

The Effect of Excessively Difficult Listening Lessons on Motivation and the Influence of Authentic Listening as a “Lesson-Selling” Tag

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Although the use of authentic material is widely advocated, it is often assumed that the difficulty posed by such material may demotivate lower-level students. This paper reports on a study showing that *excessively* difficult authentic listening can be motivational for such learners, partly because of their very inability to comprehend it. Another finding examined is that *selling*, or emphasizing the authentic provenance of such materials, can positively effect students' perception of the lesson in which they are used. The practical application of such *Level-Excessive Authentic Listening* (LEAL) and *Lesson-Selling Tags* (LST) is also discussed.

英語の教材として真正性の高い(いわゆるauthenticな)教材の使用が薦められることが多い。しかしながら一方、レベルが高すぎて特に英語力の低い学習者のやる気を削ぐこともあるという欠点も指摘されることがある。本論文では大学で英語を学ぶ学習者を対象に実証研究を行った。その結果以下の点を明らかにした。1) 難しいとされる教材であっても英語力の低い学習者の動機付けを行う効果があること、2) 学習者が実際に使われる(authenticな)英語を学んでいるのだということを意識させることにより授業に肯定的な意義を認めさせる効果があること。結果に基づき、レベルの高い実用英語(Level-Excessive Authentic Listening)と対象の英語が実用的であると意識させるための指標(Lesson-Selling Tags)の関係について論じた。

The use of authentic materials has been widely advocated and there is, as Guariento and Morley (2001) point out, “a general consensus in language teaching” (p. 347) that it benefits the learning process.

A principal advantage proposed for presenting samples of genuine spoken interaction is that it exposes learners to those language features that are often missing from concocted texts. As Willis (2003) cautions, "there is a serious danger that specifically designed texts will show the language not as it really is, but as the course writers imagine it to be or would like it to be" (p. 224).

Less apparent, perhaps, than the benefit from exposure to this *real-world* language, is the affective role of authentic resources. Peacock (1997) suggests that amongst language teachers there is a "subjective impression" that these resources confer "a positive effect on learner motivation" (p. 144). His study found an increase in on-task behavior and observed motivation when a variety of authentic materials were incorporated into language classes.

Despite the fact that authentic resources are often seen as having the potential to motivate learners, Rost (2002) points out that some teachers believe authentic material "is too difficult for the students to handle" (p. 125). Such a view reflects a general concern, no doubt influenced to some extent by Krashen's (1981) input hypothesis, to ensure that task difficulty be set at an appropriate level. After all, most teachers would want to avoid possibly demoralizing learners with input too far beyond their linguistic competence. Apart from being dispiriting, exposing learners to incomprehensible listening materials can, Anderson and Lynch (1988) stress, "encourage passive and unsuccessful listening habits where the learners equate 'listening' with sitting back and letting a largely meaningless sequence of sound wash over them" (p. 45).

This paper reports on a piece of action research carried out to assess learners' reactions to authentic listening of a level that could be described as *excessively difficult*. The aim was to determine whether motivation would be adversely affected by such *Level-Excessive Authentic Listening* (LEAL), or if the motivational effect of authentic materials found by Peacock (1997) would still apply.

Although the listening material, recordings from Internet radio (for more on using this resource see Rebeck, 2006a), had previously been used successfully with advanced adult learners (average TOEIC score 800+), prior to this study the author had not attempted to use it with lower-level university students. Midway through a Communication English course, the author taught the first LEAL lesson with such students. Considering that the previous lessons, focusing on topics such as jobs, eating out and traveling, had been relatively easy, the author was quite prepared for the

LEAL-imposed jump in difficulty to overwhelm and possibly demoralize the class as a whole. However, contrary to expectations, the lesson, as far as one could observe from student reaction, was well received and motivational.

Reflecting on the language spoken when introducing and managing the lesson, the author suspected that its apparent success was partly related to the use of the very word that described the nature of the material: *authentic*. Dörnyei (2001) suggests that generating interest in a language learning activity is, to a great degree, a “selling task” (p. 53). From the start of the lesson the author intentionally sought to “sell” the lesson with the help of the *authentic* label, or tag. It is argued that the term *authentic listening* acted as a *Lesson-Selling Tag* (LST).

In the light of this insight, it was decided to widen the scope of the study to determine the influence of this LST on learner motivation. There were, therefore, two main aims for this study: first, to establish whether LEAL, despite its difficulty, could be motivational; and, second, to test if the teacher’s use of the phrase *authentic listening* served to raise student motivation more than another LST.

Method

The same two LEAL lessons were taught by the author to students during the first semester (S1) and subsequently to another group of students in the second semester (S2) of a university Communication English course. In S1, the “selling” of the LEAL lesson began with elicitation of the meaning of the word *authentic*. The author then explained to the students, in words approximating those below, what *authentic* meant in relation to their lesson:

Today we are going to do an authentic listening lesson. The recording you will hear is not from a textbook, but from the BBC, and was not made for learners of English, but for native speakers. Remember that because it was made for native speakers, you will probably find it very difficult, so don’t worry if you can’t understand much.

