L2 Listening Support: Its Effectiveness and Limitations

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I. INTRODUCTION

Purpose of the study

To what degree can learners’ listening comprehension be enhanced through listening support?

The background of teaching and learning English in Taiwan
I. INTRODUCTION

Rationale

- Providing a context (situation, setting, domain, environment, task, content, topic, schema) for interpretation (Buck, 1995)
- Activating students’ existing knowledge of the topic (Mendelsohn, 1995).
- Narrowing down the things that the students expect to hear (Underwood, 1989)
I. INTRODUCTION

Types of listening support

- Pre-task activities
  - preteaching vocabulary and grammatical structures
  - topical discussion
  - providing background knowledge
  - previewing questions

- Support embedded in a test design
  - multiple listening
  - contextual visuals
II. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Topical information support

- Types of topical knowledge
  - Culture and religion
  - Specific topics
  - Specific domains

- Its effect on listening comprehension (Table-topical knowledge).
II. REVIEW OF LITERATURE
(contd)

Contextual Visuals (A picture is worth a thousand words)

- The effects of visual stimuli on the comprehension of spoken input depend on the following factors:
  - The task (Weidenmann, 1989)
  - Visual materials (Bauer and Johnson-Laird, 1993)
  - The characteristics of the learners (Hegarty & Just, 1993)
II. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

(Contexted)

Contextual Visuals

- When visuals bear information that complements the audio portion of the stimulus, the presence of visuals is facilitating; however, when the visual merely portrayed the context, it is debilitating (Ginther, 2002).

- The presentation of visual and verbal information must be contiguous (Meyer, 1997).

- The facilitating effect occurs when the information presented in text and visual is complementary (Salomon, 1989).
Repeated input

- The simplest way to make tasks easier (Berne, 1995)
- The most popular strategy to improve LC (Chang et al, 1993).
- The most effective way to reduce anxiety (Chang, 2004)
II. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

( contd)

Repeated input

- Listening to complex text with repetition may be equal in effect to listen to syntactically simplified text (Cervantes and Gainer, 1992)

- More effective for higher level learners (Chiang and Dunkel, 1992)
II. REVIEW OF LITERATURE
(contd)

Research Questions

Q1: Can LC of learners of low LP be enhanced through listening support? If yes, then to what degree and which form is more facilitative?

Q2: What effects (if any) will different types of listening support have on students’ perceptions of the task? If there are effects, will test-takers’ perceptions be consistent with their performance?
III. METHODOLOGY

The participants:
140 participants selected from a pool of 201 students and their score of a TOEIC test on the listening part was below 165.

Design of the study (Table 1)

The texts (Table 2)
III. METHODOLOGY (contd)

- The instruments
- Supporting materials
- A short questionnaire
- An LC test (36 items, gap-filling and MC)
- The procedure
IV. RESULTS

- The overall test scores (Table 3)
- One-way ANOVA analysis of LC tests for varying forms of support (Table 4)
- Students’ ranking on the three forms of listening support (Table 5)
IV. RESULTS (contd)

Students’ responses in the questionnaire (Table 6)
V. CONCLUSION

Summary of the findings

- Listening support has a moderate effect on comprehension and varying forms of support produced different effect on learners’ comprehension. In this study, repeated input was considered somewhat more effective than contextual visuals and topical background preparation, whereas the latter two forms produced equal effect on students’ comprehension.
V. CONCLUSION (contd)

Summary of the findings (contd)

- To students’ perceptions of different forms of support, students’ comprehension with RI support was found quite consistent with their perceptions but was widely different on CV and TP support though the two forms produced comparable effect on their comprehension.
V. CONCLUSION (contd)

Summary of the findings (contd)

- Interviewees’ report showed that repeated input was more straightforward and had less limitation on implementing listening support in a listening test. Contextual visuals were found difficult to understand the meanings of pictures, whereas topical background information provided only a general picture of an input and was considered less helpful by low-ability students, due to the threshold of linguistic knowledge needed to comprehend more detailed questions.
V. CONCLUSION (contd)

Summary of the findings (contd)

- The whole test turned out to be not very satisfactory in terms of the degree of comprehension. Most students understood only 40% to 50% with these support.
Answers to Q1:

Q1: affirmative. Students’ comprehension increased with an average of 11% to 18%. The form of RI was considered more effective than CV and TP, and no difference was shown between CV and TP.
V. CONCLUSION (contd)

Answers to Q2:

Q2: positive. Students perceived RI and CV more effective than TP. However, no difference was shown on their performance when doing CV or TP version.
VI. LIMITATIONS OF USING LISTENING SUPPORT

- The CV support: It’s difficult to understand the meanings of the pictures.
- The TP support: It just provides students with general knowledge, not sufficient to understand details.
VII. SUGGESTION

- Higher level of listening comprehension depends mainly on learners’ own language competence, so the ultimate goal is to help low level learners develop their listening competence and by which they can acquire more linguistic knowledge through aural input.

- Using audio graded readers to motivate students’ interest to listen to aural input and increase attention span.
VIII. Future Research

- Including learners of different levels of listening competence
- Investigating learners’ strategy use to find out whether learners’ know how to use the information provided.