Teaching Reading Skills in "Surround Sound"

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Considering that Japanese university reading classes are upwards of 100 minutes, EFL teachers need to be equipped with a variety of "active learning" methods to keep their students engaged and focused on specific reading skills, content comprehension, and vocabulary development. However, some Japanese students might be more familiar with a top-down, passive learning approach. Using the principles of Auster and Wylie's (2006) four dimensions of the teaching process (context setting, class preparation, class delivery, and continuous improvement), surround-sound pedagogy (SSP) was designed by the author to increase student engagement and motivation in university-level EFL reading classes by stimulating active learning. This paper provides specific strategies on how to support student vocabulary and content comprehension/retention, confidence when reading aloud, and accuracy in pronunciation/connected speech.

日本の大学ではリーディングの授業が100分以上に及ぶことから、EFLの教師は、生徒の読む力や理解力、語彙力の向上に向けて、様々な「アクティブラーニング」の手法を身につける必要がある。しかし、日本の学生の中にはトップダウンの受動的な学習方法に慣れている学生も存在する。Auster and Wylie（2006）のティーチングプロセスの4次元の原則（文脈設定、授業準備、授業実施、継続的改善）を用い、著者はサラウンドサウンド教育法（SSP）を考案した。これは能動的学習を促すことで、大学レベルのEFLリーディングの授業における学生の取り組み方とやる気を向上させるものである。本稿では、学生の語彙や内容の理解・保持、音読時の自信、発音・連結音声の正確さをサポートする方法について、具体的な戦略を示している。

Multimodal teaching is a pedagogical method which integrates various modes (e.g., visual, sounds, movement, print-based text, and technology) as a means of stimulating cognitive processing (Guichon, & Cohen, 2016). While there are proven benefits for second language learners, multimodal teaching in reading is not necessarily widespread in English as a foreign language (EFL) instruction (Ajayi, 2012; Choi & Yi, 2016). Possibly the perception remains that literacy is achieved through more traditional methods (e.g., print based), and integrating multimodality in reading instruction has been viewed by teachers as an impractical means to prepare students for standardized tests (Ajayi, 2012; Choi & Yi, 2016; Grapin, 2019). Moreover, some teachers are still uncomfortable integrating technology into their curricula (Yi & Angay-Crowder, 2016). However, with the rapid growth of educational technology platforms (e.g., Quizlet, Kahoot!) and ubiquitous technology in our daily lives, teachers might be more inclined in recent years to use multimodal teaching in EFL reading instruction (Yi et al., 2017).

As children, we all remember our first time going to the movie theater and becoming immersed in a new experience of watching a movie on a large screen while surrounded by sound emitting from large speakers. Motivated by the theater experience, many people have upgraded their living rooms with surround sound systems to create this immersive environment at home. Like movie theaters, many classrooms are also equipped with large screen projectors and sound systems. If teachers use the equipment available, I posit that we can also foster an immersive learner experience for our EFL students, and in doing so, change student perceptions of the classroom.

While many teachers and students might view reading as a quiet, receptive and possibly even a passive learning subject (Masduqi, 2014) there is a considerable amount of evidence that injecting sound in the EFL reading process can improve the learning atmosphere (Auster & Wylie, 2006; Gibson, 2008; K.M. Huang, 2011; L. Huang, 2010). When teaching EFL reading classes, there are a variety of activities that utilize sound to stimulate engagement and support reading development. These activities include, but are not limited to: (a) listening to a professional recording of the text, (b) shadowing a recording, and (c) reading aloud.

Inspired by the immersive nature of surround sound entertainment, this paper describes surround sound pedagogy (SSP) as a method that can be utilized in EFL reading instruction. Incorporating Auster and Wylie's (2006) four dimensions of the teaching

process (context setting, class preparation, class delivery, and continuous improvement), SSP was designed to stimulate active learning, learner autonomy, and the virtuous cycles of engagement, motivation, pleasure, and improvement. Moreover, SSP can be used to bridge a gap that might exist between passive learner experience and active teaching goals. Though this paper outlines a teaching design to help motivate university students in compulsory EFL reading classes, SSP can be applied to other contexts.

