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ABSTRACT

A study investigated the effect of explicit training and practice in learning strategies on errors in a second language listening cloze test. Subjects were 150 Japanese university students enrolled in four classes of first- or second-year English as a Second Language. Two additional classes served as control group. The treatment group received nine weeks of explicit instruction in the strategies of predicting, listening for key words, and self-monitoring, and had varying amounts of practice in them and were never penalized for wrong guesses. A cloze pretest and posttest were administered to experimental and control groups. In the posttest, treatment groups were told to use prediction and monitoring techniques. Results support the use of learning strategies training for improving listening comprehension. Contains 23 references. (MSE)

The Effect of Strategies Training on Student Errors on a Listening Cloze

Linda J. VISWAT, Susan A. JACKSON

INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this investigation was to study the effect of explicit training in and practice with learning strategies on errors in a listening cloze. Our hypothesis was that students who receive training in strategies of predicting, listening for key words, and monitoring will make fewer errors on listening cloze tests than students who receive no training. A second hypothesis was that the types of errors made by students who receive training will change in that students will develop a greater tendency to use auditory and visual input together rather than concentrating on only one type of input, and they will make fewer semantic errors since they will be focusing more on meaning. Results related to this hypothesis will be addressed in a later paper.

BACKGROUND

In recent years a great deal of attention has been focused on the topic of learner strategies in second language learning. (Chamot and O'Malley, 1990; Cohen, 1990; Oxford, 1990; Wenden, 1991) A number of paradigms have been developed outlining the vast array of strategies employed by language learners. Still, relatively few studies have reported results of learner strategy training which has been integrated into the context of regular EFL instruction, an approach

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advocated by many. (Reiss, 1983; Chamot and O'Malley, 1990; Oxford, 1990) In addition, listening is a skill that has been given little attention until recently and in this area, too, there have been few quantitative studies done related to training students to use more effective strategies to improve their listening comprehension.

Rather than being a passive receptive skill, listening comprehension is defined as an active, nonlinear process wherein "listeners take in the raw speech, isolate and identify the constituents of surface structure, and build propositions appropriate to each. As they build each proposition, they add it to the interpretations they have formed of the sentence so far, and the propositions taken together constitute the final interpretation. In this process listeners normally hold the constituents verbatim in working memory until they have passed a sentence boundary and then they eliminate them and retain only the finished interpretation." (Clark and Clark, 1977) That is to say, the listener engages in an ongoing process in which he/she focuses on the topic, draws upon previous knowledge to predict what is to come, monitors in order to confirm or reject predictions, and in the case that predictions are rejected, forms new hypotheses. (Clark and Clark, 1977; Fujita, 1984; Laviosa, 1991)

Learner strategies are used by the learner to control and facilitate learning. A traditional definition of learning strategies as put forth by Gagné (1977) and others states that they are used for the purpose of helping the learner in the acquisition, storage, retrieval, and use of information. Oxford (1990) provides a more dynamic definition by stating that they "are actions taken by the learner to make learning easier, faster, and more enjoyable, more self-directed, more effective and more transferable to new situations." (8)

Fujita's (1984, cited in Dixon, 1992) study of second-semester students of college-level Japanese revealed differences in the strategies employed by successful and unsuccessful listeners. Included in his findings were the following. Successful listeners try to pick out the topic, main ideas, and key factors from the beginning whereas

unsuccessful listeners listen for known words or familiar ideas. Successful learners try to confirm or modify hypotheses while unsuccessful listeners fail to self-monitor. Successful listeners attend to meaning whereas unsuccessful listeners pay more attention to form.

Using the technique of immediate retrospection with a group of Americans studying Italian, Laviosa (1991) found that listening comprehension involves three interrelated stages in which a specific problem activates a planning process wherein the listener develops or selects a particular strategy which is then applied to solve the problem. She therefore argues that the deliberate selection/development of a strategy in the planning process is crucial. Likewise Marzano's (1990) research suggests that imposing a learning strategy on students who have already developed a strategy of their own may actually impair rather than facilitate learning.

