



Using Partial Dictation of an English Teaching Radio Program to Enhance EFL Learners' Listening Comprehension

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Abstract

This paper reports pervasive decoding/listening problems of word recognition and word segmentation in connected speech at normal speed among Taiwanese university EFL students at the intermediate level. In order to resolve these serious listening problems, an activity of which integrates partial dictation with listening to an English teaching radio program appropriate to students' English proficiency was designed by synthesizing findings, suggestions, and proposals of various FL/EFL researchers. It was then implemented in an intermediate-level Freshman English class with 31 Engineering students. A valid and reliable listening test served as pre- and post-test and two short teacher-made questionnaires were adopted to collect the necessary data. Significant results of a paired-samples t-test suggest that partial dictation of an English teaching radio program (PDETRP) can effectively improve students' comprehension. Results of two questionnaires revealed that (a) 90% of the students needed the partial dictation handouts to facilitate their listening, (b) 87.0% viewed this listening activity as effectively enhancing their comprehension, (c) 74.2% thought difficulty level of the PDETRP appropriate, and (d) 80.6% considered amount of weekly PDETRP homework as adequate. Suggestions on practical guidelines and stepwise procedures for designing and implementing creative teaching/learning activities are provided. This paper offers a valuable and practical alternative for enhancing FL/L2 listeners' decoding and comprehension skills.

Keywords: listening comprehension, listening difficulties; partial dictation, English teaching radio program

Introduction

Many of my university EFL students at the intermediate level orally complained to me that they (a) knew many words by sight but failed to recognize them by sound, and/or (b) had difficulties separating a connected expression into individual words. Such complaints were empirically verified by results of the pre-course questionnaire (Appendix A) administered to participants of this study immediately after they took the listening pre-test in the first period of the initial class session. About 93.5% of the students reported that they could not immediately recall meanings of familiar-sounding words; 51.6% expressed difficulties in understanding linked words.

The two difficulties are decoding problems, with the second related to word segmentation such as segmenting a cluster of sounds into words. These problems are primarily derived from insufficient knowledge and/or practice of complex English word variations such as resyllabification (linking or liaison), reduction, assimilation, and/or elision which occur in normal-speed connected input, as highlighted in many of the EFL listening literature (Chao & Cheng, 2004; Chao & Chien, 2005; Chen, 2002 ; Cross, 2009a; Field, 2000, 2003, 2004, 2008; Goh, 2000; Huang, 1999; Katchen, 1996; Lin, 2003; Sun, 2002; Tsai, 2004; Tsui & Fullilove, 1998; Wilson, 2003; Wu, 1998; Yen 1988).

The first listening difficulty is related to the problem of word recognition (inability to recognize known words or associate sounds with words) and mainly results from an underdeveloped listening vocabulary, which is pervasive among Chinese-speaking EFL learners¹ (Chao & Cheng, 2004; Chao & Chien, 2005; Chen, 2002 ; Goh, 2000; Sun, 2002; Tsai, 2004; Tsui & Fullilove, 1998; Yen 1988). One reason for this phenomenon is that Chinese-speaking EFL learners put more effort into memorizing spelling and thus overlook how words sound (Goh, 2000; Sun, 2002; Tsai, 2004; Yang, 2005). Another possible reason is that Chinese-speaking EFL learners have insufficient practice in and/or exposure to normal-speed English acoustic input in their EFL contexts (Chao & Cheng, 2004; Yang, 2006; Yen, 1988; Yen & Shiue, 2004). Listening is not tested on the national joint high school and college entrance examinations (Yen, 1988; Yen & Shiue, 2004); therefore, the students are given limited exposure to it.

To solve the problems mentioned above on decoding/listening skills, word recognition and word segmentation, a teaching/learning activity that integrates partial dictation (PD) with listening to an English teaching radio program (hereafter ETRP) was designed by synthesizing the proposals and results of past empirical studies. However, integrating PD

with listening to an ETRP is an innovative activity with effects yet to be determined, and hence meriting this empirical study. This study investigated the effectiveness of this integrative listening activity and examined Taiwanese EFL learners' attitudes toward it.

Literature Review

Decoding Problems

Although decoding (bottom-up² processing) and meaning building (top-down³ processing) are highly interdependent and equally crucial for successful L2 listening (Nunan, 2002), recent approaches and studies on teaching listening have tended to emphasize on building meaning from context, listening for gist, and employing listening strategies (Field, 2004). Conversely, approaches to enhancing listeners' decoding skill have been comparatively undervalued or overlooked (Field, 2000, 2003, 2004, 2008; Ridgway, 2000; Wilson, 2003), spawning decoding problems such as word recognition and word segmentation, which continuously impede FL/L2 comprehension (Chang, Chang, & Kuo, 1995; Chao & Cheng, 2004; Chao & Chien, 2005; Chen, 2002; Cross, 2009a; Field, 2003; Goh, 2000; Katchen, 1997; Lin, 2003; Sun, 2002; Tsui & Fullilove, 1998; Wu, 1998; Yen, 1988). Some FL/L2 researchers (Field, 2000, 2003, 2004, 2008; Hulstijn, 2001; Tsui & Fullilove, 1998; Wilson, 2003) asserted that decoding is no less important than meaning building in developing FL/L2 listeners' comprehension. They asserted that it should be sufficiently practiced in and/or outside of listening classes.

To illustrate how word recognition and word segmentation have been consistently identified as major listening difficulties over the past two decades, Table 1 reports selected studies conducted with Taiwanese EFL college students in chronologically ascending order.

