing the meaning of what is heard during the movie. *Eiga shosetsu* are popular with college-aged learners since they represent authentic use of the target language and are relatively easy to read. When read rapidly for enjoyment, they potentially provide massive meaning-focused comprehensible input. The trick, of course, is to get the learner to read them, and then to provide objective evidence that reading *eiga shosetsu* actually helps learners acquire English. That is what the present study attempts to provide.

#### Research Focus of the *Eiga Shosetsu* Pilot Program

It is suggested that the following positive results will be observed after Japanese college EFL learners are exposed to the massive amounts of meaning focused input involved in watching six English-language movies and reading seven English-language *eiga shosetsu* about movies they have watched.

#### *Research Hypotheses*

1. The learners will receive significantly higher scores on a reading post-test than they did on a reading pre-test.
2. The learners will receive significantly higher scores on a listening post-test than they did on a listening pre-test.
3. The learners will receive significantly higher scores on a vocabulary post-test than they did on a vocabulary pre-test.

## Method

### *Participants*

The 28 participants in this study were drawn from an intact group of 36 students taking an English composition class at a private Japanese university. The majority were English majors retaking the class as a required course after having failed it the previous year. Several English majors were taking the course for a third time. There were also education majors, a group of French majors, and a graduate student in literature taking the course as an elective. All of the students were upperclassmen (or above), meaning that they had had a minimum of eight years of formal English instruction, many a good bit more than the minimum. Their ability levels ranged from false beginner through elementary to intermediate, with two fairly advanced learners also taking part. One of these advanced learners had graduated from an international school in India, and the other had studied two years in San Francisco after graduating from a Japanese junior college. In other words, this was a very mixed group.

### *Procedures*

The twenty-four week Japanese university school year was divided into six four-week sessions. Pre and post -reading, listening and vocabulary tests were administered to all students at the beginning and end of the six-session program. In the initial week of each session, the learners were shown the first part of a contemporary popular film. In the second week, the original film was viewed until its conclusion. In the third week the students were instructed to silently read the *eiga shosetsu* corresponding to that particular film. Students who did not have the correct book with them were allowed to read other material in English, often *eiga shosetsu* that they had not yet finished. The fourth session was devoted to writing a film review on the movie in question. Students were thus asked to read one *eiga shosetsu* per month as homework.

The movies chosen for viewing were *Dead Poets' Society*, *My Girl*, *The War*, *Braveheart*, *The Net*, and *The Assassins*. The students were also required to read a novel of their choice as summer vacation homework (most, but not all, choosing other unrelated *eiga shosetsu*). Weekly homework journals were also kept, assigned by the instructor on themes related to the movies. Except for written comments in the students' journals, there was no overt language instruction in the class.

In order to encourage students to complete the assignments, each student was asked how many pages he had read on the current *eiga*

*shosetsu* each week when the class role was called. In order to demonstrate that the instructor believed that massive comprehensible input is necessary for second language acquisition to take place, during the silent reading sessions the instructor read a novel in Spanish. Although many of the learners probably did not finish all seven novels (the six assigned during the school year, and the seventh read as summer homework), they read at least parts of all of them, as witnessed by the instructor during the silent reading sessions. Even the least diligent members of the class averaged at least fifty pages read per novel, for a minimum total of 350 pages. The most diligent students read all seven novels, for an estimated total of over 2,000 pages. And all learners saw the six films for an additional 10-12 hours of aural input. Furthermore, many of the learners reported viewing the films at home a second time for more listening practice.

In summary, the *Eiga Shosetsu* Pilot Program required the students to watch six contemporary films, read seven movie tie-in novels, and write seven formal film/book reviews. The reading and viewing activities were designed to furnish massive comprehensible input.

#### *Pre and Post-Testing*

Three tests, a reading test, a listening test, and a vocabulary test, were administered on the first day of class in April, 1996 and again on the last day of the academic year in January, 1997. The results were scored, tabulated, and statistically analyzed using the *StatView* (1988), *JMP* (1994), *DataDesk* (1995), and *Statistica* (1994) statistical packages for the Macintosh computer. Out of an original class of 36, 28 learners took both the pre- and post- tests in two areas, and 26 took both tests in the third area. Students who only took the tests during a single administration were eliminated from the study. The tests are described in detail below.