Throughout the lesson, and particularly when the author felt the attention of the class was waning, the students were reminded that they were doing authentic listening, which was not made [expressly] for them, but for native speakers. The students in S2 were also “sold” the lesson,

but instead of *authentic*, the LST *advanced listening* was used. Also, unlike the S1 students, those in S2 were not told the source of the material (i.e., BBC radio). Thus the introduction to an S2 listening lesson approximated the following:

Today we are going to do an advanced listening lesson. The recording you will hear was not made for your level, but for advanced students. Remember that because this listening was made for high-level students, you will probably find it very difficult, so don't worry if you can't understand much.

The word *advanced* was chosen for comparison because it was considered to be one familiar to Japanese students. A conscious effort was made by the author to project the same level of enthusiasm to both S1 and S2 groups. This was important because, as Dörnyei (2001, p. 33) emphasizes, the teacher's enthusiasm is an important factor in creating an environment that generates motivation.

In week 10 of both S1 and S2, the students completed Questionnaire 1 (see Appendix A for the Japanese original and English translation). Before the completion of the questionnaires, both recordings were played again in order to help the students recall the lessons about which they were to be asked.

A key word in the questionnaire, *iyoku* (意欲), which can be described as a feeling of wanting to do something with enthusiasm, was considered by the author, and native Japanese speakers consulted, to be the most suitable word to express the meaning of *motivation* that was intended in this study.

In addition to Likert scale items, the questionnaire included two open-ended questions. Although more difficult to analyze, Wallace (2001, p. 135) points out that such questions provide respondents with the opportunity for free expression and are more likely to yield unexpected and, potentially, more interesting data.

To determine the influence of LST in more detail, S2 students only were played a third recording (see Appendix B, transcript C) in the week following the completion of Questionnaire 1. Unlike their previous two lessons, however, this one was "sold" as authentic listening. Having now been exposed to both LSTs, S2 students were asked in Questionnaire 2 (see Appendix A) which they preferred and why.

Participants

The LEAL lessons were attended by a total of 238 (S1=144; S2=94) male and female, non-English majors, taking English as a compulsory first-year subject at a university in Nagoya. The overall level of students was estimated by the author and his colleagues as low intermediate. TOEIC scores, which provide a more objective measure of language level, were available for only one class, whose average score was 467. This figure would probably approximate the average of all S1 and S2 students.

Materials

The LEAL lessons used recorded extracts from the following three BBC Radio 4 programs (transcripts in Appendix B):

- (A) *You and Yours*: A caller explains why she is “waiting anxiously” for her mother, stricken by senile dementia, to die.
- (B) *Any Answers*: A caller to this phone-in program argues that smoking should be considered “another form of child abuse.”
- (C) *Night in the City*: A monologue in which a nurse talks about how he “got into” nursing and the way he copes when patients die.

These recordings were selected for two reasons. Firstly, they dealt with subjects that were topical and/or considered to be relevant to the students. The second reason relates to the naturalness of the speech. More so than scripted news reports, the three recordings contained many of the features that characterize unplanned spoken discourse such as fillers, terminal overlap (when two interlocutors attempt to speak at the same time), false starts and repetition (for details of these and other features, see Rost, 2002; Willis, 2003; Gilmore, 2004).

The LEAL Lessons

Buck (as cited in Helgesen, 2002) explains that pre-listening “provides context for interpretation and activates the background knowledge which will help interpretation.” (p. 29). In the *LEAL A* lesson, for example, the students were primed for the topic by questions about an item of realia, namely a poster of the Japanese film *Ashita no Kioku* (Memories of Tomorrow), about a young man diagnosed with early-onset dementia. Pre-teaching of vocabulary at this stage, however, was deliberately kept to a minimum, for reasons that will be discussed later.

Although the activities varied slightly among the three LEAL lessons, a typical lesson followed the procedure (a-k) shown below.

Note. NT (no transcript) indicates no transcript was used; WT (with transcript) shows the transcript was used during this step.

- a. Pre-listening
- b. Listening 1 (NT): Students listened to the recording and then indicated on a comprehension scale (0%-100%) how much they understood. They then compared their completed scales with a partner.
- c. Listening 2 (NT): Students answered several comprehension questions that focused their attention on key points in the text.
- d. Listening 3 (WT): Students listened and attempted a cloze exercise.
- e. Intensive study of transcript: The teacher went through the whole text line by line, explaining the meaning of difficult sections and unfamiliar vocabulary, while supplying the answers to the cloze for students to check.
- f. Listening 4 (WT): Students followed the recording on their transcripts.
- g. Alternate reading of the transcript: In pairs, students read the transcript aloud, initially line by line and then as a roleplay.
- h. Listening 5 (NT): The CD was paused at certain points to focus on pronunciation difficulties noticed during monitoring of the previous step.
- i. Roleplay of a concocted dialogue: Students practice a modified, simplified version of the original text.
- j. Listening 6 (WT→NT): Repeated choral shadowing of a section of the text until students were able to speak simultaneously with the recording, unaided by the transcript.
- k. Listening 7 (NT): Immediately after this final listening, students marked the comprehension scale a second time. Time did not permit inclusion of an important stage in the lesson: discussion. However, end-of-semester assessed-interviews did provide the opportunity for students to “relate to the text as individuals” (Anderson & Lynch, 1988, p. 77).