A study conducted by Dart and Clarke (1990) reports that students often take a surface approach to learning whereby they concentrate on specific detail and attempt to avoid error by reproducing the material and using rote learning strategies. Training in the use of a deep approach focusing on understanding, analyzing and relating new material to what is already known proved to have been effective as reported in the participants' post-course self-evaluations of their own skills.

Prior (1990) notes that students often perform well on discrete-item grammar tests but are unable to utilize the language in communicative activities. He attributes this partly to the students' inability to access the language except under conditions similar to those in which it was learned. Indeed, he theorizes that students who are not allowed to engage in self-directed searches for knowledge and attempts at communication may never develop the strategies they need to use the language outside the classroom. The knowledge they have gained through exercises on the form of the language is not integrated into their personal script for communication. In other

words, they have developed surface knowledge of the language form but not a deeper knowledge of its actual use.

In a study conducted by Philip Hauptman (1979) in which he attempted to consider the roles of semantic and syntactic clues on a reading cloze as well as to look at similarities and differences in L1 and L2 reading strategies, he was able to identify three predominate unsuccessful strategies: an unwillingness to take risks, a failure to take note of global cues, and a failure to notice local cues. Students often employ the same kinds of ineffective strategies when completing listening tasks.

Various studies suggest that explicit training in learner strategies can assist L2 learners in integrating the language more deeply into their personal script and in replacing unsuccessful strategies with successful strategies. O'Malley's (1987) study suggests that explicit training in metacognitive and cognitive strategies aids students' comprehension of lectures as measured by post-lecture comprehension tests.

In Henner-Stanchina's (1982) study students were provided with analyses of errors they had made on partial transcriptions of authentic oral texts as a means of sensitizing the students to their own errors. This resulted in an observable increase in self-monitoring.

George Cicchetti (1987) conducted a study with students who were identified as favoring a 'bottom-up' approach during the process of listening comprehension. "When decoding fails they search their conscious memory for appropriate rules, thereby losing time and missing essential information provided in subsequent material. They are unable to recover when they themselves produce miscues which change meaning in unacceptable ways. They are slow, inefficient learners." (73) These students were systematically trained in the use of metacognitive strategies. In an end-of-term questionnaire an overwhelming majority of students praised the training and indicated that they had adopted such strategies as predicting, making use of what they knew to understand new material, using the context to

guess intelligently, and so forth. Cicchetti points out that "active processing requires a greater commitment on the part of the learner... Learners must understand the benefits of employing... strategies." (81)

In this study we have attempted to verify that explicit training in predicting, focusing on key words, and self-monitoring leads students away from focusing on the surface form of the language to a deeper focus on the meaning being communicated by the text, and subsequently results in better performance on tests. Ultimately it is hoped that students will be able to transfer what they have learned beyond the classroom situation and that their overall listening comprehension will improve.

METHOD

Subjects

The subjects of the study were first and second-year students enrolled in the English department at Himeji Dokkyo University. 176 students participated in the experiment; however, the scores of 26 students were eliminated from the analysis because they were absent or late for either the pretest or posttest. It should be noted that such a high rate of absenteeism is not unusual in a Japanese university, particularly among sophomores. The participants were students from 3 of 6 first-year and 3 of 6 second-year classes, roughly 50% of all first and second-year English majors. Placement in these classes was not random but based on a combination of two factors: their choice of a second foreign language and performance on the university entrance examination, which included both Japanese language skills and knowledge of the English language, but which did not have an English language listening-comprehension component. All first-year students in the study used the text *Interactions I* taught by a native speaker. All second-year classes in the study used the text *Interactions II*. One second year group was taught by two native speakers, the other two classes, including the control group, were taught once a week by a native speaker and once a week

by a non-native speaker. In the latter case, students were given strategies training only during the session taught by the native speaker. All classes met twice a week for ninety minutes. The teachers were assigned as follows: first year: A (NS)=treatment group 1, B (NS)=treatment group 2, C (NS)=control group 1; second year: AB=treatment group 3, BD (NNS)=treatment group 4, CD=control group 2 where NS=native speaker and NNS=non-native speaker. It should be noted that teacher A taught the BD section when they were first-year students during which time they were given some reading strategies training.

