

The Effects of Teaching Methods in Using Films for Listening Comprehension Practice¹

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I. INTRODUCTION

Many language teachers use video materials in the classroom because videos can provide not only aural components of the language but also visual components. In addition, video materials strongly attract students' interest and motivate them. Furukawa (1985) reports that a nation-wide survey by the Committee for the Investigation into the Actual Conditions of College English Education found that 67.7% of the students want to use videos or films in their language learning and that the most preferred material by many Japanese college students is a film or a video².

Since 1988 we have been conducting a series of empirical studies on the effects of using films in listening comprehension (LC) practice. The results of the first two studies indicate that for Japanese college students, who have very little aural instruction in their high school days, films 1) will not necessarily help to improve their LC ability, but 2) they nonetheless highly motivate students. (See Edasawa, Takeuchi & Nishizaki, 1989; Takeuchi, Edasawa & Nishizaki, 1990.)

One of the criticisms of our studies was that the method we used, partial-transcription of the script, might have hindered students from improving their LC ability. According to Richards (1988), completing a partial transcription is an exclusively bottom-up type strategy, which does not activate an appropriate schema or assist comprehension of the utterances globally. Tomita (1989) also demonstrates in her preliminary study that transcription interferes with students' grasping the utterances globally.

With regard to classroom activities in teaching LC, some experts (e.g., Morley, 1981; Dunkel, 1986) emphasize the importance of pre-listening activities, such as glossary work and explaining the context. In the pre-listening activities students can build up schema and other linguistic knowledge about what they are going to listen to. On the other hand, we have observed that there are students

who prefer LC practice without explanations before listening. It seems that knowing the content before listening causes them to feel bored and lose interest in further listening.

These issues led us to conduct another empirical study to see 1) if bottom-up type activities like transcription differ from top-down activities in improving LC ability, and 2) if pre-listening activities make any difference in the effects of teaching. This article will discuss the use of film for teaching LC based on the results of the empirical study.

II. STUDY

Purpose

The first purpose of our present study is to see empirically whether “transcribing a film script” (a bottom-up strategy) interferes with students improving their LC and “answering questions and summarizing content” (a top-down strategy) helps students’ progress in LC. The second purpose of this study is to see if there is any difference in the effects between having pre-listening activities and not having pre-listening activities in LC instruction. A questionnaire is used to provide supportive evidence to the empirical results.

Empirical Study

〈Subjects〉

The subjects of the study were 235 female Japanese first-year students taking the required “LL Enshu” (listening) course at Doshisha Women’s Junior College. Returnees and a foreign student were excluded from the subjects. Their major was English and they had at least 6 years of English education before admission to the college.

〈Method〉

1) **Experimental groups and treatments:** The subjects were randomly divided into six classes and taught by the authors in an AV room³. Each class met for 40 minutes twice a week for 11 weeks. Three experimental groups, A, B and C, were made out of these six classes. Homogeneity among the three groups at the beginning of the study was confirmed by the listening section of the CELT test Form A⁴ ($F = 0.19$, n.s.). In order to reduce teacher’s idiosyncratic variables, each of us taught two different groups in two different treatments; that is, we rotated in the assignment of groups and treatments. Activities in each group were as follows.

Group A: Pre-listening activity and Transcription group (bottom-up).

In Group A, every week students watched a part of the film, *Splash*⁵, on TV screens several times for about 8 minutes, and its soundtrack was recorded on the students' tapes. Before watching the film, teachers gave them pre-listening activities, such as explanations of new vocabulary, idioms, cultural substance and phonological points that students should know to understand the language. After the class students were required to listen carefully to the tape at home and fill in the blanks on the text provided. In the next lesson, the same part of the film was shown several times and the correct answers to the transcription were given. At the same time additional explanations for the parts the students found difficult were provided if necessary. We called this group the pre-listening and transcription activity group (henceforth, Pre-listening group).

Group B: Transcription and Post-listening activity group (bottom-up).

In Group B, students watched a part of the same film and transcribed it just in the same way as in Group A, but explanations were given in the next lesson when they corrected their transcription. No pre-listening activities were given. We called this group the transcription and post-listening activity group (henceforth, Post-listening group).

Group C: Questions and Answers activity and Summary group (top-down).

