

## English Listening Comprehension Skill of Pre-Service ESOL Teacher Trainees in Korea, Thailand and Japan\* \*\*

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### Introduction

As the world shrinks both geographically and psychologically as a result of rapid progress in communication and transportation, the importance of a foreign language, especially the oral aspects of a foreign language are being recognized and increasingly emphasized. On the world-wide scale, in foreign language teaching circles, the teaching of oral foreign language has become one of the most important problems. In the countries where English is taught as a foreign language in the formal school education, the ESOL<sup>1</sup> teachers' working knowledge of English, specifically their oral English skill is the chief concern of the ESOL teachers themselves, the ESOL teacher trainers and the ESOL administrators as well. Japan is no exception. The efficiency in the teaching of English, especially of oral English in the formal education is being questioned not only inside but also outside the educational circle, and it has long been a serious problem in the Japanese ESOL teacher training institution.

In this context it would then be interesting to know the listening comprehension skill of the students attending at the Japanese ESOL teacher training institutions and compare it with that of their Asian counterparts. In the present experiment, Japanese pre-service ESOL teacher trainees' English listening comprehension was measured along with their Korean and Thai counterparts' with an aim to place and evaluate the Japanese ESOL teacher training system in the broader perspective of Asian ESOL teacher training.

Thai and Korean students were sampled as a group for comparison in the present experiment along with Japanese students for the reason that these countries can be identified as the English-as-a-Foreign Language (EFL) countries in the southeast and far east Asia. Table 1, a comparative table of the state of the art of TESOL of Asia, was made by the author based on the information from the Asian participants in 'ESOL Teacher Trainers Project'. It shows clearly that there is a remarkable resemblance

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1. ESOL stands for English to the Speakers of Other Languages and refers to English as a Second Language and/or English as a Foreign Language.

Table 1. The State of the Art of TESOL in Asia

	Philippines	Thailand	Hongkong	Korea	Japan
1. When does English language teaching begin in your country? (grade)	1	5	2	7	7
2. What language is in use for instruction of English on primary and secondary school levels?	English	Thai	Should be English. Not all do.	Korean	Japanese
3. What language is generally in use for classroom instruction on primary and secondary school levels?	English	Thai	English, Chinese	Korean	Japanese
4. What language is used in English classes of your teacher training institution?	English	Half Thai Half English	English	Korean	Japanese
5. What is the quality of the prospective teachers of English in your teacher training institution?	low	average	average	cream	low

among Thailand, Korea and Japan with respect to the language for general class instruction (2), the language of English class instruction on primary and secondary school levels (3), the language of English classes in the ESOL teacher training institution (4), and the initiating age of English language teaching (1). Although the initiating grade of English language teaching in Thailand is two-grades lower than that of Korea or Japan, we could say it is basically the same in the sense that English language teaching begins at the lower secondary education level, since Thai lower school education begins at the 5th grade while Korean and Japanese at the 7th grade. Thus Thailand, Korea and Japan can be grouped into one class as countries of English as a *foreign* language, not a *second* language.

On the contrary, in the countries or areas such as Hongkong and the Philippines, English language teaching begins nearly at the same time as school education, i. e. the 1st or 2nd grade. Besides, English is used in school not only as a medium of English class instruction but also as a medium of general class instruction. In this sense the Philippines and Hongkong can be classified as a country of English as a *second* language.

## Method

### Outline of the test

A general proficiency test, *Listening Comprehension Test* was made for this experiment. The basic materials for the test items were picked up at random from *Language and Life in the U. S. A.* (3rd ed.) and *English for Today*, and in this manner 50 test items were prepared for the experiment. After the question of each test item a 10-sec. pause was given to the subjects for answering.

**Test-format** The Listening Comprehension Test consists of 4 subtests, in each a different test format being used. In sub-test 1, statement type, consisting of 10 items,

subjects hear a statement and then select from among the three choices the sentence that most nearly means the same as the test statement. In subtest 2, question type, consisting of 10 items, subjects hear a statement and then select the one logical answer from among the four choices. In subtest 3, dialogue-question type, consisting of 10 items, subjects hear a short exchange between two speakers, each dialogue being followed by a comprehension question asked by a third speaker. They are to select the correct answer to the question from the four choices. In subtest 4, statement-question type, which consists of 20 items, subjects hear a statement which is followed by a comprehension question about the statement. They are to select the one correct answer to the question from the four choices.

**Speaker in the test** The test material was read for the taperecording by three native speakers of English, Mrs. Agnes Cheng (British pronunciation), Miss Phyllis A. Horney (American pronunciation) and Mr. Keith Cunningham (American pronunciation) so that each item would contain both British and American pronunciation as well as both male and female voice. This was done to give equal weight to American and British English.