Table 1: *Studies on Listening Difficulties of Taiwanese EFL College Students*

Study	Participant	Top Five Listening Difficulties/Problems
Yen (1988)	24 senior English majors	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. sound discrimination 2. division of sound stream into words 3. stress and intonation 4. vocabulary: (a) <i>words</i> familiar in print but unfamiliar in sounds and (b) unfamiliar/new words 5. phrase: unfamiliar/new idioms
Chang et al. (1995)	264 freshmen with different majors	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. fast speed 2. cluster of sounds difficult for segmentation 3. association of sounds with words and meanings 4. obsession with the Chinese translation 5. idiomatic expressions

Katchen (1996)	23 junior and senior English majors	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. new vocabulary 2. slang and idioms 3. linking and/or elision due to fast speed 4. unfamiliar accent 5. insufficient knowledge of native speakers' culture 	
Chen (2002)	190 sophomores and juniors with different majors	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. chunking streams of speech 2. neglecting the next part when thinking about meaning 3. recognizing known words 4. confusing about the key ideas in the message 5. forming a mental representation from words heard 	
Sun (2002)	40 freshmen	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. forgetting meaning of the (known) word 2. forgetting what is heard 3. neglecting the next part when thinking about meaning 4. segmenting speech 5. understanding intended meaning 	
Chao & Chien (2005)	180 English majors	Lower graders met more difficulties in <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. identifying single words in a stream of speech 2. segmenting sentences 3. recognizing familiar words 4. getting main ideas 5. catching up with the speed (p. 299) 	Low achievers met more difficulties in <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. identifying single words in a stream of speech 2. recognizing familiar words 3. dividing content into meaningful parts 4. memorizing the text 5. getting main ideas

Solutions to Decoding Problems

Small-scale full dictation

Field (1998, 2000, 2003, 2008) proposed a remedial approach on teaching decoding skills whereby instructors first identify decoding difficulties, and then design micro-scale dictations or exercises to resolve them. Field (2008) further advocated dictated passages or sentences being read in an authentic (natural and informative) way or gleaned from naturalistic or authentic recordings. This activity includes (a) a small amount of acoustic input and time, (b) authenticity, and (c) a focus on a specific decoding or listening problem at a particular time.

Similar to Field's studies (1998, 2000, 2003, 2008), Rahimi (2008) administered 50 small-scale dictations within one semester as a teaching tool to 34 Iranian EFL university students who gained significantly more on listening comprehension, reading comprehension, vocabulary, and grammar post-tests compared to 31 peers who were not provided with dictation. The length of texts ranged from 50 to 150 words, with each text read three times at normal speed the first and third times, but in chunks with pauses for the second time. Rahimi's findings support Field's proposal for small-scale dictation as a teaching technique to enhance FL/L2 listeners' decoding ability.

Significant effects of small-scale dictation on English proficiency might not be obtained if dictation serves only as a testing tool instead of as a teaching tool. Jafarpur & Yamini (1993) administered 60 small-scale dictations within one semester to 22 Iranian university students using dictation as a testing tool. Gains in scores on reading, listening, vocabulary, and grammar post-tests of the dictation group ($n_1 = 22$) were found to be significantly higher than that of the comparison group ($n_2 = 22$) which was not given dictation. The main difference between Rahimi's and Jafarpur & Yamini's studies is that the former used dictation as a teaching tool with instructions on phonological, grammatical, and lexical points, while the latter study used it as a testing tool. From these studies, it can be tentatively concluded that using dictation as a teaching tool can help to improve EFL university students' listening, reading, grammar, and vocabulary skills.

Nation and Newton (2009) considered dictation a valuable language-focused teaching and learning technique. In terms of teaching technique, they pointed out that instructors can design activities to enhance students' perception of errors detected through dictation. As a learning technique, dictation provides feedback on students' perceptual errors and gaps, which helps raise consciousness or awareness of these errors. Nation and Newton's findings support Field's proposal on the use of dictation to enhance FL/L2 listeners' decoding ability.

Partial dictation

Nation and Newton (2009) considered partial dictation (PD) as an easier variant of full dictation and a plausible activity in enhancing FL/L2 listening ability. Students are provided with an incomplete written text and fill in missing words while listening to an oral version of the text. Some FL/L2 researchers recommended the use of PD as a reliable, valid, and plausible listening test (Buck, 2001; Hughes, 1989; Nation & Newton, 2009). Buck (2001) supports Hughes' (1989) suggestion on the use of PD for low-level students when dictation proved too difficult for the students. Using PD helps students focus on missing parts, making it easier for them to follow the text and/or to get its main points. Lin (2003) reported that the cloze-test task or partial dictation was regarded as helpful by her Taiwanese 10th grade higher achievers in comprehending authentic English broadcasts.

Extensive comprehensible listening

Nation and Newton (2009) stressed that language courses should contain substantial quantities of receptive activity. Cross (2009b) and Nunan (2002) suggested providing EFL/ESL listeners with substantial authentic input and practice to facilitate their application

of listening strategies. Krashen (1996) and Dupuy (1999) recommended *narrow listening*, which is listening to a series or large amount of authentic comprehensible recordings or materials on the same topic. Ridgway (2000) suggested that exposure to extensive amounts of comprehensible listening is an effective way of enhancing comprehension. He further claimed that “*Practice is the most important thing. The more listening the better, and the subskills will take care of themselves as they become automatized.*” (Ridgway, 2000, p. 183). Although more does not necessarily mean better, a large amount of comprehensible listening is considered critical to listening comprehension by many FL researchers (Cross, 2009b; Dupuy, 1999; Krashen, 1996; Nation & Newton, 2009; Nunan, 2002; Ridgway, 2000).