In Group C, students watched a part of the same film in the same way as in Group A and its soundtrack was recorded on the students' tapes. After the class, the students were required to listen carefully to the tape and answer the questions based on the recorded contents. The questions were of two types; multiple choice questions about the content and questions requiring sentences in response. In the next lesson, the same part of the film was shown several times and the correct answers were given. When they finished watching a set of scenes they were asked to summarize the story. We called this group the questions and answers activity and summary group (henceforth, Q/A group).

Each group had two additional activities besides these main ones. They were called "Quiz" and "Rhythm". In Quiz, audio-taped short stories adapted from various sources were recorded on the students's tapes for homework⁶. In the next lesson, ten true/false-type questions based on the story were given through headsets. Students' answers were checked and immediate feedback was given after each question using an analyzer system.

In the Rhythm activity, one lesson of *Practice in English Reduced Forms* (Kobayashi & Linde, 1984) was recorded on students' tapes in each class. After

having phonological explanations about reduced forms, students did exercises on listening to reduced forms. Correct answers were given in the next lesson and pronunciation practice was required of the students to reinforce English reduced forms and rhythm.

The groups and the treatments are summarized in Table 1.

Table 1. Groups and Treatments

Groups	Treatments		
	N	Main Material	Supplementary Materials
A	85	Film and partial transcription with pre-listening activity	Quizzes + Rhythm
B	81	Film and partial transcription with post-listening activity	Quizzes + Rhythm
C	87	Film and Q & A and Summary with pre-listening activity	Quizzes + Rhythm

2) **Tests:** To measure students' progress in listening comprehension, the listening section of the CELT Test Form A was given twice, once in April and once in July. The period between the two tests was 11 weeks, which we believe that was sufficient for our students not to remember the contents of the test in a way that would affect the results of the second test. Students had the first test (pre-test) in a language laboratory wearing headsets. For the second test (post-test) they were in larger classrooms with loudspeakers on the ceiling.

3) **Proficiency Level:** For further investigation about the effects of the treatments on students of different proficiency levels, the subjects in each group were divided into three levels according to their performance on the pre-test. In each group, students both over and under $2/3$ standard deviation (SD) from the mean score were placed in the high and the low levels respectively. The rest of the subjects assigned in

Table 2. Levels, Score Ranges and Subjects.

GROUPS	High		Mid		Low	
	N	Ranges	N	Ranges	N	Ranges
A	19	76-56	45	54-40	20	38-29
B	17	82-54	44	52-38	21	36-24
C	19	76-54	49	52-38	19	36-22

the mid level. Table 2 shows the levels, score ranges and numbers of subjects for each level and group.

<Results>

We report the descriptive statistics for the pre-test and the post-test in Table 3. Figure 1 shows the graph of the mean scores of the pre-test and the post test of each group.

Table 3. Descriptive Statistics for Pre-Test and Post-Test

GROUPS	N	Pre-Test		Post-Test		Gain	
		M	SD	M	SD	M	SD
A	85	46.7	10.3	51.4	9.9	4.7	8.5
B	81	45.2	11.3	51.2	10.7	5.9	8.4
C	87	45.3	10.5	51.3	11.0	6.1	9.0