**Difficulty of L. C. T.** The average difficulty (the mean of item difficulties) computed by formula 1 with 28 subjects' scores indicated 59 percent.

$$\text{Formula 1: Difficulty} = \frac{\text{N of correct answers}}{\text{N of subjects}} \times 100$$

**Reliability of L. C. T.** To get an indicator of test reliability, test-retest method was applied and Pearson's coefficient of correlation was computed between the two kinds of test scores. The second test was administered one week after the first test. The reliability obtained in this way was .82 (df = 26,  $p < 0.01$ ). It would have been desirable to conduct the second test two or three weeks after the first one to eliminate the learning effect, but busy schedule made that impossible.

### Subjects

The subjects used in this experiment were English majors and minors in the pre-service ESOL teacher training institutions in the three Asian countries, Korea, Thailand and Japan, whose native and official language is not English. The Japanese subjects were 39 juniors, mostly English majors at the University of Saitama and the University of Kagoshima, School of Education (counted from primary school, 15th grade students) the former school being located near Tokyo and the latter in southern Japan. The Thai students were 60 English minors attending a teacher training institution around Bangkok (grade 13). The Korean students were 35 English majoring sophomores attending a teacher training institution near Seoul.

### Procedure

The author sent a test-recorded magnetic tape and answer sheets to the professors in charge of English and TESOL courses at the above-mentioned institutions and asked them to administer the English listening comprehension test to their students of English. The experimenter asked the professors to observe the following experimental conditions. (1) The test must be administered in a usual classroom, not a language laboratory, with a taperecorder. In case an institution might not have a language laboratory, the use of



Table 4. Results of Subtest 2

	Japan	Korea	Thailand
N	39	35	60
Min.	10.00	8.00	2.00
Max.	18.00	16.00	18.00
S. D.	2.25	2.16	4.02
Mean	13.23	12.91	11.10
t-test	↑ ↑ (0.32) t = 0.609 df = 72 No significance		↑ (1.81) t = 2.447 df = 93 0.02 > P > 0.01**
	↑ ↑ ↑ (2.13) t = 2.989 df = 97 0.005 > P > 0.002***		

Table 5. Results of Subtest 3

	Japan	Korea	Thailand
N	39	35	60
Min.	4.00	4.00	0.00
Max.	16.00	20.00	16.00
S. D.	3.29	3.29	3.40
Mean	9.18	10.17	8.50
t-test	↑ ↑ (-0.99) t = 1.279 df = 72 No significance		↑ (1.67) t = 2.318 df = 93 0.05 > P > 0.02**
	↑ ↑ ↑ (0.68) t = 0.976 df = 97 No significance		

Table 6. Results of Subtest 4

	Japan	Korea	Thailand
N	39	35	60
Min.	12.00	12.00	6.00
Max.	40.00	40.00	36.00
S. D.	6.14	6.45	6.37
Mean	24.10	27.14	23.83
t-test	↑ ↑ (-3.04) t = 2.049 df = 72 0.05 > P > 0.02**		↑ (3.31) t = 2.409 df = 93 0.02 > P > 0.01**
	↑ ↑ ↑ (0.27) t = 0.207 df = 97 No significance		

the Thai students at the .005 level ( $t = 3.004$ ,  $df = 93$ ,  $p < 0.005$ ). With this we can say with high reliability that Korean students' English listening comprehension is higher than the Thai students'. Between the Japanese students' and Thai students' listening comprehension, there was a difference in favor of the Japanese students at the .10 level of significance ( $t = 1.677$ ,  $df = 97$ ,  $p < .10$ ). With this we could say that the Japanese students' listening comprehension tends to be higher than that of the Thai teacher trainees'. There was no significant difference between the Korean trainees and the Japanese trainees.

**Subtest 1** As is shown in Table 3, there was a .05 level-significant difference between the Korean students and the Thai students in favor of the Korean students in the mean score of subtest 1 in which students listen to a statement and select a statement with the same meaning ( $t = 2.067$ ,  $df = 93$ ,  $p < .05$ ). Between the Japanese and Thai students there was a .10 level-significant difference in favor of the Japanese students ( $t = 1.801$ ,  $df = 97$ ,  $p < .10$ ). There was no significant difference between Korean and Japanese students.