Listening while reading

To both develop Chinese/Taiwanese EFL learners’ listening vocabulary and to enhance their word recognition ability, Goh (2000) and Tsai (2004) recommended listening-while-reading activity to help listeners associate spoken forms of words or sounds with written forms or spellings, which in turn helps to strengthen sound-to-word relationships in the long-term memory. This suggestion is in line with Hulstijn’s (2001, p. 285) proposal of *bimodal input*, whereby learners are encouraged to watch television programs, both spoken and subtitled, in the target language.

Integrating PD with ETRP as a Solution to Decoding Problems

Although Field’s micro-scale dictation activity has to be effective in enhancing EFL learners’ comprehension according to Rahimi (2008), from a viewpoint of substantial input, this activity does not seem to reach that “substantial” criterion in my own context, since English courses at the university are scheduled to meet only once a week. Consequently, the maximum number of micro-scale dictations with a text of 50~150 running words that are able to be conducted within a semester is 18, while the number of running words for students to transcribe in a semester ranges from 900 to 2700, which does not seem “substantial”.

This study integrated partial dictation (PD) with ETRP taking into account the proposals and research results of past studies that include: (a) decoding training via small-scale dictation (Field, 1998, 2000, 2003, 2008; Rahimi, 2008), (b) substantial comprehensible listening (Cross, 2009b; Dupuy, 1999; Krashen, 1996; Nation & Newton, 2009; Nunan, 2002; Ridgway, 2000), and (c) listening while reading (Goh, 2000; Hulstijn, 2001; Tsai, 2004). Partial dictation (PD) with ETRP was adopted mainly as a teaching/learning activity to teach or practice particular decoding skills while listening to an ETRP. This was conducted to

expose students to large amounts of acoustic input within many known words. A partial transcript of one day's ETRP allows students to listen while reading, which in turn could help students connect acoustic sounds with words or phrases. Thus, 'partial dictation of an English teaching radio program' (hereafter PDETRP) combines task-driven (Field, 2000) and text-based approaches (Ridgway, 2000) optimal for augmenting listening abilities. It contains both language-focused learning (e.g. dictation) and meaning-focused input (e.g. listening to English teaching radio program with its partial transcript), as advocated by Nation & Newton (2009). Yet PDETRP is a novel activity with effects yet unknown, thus prompting an empirical study on this issue. The current study is intended to address this gap.

Purpose of the Study and Research Questions

This study investigated the effects of PDETRP on Taiwanese EFL learners' listening comprehension and their attitudes toward both PD handouts and toward PDETRP in terms of difficulty level, effectiveness, and amount of weekly homework. The following are the research questions of the study:

1. Can PDETRP significantly improve Taiwanese EFL freshmen's listening comprehension ability?
2. Do participants of this study need PD handouts? Why or why not?
3. What are participants' attitudes toward PDETRP in terms of effectiveness, difficulty level, and amount of listening homework?

Methodology

Participants of the Study

The participants were 31 engineering students in an intermediate-level Freshman English class. All had at least six years of formal English education in secondary school. About 94% of the students knew the first 1000 high-frequency word families assessed by a 1000-word Level Test designed by Huang (1999) and based on Nation's (1990) principles of designing vocabulary level tests. 74.19% obtained the second 1000 high-frequency word families; however most still lacked in the third and the fifth 1000 high-frequency word families assessed by Schimtt's (2000) Levels Test: Version 1. The students' average scores on the Schimtt's Levels Test (Version 1) of 2000-word, 3000-word, and 5000-word were 26.06, 20.33, and 15.5, respectively. The perfect score for each Level Test was 30 and the passing score was 25 (Nation, 2001, p. 196).

Freshman English Course

Freshman English is a two-credit required course for all freshmen with one meeting per week with two consecutive periods of class per meeting. Freshmen are ability-grouped into three levels: low, intermediate, and high-intermediate, according to scores on English tests administered by the Center of National Joint College Entrance in Taiwan. The main goals of the Freshman English course are to: (a) enlarge vocabulary, (b) enhance listening proficiency, (c) inculcate reading skills, (d) improve reading proficiency, (e) develop good reading habits, (f) expand common knowledge, and (g) increase motivation for learning English. One-quarter of instructional time is devoted to listening training and quizzes, and three-quarters to vocabulary and reading related activities, including extensive reading of graded simplified readers, intensive reading, reading strategy training, explicit vocabulary teaching, word guessing, and reading quizzes. Listening quizzes and PDETRP account for 30% of the final grade; self-selected reading of graded simplified readers, 20%; intensive reading quizzes, 10%; tests on self-study vocabulary, 10%; midterm and final exams, 15% each.

Instruments

The instruments for the study were one listening test and two questionnaires. The listening section of an American Language Course Placement Test (ALCPT) was employed as pre- and post-test to assess listening comprehension before and after intervention (Weeks 1 and 16). The ALCPT is a valid and reliable test (Cheng, et al., 2004), developed by the Defense Language Institute English Center of the United States. Its purpose is to assess non-native English speakers' comprehension of basic English and frequently-used English military expressions. Each ALCPT contains two parts: (1) Listening - which consists of 66 multiple-choice items, and (2) Reading - which is composed of 34 multiple-choice items. The Listening Part assesses basic English listening ability, grammatical competence, and vocabulary (Cheng, et al., 2004). There are two subsections in the Listening Part. Subsection One consists of 56 items; test takers choose the best answer for each item based on a statement or question they hear. Subsection Two contains 10 items; test takers choose the best answer for each item based on a dialogue between a man and a woman. A point is assigned for a correct answer with a maximum score of 66. The time for taking the listening test is about 25 minutes.