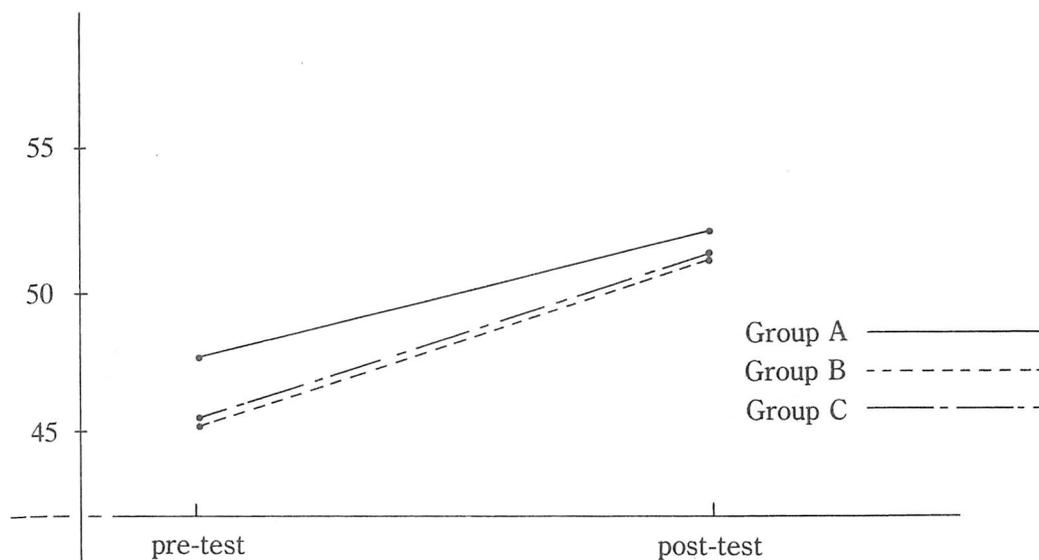


Figure 1. Graph of the mean scores of pre-test and post-test of each group

To determine what these numbers mean more concretely, we conducted an ANOVA with repeated measures on one factor, using the SPSS package of statistical programs. The results are in Table 4.

Table 4. ANOVA WITH REPEATED MEASURES ON ONE FACTOR
for Pre-Test and Post-Test between three groups

Source of Variation	SS	DF	MS	F	Sig.
Between-Subjects Effects (Group)	70.48	2	35.24	.19	.829
Within-Subject Effect (Trials)	3894.80	1	3894.80	103.53	.000 *
Groups by Trials	51.19	2	25.60	.68	.507

* $p < .01$

The F-value of "Group" in Table 4 shows that, among the three groups, there is no significant score difference in both pre-and post-tests. This means that there is homogeneity among the groups at the beginning and at the end of the study. The F-value of "Group by Trials" in Table 4 also indicates that there is no interaction among the three groups. (See Figure 1.) Within each group, however, the F-value of "Trials" shows that there is a significant gain. This means that the students in all three groups significantly improved their LC ability, but that there was no significant difference in the effects of the three different treatments.

As we explained above, to know the effects of the treatments on the subjects of different levels, we divided them into three levels. The descriptive statistics are in

Table 5. Descriptive Statistics by Proficiency Levels

GROUP	N	Pre-Test		Post-Test		Gain	
		M	SD	M	SD	M	SD
A							
High	19	60.95	6.23	60.00	9.19	- 0.95	8.44
Mid	45	46.49	4.27	51.42	7.50	4.93	7.59
Low	21	34.29	3.36	43.43	8.67	9.14	7.94
B							
High	17	61.18	7.88	64.00	10.05	2.82	6.44
Mid	44	45.41	4.15	49.27	7.56	3.86	6.95
Low	20	31.30	3.96	44.40	7.80	13.10	9.12
C							
High	19	60.84	5.59	63.58	9.60	2.74	6.64
Mid	49	44.12	4.42	49.43	8.22	5.31	8.72
Low	19	32.63	4.06	44.00	8.92	11.37	9.98

Table 5. Figure 2 shows the graph of the mean scores of the pre-test and the post-test of three levels of each group.