Gap Between Passive Learner-Experience and Active Teaching Goals

Although widely considered a receptive skill set (e.g., Hirai, 2002), second language acquisition researchers have categorized reading as both an "active" and "interactive" process (Alyousef, 2006; Carrell et al., 1988; Masduqi, 2014). Additionally, studies have shown that increased interaction in the classroom can improve motivation in L2 university learners (Al-Hoorie & MacIntyre, 2019; Braver, 2014; Dörnyei, 1994; K.M. Huang, 2011; Jones & Palmer, 2017). Many university EFL instructors employ active and interactive communicative language teaching (CLT) techniques throughout their lessons, such as encouraging active participation, acting as facilitators rather than lecturers, and placing students in a variety of interactive groupings (Ju, 2013). However, Japanese students may be accustomed to a more "passive" top-down approach, where vast amounts of knowledge are transmitted from teacher to student (Mulvey, 1999; Ono, 2007; Saito, 2006). While most university EFL teachers are trained to use CLT methods, a large majority of Japanese EFL students are unfamiliar with CLT pedagogy (Glasgow, 2014; Humphries & Burns, 2015; Thompson & Yanagita, 2017). In addition to the passive-teaching students receive at " regular" schools; this style of teaching is also common in after-hour private " cram" schools.

Cram schools have a reputation for top-down, passive teaching methods, yet many Japanese students and parents view cram schools as an effective method because students have more time to memorize the vast amount of information required to pass examinations (Ono, 2007; Saito, 2006). To further compound the issue of passive learning, many university entrance examinations have placed a priority on knowledge retention; and when discussing English testing specifically, only the receptive skills of reading and listening are usually tested. In secondary school, Japanese learners are also required to memorize a large amount of vocabulary items for formal assessments. While there are examples of regular schools and cram schools incorporating interactive teaching methods (Ozaki, 2016), many lecture and cram school-style classes go against the principles of CLT pedagogy. This is because they foster a passive learning environment with little or no interactive opportunities between the teacher-student,

student-teacher, student-student, and possibly even student-content. When considering that Japanese students may consider pre-university learning environments as passive and reading to be a receptive skill (Hirai, 2002), a gap can exist between passive EFL reading learners and trained CLT instructors.

The Emergence of Digital Extensive Reading

Most EFL reading classes use textbooks as a means to teach intensive reading. Intensive reading samples are usually short (1-2) pages and students are supported through a variety of reading skill activities (Bamford & Day, 1997). Standard university-level EFL reading texts include activities meant to improve reading skills such as vocabulary development, understanding main ideas, understanding details, making inferences, and identifying examples (e.g., Blass & Vargo, 2018).

Contrastively, extensive reading (ER) uses longer material and generally aims at reading for pleasure, increasing motivation to read, and understanding of overall meaning (Harrold, 2013; Nyamsuren & Shurentsetseg, 2020; Ro, 2013). In recent years, Mason and Krashen (2017) found that students could improve mean gain scores on the Test of English for International Communication (TOEIC) by +.6 per hour of ER. In Japan, this finding is significant because employers consider TOEIC as a determiner of English ability –– candidates will usually include this score on resumes and job applications. Meant to be an enjoyable, long-term, high-input practice, some university teachers incorporate ER in curricula by allocating class time and building activities to support ER content (e.g., Harrold, 2013). Other teachers assign ER as homework. With the increasing popularity of digital ER platforms, it is reasonable to assume that more university teachers will use ER as a core or auxiliary component to existing reading courses. Even with breaks and alternating assignments (e.g., allocating class time for ER), how can teachers stimulate active learning?

Active Learning

Active learning (AL) encourages students to actively participate in class and take responsibility for their own learning. Studies have shown that students retain knowledge at a higher percentage when engaging in AL (e.g., Freeman et al., 2014; Haak et al., 2011). Moreover, Figure 1 shows that Bloom's taxonomy has an inverse relationship with the learning pyramid (University of Toronto, 2021). As students increase engagement in AL, average knowledge retention rates increase.