Range, a vocabulary analysis tool designed by Nation (available at Paul Nation's website http://www.vuw.ac.nz/lals/staff/Paul_Nation), was adopted to analyze text coverage of the

listening test. Since proper names of persons and places are not included in any vocabulary level tests, they were excluded from this text coverage analysis. The results indicated 88.44% of the running words (excluding proper nouns) on the listening test were from the first 1000 high-frequency word families, 6.62% from the second, 1.88% from the third, and 3.28% beyond these 3000 high-frequency word families. Based on the participants' mean scores on Schmitt's Vocabulary Levels Test assessing vocabulary size and results of Nation's *Range* analysis, it can be concluded that about 95% of running words on the listening test should be known to most participants.

Two short questionnaires were administered to collect data regarding students' attitudes toward (a) PD handouts, and (b) PDETRP in terms of effectiveness, difficulty level, and adequacy in amount of listening homework. Questionnaire 1 (Appendix B) contained 11 items, one of which solicited students' answers to Research Question 2 probing participants' attitudes toward PD handouts. Questionnaire 1 was administered as soon as participants briefly experienced two types of listening to designated ETRP: with and without teacher-made PD handouts. Questionnaire 2 (Appendix C) was a post-course questionnaire with three items exploring answers to Research Question 3 which is on students' attitudes toward PDETRP in terms of its effectiveness, difficulty level, and amount of weekly homework.

Listening Materials

The listening materials were (a) a back issue (September 2006) of *Studio Classroom* magazine accompanied by a CD-ROM including recordings of all the month's audio content, such as daily radio programs, audio recordings of each article, plus educational video clips, and (b) teacher-made PD handouts on the recordings of daily radio programs. The description of the selection of the first listening material, *Studio Classroom* and the development of the teacher-made PDETRP handouts are detailed in the following two sub-sections.

Studio Classroom

Studio Classroom (SC) is a popular (Sung & Hsieh, 2009) monthly English teaching magazine accompanied by a daily English teaching radio program; it targets Taiwanese EFL high school students/graduates or intermediate learners, broadcasting several times a day and six days a week. Its content encompasses a variety of "news and fads, technological advances, outdoor activities, career, health, celebrity profiles, American lifestyle and short stories" (Studio Classroom, 2010). Many Taiwanese students find them interesting and more related to their lives (Cheng, 2009).

SC was chosen because it meets the three principles of selection of appropriate listening materials: (a) containing 90% or more known words in context, (b) spoken at a normal speed, and (c) being interesting or meaningful. The reason for principle (a) is that most Taiwanese/Chinese EFL listeners have problems with word recognition or have underdeveloped listening vocabulary (Chao & Cheng, 2004; Chao & Chien, 2005; Chen, 2002 ; Goh, 2000; Sun, 2002; Tsai, 2004; Tsui & Fullilove, 1998; Yen 1988). Listening material should be easier than their regular reading material and should contain at least 90% of known words by sight for two sub-reasons: (1) to facilitate listening while reading transcripts with most words known and (2) to consolidate sound-to-word relationships in long-term memory. The reason for principle (b) is that many English word variations happen in normal-speed speech (Fields, 1999, 2003, 2008) and EFL/ESL listeners need to be taught, reminded of, and made to practice with normal-speed input. The reason for principle (c) is that interesting materials and/or meaningful learning is critical to successful teaching and learning.

Procedure for creating PDETRP handouts

Well-designed handouts form the basis of successful PDETRP, taking substantial amounts of the instructors' time and effort. The procedure for constructing PDETRP handouts thereby merits a special subsection devoted to describing the process through which they were created.

There were four steps in creating the PDETRP handouts necessary for a 25-minute daily English radio program. First, the program was transcribed verbatim. There were almost 3000 running words spoken in one day of *SC*. Second, the instructor identified words or expressions should be deleted. Over 95% of deleted words were known to the majority of students; the chief aim of deleting known words was to provide sufficient practice in recognizing known words and/or strengthening sound-to-word relationships in long-term memory. Additionally, less than 5% of deleted words were new; these served to teach, demonstrate, and practice transcription of a new word into phonetic symbols and thus to its spelling which are aided by an electronic dictionary (e.g. Dr. Eye). This skill is crucial for life-long independent learning, for students can often find spelling and meanings of new words on their own. Third, based on deleted words, questions (primarily *wh*-questions) were designed to guide students on what to expect and to focus on. Fourth, phonemic notations of word variations in connected speech (resyllabification, assimilation, elision, and reduction of function words) were supplied in the handouts to both facilitate in-class explanations and to raise students' attention on problematic word variations that reportedly impede EFL/ESL

listeners' decoding and/or comprehension.

