

Enhancing Motivation through Repeated Listening

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Abstract

Listening in a foreign language is difficult. Previous research has identified a number of strategies that can result in increased comprehension. One such is repeated listening. The present article describes a study in which 98 Japanese college students of English as a foreign language viewed five videos, rating their comprehension of each video after an initial viewing and again after a second viewing. Self-reported comprehension was found to be significantly better after the second viewing. Participants also reported that repeated viewing was a useful learning practice.

Students differ widely in their motivations for studying English. One commonly mentioned motivation is the desire to “communicate” with English speaking people (Brown, 2004). Communication often requires understanding what is said to one. Yet a substantial number of students are unable to interpret spoken connected English and other foreign language input delivered at normal or artificially slowed rates of delivery, even when they know all of the lexical components (Bonk, 2000; Hirai, 1999). While students may of course experience difficulties in aural comprehension due to vocabulary gaps, research and classroom experience indicate that many students regularly fail to recognize words that they do know and that can be predicted from context by grammatical rules that they can explicitly state (see Wakabayashi, 1997 and Kobayashi 2001, cited in Wakabayashi, 2003). Clearly, knowing words is not sufficient for recognizing them in real-time connected speech. Consequently, the solution to aural processing inefficiencies does not lie in vocabulary development alone.

A number of studies have reported increases in comprehension subsequent to repetition of the message, for examples, Pica, Young, and Doughty (1987) and Chaudron (1983), both cited in Carrier (1999), and Dupuy (1999), cited in Krashen (2004b). Tokeshi (2005, p. 5) reports that repeating, rather than elaborating on, key words in spoken text can be effective in enhancing comprehension, at least for younger beginning level Japanese students of English. Moreover, motivational benefits have also been reported (Krashen, 2004b, citing Rodrigo and Krashen 1996). Jensen and Vinther (2003) showed that repetition has comprehension benefits whether or not the input rate of subsequent presentations is reduced. In some cases, repetition alone proved to be more effective in increasing comprehension than simplification (Cervantes and Gainer, 1992, cited in Carrier, 1999; Jensen & Vinther, 2003), and repeated listening is a comprehension strategy used by all learners, when circumstances permit (Smidt & Hegelheimer, 2004). Csizér and Dörnyei (2005) write that “. . . it is universally accepted that motivation plays a vital role in . . . the sustained process of mastering an L2,” and Vandergrift (2003a) showed that success in comprehension increases self-confidence, which increases motivation. The range of strategies and tactics second language listeners can use is wide (for reviews, see Goh, 1998; Vandergrift 1997, 2003b; Zhang, 2003). In the present article I report a brief study that lends support for the

effectiveness of one practice, that of repeated listening. The present research was inspired by Beebe's observation that orally proficient students spent significantly more time intensively watching and listening to English videos without Japanese subtitles, compared to their less proficient peers (Beebe, 2000). Relistening to incompletely understood input would seem to be a common sense tactic, but it is one that many students, despite their declared interest in learning English, do not consistently use (Brown, 2005). With this in mind, I tested the hypothesis that simply listening to (or in this case, viewing) the same material two times would increase self-reports of comprehension. Previous studies have shown that the feeling that one is making progress toward a goal has a motivating effect (McWhinney, 1995). Thus, simple repeated presentation of listening materials can enhance learning outcomes.

Method

Participants and Materials

Participants were 98 Japanese college students (62 males, 33 females, 3 unspecified, average age = 19.3), all first year students enrolled in elective English classes focusing on listening development using authentic materials at a small university in the Tokyo area. Larger samples are desirable when the population from which the sample is drawn (first year Japanese colleges students studying English electively) is highly heterogeneous and when the expected effect size is small, neither of which was assumed in the present case. Consequently, a sample size of 98 was deemed adequate for the present essentially exploratory study. However, it must be noted that because the data were collected during normal class activities, fewer than the total sample of 98 were present on any given day or otherwise able to fully complete the questionnaire (some students arrived late and missed part or all of one or both viewings). Between 38 and 84 students were available for both viewings of each of the five videos. As these data are primarily illustrative this should not be a major problem.