Analysis

In this study, the analytical process was performed on SPSS (Statistical Package for the Social Sciences). Cross-tabulations were run on the data in order to ascertain the interrelationship between the independent variable (authentic or advanced listening) and responses to items on the questionnaire (the dependent variable). Pearson's chi-square was then calculated to see if the pattern revealed by the cross-tabulations was statistically significant.

To determine whether motivation to study English could have influenced the response to LEAL, S1 and S2 students respectively were divided into two subgroups according to the results of Question 1 (*How would you rate your general level of motivation to study English?*):

1. HM (High Motivation): self-rated motivation of *very high* or *quite high*.
2. LM (Low Motivation): self-rated motivation of *not very high* or *not at all high*.

The statistical analysis was repeated to determine whether, within each of the listening groups S1 and S2, a significant relationship existed between self-rated motivation and the answers to the questionnaire items.

Students' comments from the open-questions were read by the author and classified, with a native Japanese speaker being consulted as necessary. The main categories of comments, which emerged from the more than 200 read, are introduced later in this paper.

Results

The results are presented for each question, except 2, which was used simply to determine attendance. All numbers are percentages, except *Total*, which indicates the total number of students who actually responded to the question. Results for significance are reported at the .05 level.

There was no statistically significant difference between S1 and S2 students' general inclination to study English (Table 1). Any changes in self-rated motivation were, therefore, likely to be due to the influence of the LEAL lessons.

There was no significant difference between S1 and S2, or between HM and LM sub-groups, on Q3, suggesting that all students found the LEAL lessons equally difficult (Table 2 & 3). Further evidence for the difficulty

presented by LEAL comes from the comprehension scale completed by the students. After the initial listening, most students rated their level of understanding from 0% to 10%.

Table 1. Results for Q1 concerning general level of motivation to study English

| | Very high | Quite high | Not very high | Not at all high | Total |
|--------------------------|-----------|------------|---------------|-----------------|-------|
| S1 (Authentic Listening) | 17.4 | 50.0 | 30.6 | 2.1 | 144 |
| S2 (Advanced Listening) | 18.3 | 46.2 | 32.3 | 3.2 | 93 |

Table 2. Results for Q3 concerning perceived difficulty of lesson (Dementia)

| | | Very difficult | Quite difficult | Not very difficult | Not difficult at all | Total |
|----|-----|----------------|-----------------|--------------------|----------------------|-------|
| S1 | All | 32.8 | 43.1 | 17.5 | 6.6 | 137 |
| | HM | 28.0 | 46.2 | 20.4 | 5.4 | 93 |
| | LM | 43.2 | 36.4 | 11.4 | 9.1 | 44 |
| S2 | All | 41.6 | 46.1 | 10.1 | 2.2 | 89 |
| | HM | 46.4 | 37.5 | 14.3 | 1.8 | 56 |
| | LM | 34.4 | 59.4 | 3.1 | 3.1 | 32 |

Table 3. Results for Q3 concerning perceived difficulty of lesson (Smoking)

| | | Very difficult | Quite difficult | Not very difficult | Not difficult at all | Total |
|----|-----|----------------|-----------------|--------------------|----------------------|-------|
| S1 | All | 43.9 | 43.9 | 10.1 | 2.2 | 139 |
| | HM | 41.3 | 44.6 | 12.0 | 2.2 | 92 |
| | LM | 48.9 | 42.6 | 6.4 | 2.1 | 47 |
| S2 | All | 44.9 | 44.9 | 10.1 | 0.0 | 89 |
| | HM | 42.1 | 45.6 | 12.3 | 0.0 | 57 |
| | LM | 45.5 | 44.3 | 10.2 | 0.0 | 88 |

Concerning Q4, the rapid speed of the discourse was the most common reason for perceived difficulty cited. Other reasons included: the use of unknown vocabulary, interruptions, the occurrence of connected speech, weak forms, elision and ellipsis, difficulty understanding English accents, and subject matter.

Table 4. Results for Q5 concerning the impact of authentic materials on motivation

| | | Substantially | Somewhat | Not much | Not at all | Total |
|----|-----|---------------|----------|----------|------------|-------|
| S1 | All | 20.8 | 64.6 | 13.9 | 0.7 | 144 |
| | HM | 24.7 | 63.9 | 10.3 | 1.0 | 97 |
| | LM | 12.8 | 66.0 | 21.3 | 0.0 | 47 |
| S2 | All | 12.8 | 59.6 | 26.6 | 1.1 | 94 |
| | HM | 16.7 | 66.7 | 16.7 | 0.0 | 60 |
| | LM | 6.1 | 45.5 | 45.5 | 3.0 | 33 |

As shown in Table 4, 85.4% of S1 students and 72.4% of S2 students reported that their level of motivation for studying English had either risen *substantially* or *somewhat*. It appears that LEAL was effective in raising the motivation of students overall. However, the increase in the motivation of S1 students, in comparison with those in S2, was not statistically significant. No statistically significant difference was found between HM and LM students in S1. However, a statistically significant difference was observed between the two S2 sub-groups.