There are three major elements and two sub-elements of the PDETRP handouts: (a) *wh*-questions, (b) blanks (substituting for deleted words), and (c) partial text (undeleted words) with (c1) phoneme/word variation notations and (c2) underlined collocates. The *wh*-questions and blanks are interdependent and designed to guide students on what to focus on and to listen to during the listening activity. The *wh*-questions serve as signals which alert listeners to identify a missing message. The questions also function as a test bank of listening quiz items. A hard copy of a one-day *SC* handout normally contains 35~45 questions. Quantity and difficulty level of the blanks substituting for deleted words increase over time. There are three types of blanks in terms of quantity and difficulty level and are developed in stages. In the first stage, deleted items are mainly known words, replaced by blanks with initial and final letters. One reason to do so is to lower the PDETRP difficulty level and bolster listening confidence, motivation, and interest via the experience of understanding and transcribing approximately every deleted word (Hulstijn, 2001). The main task in the first stage is to listen for known words in order to enhance sound-to-word linkage in long-term memory to (partially) solve the word recognition problems. New words are suggested and typed in boldface in the first stage, but deleted for transcribing in the following two stages when or after the skill of transcribing a new word from its phonemic notation has been taught.

After students have experienced two weeks of transcribing known words with initial and final letters to heighten motivation and confidence in PDETRP, the second stage which lasts over four weeks is introduced. In Stage 2, more known words with several new or difficult words are deleted and substituted by blanks with initial letters only. Students are reminded to heed noun declensions (e.g. -s, -es) and verb inflections (e.g. -ed, -s, -ing) with help of their grammatical knowledge. Phrasal expressions (e.g. look at, look for) or chunks of words are deleted and blanks substituting for function words (e.g. prepositions) have no initial letters due to their short spellings (e.g. on, at, for). Additionally, since students are required to transcribe several new words out of 2000~3000 running words, teachers need to clearly demonstrate how to transcribe a new word from its sounds (phonemes) into its phonetic symbols and then into its spelling form (i.e. word) with the aid of an electronic dictionary. Students are also guided or taught regarding the best or correct word by verifying whether its meaning fits the context where the missing word is. Transcribing new words is vital for independent and lifelong English learning and is considered beneficial for Taiwanese EFL students' future independent learning.

In the third stage, even more known words plus 10~12 new/difficult words are deleted and

substituted by blanks with neither initial nor final letters for known words, and with initial but no final letters for new words. Like the second stage, even more chunks of words and phrasal expressions are deleted. Unlike the second stage, blanks have no initial letters. The main function of blanks is to provide information regarding how many words there are in a chunk of missing text, whether an isolated word or (part of) a phrase, to solve problems of word variation, word segmentation, and/or word boundaries, all of which were reported as problematic for EFL listeners by numerous FL/L2 researchers (Chao & Cheng, 2004; Chao & Chien, 2005; Chen, 2002 ; Cross, 2009a; Field, 2000, 2003, 2004, 2008; Goh, 2000; Huang, 1999; Katchen, 1996; Lin, 2003; Sun, 2002; Tsai, 2004; Tsui & Fullilove, 1998; Wilson, 2003; Wu, 1998; Yen 1988). This stage offers students slightly more opportunities to transcribe missing new words substituted by blanks with initial letters only.

The third element of PDETRP handouts, (c) partial text (i.e. undeleted words), serves four purposes. First, it facilitates students' comprehension by allowing them to listen while reading. Second, it enhances their sound-to-word relationships through listening while reading, an activity which is highly recommended by some researchers (Goh, 2000; Hulstijn, 2001; Tsai, 2004). After sufficient listening while reading, students' 'listening vocabulary' should gradually catch up with their 'reading vocabulary'; therefore the problem of word recognition by sound (connecting sounds to a word and then to its meaning) is expected to diminish. The third purpose is to raise students' attention to collocates by underlining them. The fourth purpose is to supply phonemic/word-variation annotations to raise awareness of (problematic) phoneme/word variations.

In summary, providing students with well-designed PDETRP handouts constitutes the essence of successful PDETRP, and it takes much time and effort to formulate effective PDETRP handouts with (a) *wh*-questions, (b) blanks, (c) partial text with (c1) word variation notations and (c2) underlined collocates.

Data Collection and Procedure

At the initial class meeting, *SC* was introduced to students by listening to the selected topic of the day. Next, students were briefly exposed to two types of listening: without PD vs. with PD handouts. They first listened to a one- or two-minute recording of that day's ETRP without handouts, followed by a short listening quiz with two *wh*-questions. Subsequently, they were guided to listen to another one- or two-minute recording of the same day's *SC* with PD handouts, also followed by a similar listening quiz with two *wh*-questions. As soon as students experienced these two opposing scenarios, Questionnaire 1 was administered to

collect data on Research Question 2, assessing students' attitudes toward those handouts. In Week 16, the listening post-test was administered to students without prior notice. In Week 17, post-course Questionnaire 2 was given to them to collect data for Research Question 3, measuring students' attitudes toward PDETRP.

PDETRP was implemented mainly as a teaching/learning activity to enhance listening proficiency and encoding skills for eight weeks (four weeks in a row and before and after midterm exams, respectively). To encourage students to intensively listen to *SC*, they were required to do a PD of only one day, rather than six days, of *SC* per week.

During the eight-week intervention of PDETRP, 50 out of 100 minutes of instructional time per week were allocated to PDETRP associated activities, including: (a) guiding students to listen for daily topics or answers to one or two *wh*-questions (2~3 minutes); (b) explaining, illustrating, and arousing students' awareness of identified decoding difficulties (12 minutes), such as resyllabification, assimilation, reduced forms of function words and reduction of a chunk of words (Field, 2008, pp. 143-155, Field, 2003, pp. 329-332 or Nation & Newton, 2009, p. 42); (c) demonstrating how to transcribe a new word (5 minutes) with aid of an electronic dictionary; (d) administering the listening quiz (15 minutes); and (e) checking and grading answers with students (15 minutes). Except for the first week of PDETRP instruction, which started with Activity (a) and ended with (b), subsequent instruction followed a sequence of (d), (e), (a), (b), and then (c).