Treatment

All of the students in the treatment groups received explicit instruction on the strategies of predicting, listening for key words, and monitoring. They received varying amounts of time to practice these strategies alone or in groups. They also received varying amounts of feedback and reinforcement of their use of strategies. At all times during the training students were encouraged to take risks and were never penalized for wrong guesses. Moreover, they were explicitly told and sometimes reminded that strategy use depended upon one's goals and personal style so that were not forced to adopt the strategies which were introduced but rather free to select those which they felt were effective and matched their own personal needs.

In all treatment groups students were introduced to the idea of listening for key words through a game called "Who Am I?" where students were given various clues and asked to identify the occupation of the speaker. Students were then asked to explain how they had guessed, i. e. which clues (key words) had helped them. This was followed by an exercise in the text which required students to listen to a short authentic-sounding listening passage and to answer a multiple-choice inference question. The treatment groups were told that they would be required to explain their answers by sharing the key words from the passage or other clues which they had used.

The introductory phase of each unit of the two texts provides students with several prelistening questions related to the topic, including some which call for students to predict the contents of the dialog. Following these questions students are instructed to listen to the passage for main ideas. Then they have to complete a cloze exercise in which stressed words have been deleted. This basic procedure was modified for the treatment groups in order to provide additional focus on the strategies of predicting, self-monitoring, and listening for key words. Thus the treatment groups were given additional prelistening questions which were designed to lead students to make use of the title, pictures, and information in the introductory statement to predict. They were also given questions to answer as they listened for the first time with their books closed. This was done to help them focus on the main ideas only. They were then instructed to read the cloze exercise and try to predict/remember the missing words. The point was made that students should make logical, reasonable guesses based on their knowledge of the world, knowledge of English grammar, common sense, the context, and so forth. As they listened they were reminded to monitor to check to see that their answers were correct since a syntactically and semantically-correct prediction might still be different from the word they would hear.

In addition to these regular classroom procedures, the treatment groups were introduced to various other learning strategies as they related to the activities of a particular class session. These strategies and activities varied somewhat among treatment groups, especially as both first and second-year students were involved in the study. For example, first-year students were required to keep learning journals in which they reported on such things as strategy use, learning experience, feelings about and reactions to various activities. Second-year students were given a variety of writing assignments to prepare them for listening exercises in the text. Although many strategies were introduced systematically as part of each class and

course, others arose spontaneously depending on the nature of the interaction.

Instrument

Two cloze passages developed by Chihara et al (1987) were used as a pretest and posttest. A KR21 test of reliability was conducted and the results were .801 for the pretest and .711 for the posttest. Although these passages were prepared for the purpose of testing reading comprehension, we felt justified in using the cloze test for the same reasons cited by Hauptman (1979) who states that "the theoretical justification for the use of the cloze procedure centers on the theoretical belief of what is the underlying basis of language skills. Oller (1972: 151) suggests that'... the foundation of all language skills is the capacity to anticipate elements in sequence.' Since one's expectancy ability is most likely the basis of both proficiency (Aitken, 1977; Darnell, 1970) and reading (Oller, 1973), it is not strange that an instrument which measures this expectancy would be measuring both general proficiency and reading in L2." (underlining added, 177) Eichel (1989) provides a further rationale for using the cloze. "The cloze exercise is a well-established method for assessing readability of texts (Taylor, 1953). It measures the student's ability to infer meaning using contextual clues from a passage in which words and/or letters have been systematically deleted... Since reading is better taught from a whole language approach rather than as a set of isolated skills (Reinking, 1989), the cloze exercise can be an effective integration of literal and inferential levels of understanding." (169) This is equally true of listening since the ability to anticipate elements in sequence and then modify predictions according to the input received is essential for good listening comprehension. (Brown, 1977) Although the test itself is somewhat artificial in that we do not normally receive both visual and auditory input when we are listening, nor do we have the same text repeated more than once, the underlying skills of prediction, focusing on main ideas, and monitoring, while ignoring language redundancies, are all necessary skills

