

Listening Comprehension Observed in Midterm and Final Examinations in *Oral Communication B* and What It Suggests

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Abstract

This paper aims to evaluate the listening comprehension tested in regular examinations of high school students in *Oral Communication B*, a course of study to improve English listening skills introduced by the Ministry of Education. The regular examinations researched in this paper consist of all the midterm and final examinations given to evaluate students' achievement levels through one school year.

Each examination was divided into three parts: the first part testing listening comprehension (by tape-listening), the second part testing knowledge of listening materials in the textbooks and workbooks for *Oral Communication B* (without tape-listening), and the third part testing knowledge of the material from the grammar workbooks used during the course of study. The students focused on in this research were from two classes, representing two different levels of conventionally tested English aptitude (reading and writing).

The data revealed that the class with advanced aptitude gained a higher level of achievement than the class with less-advanced aptitude in almost all of the three parts of each examination, and also that the former class attained the highest level in the actual listening comprehension part among the three parts.

1. Introduction

English is not a dead language such as Latin, but rather a language which has been used practically by many people all over the world. Since long ago, the acquisition of the English language has been vital for the exchange of cultures or people between an English speaking country and a non-English speaking country. Therefore, communication has been one of the major purposes in learning the English language.

With the advent of the international age, mutual communication has become far more

important than ever. Now it is almost common sense that you can make yourself understood in English almost anywhere on Earth. Even in places where nobody seems to know English, you can still have a chance to meet someone with some English knowledge. Nowadays English can be said to be used worldwide as a means of communication.

With these conditions in mind, *Oral Communication A*, *Oral Communication B*, *Oral Communication C* were extensively introduced into the curriculums of many high schools under the guidance of the Ministry of Education in the 1994 school year. One of these courses of study was generally adopted into the curriculum of each high school according to its educational purpose.

Oral Communication B (OC·B) was designed to improve listening skills. Listening is widely considered to be more difficult than the other three skills—speaking, reading, or writing. In conversation, you cannot speak if you cannot listen. Speaking one-sidedly without the ability or will to listen to the other speaker would exemplify improper speaking leading to improper communication, because communication is a two-way or an interactive activity.

In Kagawa prefecture, *OC·B* was adopted into the curriculums of many high schools, especially schools which annually send a large number of students to colleges or universities. At these schools, the students are studying hard in order to improve their listening skills. Since *OC·B* is part of schools' curriculums, evaluation is needed to measure student achievement. It is based in most cases on the results of regular examinations.

This paper researches the achievement level of students' listening comprehension in relation to other levels, based on the results of all the regular (midterm and final) examinations during one school year. This research will lead us to some significant findings and educational suggestions concerning teaching of listening comprehension.

2. Methodology

2.1 Subjects

The study focused on eighty-five students in the second year of Takamatsu First High School in Kagawa Prefecture. All the students enrolled in general courses at the school. They belonged to two different levels of classes in terms of English aptitude (reading and writing). Forty-one students were selected as the subjects from a special class with advanced aptitude and forty-four

students from a training class. For the purpose of this research, some students were excluded because of their experience of studying abroad for one year or more.

In this paper, the special class is abbreviated as S-class, and the training class as T-class. In terms of English scholastic ability, the S-class gained an average of 62.1 points and the T-class 52.4 points—with a difference of 9.7 points—out of a possible 100 per student in the four academic achievement tests, which were given apart from the midterm and final examinations used for the research.

2.2 Lessons in *Oral Communication B*

Two units were prepared for the course of study: one unit of *OC·B* to improve listening comprehension using a *OC·B* textbook and workbook, and one unit to reinforce grammatical knowledge using two grammar workbooks. In other words, the course consisted of two fifty-minute lessons per week: one lesson for listening and the other for grammar.

Both the listening comprehension and the grammar lessons in this research were taught by the Japanese author, and the explanation or instruction was mainly given in Japanese. For the listening activities, a tape recorder was frequently used so that the students could listen to recorded voices of many native speakers of English in various levels and fields.

2.3 Teaching Procedure

Listening comprehension lessons were given step by step, according to a selected *OC·B* textbook and workbook, proceeding from the first lesson to the last lesson. The textbook was used first, and then the workbook for supplementary and developmental exercise of the textbook material. Various activities to assist in listening comprehension were introduced in those books.

