

Doing Extensive Listening and Shadowing using Graded Readers with CDs

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This paper presents ways graded readers with CDs can be used to improve students' English skills. It is a corollary to the data presented in "Investigating Extensive Listening Using Graded Reader CDs" (Ware, et. al, 2011) and the previous work done by Yonezawa and Ware (2008, 2009). While investigating how using graded readers with CDs can benefit students, we have developed procedures that students report are helpful. These include having students select a book at an appropriate level and read the book to understand its message. Then, students should read and listen to build listening skills, followed by listening and shadowing to build speaking fluency. Students felt that doing these activities helped many aspects of their English including reading, listening, speaking, vocabulary, motivation, and language awareness.

Publishers of extensive readers have begun supplementing their readers, especially at lower levels, with cds. In a paper also part of this proceedings (Ware, et. al, 2011) and the previous work done by Yonezawa and Ware (2008, 2009), the author and her colleagues outline the benefits of extensive listening in conjunction with an extensive reading program. For the past four and half years the author and her colleagues have been studying the benefits of using graded readers with CDs (GR-CDs) for extensive listening and shadowing. Multiple classes of students taking required English classes at a university have been a part of these studies. In the process, we developed procedures for using graded readers with CDs that students report are helpful.

Using GR-CDs for Extensive Listening and Shadowing

Introducing GR-CDs

Students were given handouts in Japanese to introduce them to concept of extensive reading and the steps to follow for doing extensive listening and shadowing.

A mobile library of graded readers with CDs and battery-powered CD players for each student are taken to class using shopping carts (see Figure 1). Each cart has 8 levels of books with about 500 different titles (see Figure 2). For sanitary reasons, students were asked to bring their own headphones, although students could borrow headphones when necessary.

Extensive Listening Goals.

Following the pattern given for doing extensive reading, students were encouraged to do lots of

listening, starting with easy materials. Students should understand 95% of what they hear so they can enjoy listening and experience success. If they find that the book is not interesting, then they should stop reading or listening, and choose a different book.



Figure 1. Shopping Cart with Graded Readers and CD players

Selecting Appropriate Levels of Graded Readers

Since most of our students have stronger skills in reading as compared with their listening skills, the following steps create a beneficial extensive listening experience.

Students should determine the level that they can read with 95% comprehension. One way to do this is to open the book in the middle and read a page. If there are more than 2 or 3 unknown words (excluding proper nouns), then they should choose a lower level.

For their listening and shadowing practice, survey data indicates that most students should choose books that are 1 or 2 levels lower than their 95% comprehension reading level.

Shadowing requires students to continuously listen while echoing what they've heard. Students are instructed not to stop the CD, but to continue listening and shadowing. Students should be instructed to listen to chunks of meaningful "text" and then echo what they've heard. It's almost impossible to shadow everything you hear, but when done in phrases, someone listening to you should understand what you're hearing. Shadowing is cognitively difficult. Further, many students have found that the speed at which the graded readers are read is much faster than they are able to speak. For these reasons, the books that are used for shadowing will generally be from levels that are lower than students' extensive reading

level.

Before allowing students to choose their listening and shadowing books, teachers should demonstrate shadowing with both a low level book (e.g., 1 Pink) and a higher level book (e.g., 4 Brown). After explaining and demonstrating the process, have the whole class shadow both books. This will encourage students to select appropriate levels for their listening and shadowing practice.

Steps to Building Listening & Shadowing Skills

During the first class using the graded readers, students should read their selected book for a few minutes in class to verify that it is both interesting and a good level. They should then finish reading the book without using a dictionary as homework. Teachers should stress that students should understand 95% of the words, otherwise they should choose a lower level book.

During class the next day, and every day thereafter, the following steps should be used.

Step 1. Students should read and listen to what they had previously read for about 7 minutes.

Step 2. Ideally, students should listen to the book a second time without reading. However, because of time constraints, we skipped this step during class.

Step 3. Students should listen again (while their books are closed) and shadow (say) what they hear for about 6 minutes.

Step 4. Students should then engage in interactive activities related to their graded readers.

Alternately, you could divide Step 3 above into two parts: one where you have students shadow while reading (books open) and a second where they shadow without reading (books closed). This could help weaker students become more comfortable with shadowing and give more time for students to connect what they see with what they are hearing. However, shadowing without reading requires more intense listening and should not be omitted.