#### *Reading Test*

The Scholastic Research Associates Reading Laboratory (SRA) is a well-known reading program used in the US to improve learners' reading abilities. The accompanying SRA Placement Test measures American grade school children's reading skills. It consists of two reading passages followed by five and nine (for a total of 14) reading comprehension items respectively. Each passage is timed, with students having exactly three minutes to complete reading the passage and to answer the multiple choice questions accompanying each reading. The same version of the SRA Placement Test was administered as both the pre-

test and the post-test. The test is easy to administer, score, and interpret. It also has proven reliability with American learners.

#### *Listening Test*

The Campbell Listening Test (CLT) was developed by Professor Peter D. Campbell (Campbell & Redfield, 1996) to measure Japanese students' listening abilities in English. The test consists of 30 multiple choice items, based on grammar and vocabulary found in the Mombusho's school curriculum. The test is administered by playing an audio cassette containing instructions in both English and Japanese and the 30-item sentences, read by a female native speaker of "mid-Pacific" English. Students have an answer sheet only. Administration of the test takes approximately 25 minutes. The test was normed with Japanese college students drawn from the same population as those involved in the present study, and has a reported reliability of .8429 (Campbell & Redfield, 1996).

#### *Vocabulary Test*

The vocabulary level test was a modified version of Nation's Academic Vocabulary Test (AVT) (Nation, 1990). It consists of 18 items from each of five levels of a word count list, for a total of 90 items. The items were randomly selected from the 2,000, 3,000, 5,000, 10,000 and university word level lists. Participants had to match sets of three definitions from a column on the right with six words in the column on the left. There were six sets of three items each for each of the levels, for a total of 90 items. Learners were allowed 30 minutes to complete the vocabulary test. Although not normed with Japanese college learners, the test is purported to be highly reliable.

#### *Statistical Analysis*

For each test, the pre and post-test scores were combined to check the distribution, with a Shapiro-Wilk W test (Hatch & Lazaraton, 1991) performed to determine if the distribution was normal. Descriptive statistics were then calculated and differences between the pre and post-test scores were analyzed to determine whether they were significant using a paired one-tailed t-test. However, because there were only 26 participants (t-tests should be used when there are 30 or more participants), the non-parametric Wilcoxon Matched Pairs procedure (Hatch & Lazaraton, 1991) was also performed. The alpha level for statistical significance was set at the .05 level, usual for studies in the field.

## Results

### *Reading*

As described above, the pre and post-test SRA scores were combined to check the distribution. A Shapiro-Wilk  $W$  test was performed to determine if the distribution was normal. It was, barely ( $W = 0.9512$ ,  $p < 0.0584$ ). Descriptive statistics were then calculated and differences between the pre and post-test performances were observed (Table 1). A paired t-test was performed to determine the significance of the difference between the pre and post-test scores ( $t = 7.759$ ,  $p < .0001$ ). The post-test scores were significantly higher than the pre-test scores. Thus the learners improved significantly over the course of the year.

Table 1: Reading Test Descriptive Statistics

	Number	Mean	Std. Dev.	Std. Err.
Pre-test	26	6.577	1.579	.31
Post-test	26	9.769	1.966	.386

As mentioned, since there were only twenty-six subjects taking this test, the non-parametric Wilcoxon Matched Pairs procedure was also performed ( $z = -4.197$ ,  $p = .0001$ ). This test also indicated that the students scored significantly higher on the post-test than on the pre-test. The first hypothesis regarding significant reading gains was therefore confirmed.

### *Listening*

Again, the pre and post-test CLT scores were initially combined to check the distribution. A Shapiro-Wilk  $W$  test was then performed to determine if the distribution was normal. It was ( $W = 0.9637$ ,  $p < 0.1813$ ). Descriptive statistics were calculated (Table 2) and a paired t-test was performed ( $t = -2.195$ ,  $p < .0184$ ). The post-test scores were again significantly higher than the pre-test scores. It is therefore suggested that the *eiga shosetsu* program led to progress in listening.

Table 2: Listening Test Descriptive Statistics

	Number	Mean	Std. Dev.	Std. Err.
Pre-test	28	16.786	5.1521	.974
Post-test	28	18.464	4.67	.883

Again, because of the limited number of students, the Wilcoxon Matched Pairs procedure was also performed ( $z = 1.991, p < .0465$ ). Here as well significant gains were observed. The second hypothesis was therefore confirmed.