The students repeatedly listened to recordings of the various kinds of texts provided in the textbook and the workbook. After listening to a text, they were given a chance to read it—sometimes aloud, and sometimes in silence—in order to understand the meaning more clearly and properly. When the material was a dialogue, they were asked to play roles in a pair and encouraged to show their achievement in class. Useful words and phrases were repeated after the tape or the teacher and recommended to be memorized. Basic phonetics was taught in theory and practice with examples of words, phrases, or sentences. As a whole, listening

comprehension was taught not only in the field of listening but also in relation to that of speaking, reading, or writing.

Grammar lessons were given using two selected workbooks—one elementary, and the other intermediate. The elementary level workbook was used, followed by the intermediate level workbook. The elementary workbook was taught from basics such as five sentence styles to more complicated rules such as subjunctives. After completion of the elementary workbook, several materials in the intermediate workbook were chosen to be taught with consideration to the time remaining in the course. The chosen materials of study were subjunctives, participial constructions, and narration.

The students were assigned the task of answering grammatical questions in each workbook at home and were required to answer the questions in class. The teacher explained the difficult or complicated grammatical questions that the students could not answer and clarified the questions the students seemed to have trouble in answering or understanding.

Listening comprehension and grammar lessons were not deliberately planned to be taught in relation to each other.

2.4 Regular Examinations : Midterms and Finals

Five regular examinations were given to the students. They consisted of a midterm and a final examination in the first term, a mid-term and a final examination in the second term, and a final examination in the third term.

Each examination was composed of three parts (see Appendix A) : a part testing listening comprehension of the materials somewhat related to the topic but different from those in the *OC·B* textbook and workbook, a part testing knowledge of listening comprehension acquired from the textbook and workbook (without using tape-listening), and a part testing grammatical knowledge from the grammar workbooks. The first part accounted for twenty points, the second thirty points, and the third fifty points out of one hundred for each examination.

The time allowed for each examination was fifty minutes. At a certain time during the examination, students had to spend several minutes listening to the broadcasted English sentences twice for the actual listening part (see Appendix B); and during the rest of time, they could work on the other two parts.

3. Results and Discussion

Table 1 shows the results of the students' achievements in all the five examinations.

Table 1. Results of the five examinations

exam class	final exam in the 1 st term			final exam in the 1 st term			final exam in the 2 nd term			final exam in the 2 nd term			final exam in the 3 rd term		
	①	②	③	①	②	③	①	②	③	①	②	③	①	②	③
S-class	13.95	22.30	38.02	16.95	23.13	34.85	17.71	28.05	40.17	13.90	25.35	35.03	14.63	23.15	37.90
	④ 74.3			④ 75.0			④ 85.9			④ 74.3			④ 75.6		
T-class	12.73	20.07	35.07	15.64	21.43	33.27	16.55	27.45	35.61	12.45	24.02	36.50	11.27	22.45	34.68
	67.9			70.3			79.6			73.0			68.5		
score difference	+1.22	+2.23	+2.95	+1.31	+1.70	+1.58	+0.86	+0.60	+4.56	+1.45	+1.33	-1.47	+3.36	+0.70	+3.22
	+6.4			+4.7			+6.3			+1.3			+7.1		

In this table, the figures indicate the scores obtained. The figures for the three parts of each examination are rounded off to the second decimal place, and those for the total score to the first decimal place. In each examination, ① is the part testing listening comprehension, which is composed of the materials somewhat related to the topic but different from those in the *OC · B* textbook or workbook ; ② is the part testing knowledge of listening comprehension acquired from the textbook and workbook (without using tape-listening), ③ is the part testing grammatical knowledge from the grammar workbooks, and ④ is the total score of each examination. The perfect scores for ①, ②, ③, ④ are twenty, thirty, fifty, and one hundred respectively. Partition numbers such as ①, ②, ③, and ④ for the S-class apply to the partitions for the T-class and the "score difference" in the same way. The "score difference" represents the difference in scores between the S-class and the T-class ; "+" means that the S-class exceeds the T-class by the points indicated, and "-" means that the T-class exceeds the S-class. All the descriptions thus far for Table 1 also apply to Table 2 and Table 3.

It is shown in this table that the S-class exceeds the T-class in the scores for the three parts of all the examinations, with only one exception : the grammar part of the final examination in the second term. This tells us that the class with advanced English aptitude (reading and writing) exceeds not only in both grammar and knowledge of listening comprehension but also in actual listening comprehension tested with the use of a tape recorder.

Table 2 was created from Table 1 so as to present the comparison of the average score for each of the three parts of the five examinations between the two classes.