Figure 1
Bloom's Taxonomy and the Learning Pyramid

(Adapted from National Training Laboratories Institute, Bethel, Maine.)
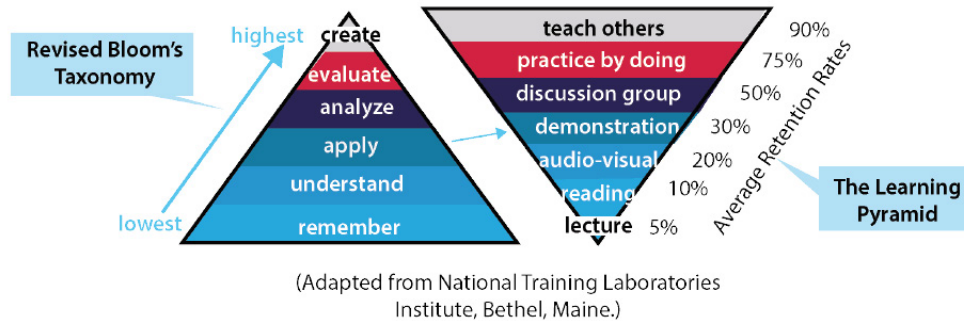
Note. Image retrieved from: https://tatp.utoronto.ca/teaching-toolkit/ci-resources/cdg/lesson-design/active-learning/

In CLT methodology, teachers choose activities that promote AL, however, one differentiating element of AL pedagogy is that students may gradually take responsibility for decisions made in the classroom (Herder, 2016). Although some researchers have expressed concerns about AL (e.g., Jones & Palmer, 2017), from my experience, employing an AL approach has tangible benefits. By sharing classroom responsibilities with students, teachers can facilitate a collaborative learning environment, such as student leaders helping guide classroom decisions, and stronger students mentoring weaker students. But many first-year university students in Japan might be expecting a passive learning environment - especially in an EFL reading class. Surround sound pedagogy (SSP) was designed to stimulate active learning (e.g., audio-visual stimuli, discussion, practice by doing, and so on) within a familiar weekly lesson framework.

The Foundation of Surround Sound Pedagogy

According to Auster and Wylie (2006), the four dimensions of the teaching process are context setting, class preparation, class delivery, and continuous improvement. Using Auster and Wylie's (2006) construct as a foundation, I created surround sound pedagogy (SSP) as a style of teaching designed to immerse students in as many mediums as possible in order to stimulate active learning. With SSP, dimension 1, context setting,

should be incorporated with audio or visual stimuli (e.g., music playing as students enter the classroom). In dimension 2, class preparation, teachers need to review reading assignments carefully and look for ways to draw out content three-dimensionally using audio or visual stimuli and include them as part of explicit instruction, implicit instruction, or within comprehension checks. Regarding dimension 3, class delivery, teachers should make sure to test all technical equipment and have all their materials *at the ready*. To ensure continuous improvement (dimension 4), I suggest using the same lesson structure throughout a term because it may help students who struggle with the challenges of adjusting to CLT (e.g., routine inconsistency and changing interactional domains). By establishing an AL environment, students will become more engaged in the reading content, begin to view their reading assignments as enjoyable, and consequently commit more energy and effort into their own improvement. Our goal as teachers is to create this virtuous cycle. By fostering autonomous and motivated learners, we can also support dimension 4, continuous improvement of Auster and Wylie's (2006) model.

Reading in Surround Sound

Setting Expectations

When students arrive for the first reading lesson of term they might expect the teacher to say something like, *Okay everyone, please open your books to page 1*. From there, they may anticipate that the teacher will lecture to them, read from the book and write information on the board. While the EFL teacher and classroom environment on first glance may appear to be different, incoming university students may be envisioning a passive learning environment. So what happens if the teacher diverges from presumed behavior? What will be the response?

Imagine this instead. As students walk into the classroom for their first lesson, music is playing (layer 3 of the learning pyramid). It is probably music they have not heard before. For example, if your students are reading about a musician or band, have that music playing (e.g., Spotify, YouTube) as they enter the room. The music or related video continues to play as students settle into their seats. The bell rings and the teacher asks a few questions as the music continues on the classroom speakers.

