

Assignment 1: Focus on the Learner

Note: The student's name has been changed for the purpose of this example assignment

1. Background

For this assignment, I interviewed Suzie, a Japanese lady in the Upper-Intermediate English class. Suzie moved to Australia for her husband's work and has been living here for about one year. Back in Japan, she worked in an office but is not currently working here. She would like to improve her English so she can make new friends here and more fully integrate into Australian society and is concerned that, "if I don't learn English, I will be isolated in this country."

Growing up in Sapporo, Japan, Suzie began learning English in junior high school but indicated that she didn't retain much. The Japanese school system has a strong focus on grammar and passive learning with less emphasis on language practice. Though she did not have many opportunities to practice English in Japan and her previous jobs did not require any English skills, Suzie has made good progress during her time in Australia and can communicate fairly effectively.

From observation during class, Suzie is a visual learner and prefers tasks with visual props and written components. She demonstrates a good vocabulary and is most comfortable with reading and writing English, but is reserved and sometimes unsure of herself when asked to speak.

Outside of regular language classes, Suzie does not have much opportunity to practice conversational English, as she speaks in Japanese with her husband and close friends. This lack of practice was evident during the interview. Though her phrases were generally well-formed they were often halted and lacked fluency. Suzie also experiences difficulty understanding native English speakers in everyday situations but is motivated to improve her receptive and productive skills.

2. Identification and Analysis of one main language difficulty (grammar)

Area of Difficulty and Rationale for Chosen Activity

While her pronunciation was fine, Suzie tended to confuse or misuse determiners about quantities when speaking. For example, during the interview, she said:

- "...is *much* difficult for me..." (instead of *very difficult*)
- "maybe not *so many*..." (instead of *not very much*)
- "...not so much nationalities..." (instead of *not many* or *a few*).

This grammatical problem is best addressed by raising awareness of when to use the appropriate quantifier in speaking and writing. I would recommend using the attached gap-fill exercise on countable and uncountable quantities from the book *Oxford Practice Grammar - Intermediate* by John Eastwood [1]. This activity is suitable for Suzie because it gives her revision and controlled practice of English quantifiers.

To set up this grammar activity, I would introduce (or revise) the usage of the words *a lot of*, *lots of*, *many*, *much*, *a few* and *a little*. The book *Oxford Practice Grammar* [1] has a good section explaining the usage and distinction of these. She would then complete the gap-fill exercises.

Ideally, the exercise would work better with a partner so that the learner could practice saying the answers before writing them down. For example, the first activity has the learner correcting sentences by replacing the quantifier with a correct one. Saying the incorrect sentence to a partner, then finding the correct replacement verbally would increase the effectiveness of the exercise.

Reason for inaccuracy

The difficulty with quantifiers can be understood in the more generalised context that the Japanese language has no grammatical equivalent of articles[2]. Japanese students, such as Suzie, therefore have no frame of reference in which to relate countable or uncountable determiners and quantifiers. In addition, Suzie's learning background of learning prescriptive grammar means that she may know the rules deductively but cannot use them in the actual production of language.

3. Identification and Analysis of one skill area of specific need (listening)

Area of Difficulty and Rationale for Chosen Activity

From the interview, it was evident that Suzie had difficulty with listening to and understanding English speakers. Occasionally, I would need to pronounce words more clearly before she understood. She mentioned that, "Australian people speak very quickly, so sometimes I can't understand. And some words are very short, not individual sound[s]."

An example she gave was in distinguishing the phrase "Cash out" when spoken by a native sounds like "ca-shout" (kə-ʃaʊt). This is a common issue for those whose native language is syllable-timed, such as Japanese, rather than stress-timed.

For Suzie, I would suggest the attached exercise from *Aspects of Connected Speech* by David Brett [5] to give her practice listening for weak sounds in natural conversation. This exercise is designed to give the learner controlled practice in comprehension of connected speech via 2 gap-fill activities. The learner listens to short phrases spoken by a native speaker at natural speed and writes in the missing words on the script that complete that phrase.

I chose this activity because it gives good, focused practice on listening for weak sounds and linked words in short phrases, without extraneous considerations present in a regular, more inclusive listening lesson. The audio script is specifically formulated to target the problem that Suzie experiences with interpreting connected speech in everyday conversation.

Reason for inaccuracy

The main area of difficulty here is a problem with recognizing connected speech – or more specifically, word linking. Native speakers often run together words to maintain a rhythm or flow. This is exacerbated when English is spoken quickly and the words blend into one another. That we speak too quickly is a very common complaint of students learning English as a second language. For many Japanese learners, they tend to unconsciously revert to their native, more staccato rhythm when listening to English conversation, causing them to misinterpret the unstressed words in phrases.

There is no overnight solution to developing receptive sub-skills, such as recognition of weak sounds and elision. Rather, it is a process of gradually raising awareness over a series of listening exercises, of which this exercise is just one.