For the out-of-class activity, students had to accomplish three PDETRP sub-tasks. First, they transcribed missing words on teacher-created PD handouts by intensively listening to designated ETRP (i.e. *SC*). With nearly 3000 running words on daily *SC*, students normally took 1.5~6 hours to do the PDETRP by intensively listening to a 25-minute recording on the super CD-ROM, equipped with multiple functions to expedite comprehension and self-learning. Students could adjust the speed to their level and repeatedly listen to a certain expression, phrase, sentence, or paragraph.

The second sub-task outside the classroom was self-correction. Some researchers (Davis & Rinvolutri, 1988; DeFilippo & Sadow, 2006) consider self-checking or self-correction after dictation an active learning activity. After accomplishing the PDETRP, students were encouraged to self-correct answers by checking with me during my office hours, allocated to three weekdays (Monday/Tuesday/Friday), or with their classmates who had finished SDETRP. However, they were discouraged from copying answers without first listening to *SC*. Therefore, answers to the PDETRP activities were not uploaded to the internet or made available online. On the contrary, English low achievers facing extreme difficulties

understanding *SC* were advised and allowed to copy answers before listening so that they could listen and read simultaneously, with the hope that they are able to internalize sound-to-word relationships in long-term memory. Four or five weeks of this would reinforce those relationships, after which low achievers were encouraged to undertake PDETRP before copying answers. However, if they still found PDETRP too difficult, they could retreat to their original procedure of copying answers beforehand. The final out-of-class sub-task was quiz preparation. Students were encouraged to study or review completed PD handouts before a listening quiz.

Data Analysis

A paired-samples t-test was employed to rate differences between mean scores on pre- and post-tests. Frequencies, percentages, and descriptive analysis were employed to analyze data from two questionnaires on students' attitudes toward PD handouts and toward PDETRP. In addition, students' reasons for their attitudes toward PD handouts were typed and analyzed for possible patterns and further understanding of the rationales behind their attitudes toward PD handouts.

Results and Discussion

Research Question 1. Can PDETRP significantly improve Taiwanese EFL freshmen's listening comprehension ability?

Table 2 displays the results of the paired-samples t-test on the gain score of the post-test. The mean score of the post-test (40.48) was found to be significantly higher than that of the pre-test (33.6), with p-value smaller than .000, suggesting that PDETRP had significantly improved students' listening comprehension. This finding supports the use of PDETRP as an alternative activity in enhancing EFL learners' listening comprehension in a teaching context where a class could meet only once a week, instructional time is extremely limited (less than two hours a week), and where frequent (three times/week) micro-scale dictations, as in Rahimi's (2008) study, are somewhat impossible to implement.

Table 2: *Results of Paired-samples t-test on Listening Pre-test and Post-test*

	Pre-test		Post-test		Post-test – Pre-test	
N	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Gain	p-value
31	33.61	8.50	40.48	7.21	6.87	.000

Research Question 2. Do the participants need PD handouts? Why or why not?

Results of Questionnaire 1 that gauged students' attitudes toward PD handouts indicated that 90.0% of them needed PD handouts mainly to facilitate understanding of the native English teachers' speech at normal speed (which was too fast or too difficult for them to follow or comprehend without handouts). Their response exactly matched the prediction that PD handouts could assist students in following or comprehending native English teachers' instructions or discussion at normal speaking speeds. This finding supports Nation's (2001, p. 121) view that experienced teachers' intuitions and feelings are sometimes useful and should be recognized. Furthermore, it upholds Buck's (2001) proposal of using PD to help low-level listeners keep up with the text and to get at its main ideas.

Research Question 3. What are participants' attitudes toward PDETRP in terms of effectiveness, difficulty level, and amount of listening homework?

Table 3 provides a summary of students' attitudes toward PDETRP in terms of efficacy, difficulty, and amount of listening homework. A majority (87.0%) of the students evaluated PDETRP as effective in elevating comprehension by assigning points 5~7 to the item regarding PDETRP effectiveness on a 7-point scale, where 1 point indicates extremely ineffective and 7 extremely effective. Only 6.5% thought PDETRP ineffective in enhancing listening comprehension, assigning 1~3 points to this item. The mean score for effectiveness is 5.28 out of 7, which demonstrates a positive attitude toward PDETRP effectiveness.

Table 3: *Percentage and Descriptive Statistics of Attitudes Toward PDETRP*

Effectiveness (7-point scale)					Difficulty Level			Homework amount/wk		
Eff. (5-7 pts)	Ok (4pt)	Ineff. (1-3 pts)	Mean	SD	Diff.	App.	Easy	overmuch	App.	Insuff.
87.0%	6.5%	6.5%	5.35	1.23	3.2%	74.2%	22.6%	9.7%	80.6%	9.7%

Note: Eff. = Effective; Ineff. = Ineffective; Diff. = Difficult; App. = Appropriate; Insuff. = Insufficient; pt = point

As for the difficulty level of listening to the designated ETRP with help from handouts, 74.2% of the students considered it appropriate, 22.6% easy, and only 3.2% difficult. This suggests that ETRP (i.e. SC) is appropriate for most students' English comprehension in terms of difficulty level. Choosing or adopting appropriate listening material is an important task for instructors and the key to successful or effective listening training. Wilson (2000, p. 341) claimed that students will not be motivated by listening texts at the wrong level. Finding listening texts at an appropriate level requires a certain 'feel' for the task, based on teachers' experience with students. Furthermore, Wilson (2003) saw the ability to find appropriate listening material for students as an invaluable skill for teachers.