Table 2. Comparison of average itemized score between the two classes

class \ items	OC·B		grammar
	① (20 points)	② (30 points)	③ (50 points)
S-class	15.43	24.40	37.19
T-class	13.73	23.08	35.03
score difference	+1.70	+1.32	+2.16

Although this table clearly indicates the average score of each item, the scores for the “score difference” might as well be converted into those based on fifty or one hundred points for easier comparison.

The converted scores are shown in Table 3. The “50-point conversion” and “100-point conversion” mean that the perfect scores for each ①, ②, ③ are converted into fifty points and one hundred points respectively.

Table 3. Conversion of itemized score difference

difference & conversion \ items	OC·B		grammar	
	①	②	③	
score difference	50-point conversion	+4.25	+2.20	+2.16
	100-point conversion	+8.5	+4.3	+4.3

(NOTE : The figures for the “50-point conversion” are rounded off to the second decimal place, and those for the “100-point conversion” are to the first decimal place.)

In the “50-point conversion” and the “100-point conversion,” the scores for ② and ③ are almost the same or just the same, with the S-class exceeding the T-class (shown by “+”). On the other hand, the score for ① in each conversion is almost the double of that for either ② or ③. This also shows the superiority of the S-class.

4. Conclusion

The class with advanced English aptitude (reading and writing) attained greater achievement than the class with less-advanced aptitude in the listening comprehension test (given using a tape recorder as the testing tool) as well as in the listening knowledge test and in the grammar test. Even in the *OC·B* test, as long as it was given in a conventional written form as seen in the listening knowledge test mentioned above, the average score difference between the two classes with different levels of aptitude was similar to that seen in the grammar test.

However, the actual listening test given with the use of a tape recorder yielded a different result. The data acquired, although limited, indicated that the class with advanced aptitude gained almost twice as large an average score difference in the listening test as in the other test parts. This might suggest that students with advanced aptitude conventionally measured in a written examination might possibly be more advanced in listening than in reading or writing. We could then surmise that those students might be more practically sensitive to the urgent need of listening competence in the international age where English is increasing its significance as a means of communication day by day.

5. Related Thoughts Concerning Listening Education

In the future, when a large number of colleges and universities are equipped with listening facilities, listening comprehension tests will be widely given to the applicants of those educational institutions. Then the newly adopted course of study, *Oral Communication B*, will greatly increase its significance, since the course was mainly designed for improving listening skills.

The author is not claiming that students should be encouraged to improve their listening skills just for the listening tests given in entrance examinations. It is noteworthy, however, that students with advanced aptitude might have the advantage of gaining higher scores in listening tests than other written tests which have conventionally been given for many years. That being considered, less advanced students should be more interested in listening and try to improve their skills, while students with advanced aptitude should keep their interest and concern in listening and make even more efforts to improve their skills.

Listening comprehension will surely increase its importance in entrance examinations for

colleges or universities. Furthermore, improving students' listening ability will contribute to proper communication among different races in this rapidly changing world, since listening to others can be said to be the ability leading to mutual understanding and friendship.

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Appendix A. Examination Example : Second Term Final Exam

Part 1 : [オーラル・コミュニケーション ; for listening]

- A. Foreign Study (2点×10=20点)
- i) はじめに英文を1回読む。その内容について、1から5の英文を1回だけ読む。
内容があてればTを、あてなければFを解答欄に書け。
- ii) 今読んだ英文の内容について、英語で1から5までの質問を1回読む。
よく聞いて、それぞれの質問に対する正しい答をイ~ハの中から1つ選べ。
1. イ. in special classes ロ. by Jane Fonda ハ. by video ニ. by a fitness teacher
 2. イ. gain weight ロ. lose weight ハ. get thin ニ. how to exercise
 3. イ. 20 million ロ. more than one quarter of the population ハ. 16 million
ニ. less than one quarter of the population
 4. イ. 20 million ロ. 60 million ハ. one quarter of the population ニ. 16 million
 5. イ. 300 ロ. 3,000 ハ. 16,000 ニ. 116,000

Part 2 : [オーラル・コミュニケーション ; for reading and writing]

B. 次の英文を読み、後の設問に答えよ。(2点×3 = 6点)

May I have your attention, please? This is the Chief Steward speaking. We would like to inform all passengers that the snack bar and gift shop are now open. The snack bar and gift shop are located on the passenger deck in the middle of the ferry. The snack bar offers cafeteria-style service. On sale are coffee, tea, soft drinks and juices. We offer a wide selection of meals and snacks, including hamburgers, hot dogs, sandwiches, clam chowder, and a salad bar. Today's special is a bacon, lettuce and tomato sandwich, French fries and a soft drink for \$3.99. The gift shop, located near the snack bar, carries postcards, books, newspapers, maps, candy and gum, as well as a selection of gift items. Both the snack bar and the gift shop will close approximately 15 minutes before arrival. Thank you.