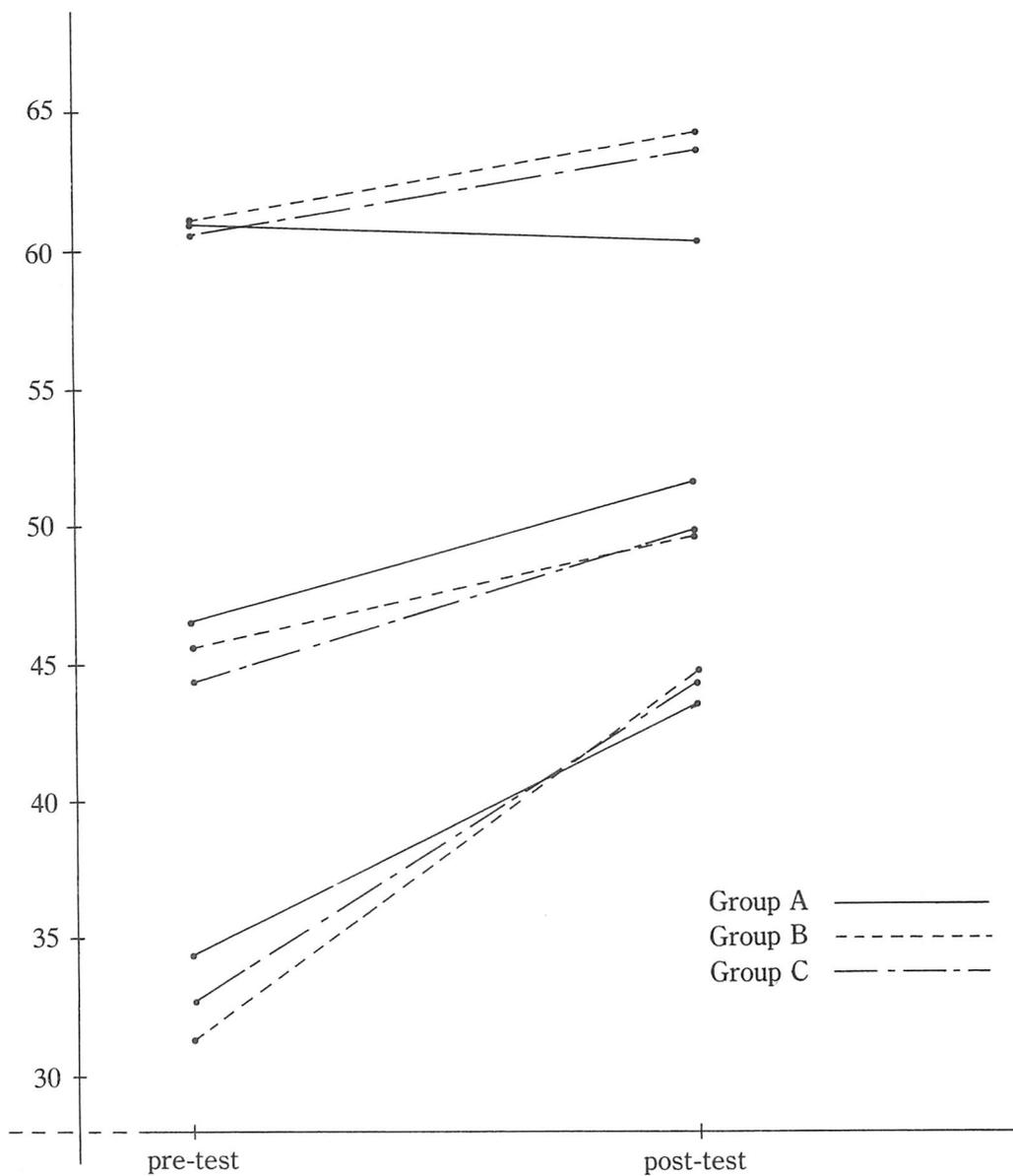


Figure 2. Graph of the mean scores of pre-test and post-test of three levels of each group

We used an ANOVA with repeated measures on one factor to determine what these numbers meant. The results are reported in Table 6.

Table 6. ANOVA WITH REPEATED MEASURES ON ONE FACTOR
for Proficiency Level Groups

Levels	High		Mid		Low	
	F	Sig.	F	Sig.	F	Sig.
Between-Subjects Effects (Group)	.43	.653	2.45	.0910	.23	.796
Within-Subject Effect (Trials)	2.46	.123	49.74	.000 *	92.51	.000 *
Groups by Trials	1.64	.204	.42	.659	.99	.377

* $p < .01$

The results in Table 6 show that the high-level students in all the three groups have not significantly improved their LC ability. The mid- and low-level students showed significant improvement in their LC ability⁷.

Analysis of Questionnaire

<Subjects and Method>

To provide supportive evidence to the empirical results, the subjects of the study were asked to fill in a questionnaire in the last class of the semester. Groupings of the subjects were the same as those in the empirical study. The points we investigated in this questionnaire were 1) the degree of interest of the materials, 2) the degree of difficulty of the materials, 3) the degree of usefulness of the materials, and 4) the degree of students' prediction in listening to the materials. The questionnaire is shown in the Appendix.

<Results>

The analysis of the questionnaire showed the following results.

1) With regard to the degree of interest of the materials, we found that in all three groups, the film material used in this study was considered the most interesting. 41%, 34% and 48% of the students in Pre-listening group, Post-listening group, and Q/A group respectively answered that film was "very interesting." On the other hand, the rhythm material is the least interesting since only 7%, 19% & 9% of the students in each group considered the rhythm material

“very interesting”.