1. *Has anyone heard this music before?*
2. *What instruments do you hear?*
3. *Who is the artist?*

4. *Where do you think this was recorded?*

5. *When was this recorded?*

Try to give students time to listen and think. If the reading passage for that day's lesson details how elephants can paint, for example, the teacher could show a YouTube video that demonstrates this and alter the above questions accordingly. Perhaps the teacher could write the questions on the board. Then form speaking pairs and direct the class to discuss the questions with a partner (layer 5 of the learning pyramid). Teachers could instruct each pair to think of questions (third layer of Bloom's taxonomy), then elicit questions and answers from the class and write these contributions on the board. In this manner, teachers deliberately engage in "context setting", which according to Auster and Wylie (2006) is "an essential first step in creating an active learning classroom" (p. 338). Students may be wondering: *Isn't this a reading class?* That is what we want –– before reading one word on the page, our students are beginning to imagine a world outside of the textbook and curriculum.

In the following section, I will describe my lesson design used in university-level 1st and 2nd year compulsory reading classes. The elements of SSP are pre-reading activity (e.g., listening to music, having a discussion as described above), vocabulary, reading pairs, listening, reading aloud, comprehension checks, and accommodating levels. Next is a recommended order of activities to be used in a university EFL class, with a description of each.

Vocabulary Journal

Vocabulary development is recognized as an essential component of reading comprehension (e.g., McLean et al., 2020; Pellicer-Sánchez, 2015). Without vocabulary knowledge, reading can become a slow, arduous task mainly because some learners become frustrated if they do not understand a word and become focused on word meanings rather than the overall meaning of the sentence or passage (Shehu, 2015). To support student vocabulary development without spending too much class time on explicit vocabulary instructions, I have students keep a vocabulary journal for homework. In the journal, students will study and write key terms that appear in the *following* week's lesson. Key vocabulary items in EFL readers are usually highlighted in bold colors of black, red or blue. Each unit has around 10 words. I instruct students to write the word, definition, part of speech, Japanese translation, and an example sentence. I encourage students to use multiple online sources (e.g., Jisho.org and Deepl) as a way to cross-

reference meanings. I expect students to have a firm grasp of vocabulary before the next week's lesson so when they are reading aloud in class, vocabulary issues do not impede fluency. The aim of the journal is for students to independently understand vocabulary that they will be reading aloud in the upcoming lesson. Figure 2 is an example of a student's vocabulary journal.

Figure 2
Vocabulary Journal
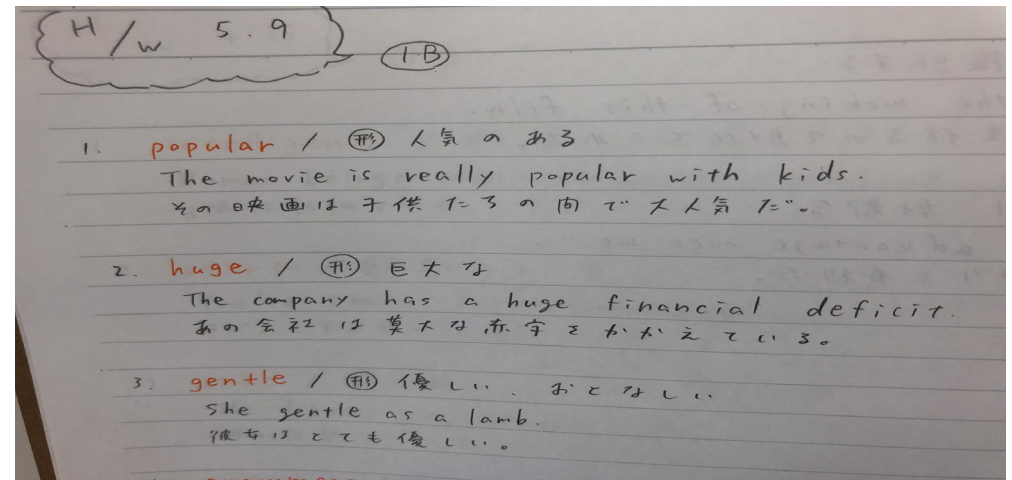
Note. Permission was received to use this photo.