Bibliography

1. Eastwood, J. (2006) *Oxford Practice Grammar (Intermediate)* Oxford University Press p.225
2. Kimizuka, S. (1967) *Teaching English to Japanese* Los Angeles: Anchor Enterprises.
3. Bradford, B. (1993) *Teaching English Pronunciation to Japanese Learners* Speakout, No 12 Aug
(Online reference: www.brookes.ac.uk/wie/East-Asian-Learner/27.pdf)
4. Yuzawa, N. (2007) *Teaching English Pronunciation* The Economic Journal of TCUE, Vol 50 pp. 95-107
5. Brett, D. *Aspects of Connected Speech Dictation Exercises 1-3*
http://davidbrett.uniss.it/phonology/aspects_of_connected_speech_inde.htm (accessed Nov 2010)

Activity 1: Grammar Focus – Quantities

A A lot of, lots of, many, much, a few and a little

Write the sentences correctly.

▶ Mark was only spending one night away. He quickly put a little things into a bag.

He quickly put a few things into a bag .

1. Rachel is learning to drive. She hasn't had much lessons yet.

.....

2. I'm making soup for twenty people. I'll have to make a lot of.

.....

3. I feel really tired. I haven't got many energy.

.....

4. The mixture looks rather dry. Maybe you should add a few water.

.....

5. We're having a big party. We've invited much friends.

.....

B A lot of, many and much

Complete the conversation. Put in *a lot of*, *many* or *much*. More than one answer may be correct.

Matthew: There are (▶) a lot of athletes taking part in the International Games in London. There's been (1)as coverage in the papers

Daniel: Our runners haven't won (2)as medals, have they?

Matthew: No, not as (3)as last time. But there's plenty of time. There are still (4) events to come. I'd like to go and see some of the track events, but I haven't got (5) time at the moment.

Daniel: No, not with exams coming up.

Matthew: I'm hoping to go on the weekend if I can get a ticket. Apparently there aren't (6)as seats left.

Daniel: I've heard the cheapest tickets are \$65. I think that's too (7)

C A few, few, a little and little

Put in *a few, few, a little or little*.

- I don't think I can lift this box on my own. I need a little help
- Few tourists visited Northern Ireland in the 1980s because of the terrorism there.
1. The postman doesn't often come here. We receive..... letters.
 2. The snow was quite deep. There seemed.....hope of completing our journey.
 3. Trevor isn't finding it easy to fix the shelves. He's having.....trouble.
 4. Sarah is exhausted. She's having.....days' holiday next week.
 5. David quite likes golf, but unfortunately he has.....ability.
 6. I can speak.....words of Swedish, but I'm not very fluent.

D Many, few, much and little

Complete this paragraph from a travel book. Put in *many, few, much or little*.

The main town in the island is very small and does not have (►) many important buildings. The islanders do not have (1)money, and they have (2)contact with the outside world. There is not (3)chance of the place attracting large numbers of tourists. The roads are not very good. There are lots of bicycles but not (4)cars. And there are hardly any of the modern facilities which visitors expect. There are (5)shops, and there is (6)entertainment.

Answer Key

- | | | | | | |
|---|---|-----------------|---|----------|----------|
| A | 1 She hasn't had many lessons yet. | | | | |
| | 2 I'll have to make a lot (of it). | | | | |
| | 3 I haven't got much energy. | | | | |
| | 4 Maybe you should add a little water/a few drops of water. | | | | |
| | 5 We've invited lots of friends/a lot of friends. | | | | |
| B | 1 a lot of | 5 a few | D | 1 a few | 4 many |
| | 2 many/a lot of | 6 many/a lot of | | 2 little | 5 few |
| | 3 many | 7 much | | 3 much | 6 little |
| | 4 a lot of | | | | |
| C | 1 few | 4 a few | | | |
| | 2 little | 5 little | | | |
| | 3 a little | 6 a few | | | |

Activity 2: Listening Focus – Connected Speech Dictation

Aim: To raise students' awareness of some aspects of fast connected speech as an aid to listening; specifically word-linking and reduced forms.

Overview: There are 2 gap-filling exercises dealing with aspects of connected speech. No context is required for this exercise, the learner simply needs to listen to the short phrases spoken by a native speaker at natural speed and determine if what they hear is correct by filling in the missing words.

Dictation Activity 1

Visit: <http://davidbrett.uniss.it/phonology/dictation/dictation1/dictation1.html> for the audio files, online gap-fill and answer key for this activity.

Listen to the following sentences and fill in the missing word:

1. ► She comes from a hot country.
2. They went.....supermarket after lunch.
3.turn off the light?
4. I speak a little.....French.
5. The.....said it had arrived.
6.lots of people there.
7.were involved in the accident.
8.play tennis much?
9. She spoke about it.....end of the lesson.
10. I told.....not to say anything.

Dictation Activity 2

Visit: <http://davidbrett.uniss.it/phonology/dictation/dictation2/dictation2.html> for the audio files, online gap-fill and answer key for this activity.

Listen to the following sentences and fill in the missing word:

1. ► What did you think of it?
2. They.....walk.
3. She found the book.....been lost
4. It wasn't.....I had expected it to be.
5. It was far better.....the last one.
6.quite a few good restaurants around here.
7. The version.....had was newer.
8.think it's a good idea?
9.meet her at the party?
10.were they offering?

Further practice with Dictation Exercise 3 (more difficult)

Visit: <http://davidbrett.uniss.it/phonology/dictation/dictation3/dictation3.html>

Source: Brett, D. *Aspects of Connected Speech Dictation Exercises 1-3*
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