Table 7 shows the results of the analysis in terms of students' interest.

Table 7. Degree of Interest of the Material

Groups	Film		Rhythm		Quiz	
	1	2	1	2	1	2
A	41	37	7	18	20	47
B	34	33	19	34	25	51
C	48	35	9	37	35	43

1: very interesting 2: interesting (unit: %)

2) As for the difficulty of the materials, the results showed that the film material, which we had considered easier than many other films and fit for the proficiency level of our students, was still found to be the most difficult. Over 89% of the subjects in all groups considered the film difficult. However, in the Q/A group only 47% students thought the film “very difficult,” as compared with 62% and 76% of the students in Pre-listening group and Post-listening group judging the film “very difficult.” It seems that the subjects in the Q/A group evaluated the film as being comparatively easier than those in other groups. About the supplementary materials, there was no big difference among the groups. Table 8 shows the results in terms of difficulty of the materials.

Table 8. Degree of Difficulty of the Materials

Groups	Film		Rhythm		Quiz	
	1	2	1	2	1	2
A	62	32	14	49	14	53
B	76	19	6	47	13	57
C	47	42	9	50	6	49

1: very difficult 2: difficult (unit: %)

3) With regard to the degree the subjects thought the materials useful for improving their LC, in each group the film material was considered the least useful. 18% of the subjects in the Q/A group thought the film useful, while 29% and 28% in the Pre-listening and Post-listening groups considered it useful. This suggests that our subjects in Q/A group, unlike those in other groups, thought the film material was not very difficult but less helpful for their LC practice. Regarding the supplementary

materials, the students in all groups considered them useful, and the rhythm material seems to be considered a little more useful than the quiz material but the difference is very small. Table 9 shows the results.

Table 9. Degree of Usefulness

Groups	Film		Rhythm		Quiz	
	1	2	1	2	1	2
A	29	33	54	35	44	41
B	28	37	46	42	41	55
C	18	33	55	40	48	43

1: very useful 2: useful (unit: %)

4) Lastly, we investigated how much our subjects predicted or anticipated when they tried to understand the film. It is said that in the process of listening comprehension prediction and confirmation are very important (Kohno, 1985) and we assumed that the activity of transcription prevented students from doing prediction. The results in Table 7 show that the Q/A group predicted most often and the Pre-listening group least.

Table 10. Degree of Students' Prediction

Groups	predicted <----->					not predicted
	5	4	3	2	1	
A	8	33	43	14	2	
B	12	28	20	28	12	
C	20	40	24	14	2	

(unit: %)

III. DISCUSSION

From the results of the empirical study, we found that there was no significant difference in gain among the three groups. This indicates that for the subjects in our study, our choice of method made little difference to their learning. We also found that the high-level students in all groups made no significant progress in LC, while mid- and low-level students showed significant progress. This finding is the same as those in the studies of Edasawa et al. (1988) and Takeuchi et al. (1989), which found

that only in the film group the top level students could not improve their LC ability significantly. This can be interpreted like this : for most of our high - level students, even a film that seemed to be easy was too difficult to comprehend. At the same time the supplementary materials were too easy for them. Consequently they did not have enough suitable input to improve their LC ability. On the other hand, for our mid- and low-level students, although the film was too difficult for them, the supplementary materials provided them with useful input and helped them make significant progress.

This interpretation found some support in the analysis of the questionnaire. The results showed that our subjects in all groups considered the film material used in this study to be more difficult, less useful, yet more interesting than the supplementary materials.

As for the effects of pre-listening and post-listening activities, we could not see any difference between the two groups. In the pre-listening activities, we explained about vocabulary, idioms, culture and sounds before watching the film. However, we did not mention the context or the story line because we thought it was provided by the pictures. The students, therefore, might not have been able to develop enough schema to understand the content of the film, and thus the extent of schemata the students developed in the Pre-listening group might have not differed from that in the Post-listening group.

Important findings from the questionnaire were that there were differences in the evaluation of the film material and differences in the amount of prediction in listening activities among the groups. In the Q/A group, the subjects thought the film material less difficult and less useful compared with the other groups. At the same time the Q/A group predicted more often than those in other two groups. Although it is difficult to interpret this phenomenon, one explanation is as follows. Because the subjects in the Q/A group were not asked to transcribe every word of the script, they might have thought that understanding the film was not difficult, but at the same time, because they could not decode exactly what the film said, they did not feel that their listening ability was improving. In addition, because they had no script to rely on, they had to do more prediction in the process of answering questions.