Table 5. Results for Q6a concerning the perceived value of the authentic listening lessons

| | | Extremely | Quite | Not very | Not at all | Total |
|----|-----|-----------|-------|----------|------------|-------|
| S1 | All | 63.2 | 34.0 | 2.8 | 0.0 | 144 |
| | HM | 66.0 | 30.9 | 3.1 | 0.0 | 97 |
| | LM | 57.4 | 40.4 | 2.1 | 0.0 | 47 |
| S2 | All | 41.5 | 51.1 | 7.4 | 0.0 | 94 |
| | HM | 51.7 | 40.0 | 8.3 | 0.0 | 60 |
| | LM | 21.2 | 72.7 | 6.1 | 0.0 | 33 |

While the results of Question 5 did not show that the LST “authentic” listening was significantly more effective as a motivator than “advanced” listening, those of Question 6 suggest otherwise. When “sold” as authentic listening, 63.2% thought that LEAL was *extremely* worthwhile. Significantly, in comparison, only 41.5% of the students who were “sold” the same lesson with the advanced listening LST gave this rating (see Table 5).

In effect, Question 6 is seeking to ascertain the student’s perceived value of the LEAL lessons, and motivation is, as Williams and Burden (as cited in Doyon, 2003, Perceived Value section, para. 2) point out, closely related to such perception:

The greater the value that individuals attach to the accomplishment of or involvement in an activity, the more highly motivated they will be both to engage in it initially, and later put sustained effort into succeeding in the activity.

While the S1-S2 comparison in Question 5 was inconclusive, the results for Question 6a suggest that, if perceived value is equated with motivation, the S1 students could be expected to have gained more motivational benefit from LEAL than those in S2.

Looking within the groups, the results mirrored those of Question 5: a statistically significant difference was found between HM and LM students in S2 but not in S1.

When asked to give reasons for the perceived value of LEAL lessons as *extremely* or *quite* worthwhile the students offered various responses. A small sample of these comments, categorized under five main headings, is introduced below.

1. The Positive Perception of Difficulty

Comment 1a, and numerous others, suggested that the difficulty of the material itself was viewed positively. For some, including the writer of 1b, this was because they considered LEAL as preparation for real-life situations. A similar sentiment, expressed, for example, in 1c, was that coping with English outside the classroom requires more than being exposed to the relatively undemanding listening they had been given at school:

- a. [I thought the authentic listening lessons were *extremely* worthwhile] because most students, including me, were unable to catch hardly anything. (S1)

- b. *[The lessons] made me understand about the speed and pronunciation of native speech, and I think that I would be mentally prepared if I actually went abroad. (S1)*
- c. *[I thought it was extremely worthwhile] because it was real English. We did listening in junior and high school, but there the material used had been slowed down, so it was easier to hear. You'll never be able to comprehend what is being said in a real-life situation that way. (S1)*

2. Appreciation of one's English Ability

Students commented that the LEAL lessons had made them more aware of their own level of English. This possibly sobering realization, however, seems to have been perceived positively rather than with a sense of discouragement.

- a. *I really felt how low my English ability was. Even though I can translate grammar and sentences, when it actually came to listening, I was unable to answer [the comprehension questions] at all. But it was a great stimulus to make me want to study English conversation. (S1)*
- b. *The lessons were of value because I realized that the level of English we usually listen to is completely useless, and that it's necessary to practice with a variety of levels. (S1)*
- c. *[I thought the lessons were extremely worthwhile] because it made me acutely aware of my lack of English ability, and made me think that I had to at least study a bit by myself. (S1)*

3. Exposure to what is Perceived as an Inaccessible Media

Despite the proliferation of authentic material available on video and on the Internet, some students commented that they had been afforded a rare opportunity to hear native speakers. It is possible that English language radio is regarded as particularly difficult or inaccessible, and consequently the opportunity to learn from it, as opposed to a more familiar authentic medium, for example movies, may have been motivational for S1 students (S2 students were not, of course, told the true source of the recordings):

- a. *[It was quite worthwhile] because even though we're studying English, there's not much opportunity to experience authentic English. (S1)*

4. Stimulating Subject Matter

From the comments it was clear that many students responded positively to the content of the listening material:

- a. *I was able to learn a different point of view. (S2)*
- b. *The content [of the recordings] dealt with things that we ourselves will have to face. (S2)*
- c. *Because the content had substance and depth, it was impossible to come up with the answer just like that. In this regard the subjects were difficult, but I think these lessons were important. (S1)*

5. Teaching Procedures

Comments indicated that certain aspects of how the lessons were conducted, in particular the use of the script and repeated playing of the recordings, seemed to have contributed to the overall positive perception of the lessons:

- a. *After looking at the script it wasn't that difficult, but before we saw the script the speed was so fast we couldn't catch anything. (S2)*
- b. *The lessons were good because I came to understand more and more as the recordings were played repeatedly. (S1)*
- c. *[It was extremely worthwhile] because although at first I didn't understand, after listening repeatedly I was able to comprehend what was being said. This is the point when I felt that my listening ability had improved. (S1)*
- d. *It was difficult because it took some time to understand the content, but after the teacher explained it to us, and we practiced in other ways, I was able to understand it well. (S1)*

Although greatly outnumbered by positive responses, a number of negative comments were received. These were mainly concerned with the difficulty of the lesson:

- a. *[I thought it was not worthwhile] because I couldn't understand anything. I think we should have done something easier. (S2)*
- b. *It was impossible to understand with such high-level English from the start. (S2)*

- c. *I didn't expect that I would only be able to catch so little, and I felt disappointed with myself. (S1)*
- d. *Just realizing that [authentic listening] is so different from what we did at junior high and high school has some value. But I felt myself feeling even more turned off English than before. My motivation didn't increase. (S1)*

Comparison of S1 and S2 Comments

Analyzing the written responses of both groups of students, it was apparent that those by S1 students often included *authentic* (sometimes written in *katakana*). In contrast, the word *advanced* occurred in relatively few S2 comments. This may indicate that of the two LSTs, *authentic* had been more internalized, possibly because, being a new term for most students, it was attended to more readily than the already familiar *advanced*.

Another difference observed was the greater number of S1 comments comparing the LEAL lessons with the listening they had done at school, including for examination preparation. This suggests, perhaps, that *authentic* signaled to students a departure from previous listening practice in a way that *advanced* did not.

Out of the 80 students in S2 who responded to Questionnaire 2 (see Appendix A), 54 indicated they would choose “authentic listening” over “advanced listening” if they were naming the lesson. Responses to the open question for Questionnaire 2 suggest that the associations students attached to particular LST influenced how they perceived a lesson:

- a. *There's no denying it was difficult, but I think the term authentic is better than advanced because it is more suitable for a lesson, which, rather than being at a high level, was more a chance to experience English as it is really spoken.*
- b. *Authentic has a more practical ring to it.*
- c. *[Authentic English] just sounds closer to native.*
- d. *[I'm against advanced] because it feels that it was made for Japanese people.*
- e. *[I'm for advanced] because the word is more familiar to Japanese.*
- f. *The word advanced gives the feeling that if you study this, you will go one step up.*

The results for both Questions 5 and 6 showed that, while no statistically significant difference was found between HM and LM sub-groups in S1, such a difference was found in S2. This suggests that HM S2 students may have benefited affectively from the challenge of advanced listening, while LM S2 learners were to some extent inhibited or demoralized by the level of difficulty. In contrast, when LEAL was “sold” as authentic listening (S1), students reacted in a similar (positive) way regardless of self-rated motivation.

Differences in the connotative meaning triggered by each LST may partly explain these results. Because the word *advanced* seems to be imbued with connotations of levels or grades (see above), LM students may have wondered why they were being subjected to material obviously meant for more proficient learners. On the other hand, *authentic listening*, being free or less suggestive of such associations, may not have inhibited LM students in the same way. Even for learners in whom *authentic* did evoke connotations of difficulty, it was more likely to be that difficulty associated with real-life communication rather than exams or formal study.

Discussion

The responses to Question 5 showed that Japanese learners valued the opportunity of being exposed to samples of authentic English despite, and also, in some cases, because of its difficulty.

Although LEAL was rated positively by the students in this study, Cauldwell (1998) points out that there is a general reluctance amongst teachers to use anything but listening materials that cater to what the learners “can manage at their current level” (p. 7). Insufficient consideration is given, he argues, to the ability level that is needed to understand spontaneous fast speech. Such “misdirected charity” as he describes it (p. 7), deprives students of the opportunity to become aware of the divide between their present level and the target level.

Faerch and Kasper (cited in Anderson and Lynch, 1988, p. 35) also stress the need for learners “to experience comprehension problems.” They argued it is only after learners are alerted to gaps in their internal L2 systems that they will try to plug these gaps, and thereby learn. By showing that LEAL can be motivational, the results of this present study complement the linguistic arguments for difficult input.

Peaty (2003) stresses that “students should not have to waste a lot of time deciphering authentic texts” (p. 4), and it could well be argued that

incorporating LEAL into a communicative English course is time squandered when what Japanese students most require is level-appropriate input and every opportunity to use practical English. This study suggests, however, that regardless of the immediate usefulness of the content, the psychological impact of LEAL, even in terms of making students acutely aware of what they do not know, could justify its inclusion in conversation courses.

The Theory and Practice of LEAL

This study was a piece of action research conducted by a single teacher who no doubt influenced the results to some degree. Although, as Wallace (2001, p. 18) points out, the priority of action research is not to make “general statements,” certain aspects of this study may have relevance for other EFL professionals. The following section, therefore, includes some points to consider when implementing LEAL in the classroom.