for listening in the real world. For measuring students' comprehension of a passage, the cloze procedure is a useful tool since "the more blanks the learners fill in, the more they comprehend the material." (Chihara, 1987, 22) In addition, the cloze passages used had previously been tested with Japanese college students in order to check the effect of culturally-familiar material on comprehension and had been found to be more accessible schematically.

The pretest cloze consisted of 56 items with every 7th word having been deleted. The posttest consisted of 48 items; however, one item was omitted from analysis because of an error on the scoring sheet. Every 6th word had been deleted from the text. The text, as prepared by Chihara, had been taken from English textbooks and modified into Japanese contextualized texts, mostly by changing proper nouns, such as Joe to Hiroshi and Klein's [department store] to Daiei.

Each cloze was recorded by a native speaker of English who was not involved in the study and who did not teach any of the treatment or control groups. The passages were recorded at natural speed with no pauses since we were concerned that asking the recorder to pause might cause him to unconsciously modify his stress, intonation or use of reduced forms. Tapes were then prepared on which each passage was played 3 times with 30-second pauses inserted after each recording of the passage to allow students to finish writing answers, review what they had written, make new predictions, and so forth.

Procedure

All of the treatment and control groups met either on Monday or Tuesday. As it was impossible to arrange for all students to take the pretest and posttest together, the pretest was administered at the beginning of the first regular class meeting and the posttest was given during the 9th week of the semester. Both treatment and control groups followed this procedure: For the pretest, the test papers were distributed. The students were instructed to write their names, student numbers and the date on their papers. Students were

then told that they were going to listen to a short story and that they were to fill in the blanks as they listened with one word in each space. Before beginning, they were given two minutes to read through the story. Then the instructor for each class played the tape without stopping. After the third reading of the passage students were told that they would have one minute to look over their answers without talking to anyone else. The papers were then collected.

For the posttest, the same procedure as above was followed for the control groups. The treatment groups were given additional instructions: at the beginning when they were told to use the two minutes to *predict* what they would probably hear, and then just before listening when they were told to *monitor* as they listened to check that their guesses were correct.

Results

Mean scores and standard deviations for pretest and posttest scores are provided in Table 1. Table 2 shows a breakdown of the mean scores and standard deviations of the treatment groups and control groups. Only the effect size for group A reached a significant level (.566) on the posttest. An analysis of covariance (ANCOVA) was run with training as the variable under consideration (treatment groups receiving training versus control groups not receiving training) and the pretest was used as the covariate. This analysis was significant at the (.05) level (p=.037). (See Table 3) A Fisher posthoc test comparing the treatment group and control group was significant (Table 4). When ANCOVA was performed on treatment groups separated by teacher, p=.004. (See Table 1) A Fisher posthoc test (Table 5) was conducted with each treatment group and the results for all groups were significant except group B.