Reading Pairs

After the pre-reading activity and checking that students have completed their vocabulary journal assignment for the week, I split the class into reading pairs. It is better to vary the pairs each week so students are not always with the same partner. There are a variety of methods teachers can use to assign pairs (e.g., numbers, birthdays, height, hometown, and so on). From the beginning of each class, students will become accustomed to standing up, moving desks, and interacting with a new classmate. This movement encourages an active learning environment and is also a component of multimodal teaching.

Listening, Shadowing, Reading Aloud

Most university-level intensive reading textbooks come with audio tracks, so while sitting in pairs (or the occasional group of three), have the class listen to that day's reading task while reading along silently. Each week, students will be exposed to clear examples of pronunciation, intonation, and connected speech. In regard to extensive reading, students should also be reminded that most online ER platforms (e.g., XReading) come with accompanying audio tracks. From my own experience, teachers and students tend not to incorporate recorded audio examples when practicing reading. After listening, students could also practice shadowing the text. Through shadowing practice, students gradually become more aware of phonetic patterns, which can lead to improvements in listening comprehension (Hamada, 2016).

After students listen to a model reading of the text, in pairs and alternating paragraphs, I have students read-aloud (without the audio playing). Reading aloud provides multiple benefits for students because it forces them to practice connected speech, develop reading fluency and helps to pronounce new words (Gibson, 2008). When students "practice by doing" their knowledge retention rate is approximately 75%, which is the second-highest layer on Bloom's learning pyramid in Figure 1. The main benefit of reading aloud for teachers is the opportunity for error detection. Teachers can listen for accurate pronunciation, connected speech, and intonation. Because upward intonation at the end of a word may indicate uncertainty, teachers should listen for this. As students are reading aloud, teachers can quietly walk around the room and monitor for accuracy. As the term progresses, students will become comfortable with this casual style of monitoring and supportive correction since nobody wants to be corrected in front of the whole class.

Some students experience language-learning anxiety (LLA) and will be averse to reading aloud (Gibson, 2008). However, many Japanese students have indicated that they prefer working in pairs rather than individually (Shachter 2018; Woodrow, 2006). This pair work might mitigate some level of anxiety. Furthermore, Shachter (2018) found that LLA reduces over the course of term without direct intervention. By establishing a consistent routine throughout the term, students with LLA can build more confidence in reading aloud. In addition, other students are reading aloud at the same time, so the classroom should be filled with sound and the class's attention is not focused on one individual.

1st Content Comprehension Check: Kahoot!™

For my first content comprehension check (e.g., vocabulary comprehension, main idea, details), I use the learning application Kahoot!™, which has been found to improve student motivation and engagement (Licorish et al., 2018). After students finish the week's reading task, in pairs they register for the Kahoot! quiz using one student's smartphone. After registering, the smartphone is linked to the online quiz and will serve as a tool to answer the quiz questions (i.e., students press A, B, C, D on the smartphone screen). Since both students share the phone, during each question, they have opportunities to discuss what they think is the best answer. To increase the amount of time given to students to negotiate meaning, teachers can adjust the time settings for individual questions. A graphic that shows the percentage of correct answers is displayed to the class after each question. If there is a higher percentage of incorrect answers after a specific question, I recommend pausing the game and offering explicit instruction to clarify the question and confirm that students understand content meaning (less than 2 minutes). This is one of the only points in the lesson when I will offer explicit instruction because I already have the students' attention and they are already engaged in the activity. For example, if there is a question in the Kahoot! quiz which references a specific sentence in the text, I may put the text on the screen, read it, diagnose where students need support, and then provide clarity as to why the majority of the class chose the wrong answer. This usually can be done very quickly and the students might verbalize their "aha" moment.

Also, I recommend embedding implicit instructions, which can come in the form of relatively simple and easy "True or False" questions with an accompanying image or video. For example, if the topic of the text is "land diving", teachers can embed a YouTube video example of land diving into the question. This video plays for about one minute (the time they have to answer the question). The purpose of this question is not to test, but rather to implicitly teach or reinforce content comprehension. For example, the question could be "What is land diving"? One answer is a detailed explanation of what the students are watching in the video while another question could include an error that is not in the video. With longer, detailed questions like this, students have more opportunities to practice reading and teachers have more opportunities to confirm comprehension in a low-stress fun environment.