Appropriate Number and Frequency of LEAL Lessons

The experience of teaching LEAL to lower-level students since this study, has led the author to feel that two or three of these lessons over 15 weeks appears to inject an appropriate amount of positive tension into his course, which is not specifically a listening one. Further research is necessary to establish whether exceeding a certain number of LEAL lessons would be counterproductive in terms of motivation.

Interesting and Relevant Subject Matter

Dörnyei (2001) stresses the importance of relevance for motivation:

One of the most demotivating factors for learners is when they have to learn something that they cannot see the point of because it has no seeming relevance whatsoever to their lives. (p. 63)

A particular topic may, of course, have been especially meaningful to certain individuals (the impact of LEAL 1, for example, was probably greater for the handful of students who may have been living with a grandparent suffering from dementia), but student feedback indicated a general interest in the content of the recordings.

If the recordings had not been relevant to the students, it is unlikely that motivation would have been maintained to the extent observed.

Moreover, the relevance of a particular topic is most likely amplified when it is made explicit (as it was for S1 students²) that it is “real” people, as opposed to actors, who are speaking.

Minimal Pre-teaching

A possible reason why even students with low self-rated motivation generally responded positively to LEAL was that its extreme relative difficulty served as an equalizer of learners. In effect, the first playing of the recording acted to place the whole class in the same boat of minimal comprehension.

As was explained earlier, after the first playing of the recording, students marked on their comprehension scale the degree to which they had understood and then compared their rating with a partner. While comparing, the author observed a number of students giggling as they revealed to each other how *little* they had understood. It seemed to the author that the realization they had not fared any worse than their classmates had a reassuring and anxiety-lowering effect. By the end of this rating-comparison, the atmosphere felt more relaxed and the class appeared more ready to tackle the lesson.

Students were not asked to learn a list of key vocabulary or do other out-of-class preparation. Although it is considered sound pedagogical practice, the author decided against setting such pre-listening homework as it might have placed certain students, particularly those more inclined to study autonomously, at an initial advantage. Listening to the first playing of the LEAL selection cold was designed to maximize the alleviation of anxiety described above as well as the distance that needed to be traveled to span the *achievement gap* (see below).

Comments by students (see Question 6 [1]) revealed that part of the value of LEAL was that it simulated what they considered to be the real world outside the classroom, where language is often highly unpredictable and filled with unknown vocabulary. Having students listen with limited preparation brings them closer to the kind of situation they may encounter and the emotions they may feel on the *communication front line* (as mentioned earlier in this paper, activities that contextualized the topic of the recording were included before the listening).

Creating an Achievement-Gap

The results of this study have led the author to hypothesize that the motivational benefit of LEAL is greatest when the gap between what

learners had been unable to do and what they ended up accomplishing is greatest. This hypothesis could inform future inquiry in the area.

Rost (2002, p. 125) points out that task design is a pivotal factor, allowing authentic listening material to be calibrated and utilized in a way that is motivational for different ability levels. However, the priority of task design for LEAL lessons was not to render the material manageable from the start by, for example, previewing vocabulary, but rather to ensure that the initially incomprehensible became, in the space of a 90-minute lesson, comprehensible. The two main lesson procedures that enabled students to span this gap were repeated exposure to the input and use of the transcript.

Traversing the Achievement Gap

Among the things that White (1998) considers wrong with the typical listening lesson is the limited time spent actually listening to the tape. He laments that, “students perhaps hear a two-to-three-minute tape three or four times in the lesson at the most—a total of about 12 minutes’ listening,” and spend the rest of the lesson “discussing the answers, and doing transfer activities” (p. 5).

Repeated exposure to the text, which is generally regarded as an important factor promoting comprehension (Takefuta & Kusagaya, 2004, p. 148), was feasible in this study because the three LEAL recordings were relatively short (104, 80, and 67 seconds for LEAL 1, 2, and 3 respectively). This brevity also made it less likely that students would switch off during any of the eight times the recording was played during a single lesson.

The input load placed on students by the difficulty of LEAL and the target of reaching maximum comprehension in a short time, necessitated intensive study of the transcript during the lesson.

The author observed that, after the final listening, the majority of students indicated on their comprehension scales that they had understood from 50% to 80% of the recording, compared with 0% to 10% after the initial playing. It is unlikely that such increases would have been seen without bottom-up processing achieved by concentrated attention to the details of the text.

Such a drastic increase in comprehension seems to have made some students (see, for example, comment 5c) feel that their listening ability had improved. It is unlikely, however, that any real gains could have been made in only two lessons, especially since listening strategies, for instance, predicting and listening for gist, were not explicitly covered

in class. Instead, the increased comprehension students experienced was most likely limited to the understanding of the particular recording. Nevertheless, even such a lesson-specific improvement was in itself important motivationally because it showed learners what they could achieve through application. Students, as D. Verity commented (personal communication, June 23, 2007), were given a glimpse of their potential future selves.

Listening comprehension was supplemented by production activities, mostly using the transcript, such as class and peer shadowing (Wiltshier, 2007, p. 43), role-play, and practice of concocted conversations adapted from the transcript.