It seems that there were no big differences between the Pre-listening group and the Post-listening group, but the subjects in the Post-listening group tended to feel the film material more difficult and to predict more often. Although we could not obtain significant quantitative differences in progress among the three groups, there might be qualitative differences.

From the students' freely written comments about the use of film in LC practice,

we can summarize the reasons for the difficulty in understanding the film as being due to 1) fast speech rate and many reduced forms, 2) English rhythm and stress pattern, 3) hesitations and pauses in the middle of an utterance, 4) unstable volume and pitch, 5) more than one utterance simultaneously, 6) sudden changes in the thread of the story and 7) low redundancy of information.

Reasons 1) and 2) explain why many students think the rhythm material used in the study more useful than the other kinds of material. These two reasons suggest the importance of teaching English rhythm and basic rules of reduced forms. We think that our subjects may need more of a bottom-up type approach than a top-down type approach because in the questionnaire at the end of the year more than 80% of the students in the Q/A group prefer transcription to Q & A and Summary. Many of them claim that it was not easy to answer questions with no written clues but that the scripts given in partial transcription are a big help for their understanding. Reasons 4) to 7) are problems typical of using authentic materials, but because of authenticity students think a film provides more realistic use of a language and is thus more interesting.

Films are challenging materials for students who study English as a foreign language. From our previous studies, we have observed that students find it difficult to focus on grasping auditory information. We have also observed that in films students do not have enough auditory clues to understand the contents. Films can provide so much visual information about the contents that they need not supply auditory clues for comprehension of many scenes. In other words, films have less auditory redundancy than the audio tapes made for LC practice.

Rost (1990) claims that "understanding spoken language is essentially an inferential process based on a perception of . . ." (p. 33), and suggests the following inferential processes in listening comprehension.

- 1) estimating the sense of lexical references;
- 2) constructing proportional meaning through supplying case-relational links;
- 3) assigning a "base (conceptual) meaning" in the discourse;
- 4) supplying underlying links in the discourse;
- 5) assuming a plausible intention for the speaker's utterances. (pp.62-63.)

From this point of view, we think that the soundtrack tapes may not provide enough cues for our students to link information given in the utterances and do not help them organize or elaborate the context of what they have heard. Although our students watch the film several times in class, at home they only listen to the soundtrack tapes recorded in class. This might indicate that while they are listening to the tapes, they

may not be able to recall the scene, and the information given by the tape cannot help them construct meanings of the story. In other words, they cannot link what they have seen and what they are listening to. Therefore, if we can use a film in the way that students watch it with visual and aural information at the same time and can repeat it as many times as they want according to their individual LC ability (e.g., a laser disk controlled by a computer for each student), then the film may be a good teaching material for LC practice.

O'Malley, Chamot and Kupper (1989) say that effective listeners make use of prior knowledge while listening. They found that effective listeners in their study "frequently related the new information to their personal experiences and made critical judgments about the value of the information." (p.432). So, if we can help students activate prior knowledge such as world knowledge and personal knowledge and utilize it more effectively in addition to providing the knowledge of the texts, their comprehension of film material will improve better. Further study about strategies in listening comprehension by EFL students is needed.

IV. CONCLUSION

One of the purposes of our present study is to examine whether different methods of teaching LC by using a film may cause different effects on progress in students' LC ability. In other words, we wanted to see if transcription (a bottom-up type activity) interferes with progress in students' LC ability and Q/A and Summary (a top-down type activity) promotes more progress than transcription. The study finds that there was no significant difference in the effects on LC ability.

From the results in the empirical study and the questionnaire, we also found that film as a LC material seems to be too difficult for many Japanese college students to help them improve their LC ability. However, since films motivate students a lot to study, we would like to say that film material can be used with the parallel use of other materials.

Although we did not find any quantitative difference in progress among the three different treatment groups, the analysis of the questionnaire shows that there may exist some qualitative differences because, for example, it seems that the Q/A group predicted more often than the other groups.