Nation & Newton (2009) suggest that dictation texts usually contain no words that learners have not encountered before. This suggestion is useful for teachers in choosing PD texts or ETRPs and to design PD handouts in which all or most words listened to or transcribed should be known or familiar to students. Field (1998, 2000, 2003, 2008) highly recommends using naturalistic or authentic recordings for dictation practice because these contain normal-speed acoustic input with numerous word variations which are problematic and difficult for FL/L2 listeners and thus could help draw special attention to these problems. The above two suggestions are congruent with the first two of my three principles of choosing appropriate ETRP and designing PD handouts: (a) more than 90% known words are in context, (b) it is at normal talking speed, and (c) it is interesting or meaningful. This might explain why 74.2% of the students considered the difficulty level of the PDETRP appropriate, 22.6% easy, and only 3.2% excessive.

As for weekly PDETRP homework, 80.6% of the students perceived the quantity as appropriate, 9.7% too much, and 9.7% insufficient. Overall, most students perceived: (a) PDETRP as effective in upgrading their English listening comprehension, (b) the difficulty level of listening to the designated ETRP with handouts as appropriate, and (c) the amount of weekly homework as adequate.

PDETRP fulfills four of Nation & Newton's (2009, p. 12) ten pedagogical principles for teachers. For instance, requiring students to listen to an ETRP with 2000~3000 running words a week and providing partial transcripts meets the first principle of providing and organizing "*large amount of comprehensible input through both listening and reading (Ibid.)*." Partially dictating an ETRP matches the second principle of "*learning through comprehensible input by adding a deliberate element*" (Ibid.) (i.e. transcribing missing words). Offering word variation annotations and underlined collocates on PD handouts also meets the fifth principle of helping "*learners deliberately learn language items and patterns, including sounds, spelling, vocabulary, multi-word units, and discourse (Ibid.)*." Finally, SDERP concurs with the eighth principle of having "*a roughly equal balance of the four strands of meaning-focused input (e.g. listening to an English radio program), meaning-focused output (e.g. listening for missing words), language-focused learning (e.g. learning word/phoneme variations, collocations, and grammar through teacher's instruction and/or notations on PD handouts), and fluency development (e.g. listening while reading partial texts with known words, repeatedly listening to recordings with known words spoken at normal speed) (Ibid.)*." Nevertheless, there are two possible disadvantages for dictation pinpointed by FL/L2

researchers and practitioners. One is that dictation training may drive students to listen for every word more than for meaning and thus this method should not be overused (Snow, 1996, p. 109). The other is that listening to an ETRP or an audio recording can be boring because of the lack of visual stimulus (Snow, 1996, p. 113). To mitigate the first drawback, instructors should introduce top-down strategies or activities to students, such as listening for main ideas or topics, listening for specific information (e.g. who, where, when, why, what, how). Moreover, instructors should let students know that dictation is used as intensive listening especially when they are allowed to hear a recording or passage multiple times; otherwise, they need not listen word for word but for gist, topic, or some critical/specific information. As for reducing boredom due to lack of visual stimulus, choosing lessons with interesting or useful content for students to (partially) dictate or listen to is imperative. For example, in order to choose a certain back issue of ETRP magazine with more interesting topics/content, I usually overview the latest seven or eight issues of a designated ETRP's magazine and pick one with the most absorbing topics. Moreover, to alleviate boredom from full dictation, Nation & Newton (2009, p. 60) suggest amusing dictations with useful or interesting content: e.g. humorous or unusual stories, dialogues, poems, puzzles.

Conclusion and Limitations

This study gauged the effects of a novel listening teaching/learning activity, a partial dictation of an English teaching radio program (PDETRP), in an intermediate-level class of 31 Taiwanese EFL university students' comprehension and attitudes toward this innovative activity. Results indicated: (1) PDETRP effectively improved students' listening comprehension, (2) almost all students needed teacher-made PD handouts to expedite their PDETRP, and (3) a majority of students perceived that (a) PDETRP effectively boosted their English listening comprehension, (b) the difficulty level of listening to the designated ETRP with PD handouts was suitable to them, and (c) the amount of weekly PDETRP homework was appropriate. Significant effects of PDETRP, positive attitudes toward PDETRP, and stepwise procedures for designing and successfully implementing this creative activity altogether assure EFL teachers that this can be a feasible alternative for solving students' word recognition and word segmentation problems or enhancing their comprehension, especially in a teaching context where a class meets no more than once a week.

However, this study lacked a control group to validate how much improvement on the listening post-test could be attributed to positive effects of PDETRP instead of other factors such as testing effect, other out-of-class practice unrelated to PDETRP, and obtaining more

linguistic knowledge in terms of vocabulary and grammar. In addition, generalizability of the results of the study is limited due to the small sample size (n=31). There is a need for a similar study, with a bigger sample size and a control group, to further determine the rate of enhancement of comprehension attributable to PDETRP.

¹: Chinese-speaking EFL learners include those learners in/from China and Taiwan. However, Taiwanese EFL learners include only people in/from Taiwan.

²: Decoding and bottom-up processing are interchangeable.

³: Meaning building and top-down processing are interchangeable.

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Appendix A**Pre-course Questionnaire**

Dear Freshmen:

The following short questionnaire pertains to difficulties you confronted on the listening test just administered. Your responses are vital for the instructor to detect problems and thereby design specific activities to surmount listening obstacles. Your answers will be confidential and not affect your course grade. Please rest assured when answering these questions. Thanks for your cooperation!