Lesson-selling tags

Understanding that words can often evoke associations beyond their literal meaning is important for teachers. Ikeoka (2007), for example, suggests that teachers in junior high schools consider the emotional reaction of pupils to certain labels when streaming classes. He offers the following caution:

A little thought needs to be given when naming the different levels... *beginners' course*, *intermediate course* and *advanced course* may be easy to understand, but there is a chance these names will have a considerable impact on both the individual pupils and on interpersonal relationships in the class. (p. 14; my translation)

Using the homeroom teacher's nickname instead, will, Ikeoka suggests, help produce an all-important "at-home atmosphere" (p.14).

The results of this present study suggest that connotations perceived by learners to certain words can influence their response to a lesson. It was seen that "selling" LEAL as authentic evoked more positive connotations than presenting it as advanced listening. One student, for example, wrote that *authentic* triggered associations of "native [speaker]," a concept that has considerable status in Japan.

Of course, just as good retailers conduct their sales talk with enthusiasm, teachers should pay attention to the manner in which they deliver their pedagogical "sales pitch". It is also important to remember that what the lesson learners are being persuaded to "buy into" should be well planned and based on material that has value commensurate with the effort they are expending in order to understand it. Desperately justifying

a lesson's rationale by emphasizing its "authentic" credentials is unlikely to galvanize the class if the material is irrelevant and uninteresting.

Conclusion

In this study it was shown that material pitched substantially above the learners' current level tended to motivate rather than demoralize. There are other ways, besides its challenging nature, that authentic material can serve to motivate learners. Guariento and Morley's (2001) description of one of these may resonate with many language learners: "[authentic resources] give [learners] a feeling that...[they] are in touch with a living entity, the target language as it is used by the community which speaks it" (p. 347). In the classroom, this feeling is more likely to be inspired in learners when the authentic provenance of material is made explicit and emphasized by the teacher, as it was to the S1 students.

Finally, as a university teacher of Communication English, this author agrees with Moteki Hiromichi, who declares that higher education should provide more than a "mere extension" of what he views as the increasingly undemanding English education taught in schools (Rebuck, 2006b). To this end, LEAL can affirm to students the challenging nature of their academic environment and provide an indication of the teacher's confidence in their potential as language learners.

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Notes

1. "Authentic" does not necessarily have to equate with "difficult". In fact, as Ueda (2005, p. 94) points out, the redundancy that characterizes natural speech often provides many more semantic cues for the listener than a cleaned-up concocted text.

2. While it is necessary to acknowledge that some S2 (advanced listening) students would have guessed correctly that the recording they had heard was not concocted, the results suggest that it is the teacher's promotion of

class resources as authentic that is more important in raising motivation than the assumptions of individual students as to the source.

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Appendix A

Questionnaire 1

質問1. あなたは、自分の「英語の学習意欲」をどのくらいだと思いますか。

1. 非常に高い 2. やや高い 3. あまり高くない 4. 全く高くない

質問2. あなたは、次の話題を扱ったオーセンティックリスニング Authentic Listeningの授業に出席していましたか?出席していたものに○をつけてください。(複数回答可)

1. オーセンティックリスニング「認知症Dementia」
2. オーセンティックリスニング「喫煙Smoking」

質問3 これらの授業はあなたにとって難しいものでしたか?

「認知症Dementia」の話題について

1. 非常に難しかった 2. まあまあ難しかった
3. あまり難しくなかった 4. 全く難しくなかった

「喫煙Smoking」の話題について

1. 非常に難しかった 2. まあまあ難しかった
3. あまり難しくなかった 4. 全く難しくなかった

質問4a 「非常に難しかった」あるいは「まあまあ難しかった」と答えた方に伺います。

質問4b どのようなところが難しかったですか?

質問5 あなたはオーセンティックリスニング Authentic Listeningの授業を受けて、英語への学習意欲が高まりましたか?

1. 非常に高まった 2. まあまあ高まった
3. あまり高まらなかった 4. 全く高まらなかった

質問6a あなたはオーセンティックリスニング Authentic Listeningの授業は価値があると思いますか?またなぜそう思いますか?

1. 非常に価値がある 2. まあまあ価値がある
3. あまり価値がない 4. 価値はない

質問6bその理由

Translation of Questionnaire 1

Note. While the questionnaire completed by S2 students was the same as the one below, *Authentic* was replaced with the word *Advanced*.

Q1. How would you rate your general level of motivation to study English?

1. Very high 2. Quite high 3. Not very high 4. Not at all high

Q2. Did you attend the *Authentic Listening* lessons dealing with the following topics? Circle the lesson(s) that you attended:

1. Authentic English: Dementia
2. Authentic English: Smoking

Q3. Were these lessons difficult for you?

Dementia

- | | |
|-----------------------|-------------------------|
| 1. Very difficult | 2. Quite difficult |
| 3. Not very difficult | 4. Not difficult at all |

Smoking

- | | |
|-----------------------|-------------------------|
| 1. Very difficult | 2. Quite difficult |
| 3. Not very difficult | 4. Not difficult at all |

Q4. If you replied *very difficult* or *quite difficult*, in what way was it difficult?