**Subtest 2** As is shown in Table 4, there was a significant difference between the Japanese students and the Thai students in favor of the Japanese trainees at the .01 level ( $t = 2.989$ ,  $df = 97$ ,  $p < .01$ ) in the mean score of subtest 2 in which subjects listen to a question which is not preceded by any statement and select one logical answer from the alternatives. There was a significant difference at .05 level ( $t = 2.447$ ,  $df = 93$ ,  $p < .05$ ) between the Korean students and the Thai students. There was no significant difference between the Japanese and Korean students. It is interesting to note that only in subtest 2 was the Japanese students' mean score the highest of the three. In this subtest there is no preceding introductory statement or dialogue leading to the questions and the subjects are asked questions (general and specific questions) abruptly. Therefore students can concentrate their attention on only one point among many informations involved. For example, if students are asked "Where did Tom go yesterday?", they can only look for and pick up a name of a place, New York in this case. This kind of question might be more simple than the other speech-preceded questions and have more to do with the mechanical manipulation of the language pattern. In this sense it is similar to the drills of pattern practice. The fact that Japanese English language teaching has been strongly influenced by the Audiolingual method with its emphasis on the manipulation of structural patterns of English, might account for this result.

**Subtest 3** As is shown in Table 5, there was a significant difference between the Korean students and the Thai students in favor of the Korean students at the level of .05 ( $t = 2.318$ ,  $df = 93$ ,  $p < .05$ ) in subtest 3 in which the subjects are to listen to the short dialogue and answer the question following it. There were no significant differences between the Korean students and the Japanese students, and between the Japanese students and the Thai students either.

**Subtest 4** As is shown in Table 6, there was a significant difference between the Korean students and the Thai students in favor of the Korean students in the mean score of subtest 4 in which the subjects are to listen to a statement and to answer the questions about the statement ( $t = 2.409$ ,  $df = 93$ ,  $p < .05$ ). Between the Korean trainees and the Japanese trainees there was a significant difference in favor of the Korean stu-

dents ( $t = 2.049$ ,  $df = 72$ ,  $p < .05$ ). There was no significant difference between the Japanese students and the Thai students.

Based on the above findings of this experimental research, we could conclude that the Korean and Japanese ESOL teacher trainees' listening comprehension is higher than that of the Thai trainees' (minors'). Although there was no statistically significant difference found in the mean of the total score between the Korean and the Japanese ESOL teacher trainees, the general tendency was that the Korean trainees' listening comprehension skill is higher than the Japanese counterparts'. Indeed, the analysis of the results of the subtests confirms this except for the results of subtest 2.

It would be dangerous to draw a conclusive evaluation of the English knowledge of the ESOL teacher trainees and the ESOL teacher training system in the three Asian countries from the results of this research, since this is essentially a pilot study with a limited number of subjects and furthermore is not concerned with the other aspects of English skills such as reading comprehension and writing. Besides, Thai subjects were English minors. However it will give some insight into the ESOL teacher training systems of the three countries and some suggestions for the improvement of the system. It is interesting to note that the Korean ESOL teacher trainees' English listening comprehension tends to be higher than their Japanese counterparts'. The data would partly be accounted for by the fact that the Korean would-be ESOL teachers are the selected *cream* while teacher training institutions are not popular among high school students in Japan. In Japan, however, the greatest emphasis has been placed on the teaching of the oral aspects of English through all the stages of the formal education system. It is not an exaggeration to say that in Japan we have been expending a great deal of our time, energy and money to improve English language teaching and to enhance our students' practical knowledge of oral English. We have introduced into classrooms a so-called Audiolingual method which stresses the teaching of oral English and various electronic audiovisual aids including a language laboratory system. The data of this research suggest that these investments were not as rewarding as had been expected. In this sense the findings of this research should be taken seriously by the Japanese ESOL teacher trainers and administrators as well.

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**Appendix**

## LISTENING COMPREHENSION TEST

**Subtest 1 Statement type**

You will hear 10 statements. Each statement is spoken just one time. For each statement, select the sentence that most nearly means the same thing as the test statement. Then mark the letter for that sentence with a circle on your answer sheet.