### Vocabulary

Following the same procedures, the pre and post-test vocabulary scores were combined to check the distribution. A Shapiro-Wilk  $W$  test was then performed ( $W = 0.9765, p < 0.5575$ ), indicating that the distribution was normal. Descriptive statistics were calculated (Table 3) and a paired t-test performed ( $t = -2.469, p < .0101$ ). Again, the post-test scores were significantly higher than the pre-test scores, indicating that the learners had improved significantly over the course of the year. Thus, the *eiga shosetsu* program led to significant progress in vocabulary acquisition. However, once again because there were only 28 participants, the non-parametric Wilcoxon Matched Pairs procedure was also performed ( $z = -2.362, p < .0182$ ). Here, as well, the students scored significantly higher on the post-test than on the pre-test, which, it is suggested, can be attributed to the *eiga shosetsu* program. The third hypothesis was therefore confirmed.

Table 3: Vocabulary Test Descriptive Statistics

	Number	Mean	Std. Dev.	Std. Err.
Pre-test	28	53.25	7.881	1.489
Post-test	28	56.003	8.792	1.661

### Discussion

As indicated by the significant gain scores in reading, listening and vocabulary comprehension, the results of the *Eiga Shosetsu* Pilot Program were most satisfactory, especially the reading results. As measured by the SRA Placement Test, the participants improved an average of over 1.5 grades in reading skills over the course of a year, from roughly beginning third grade, second semester, to final fourth grade, second semester. This is impressive because it had taken the learners at least eight years to reach the third grade level in reading, and yet, after a single course, they were now almost at the fifth grade level. Massive pleasure reading of the seven *eiga shosetsu* is suggested to be the reason. To paraphrase Frank Smith, students learn to read by reading (Smith, 1982).

Although no formal student program evaluation was included in the pilot study, informal conversations and written journal entries indicate that the participants felt that it was easier to read at the end of the program than it had been at the beginning. When the students first took the SRA Placement Test, they had a difficult time, even though the class carefully went over a sample test before taking the actual exam. It appeared that these students had little experience of reading for meaning, especially under time constraints. At the end of the program, however, they easily completed the SRA Test.

There were also significant gains in listening ability. After watching six movies, reinforced through the subsequent reading of the movie tie-in book, these learners significantly improved their English listening skills, as measured by the Campbell Listening Test. Although the gains were not as dramatic as those evidenced in reading, these learners still improved over 5.5% over the course of the program. Massive input through twelve hours of movie viewing is suggested to have significantly improved the learners' listening scores since this was the primary listening activity of the course. All of this, it should be emphasized, was a result of massive input through pleasure viewing, and not a result of direct instruction.

The positive listening results reflect those reported in a recent paper by Redfield & Campbell (1996), who found that students taught through the medium of English showed significantly higher listening gains scores as measured by the CLT than did students instructed through the medium of Japanese, even when the major objective of the course was not the improvement of English listening skills.

Vocabulary recognition, which is closely related to reading (Day, Omura & Hiramatsu, 1991; Jenkins, Stein & Wysocki, 1984; Nagy, Anderson, & Herman, 1987; Krashen, 1982, 1989) also showed significant improvement over the course of the program, although to a lesser degree than reading and listening. As measured by Nation's Academic Vocabulary Test, the participants improved about 3% during the year. However, after reading up to seven novels, one might expect more substantial gains. Both the material read and the instrument chosen to measure vocabulary might have acted to limit the gains.

*Eiga shosetsu* are a type of easy reading. Although in no way can this be regarded as an objective measure, it took the researcher an average of less than an hour to finish reading each of the movie tie-in books used in the program. Although the books follow the movies down to the smallest detail (which is what makes them so attractive as teaching materials), they concentrate on simple narrative and dialogue. To this researcher, they fall somewhere between popular fiction and graded

readers. As such, the vocabulary used is quite restricted. For pedagogical purposes, this is a plus, and one of the reasons behind developing the *Eiga shosetsu* Pilot Program in the first place. But reading works of a restricted vocabulary does not promote substantial gains on a vocabulary measure such as the AVT. This test measures words drawn from frequency count lists, and includes words at the 5,000, 10,000 and university vocabulary levels. It is doubtful that much vocabulary from the higher levels appears at all in movie tie-in literature, although this was not ascertained. However, it is suggested that a vocabulary test focusing on words from the 1,000, 2,000 or 3,000-word levels might have indicated larger gains.

A different way of measuring vocabulary knowledge might have resulted in more obvious vocabulary gains as well. Instead of having learners match definitions as a measure of vocabulary depth, one might, for example, follow Meara's suggestion (Meara & Buxton, 1987) and have learners simply indicate whenever they know a certain vocabulary word or not. Professor Campbell is working on just such a vocabulary measure, combining the limited vocabulary of the JACET Vocabulary List with the test procedures developed by Meara (Campbell, in preparation).