Interactive Activities using Graded Readers

Since our students like our English classes because they give them a chance to connect with other students, we have found that it is important to include interaction as part of our in-class graded reader activities.

These activities can include discussing their

FLC Levels	HeadWords
0 White	75-175
1 Pink	200-250
2 Yellow	300-350
3 Orange	400-525
4 Brown	600
5 Lime Green	700-800
6 Red	1000-1100
7 Purple	1200-1400

Figure 2. Grader Reader Levels—Based on Headwords

books: answering questions about their book's genre, plot, favorite characters, and opinions about the book. As another idea, students can then read from their book to their partner for two to four minutes. In addition, students could shadow their partner's reading. Another suggestion is to have pairs of students choose a book to read (sequentially) and then to present to the class. Part of the presentation could include a dramatic reading from the book.

Logistics

It is good to allow students to borrow two graded readers: one for reading and a lower level reader for listening and shadowing. Students should read the entire book as homework before practicing listening.

Because different publishers handle their CDs in different ways, in our extensive listening library, CD pockets are attached to each book using staples. (See Figure 3.) The opening to the pocket faces the spine of the book so that the CDs do not fall out of the books. Tape is then placed over the staples to keep them from catching on other books when the books are placed in the shopping baskets. Labels are put on the plastic bags around the CD players so that students use the same CD player during the semester. That way, if a student forgets to return a CD to its book, then it will be easier to locate. Students are required to fill in cards with their name and student ID before taking books home.



Figure 3. Graded Reader with CD Pocket and Card

Recording Shadowing and Reading

As part of using GR-CDs for listening and shadowing, we asked students to record their shadowing of a graded reader. Students were allowed to choose whatever book (and level) they preferred. The recordings were done twice: a few weeks after introducing listening and shadowing, and then at the end of the semester. Students were graded on how much better they could shadow at the end of the semester. We found that needing to make these recordings increased students' investment in learning to shadow well.

To do the recordings, students were seated in groups. Then one person in the group used a digital recorder to record their shadowing. The headphone jack of their headset was connected to the battery-powered CD player, while the microphone jack was connected to the digital recorder. Students then pressed the record button on the digital recorder followed quickly by pressing the play button on the CD player. They then listened and shadowed without reading for about three minutes. Later students would listen to their recording and reflect on how well they did and which areas they needed to improve.

Similar benefits could be obtained by having students record themselves reading from a graded reader that they had listened to. Then they could compare their reading with the reading on the CD.

Student Comments about Using GR-CDs and Doing Shadowing

Survey Questions

At the end of each semester, students responded to survey questions about how much reading, listening, and shadowing they did with the GR-CDs. They were also asked open-ended questions about their English learning experiences. For example, (1) Why did your English skills improve, remain the same, or decrease? And (2) What part of this class has been the most helpful or the most interesting to you?

Student Comments

The following are some comments about doing extensive listening and shadowing of GR-CDs.

It's very helpful for my listening skill[s] to

[do] shadowing (C2, 2009).

My English developed. I noticed it's important for [my] listening skill's improvement to listen every day (C3, 2009).

I improved not only my listening comprehension, but also my reading skills. My vocabulary increased (B2, 2009, 1st semester).

I thought that doing shadowing with my favorite book was new and exciting (A1, 2009, 1st semester).

Not only my listening but also my speaking skills have improved. I can read books more easily than before (B1, 2009, 1st semester).

My speaking level is higher than it [was] in April. I want to speak more in English (C1, 2009).

I think (shadowing) helps my speaking... Probably because I can [better] control what I'm saying. For example, when you speak, you just speak without knowing your English mistakes. But after doing shadowing of English sentences, and listening to it and yourself, you'll notice that you made mistakes about what you used to say [about the usage of specific words in different contexts], and you are trying to be careful about your mistakes for the next time (Z, interview, Feb. 2011).

Language Center, 29, 35-45.

Ware, J. L., Yonezawa, M., Kurihara, Y., & Durand J. (2012). Investigating Extensive Listening using graded reader CDs *Extensive Reading World Congress Proceedings*, 1, 120-123.

Conclusion

Having students read graded readers, then listen to and shadow their GR-CDs helps them build their English skills. Students report that doing these activities helps many aspects of their English including reading, listening, speaking, vocabulary, and motivation. Having students record and listen to their shadowing of GR-CDs increases their awareness of their language use. Finally, giving students opportunities to interact about what they have read enables them to connect with other students.

References

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