1. I got the barber to cut my hair.
  - a. I had to cut my hair.
  - b. I cut my hair.
  - c. I had my hair cut.
2. I'll put off my hardest assignment.
  - a. I am going to do my hardest assignment immediately.
  - b. I am not going to do my hardest assignment now.
  - c. I'll never do my hardest assignment.
3. I have a written assignment for tomorrow.
  - a. I'll be free tomorrow.
  - b. I must do my assignment.
  - c. The assignment for tomorrow is difficult.
4. I have difficulty in pronouncing some English words.
  - a. I can not pronounce some English words well.
  - b. English is difficult.
  - c. I can not pronounce any English words.
5. My brother came to New York to see me last week.
  - a. I met my brother last week.
  - b. I went to New York last week.
  - c. My brother left New York last week.
6. I have studied for 2 hours since 3 o'clock at the library.
  - a. It is 3 o'clock now.
  - b. It is 1 o'clock now.
  - c. It is 5 o'clock now.
7. Jim studies mathematics at Stanford University.
  - a. Jim was graduated from Stanford University.
  - b. Jim is a student at Stanford University.
  - c. Jim is a professor of mathematics.
8. Most of the students were quietly reading in the classroom.
  - a. All were reading.
  - b. Most students were noisy.
  - c. Most students were calm.
9. Mary makes her husband do all the work and she spends all the money.
  - a. Mary is a hard worker.
  - b. Her husband does all the work.
  - c. Mary allows her husband to spend all the money.
10. He didn't give me a chance to protest.
  - a. I was not given a chance to protest.
  - b. He did not protest to me.
  - c. I had a chance to protest.

**Subtest 2 Question type**

You will hear 10 questions. Each question is spoken just one time. For each question, select the one logical answer from among the 4 alternatives. Then mark the letter for that answer with

a circle on your answer sheet.

1. Who did Betty give her pen to last night?
  - a. Mary did.
  - b. Her pen.
  - c. Last night.
  - d. To John.
2. Are Ted and Elizabeth about the same age?
  - a. Yes, they are.
  - b. No, he is not.
  - c. Yes, she is.
  - d. They are seventeen years old.
3. Didn't you put that paper in your briefcase?
  - a. Yes, I didn't.
  - b. No, I didn't.
  - c. No, I did.
  - d. No, I don't.
4. How long will it take to go to Honolulu by plane?
  - a. My mother will.
  - b. No, she won't.
  - c. By air.
  - d. Seven hours.
5. This road is certainly full of curves, isn't it?
  - a. Yes, it is.
  - b. Yes, they are.
  - c. Are they?
  - d. Yes, I do.
6. How long have you been here?
  - a. In the library.
  - b. By train.
  - c. For two hours.
  - d. Yes, I have.
7. Why did he run off?
  - a. Because he loves his mother.
  - b. Because it was 10 p. m.
  - c. Because his mother spanked him.
  - d. In the yard.
8. Where have you been?
  - a. By bus.
  - b. In the library.
  - c. In the morning.
  - d. Because I was sick.
9. Where did Tom go yesterday?
  - a. To New York.
  - b. No, he didn't.
  - c. By air.
  - d. Last night.
10. How do you like coffee?
  - a. None at all.
  - b. With cream and sugar.
  - c. Tea please.
  - d. No, thank you.

**Subtest 3 Dialogue-Question type**

You will hear 10 short exchanges between two speakers, each dialogue being followed by a comprehension question asked by a third speaker. As in the other parts of the test, each item is given just one time. Select the one correct answer to the question from the four alternatives in the test book. Then mark the letter for that answer with a circle on your answer sheet.

1. A : Where was Tom going in such a hurry?  
B : He must have been going to the bank. Today's pay day, and he just got his check.  
Why was Tom hurrying to the bank?
  - a. Information is not given.
  - b. Because the bank is closing.
  - c. Because he is going to draw his savings.
  - d. Because he got his check.
2. A : I'd no sooner walked into class this morning than the teacher announced a test.  
B : Don't you like tests, Phyllis?  
A : Who does?  
Does Phyllis like tests?
  - a. Information is not given.
  - b. Yes, she does.
  - c. No, she does not.
  - d. The teacher does.
3. A : May I help you?  
B : I need some typing paper and some envelopes.  
Where are they?
  - a. In an airport.
  - b. At a restaurant.
  - c. At a store.
  - d. In the train.
4. A : Why didn't you go with me, Agnes?  
B : I could have gone with you if I had known you were going, Phyllis.  
Did Agnes know where Phyllis was going?
  - a. No, she didn't.
  - b. Yes, she did.
  - c. She had known.
  - d. Information isn't given.
5. A : How did you do on your driver's test, Agnes? Did you pass it?  
B : I must have. They gave me my licence.  
Did Agnes pass the test?
  - a. Yes, she did.
  - b. No, she didn't.
  - c. Information is not given.
  - d. Driver's licence.
6. A : Aren't you up yet, Agnes?  
B : No, it isn't time to get up yet.  
Where is Agnes?
  - a. Out of bed.
  - b. In bed.
  - c. At the breakfast table.
  - d. In her study.
7. A : How about some ice cream, Agnes?  
B : I can't eat ice cream after I've had a big dinner.  
Did Agnes finish dinner?
  - a. Yes, she ate ice cream.