The visual context provided in videos can provide cues as to the identity of the spoken words (Sueyoshi & Hardison, 2005), or communicative intent of the speakers, as is the case in many types of real world language use. Accordingly, videos were used as stimulus materials. Five videos were selected based on the attested preferences and interests of similar groups of students in past terms at the same school elicited by having them write brief evaluations after watching the videos. They were segments from *Enter the Dragon*, (the 1972 action classic starring Bruce Lee), *Peanuts* (an episode titled "Rainy Day," *The Simpsons* (an episode titled "Lisa's Substitute"), *Cops* ("Cops in Venice Beach"), and a Bugs Bunny story called "Bugs Bunny and the Three Bears." Light, entertaining content was appropriate because the participants had electively enrolled in the class in order to learn English in part by watching animations, action movies, American TV, and travel documentaries. The *Cops* segment additionally provided a listening task that incorporated the features of real conversations, such as non-standard grammar, performance errors and disfluencies. It was also chosen as a limiting case for comprehension, on the assumption students would find such material especially challenging (which was subsequently confirmed in participants' self-reports and written comments). Thus, if repeated listening yields improved comprehension of "Cops in Venice Beach", it can reasonably be expected that repeated listening will improve comprehension for English that is more deliberately comprehensible, as for example in a service encounter or lecture (where the purpose of the transaction is precisely to be understood). Past experience has demonstrated that these videos (with the exception of "Cops in Venice Beach," probably

due to its low comprehensibility) are judged to be interesting by students similar to the participants in the present study in age, academic background, English proficiency, and it was accordingly assumed that attention would be at a high level and would therefore yield relatively accurate self-assessments. Each selection was approximately 10-20 minutes in length with a brief pause between the first and second viewing.

Procedure and Analysis

After viewing the video the first time, students assessed their own comprehension on a scale ranging from “nothing” to “everything,” separated by incremental steps of 5%. (Instructions and supplementary items were written in Japanese). After a short break, they viewed the same video a second time, once again assessed their comprehension, answered two additional questions (discussed below), and wrote a short comment on the video. The Wilcoxon Signed Rank test was used to test whether the average self-reported subjective comprehension of the videos after the second viewing was better than after the first viewing. (The Wilcoxon test is a non-parametric equivalent to the paired-samples *t* test.) All analyses were conducted with SPSS 11.0.

Because interest in the stimulus materials may influence listening comprehension (Tokeshi, 2005), participants were asked to evaluate the interestingness of the videos, as well as the usefulness of watching them two times. Seven-point Likert type rating scales were used, anchored by “*not at all*” (1) and “*very much*” (7). The middle scale step was explicitly labeled *futsuu* (ordinary), which, for the purpose of the statistical analysis, was interpreted as indifference. Ratings above that point were regarded as positive endorsements, ratings below as expressions of lack of enthusiasm for the video. Single-sample *t* tests against the neutral scale point (4) were conducted to determine whether the videos were perceived as interesting and whether the repeated viewing was perceived as useful. Finally, students wrote (in English) a short review or comment on the video. Although these data were not statistically analyzed, it was noted that students who claimed greater comprehension more often than not demonstrated better comprehension by describing the video at greater length and in more detail, which adds credibility to the comprehension self-assessment. The five videos were shown on different class days, two to three weeks apart. Data were collected during regular class hours, between fall 2004 and spring 2006.

Results

Initial analyses indicated that students found at least four of the five videos interesting, regarded repeated listening as useful, and reported better comprehension after a second listening.

Table 1. *Interestingness and Usefulness of Five Videos, Means and Standard Deviations (in parentheses).*

	Interestingness	Usefulness
Rainy	4.3 (1.4)	4.3 (1.3) *
Dragon	5.0 (1.3) ***	4.4 (1.1) **
Lisa	4.6 (1.3) ***	4.5 (1.3) ***
Cops	3.6 (1.4)	4.0 (1.2)
Bugs	5.6 (1.2) ***	4.8 (1.3) ***

Note. Rainy = “Rainy Day”, Dragon = *Enter the Dragon*, Lisa = “Lisa’s Substitute”, Cops = “Cops in Venice Beach”, Bugs = “Bugs Bunny and the here Bears”. Interesting = *The video was interesting.*; Useful = *how useful was it to watch this video twice?*, both rated on 7-point scales (1 = not at all, 7 = very much).

Note. * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$, relative to scale midpoint, single-sample t test.