1. The listening test I just took is _____ for me.
(A. too difficult B. difficult C. neither too difficult nor too easy D. easy
E. too easy)

2. Please check difficulties you encountered while taking the listening test just administered. Put a check to the right of a difficulty. You can check more than one difficulty.

Statement of Listening Difficulty/Problem	
(a) I can't immediately recall the meanings of the words sounding familiar to me.	
(b) I neglect the next part when thinking about a word meaning.	
(c) I quickly forget what is heard.	
(d) I understand every word but not the intended message.	
(e) I have difficulties understanding words linking together.	
(f) The speaking speed is too fast.	
(g) The pause for reading the four choices for each item is too short.	
(h) My vocabulary size is too small to understand the test items.	
(i) I cannot concentrate in listening because _____.	
(j) Other(s) (Please briefly describe it/them) _____.	

Results of Questionnaire 1

Statement	Options	Frequency (%)
1. The listening test I just took is _____ for me.	(a) too difficult	2 (6.4%)
	(b) difficult	6 (19.4%)
	(c) neither too difficult nor too easy	20 (83.9%)
	(d) easy	4 (12.9%)
	(e) too easy	0 (0%)
2. The factors impeding me from understanding the listening test items is/are _____ (can be more than one answer).	(a) I can't immediately recall the meanings of the words sounding familiar to me	29 (93.5%)
	(b) I neglect the next part when thinking about a word meaning	22 (71.0%)
	(c) I quickly forget what is heard	5 (16.1%)
	(d) I understand every word but not the intended message	0 (0%)
	(e) I have difficulties understanding words linking together	16 (51.6%)
	(f) The speaking speed is too fast.	2 (6.5%)
	(g) The pause for reading the four choices for each item is too short	7 (22.6%)
	(h) My vocabulary size is too small to understand the test items.	22 (71.0%)

	(i) I cannot concentrate in listening because _____	9 (29.0%)
	(j) Other(s) (Please briefly describe it/them) _____	2 (6.5%)

Appendix B

Questionnaire 1

Dear Freshmen:

The following is a short questionnaire on teaching and learning oral English. Your responses will be confidential and not affect your course grade. Please feel safe and comfortable to answer the following questions without reservation. Thanks for your cooperation!

1. Without teacher-made handouts, to understand conversations and explanations of English teachers Vickie and Steve on *Studio Classroom* is _____.

- (A. too easy, and I can comprehend more than 90% of them without much attention.
- B. easy, and I can comprehend 80~90% of them with attention.
- C. neither too easy nor too difficult, and I can understand 70~79% of them with much attention.
- D. difficult, and I can comprehend 50~69% of them with much attention.
- E. too difficult, and I can comprehend 10~49% of them with much attention.
- F. extremely difficult, and I can understand no more than 10% of them.)

2. Do you need teacher-made handouts to guide you and assist you listen to *Studio Classroom*?

- (A. Yes. -> Because _____
- B. No. -> Because _____
- C. Others: (title) _____ . -> Because _____)

3. Did your high school English teachers require you to listen to programs like *Studio Classroom*?

- (A. Yes. Name(s) of English teaching radio program(s): _____
- B. No, but I myself listened to it/them. Name(s) of English teaching radio program(s): _____
- C. No, and I did not listen to any English teaching radio program.)

4. How often did you listen to designated English teaching radio program(s) while in high school? Why?

- (A. Often, because _____
- B. Rarely, because _____
- C. Sometimes, because _____
- D. Never, because _____
- E. Never, because my high school English teachers did not require me to listen to any such program.)

5. What was your frequency of hearing these program(s) in different years of high school (HS)?

- 1st year in HS: about _____ days per week, because _____
- 2nd year in HS: about _____ days per week, because _____
- 3rd year in HS: about _____ days per week, because _____

6. Did your 1st-year high school English teacher give you listening quizzes?

- (A. No. B. Yes, about _____ (day[s]/week[s]) a time.
7. Did your 2nd-year high school English teacher give your listening quizzes?
(A. No. B. Yes, about _____ (day[s]/week[s]) a time.)
8. Did your 3rd-year high school English teacher give your listening quizzes?
(A. No. B. Yes, about _____ (day[s]/week[s]) a time.)
9. Do you think you need to improve your English listening comprehension ability? Why?
(A. No, because _____
B. Yes, because _____)
10. Did you ever live in an English speaking country about or more than one year?
(A. No. B. Yes. -> _____ year[s])
11. Score on the first listening quiz after listening without handouts: _____;
Score on the second listening quiz after listening with handouts: _____

Appendix C

Questionnaire 2: Post-Course Survey

Dear Students:

This questionnaire collects data regarding **your feedback** on the listening activity. Your answers will not affect your course grade but help the instructor design a better listening activity in the future. Please feel safe and comfortable to answer the questions without reservation. Thanks for your cooperation!

1. I think the partial dictation of *Studio Classroom* (PDSC) listening activity is _____ in improving listening comprehension.
(1. extremely ineffective 2. ineffective 3. somewhat ineffective 4. = okay
5. somewhat effective 6. effective 7. extremely effective)
2. I think the difficulty level of the PDSC listening activity is _____.
(A. extremely difficult B. difficult C. proper D. easy E. extremely easy)
3. I think the amount of homework for the PDSC listening activity is _____.
(A. extremely overmuch B. overmuch C. proper D. insufficient
E. extremely insufficient)