[設問] Snack bar で買うことができないものの番号を3つ書け。

1. coffee 2. tea 3. juice 4. wines 5. salads 6. roast chicken 7. sandwiches
8. hot dogs 9. hamburgers 10. clam chowder 11. bacon and eggs

C. 次の空欄にあてはまる適語を後の日本語を参照して入れよ。(3点×8 = 24点)

1. What () should I do? [他に何を]
2. She's not in () now. [ただ今いません]
3. We'll have to go through () inspection. [入国検査場]
4. How many () can you do at a time? [腕立て伏せ]
5. You're in good (), Carlos. [体調がよい]
6. Would you like to () a message? [伝言がありますか]
7. baggage () [手荷物引き渡し所]
8. () [エアロビックス]

Part 3 : [文法 ; grammar]

A. 次の () 内に入る適語を後の語群より選び、その記号を書け。(2点×8 = 16点)

1. Who () has pride can do such a thing?
2. We saw a photograph, () was taken in France.
3. I have the same watch () he has.
4. We look forward to winter, () we can ski.

5. Karuizawa, () I have moved, is a beautiful place.
 6. () hard you try, you can't complete it in a day.
 7. There are few books () have some misprints.
 8. He owes () he is to his father.

イ. who	ロ. whose	ハ. whom	ニ. which	ホ. that	ヘ. of which
ト. what	チ. as	リ. but	ヌ. when	ル. where	ヲ. how
ワ. why	カ. whoever	ヨ. however	タ. whenever	レ. wherever	

B. 次の文の中に、正しいのが2つある。その文の番号を書け。(3点×2=6点)

1. On hear the news, he turned pale.
2. Take care not eat too much.
3. Jack is the stronger of the two boys.
4. Mr. Smith is happiest in his neighborhood.
5. I prefer eating than cooking.
6. Had I known your trouble, I would help you.
7. If it had not been for your advice, he would not have succeeded.

C. 次の各組の文がほぼ同じ意味になるように () 内に適語を入れよ。

(3点×4=12点)

1. Nancy is the shortest of all the members of her club.
 =Nancy is shorter than ()() member of her club.
2. But for the traffic jam, we would have arrived home earlier.
 =If ()() not been for the traffic jam, we would have arrived home earlier.
3. He wins whenever he runs a race. =He wins ()() he runs a race.
4. He was never so happy as when he was busy in his office.
 =He was () when he was busy in his office.

D. 次の各文を後の指示に従って書け。(4点×4=16点)

1. I am sorry I don't have enough time to play with you.
 [I wish を使って書き換えよ]
2. 彼女はまるで女王であるかのように振る舞った。[英文にせよ]
3. ネズミが鳥でないのと同様、コウモリも鳥でない。[英文にせよ]
4. I was just about to go out, when the telephone rang. [和文にせよ]

Appendix B. Broadcasted Text and Questions for Part One of the Examination Example

A. i) (Broadcasted Text)

Jane Fonda is a famous movie star who has made exercise popular. Her video, called "Workout" has sold millions of copies, especially to women. People use the video to teach them how to exercise. The exercise helps them lose weight and improve their health. The popularity of Jane Fonda's exercise lessons is only one sign of how interested people have become in physical exercise. More than twenty years ago President Kennedy warned about a growing lack of physical exercise in America. Kennedy thought that this was not good for the security of the US. In those days, less than 1 / 4 of Americans played sports, or did other kinds of exercise. Since then sports and exercise began to grow in popularity. Now 60 million Americans swim as a way to get exercise. Others ride bicycles, take walks or jog to keep physically fit. Still others take part in other sports, such as tennis, basketball or golf. About 20 million Americans now jog. A sign of its popularity is the increase in the number of runners taking part in long-distance races. For example, in 1971 only about 300 runners entered the New York Marathon. Ten years later, 16,000 runners competed in the race.

(Broadcasted True or False Sentences)

1. Jane Fonda and her video have made exercise popular.
2. Especially men buy her video.
3. Kennedy thought that exercise was bad for the security of the US.
4. The number of people doing exercise is now greater than before.
5. Jogging is the most popular type of exercise.

ii) (Broadcasted Questions)

1. How has exercise been taught recently?
2. What does exercise help people do?
3. In Kennedy's day, how many Americans did exercise?
4. How many Americans now jog?
5. How many people ran in the New York Marathon in 1981?

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