Q5. Did taking the *Authentic Listening* lessons increase your motivation to study English?

1. Substantially 2. Somewhat 3. Not much 4. Not at all

Q6a. Do you think the *Authentic Listening* lessons were worthwhile?

1. Extremely 2. Quite 3. Not very 4. Not at all

Q6b. Give reasons for your answers to 6a below.

Questionnaire 2

この授業で扱ったリスニングは、すべてイギリスのラジオ番組から取ったものです。来学期からこのリスニングを、アドバンスト・リスニング *Advanced Listening* と呼ぶか、オーセンティック・リスニング *Authentic Listening* と呼ぶか、現在、考え中です。あなたはどう思いますか。ぜひご意見を聞かせてください。

1. アドバンスト・リスニング *Advanced Listening* と呼んだほうががいい
2. オーセンティック・リスニング *Authentic Listening* と呼んだほうががいい

その理由

Translation of Questionnaire 2

All the listening material used in the [listening] lessons was recorded from British radio. At present, your teacher is deciding whether to call these lessons *Advanced Listening* or *Authentic Listening*. What do you think the lessons should be called?

1. It would be better to call the lessons *Advanced Listening*.
2. It would be better to call the lessons *Authentic Listening*.

Your reason:

Appendix B (Transcripts)

LEAL 1 (You and Yours, BBC Radio 4, November 29, 2005)

Presenter: Jean, good afternoon

Caller: Good afternoon.

Presenter: It is your mother as well who has dementia, explain your own feelings about that... that you called us about.

Caller: My feeling is that I'm waiting anxiously for my mother to die. That sounds awful, doesn't it? But I think first of all she's in a rather worse state than any of your earlier callers have described. I've been through all those states. My mother has been in care for nine years; she hasn't spoken a coherent word for five. She can't walk. She can't do anything for herself. There is no... she once had a lovely smile... there is no human interaction at all. You don't make eye contact with her. She doesn't respond when you hold her hand. She's been in this state for a year or so now. About two years ago, I found that I was starting to talk about her in the past tense as though she were already dead; and indeed she is. The mother I knew and loved is already dead. She's not there anymore. But we're left with this awful situation where, apart from this wicked disease, she appears to be in quite good health.

Presenter: And you feel guilty, obviously, about your reactions even though you're being very honest about them to a lot of people.

Caller: Dreadfully guilty. But at the same time I think we have to be honest about it. There doesn't seem to be any point. There is no prospect of any cure, any help, any recovery, any return to any sort of quality of life. Erm... we don't know what to do.

LEAL 2 (Any answers, BBC Radio 4, October 29, 2005)

Interviewer: Dr Tom Goodfellow from Rugby.

Caller: I'm a doctor. I'm a radiologist and I actually diagnose the nasty work, the nasty cancers. My point is that I lived with my parents, god rest them, for over 20 years, and they were both heavy smokers, and as a result I've got a mild chronic bronchitis; not life threatening, not serious, but, you know, unpleasant. Now, when everyone is discussing the effects of smoking in pubs and clubs and bars, no one is mentioning the effects of passive smoking on children by their parents. You can choose to go in a

pub or club, but you can't choose who your parents are. And actually the effect of passive smoking on children is quite appalling. We forbid and ban all sorts of other abuse of children, but somehow this one is ignored.

Interviewer: That's an extraordinarily interesting point. If you were to have such a ban, you would effectively be banning cigarettes altogether, wouldn't you? Would there be anywhere where you could smoke cigarettes?

Caller: I think that if people choose to smoke, they have to do it outside, completely separate. But certainly there must be a real rule that parents must not be allowed to subject their children to a smoky atmosphere with all the negative effects on it. Yes, I think we have to... as a society.

Interviewer: Quite difficult to enforce, wouldn't it?

Caller: Very difficult to enforce and that's why I'm very disappointed the government have been so mealy-mouthed about this bill. Rather than taking a real clear stand, they've just watered it down unacceptably. And children can't choose, that's the tragedy; and it's another form of child abuse.

Interviewer: Thank you.

LEAL 3 (A Night in the City, BBC Radio 4, 12 December 2005)

I got into nursing by pure fluke really. Me and my best mate at school, we decided to play a prank on everybody. The prank was that we were going to apply for nursing and fish farming as a wind up.

Anyway, they wrote back and offered me an interview, so I came over to England, had a whale of a time—again didn't think any else of it, 'cause I wasn't interested in doing it— and then they offered me a place. So, that's how I've ended up doing this. True story... true story.

I've always been very realistic. I'll do the best for patients. I accept that some patients are going to be unwell. I accept that some patients I see are going to die. And I accept that some patients just don't need our treatment, but they're going to be here anyway.

I know it sounds very harsh and callous, doesn't it, for a nurse to say, but people do die, and me dwelling on somebody passing away isn't going to change the fact that they have passed away. That sounds horrible, doesn't it? But that's the way, that's the way I work.