It is possible to suggest that the gains reported above resulted primarily from participation in the *Eiga Shosetsu* Pilot Program since all of the participants were upperclassmen who had taken all of their required English language courses. Thus, the composition class featuring the Pilot Program was the only English course the subjects were taking in the university. Certainly individual differences existed among participants and a number of outside factors could not be controlled; for example, several of the participants spent the summer of 1996 abroad and others might have been taking English classes at outside language schools. However, any gains registered by these participants did not arise as a result of work in other English classes because these learners were not enrolled in other English language classes.

Regarding suggestions for future research, the use of a control group consisting of a group of students from the same population studying in the traditional fashion without recourse to massive comprehensible input, would have been ideal. For the present pilot study, use of a control group was not possible. All efforts will be made to include a control group in the follow-up study.

#### *Classroom Implications*

Since the participants made significant gains by viewing, reading, and writing about movies, educators interested in achieving similar results in their own classes and programs should look to the different elements of

the *Eiga Shosetsu* Pilot Program for ideas. Introducing a regular period of free pleasure reading into a typical 90-minute Japanese college class would be one obvious application. Showing contemporary films with required follow-up (such as movie reviews) is another. Initiating a reading homework program is a third, and having learners read a novel of their choice over the summer an obvious fourth. The key is to accept the theory behind the *Eiga Shosetsu* Pilot Program (i.e., that massive comprehensible input is necessary, if not sufficient, for second language acquisition to take place) and then develop appropriate course-specific applications of the theory.

Although the *Eiga Shosetsu* Pilot Program proved to be successful, it will necessarily be in need of constant modification. For example, because of the popularity and local availability of both movies and the corresponding *eiga shosetsu*, different movies will be introduced this year, with only *Dead Poets' Society* being retained from the previous program. Another change will be within the four-week sessions. Instead of playing the movie over the first two sessions, the first 90 minutes of the film will be played in the initial week only. The learners will then be required to rent the video themselves if they want to know the ending. There are two reasons for this change. First, if the learners rent the video in order to see the ending, they might be tempted, and certainly will be encouraged by the instructor, to watch the movie a second and third time, concentrating on listening closely to the English in an effort to improve their listening skills. It is hoped that they will not rely on reading Japanese subtitles.

The second reason has to do with a fundamental change in thinking about the use of class time. Rather than use class time watching the video and reading the book—activities which can be done outside of class—class time in the second administration of the program will be devoted to what can be done best in a social setting—interactive speaking and listening. Except for a brief 10-minute free reading warm-up period (introduced partially to check on the students' progress in reading the *eiga shosetsu* outside of class) at the start of each of the final three classes of the four-week session, class time during the last three weeks will be devoted to group and paired oral English practice. The second movie viewing, the silent reading periods, and the in-class review writing will all be moved outside of class. This, of course, is an experiment. Will the students actually do the work outside of class? The reason that movie viewing, reading and writing were initially structured as in-class activities was the lack of willingness on the part of the students to do homework. However, the thinking behind the change is that students need more than massive comprehensible input to master En-

glish; they also need time to interact with their peers and their instructor using English communicatively. This can best be done in a group setting and makes better use of class time. The question remains whether the learners will do the necessary outside work.

### Conclusion

This paper describes the first administration of an experimental ELT program designed to provide massive comprehensible input to Japanese college students. Under the *Eiga Shosetsu* Pilot Program, twenty-eight university upperclassmen taking English composition class were asked to see six contemporary movies, read seven movie tie-in books, write seven movie/book reviews and keep a weekly journal. The learners took reading, listening, and vocabulary tests before and after finishing the nine-month program. On all three measures, the gains were statistically significant, suggesting that the *Eiga Shosetsu* Pilot Program was successful in raising participants scores on reading, listening, and vocabulary measures.

Future research includes modification of the program and this should also be studied to determine if the modifications were successful. Control groups should be included in further studies, and student evaluations of the program would be desirable. If the modified program also proves successful, it could be expanded to include learners from different faculties and institutions. Qualitative research might also be undertaken in order to see how the program affects individual learners. Student journals, think-aloud protocols, in-depth interviews, and ethnographic observations all come to mind. Finally, if the program consistently results in significant gains in reading, listening and vocabulary comprehension, then, with locally-mandated modifications, the program can be expanded to include learners from other cultures as well. All of these are deserving of further research.

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