Mean assessment of the interestingness of the videos were found to be significantly higher ($p < .001$) than the neutral scale point for *Enter the Dragon*, “Lisa’s Substitute”, and “Bugs Bunny.” “Rainey Day” was rated as useful ($p < .05$), but only marginally interesting ($p < .06$). “Cops in Venice Beach” was not significantly higher than the midpoint (see Table 1). Students also reported that repeated listening of the same videos was useful for *Enter the Dragon*, “Rainy Day,” and “Lisa’s Substitute,” ($ps < .05$), but not “Cops in Venice Beach.” These results should be viewed in the light of the tendency of Japanese participants to prefer the middle parts of Likert type response scales (Chen, Lee, & Stevenson, 1995). Comprehension of the videos ranged from 0 to 80% for the first viewing, and from 0 to 90% for the second viewing. Medians ranged from 12.5 to 30 for the first viewing and from 25 to 45 for the second viewing, as shown in Table 2. Wilcoxon tests indicated that perceived comprehension of all five videos was significantly better (at $p < .0001$) after the second viewing (see Table 2). Several students report no improvement in comprehension after the second viewing. With one exception, these were all students who claimed that they understood *nothing* either time. The exception was a 19 year old male student who claimed to understand *less* the second time. When asked to explain, he said that he thought he understood a little the first time, but realized after the second viewing that he had been mistaken. Notwithstanding these exceptional cases, the majority of participants felt that their comprehension was better after a second viewing.

Table 2. *Median Scores for the Five Videos.*

	First Viewing	Second Viewing
Rainy	20	30 ****
Dragon	30	40 ****
Lisa	20	40 ****
Cops	12.5	25 ****
Bugs	30	45 ****

Note. Rainy = “Rainy Day”, Dragon = *Enter the Dragon*, Lisa = “Lisa’s Substitute”, Cops = “Cops in Venice Beach”, Bugs = “Bugs Bunny and the here Bears”.

Note. **** $p < .0001$, Wilcoxon test, comparing self-assessed comprehension of first and second viewings.

The female participants reported better comprehension of “Lisa’s Substitute” and “Team Spirit”, for both first and second viewings (both $ps < .0001$). However, the sample size is not large enough to fully explore the possibility of gender related differences, and I will say no more about this.

As mentioned above, interest may influence comprehension (Tokeshi, 2005). There did appear to be a tendency for participants who reported more interest in the videos to feel that they understood them better. Comprehension of the initial viewing of “Rainy Day”, “Lisa’s Substitute”, and *Enter the Dragon* were significantly correlated with the participant’s interest in them. There was also a clear tendency for this association to hold in the cases of *Cops* and *Bugs Bunny* as well, but due to the smaller sample size involved, the correlation coefficients did not reach significance (all correlations are significant at $p < .05$, Bonferroni adjusted to $p < .01$ to hold the alpha error rate constant over the five separate tests).

Table 3. *Correlation between Self-Reported Comprehension after First Viewing, and Interestingness of the Videos.*

Rainy	.50 ***	(N = 82)
Dragon	.30 **	(N = 74)
Lisa	.42 ***	(N = 84)
Cops	.30	(N = 38)
Bugs	.26	(N = 39)

Note. Rainy = “Rainy Day”, Dragon = *Enter the Dragon*, Lisa = “Lisa’s Substitute”, Cops = “Cops in Venice Beach”, Bugs = “Bugs Bunny and the here Bears”. *Note.* * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$,

Discussion and Conclusion

The present results indicate that subjective comprehension for all five target videos improved with a second viewing, and that the participants themselves regarded the second exposure as useful, both of which have motivational implications. Nation (2001) points out that self-assessments of vocabulary knowledge often correlate highly with actual knowledge, and this may apply more broadly to comprehension in general. However, even if participants’ feeling that they understood substantially more after a second exposure proved upon objective assessment to be illusory, it could have a beneficial effect on learning outcomes, in that, as noted above (McWhinney, 1995) a sense of making progress is motivational, while frustration as a result of not making progress can be demotivating (Dörnyei, 2001). The perceived usefulness of the repeated viewing is also relevant, in that students are likely to engage more actively in tasks that they believe will help them achieve their learning objectives. It is encouraging that in the majority of cases participants felt that their comprehension doubled simply by watching the video a second time. This implies that their linguistic resources are adequate for extracting a considerable amount of the informational content of the video and that their primary deficiency is simply lack of processing efficiency. Since this is largely a matter of repetitive exposure to the material, the appropriate learning tactic will be obvious to the students. Whether they actually do what they believe will be effective in promoting their learning goals, is of course, a different matter (Brown, 2005).

A final point should be made: If students know that a second listening can improve their comprehension, this

can motivate them to work on their pragmatic skills as well. A listening class might be an excellent place to introduce such phraseology as “I’m sorry, could you repeat that please.” Knowing that using this and similar expressions will improve their chances of experiencing a successful communicative interaction should provide the motivational impetus to acquire and use them.

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