- b. No, she didn't.  
c. Information is not given.  
d. Yes, she did.
8. A: Did you understand Dr. Mason's lecture?  
B: I wish I could have.  
Did Agnes understand Dr. Mason's lecture?  
a. She didn't try to.  
b. Information is not given.  
c. Yes, she did.  
d. No, she didn't.
9. A: I'd like a room, please.  
B: Do you have a reservation?  
A: No, I don't.  
Where are they?  
a. At a store.  
b. At a hotel.  
c. At a station.  
d. In an airport.
10. A: What would you like for dinner, Agnes?  
B: A big steak, of course.  
Is Agnes hungry?  
a. Yes, she is.  
b. She likes steak.  
c. No, she is not.  
d. Information is not given.

**Subtest 4 Statement-Question type**

You will hear 20 statements, each statement being followed by a comprehension question about the statement. As in the other parts of the test, each item is given just one time. Select the one correct answer to the question from the four alternatives in the test book. Then mark the letter for that answer with a circle on your answer sheet.

1. My friend brought me some lovely flowers.  
What did my friend bring?  
a. My friend.  
b. To me.  
c. Lovely.  
d. Some flowers.
2. Mary met Susie at the theatre last night.  
Who did Mary meet?  
a. At the theatre.  
b. Susie.  
c. Last night.  
d. Mary.
3. Tom wants some money to buy some books on rapid reading.  
Why does Tom want money?  
a. For rapid reading.  
b. Much money.  
c. To buy some books.  
d. Tom.
4. John went to the barber yesterday to have his hair cut.  
Where did John go?  
a. John did.  
b. To the barber.

- c. To have his hair cut.  
d. Yesterday.
5. He has an appointment with the dentist at one-thirty.  
When does he have an appointment?  
a. At one-thirty.  
b. With the dentist.  
c. John has an appointment.  
d. At one-thirteen.
6. Tom wants to buy a new bicycle. It costs \$50. He is saving \$5 a week. How long will it take him to buy a bicycle?  
a. 5 weeks.  
b. 10 weeks.  
c. 3 weeks.  
d. 20 weeks.
7. Susan was born in New York on March 21, 1936.  
When is her birthday?  
a. March 21.  
b. 1936.  
c. New York.  
d. Susan.
8. A river is useful for transportation.  
What is a river useful for?  
a. A river.  
b. Translation.  
c. Transformation.  
d. Transportation.
9. The Browns wanted to go to Argentina next month. But they had to stay home.  
Why did the Browns have to stay home?  
a. Because they wanted to go to Argentina.  
b. Information is not given.  
c. Home.  
d. Next month.
10. Ted and Elizabeth are in Honolulu Airport waiting for their Uncle Harry.  
Who are in the airport?  
a. Harry.  
b. In Honolulu Airport.  
c. Ted and Elizabeth.  
d. Waiting for their uncle.
11. On Monday the instructor said there would be test on Friday.  
When will there be a test?  
a. On Monday.  
b. On Friday.  
c. An examination.  
d. Yes, there will.
12. The president backed up his argument with figures from the Agriculture and Education Department.  
How did the president back up his argument?  
a. With figures.  
b. From the Agriculture Department.  
c. From the Education Department.  
d. From the Agriculture and Education Department.
13. Paul was cutting down trees near Whistling River.

- What was he doing?
- In the river.
  - Paul was.
  - Near Whistling River.
  - Cutting down trees.
14. Every Saturday Mrs. Cox goes to the supermarket. She buys large cans of vegetables, and she saves money by doing this.  
How does she save money?
- By buying large cans of vegetables.
  - Information is not given.
  - Every Saturday.
  - To the supermarket.
15. Tom has a lot of things to do after school today.  
Is this a busy day for Tom?
- Yes, he has.
  - No, it is not.
  - Yes, it is.
  - After school.
16. Yesterday Tom tried three times to telephone them.  
How often did Tom try?
- To telephone them.
  - Yesterday.
  - Three times.
  - Tom.
17. Mr. Smith could have saved a lot of money.  
Did he save money?
- Information is not given.
  - Yes, he did.
  - He lost money.
  - No, he didn't.
18. It is better to raise a family in the country than in the city.  
Where is it better to raise a family?
- In the country.
  - In a family.
  - In the city.
  - Information is not given.
19. The positions of the ships in the race were drawn by lots.  
How did they decide the positions?
- In the race.
  - By the ships.
  - By lots.
  - Information is not given.
20. It's safer to keep money in a bank than to keep it in your house or carry it around with you.  
Which is safer?
- To keep money in a bank.
  - To keep it in your house.
  - To carry it around with you.
  - No information is given.