The results from the analysis of the questionnaire also suggest that it is important to teach English reduced forms and rhythm system to improve listening ability, especially for Japanese college students who have not had much aural practice in high school. To reinforce English reduced forms, we think that transcription does

not necessarily have bad effects on the students. We do not deny the importance of global understanding of the text and the top-down activities, but we think that students in a certain level need more basic skills and bottom-up type activities to comprehend spoken language.

To go further than this, a longer period of study on the effects of different teaching methods in using a film for LC practice, at least a whole year of research, will be necessary⁹. We also have to study empirically more about how film is different from audio tape material or ELT video material and what kind of mechanism of listening comprehension works while EFL students watch films. More different kinds of studies on the effects of films to improve LC ability are needed.

NOTES

1. This is a revised version of a paper presented by the authors at the Fall Annual Conference of LLA Kansai Chapter held at Doshisha University, November 1990. We would like to express our gratitude to our colleague, Professor H. Mine, for his help with the statistics, and to Professor B. Susser for his comments on the draft. We would also like to convey our special thanks to Professor P. Black at Waseda University for his helpful comments on early drafts of this paper.
2. We use the term 'film' to refer to a Hollywood-type motion picture which was originally made to entertain native English speakers, whether on acetate or videotape. The term 'video' refers to all kinds of video-taped pictures other than films.
3. The language laboratory we used at Doshisha Women's Junior College has a SONY 5500-Mark II console, four 27 inch TV monitors on the ceiling, and a 14 inch monitor screen for every two students.
4. *The CELT Test* is a standardized test of English proficiency used in many schools. For further information, see Harris and Palmer, 1986.
5. *Splash* is a science fiction film made in America in 1984. It is a romantic comedy about a young man in New York and a mermaid. With regard to the difficulty of the film, we used it in the second term of 1989 and found it easier for our students to understand than *Love Story*, *The Graduate*, or *Back to the Future*, which are often used in college English classes in Japan.
6. The level of the stories is almost the same as that of *Intermediate Stories for Reproduction* (Hill, 1965), which we used in 1989 and 1990.
7. To determine whether there was interaction among the three high-level groups, we conducted a one-way ANOVA of the post-test, because the post-test scores for group A were much lower than those of the other two groups. However, we did not find a significant

difference among the three groups ($F=0.320$, N.S.). The results with no difference may be caused by the high value of SD in the high-level groups.

8. As for the ELT videos, which we used in our 1990 study, we think listening to the soundtrack of the ELT videos may not cause serious problems for comprehension because the texts are graded and the amount of information in ELT videos is much less than in films.

9. It may not be easy to conduct year long, empirical research on progress in LC ability because controlling extraneous variables such as influence from learning in other classes, different personal experiences like studying abroad in the summer vacation, etc. is very difficult.

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Appendix

Questionnaire on LL Enshu

Please circle the appropriate number:

1. Degree of Interest of the Materials

	1	2	3	4	5
Film:	+ _____	+ _____	+ _____	+ _____	+ _____

	1	2	3	4	5
Rhythm:	+ _____	+ _____	+ _____	+ _____	+ _____

	1	2	3	4	5
Quiz:	+ _____	+ _____	+ _____	+ _____	+ _____

1: very interesting 2: interesting 3: average

4: less interesting 5: least interesting

2. Degree of Difficulty of the Materials

	1	2	3	4	5
Film:	+ _____	+ _____	+ _____	+ _____	+ _____

	1	2	3	4	5
Rhythm:	+ _____	+ _____	+ _____	+ _____	+ _____

	1	2	3	4	5
Quiz:	+ _____	+ _____	+ _____	+ _____	+ _____

1: very difficult 2: difficult 3: moderate

4: easy 5: very easy

3. Degree of the Usefulness

	1	2	3	4	5
Film:	+ _____	+ _____	+ _____	+ _____	+ _____

	1	2	3	4	5
Rhythm:	+ _____	+ _____	+ _____	+ _____	+ _____

	1	2	3	4	5
Quiz:	+ _____	+ _____	+ _____	+ _____	+ _____

1: very useful 2: useful 3: average

4: less useful 5: least useful

4. Did you predict the contents of the film when you saw it?

	Predicted			Not predicted	
	1	2	3	4	5
Film:	+ _____	+ _____	+ _____	+ _____	+ _____

* This is a part of the questionnaire given to the subjects of this study. The original version was written and answered in Japanese.