DISCUSSION

Evidence from this study seems to support the use of strategies training for improving listening comprehension skills. It is uncertain, however, if it was the training that caused students to make fewer

TABLE 1

Summary of Means and Standard Deviations for all participants

	N	MEAN	MEDIAN	TRMEAN	STDEV
ALL PRE	150	28.927	29.000	28.925	8.113
ALL POST	150	31.953	32.000	32.037	5.798
	SEMEAN	MIN	MAX	Q1	Q3
ALL PRE	0.662	6.000	48.000	23.750	34.000
ALL POST	0.473	18.000	45.000	28.000	36.000

TABLE 2

Summary of Means and Standard Deviation by group

	N	N*	MEAN	MEDIAN	TRMAN	STDEV	SEMEAN
Trt 1Pre	26	2	27.04	26.00	26.71	8.60	1.69
Trt 2Pre	28	0	25.82	28.50	26.15	7.82	1.48
Trt 3Pre	27	1	32.52	31.00	32.44	8.55	1.65
Trt 4Pre	27	1	29.85	30.00	30.20	5.66	1.09
Con 1Pre	22	6	26.00	26.00	25.95	7.45	1.59
Con 2Pre	20	8	32.95	34.50	33.11	7.92	1.77
Tr 1Post	26	2	32.96	32.50	32.88	6.19	1.21
Tr 2Post	28	0	29.79	31.00	29.92	5.38	1.02
Tr 3Post	27	1	32.89	33.00	33.04	6.05	1.16
Tr 4Post	27	1	33.59	34.000	33.760	3.866	0.744
Con 1Post	22	6	29.86	29.50	29.75	5.47	1.17
Con 2Post	20	8	32.50	33.00	32.78	7.04	1.58

errors on the posttest since group B behaved very differently from the other groups. A common factor linking the other treatment groups is teacher A, who taught two of the treatment groups during the course of the training and who also taught group BD when they were freshmen, but it is not clear whether it was something that she did that affected the outcome for those groups or some other factor. Clearly, the study needs to be replicated, ideally with the same teachers teaching both the treatment and control groups, and having teachers keep detailed records so as to be able to isolate

TABLE 3

Results of Analysis of Covariance of Posttest Scores

Source	DF	ADJSS	MS	F	P
Covariates	1	2737.00	2737.00	200.95	0.000
TRNG.	1	60.47	60.47	4.44	0.037
TRT. XGRP	4	219.79	54.95	4.03	0.004
Error	143	1947.66	13.62		
Total	149	5008.67			

Covariate	Coeff	Stdev	t-value	P
ALL PRE	0.5496	0.0388	14.18	0.000

$p < .05$

TABLE 4

Results of Fisher's pairwise comparisons on Posttest

Family error rate=0.0500
Individual error rate=0.0500
Critical value=1.976
Intervals for (column level mean)−(row level mean)

	0
1	−3.241 0.923

TABLE 5

Results of Fisher's pairwise comparisons on posttest of treatment groups

Family error rate=0.283
Individual error rate=0.0500
Critical value=1.976
Intervals for (column level mean)−(row level mean)

	0	1	2	3
1	−4.657 0.972			
2	−1.419 4.058	0.104 6.248		
3	−4.552 1.013	−3.027 3.172	−6.146 −0.061	
4	−5.256 0.309	−3.731 2.468	−6.849 −0.764	−3.774 2.366

(0=control group)

factors which may impact on language learning. Randomly assigning students to groups would help to control for subject characteristics. In addition, another measure needs to be used to test the students' ability to transfer what they have learned in the classroom to other situations. Finally, it is hoped that an analysis of the types of errors committed by students in the pretest and posttest will give us a clearer picture of the nature of the effect of the training. We are hesitant to make any claims regarding the value of the training based on one study, especially considering the fact that we used a nonrandom sample and results are not conclusive; however, the results are promising and further studies are indicated. One of the most positive results is purely anecdotal in nature, the comments students have made in their learning journals. Many students have reported that the training has given them better insights into their learning and that they feel that it has been helpful.

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This paper reports on the results of a study undertaken by the authors to investigate the effect of strategies training on errors in a listening cloze. It was hypothesized that students given explicit training in and practice with the strategies of predicting, listening for key words, and monitoring would make fewer errors on a listening cloze than students who received no training. The hypothesis was confirmed but cannot be generalized beyond the sample population for which the training was provided.

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