2nd Content Comprehension Check: Accommodating Levels

For the second content comprehension check (e.g., the purpose of the reading, critical thinking, application), still in pairs, I direct students to complete tasks from their

textbooks (usually 1-2 pages). To ensure that there is still an element of active learning, I encourage students to take their time and if they disagree on an answer to discuss the question with their partner to negotiate meaning. I also encourage students to actively engage with me at any point (e.g., questions arise, interested in my opinion). When I join a pair, I can enter the discussion as more of a guide toward learning rather than a provider of knowledge. There is empirical evidence that students are less anxious around teachers who serve the role as a facilitator rather than a lecturer (Gkonou et al., 2018). Tasks in the textbook confirm students understand meaning and prompt students to apply their knowledge through critical thinking and discussion.

When the pair work is finished, one student comes to the front of the room to take a picture of the answer key and then returns to their partner so they can check the answers together with a red pen. In this manner, teachers can accommodate the students' levels because students are allowed to progress at their own pace. During this time, teachers can help struggling pairs or support students who need individual attention. It is important to have assignments ready for faster pairs. My reading classes have a 60,000-word ER requirement for the term, so some students may decide to continue their ER reading or begin working on the next unit's vocabulary journal. If there is adequate time remaining in the lesson, I encourage students to reflect on what they have learned in that lesson. Reflection can take the form of a discussion, or alternatively, teachers can assign students to make a short entry in a weekly reflective journal. Students will end the second comprehension check at various times, and as the term progresses, students will become accustomed to starting the following week's vocabulary journal or engage in ER tasks until the end of class. Allowing time for homework promotes active learning because students autonomously move toward their own learning goals. Moreover, students become aware that their homework is connected to short-term (the next class's vocabulary) and long-term goals (e.g., improvement on TOEIC scores).

Summary of Surround Sound Pedagogy

By implementing SSP in reading classes, teachers will be able to move away from lecture-style passive learning techniques by: (a) incorporating audio-visuals, (b) encouraging students to discuss content, (c) encouraging students to create questions, and (d) practice by doing. Play music or show videos at the very beginning of class (as students enter the room). Use these stimuli as a launching point (pre-reading task) to generate discussion and elicit knowledge of the topic. This discussion in turn may help to activate vocabulary knowledge previously reviewed in their assigned vocabulary journal homework. Have students listen to the text so they can hear clear examples

of connected speech, pronunciation, and intonation. Place students in pairs or small groups to facilitate a low stress environment where students can practice reading aloud and negotiate meanings. When providing pronunciation feedback or corrections, try to maintain this low-stress supportive environment. In your comprehension checks use stimulating learning applications, such as Kahoot!. Allow time for students to complete textbook assignments at their own pace and encourage mini discussions between other students and the teacher. Give students time to reflect on what they have learned and allow them the freedom to engage in their short-term (vocabulary journal) and long-term (extensive reading) homework. In summary, *reading in surround sound* is a very simple concept that encourages teachers to be creative when incorporating audio and visuals in lesson delivery. With planning, multimodal lessons can help students engage in reading tasks and in turn become more motivated EFL learners.

Conclusion

When giving presentations on reading pedagogy I often ask teachers if they prefer teaching reading or speaking, and inevitably, most teachers answer speaking. As to why, the common reason given is they feel that speaking classes are more interactive. With advances in technology, I strongly feel that any teacher can make reading lessons more interactive. Using the fundamental principles of Auster and Wylie's (2006) four dimensions of the teaching process (context setting, class preparation, class delivery, and continuous improvement), surround-sound pedagogy (SSP) was designed to increase student engagement and motivation in university-level EFL reading classes by stimulating active learning. While SSP does take a degree of creativity and preparation, I posit that this method can have a positive impact on any classroom environment. Using SSP, students can envision a world outside their textbooks and engage more in the content. With engagement comes motivation - a virtuous cycle.

Bio Data

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