

Into the Mind of the Listener

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John Field

Into the mind of the listener...

- 1. Ask the listener to **record** what they have understood
 - a. globally by note-taking / summary
 - b. locally by transcription
- 2. Ask the listener to **report** on their listening experience
 - a. globally
 - b. locally by means of retrospective verbal report
- 3. Compare the listener's behaviour with **standard models** of expert listening

Sources of listener information

Listening of any kind is based upon a trade off between

- **perceptual** information obtained by accurately **decoding** the speaker's utterance into syllables, words, clauses.
- **conceptual** information based upon
 - topic knowledge,
 - knowledge of speaker ,
 - understanding of situation,
 - recall of what has been said so far
 - co-text.

Some preliminary assumptions

- *Decoding*. Just because a learner knows a piece of language, it does not mean that it will be recognised in connected speech. **Knowledge \neq Recognition**
- *Decoding*. Until quite a high level of L2 knowledge and listening proficiency, parts of the input will not be successfully decoded **Input \neq Intake**
- ‘*Context*’ and ‘*Text-so-far*’ serve two purposes
 - For competent listeners, they enrich overall understanding. They add to what has been decoded.
 - For less experienced listeners, they compensate for gaps in understanding

- Q1: How much input is available to an L2 listener at (say) IELTS 6.0 or CEFR B2 when listening to a lecture?

How much has to be inferred from context, co-text and discourse presentation?

Stanovich's (1980) Interactive-Compensatory Hypothesis

Low noise

⇒ High confidence



High noise

⇒ Low confidence

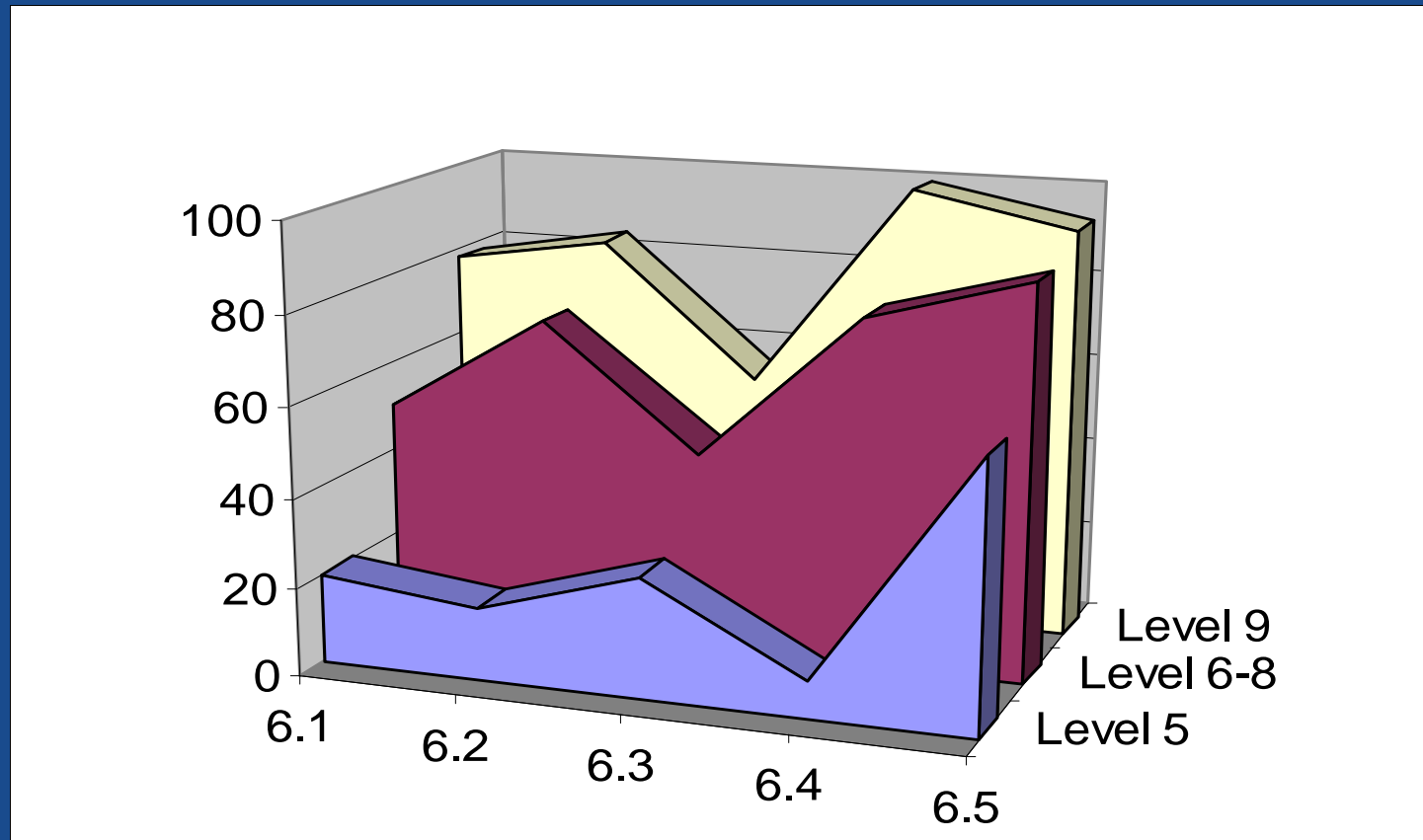


Paused Transcription

- A means of ensuring natural listening for meaning while at the same time obtaining information on the accuracy of input decoding
 - Authentic recording at learners' level or a little above. Pauses inserted at irregular intervals at the end of target clauses
 - Learners transcribe the last 4, 5 or 6 words whenever a pause occurs
 - Justified by current models of listening which assume that input stored in memory is not 'wrapped up' and turned into an abstract idea unit until the end of a clause or long phrase (Jarvella, 1971)

How much input becomes intake?

'a higher standard of entertainment'

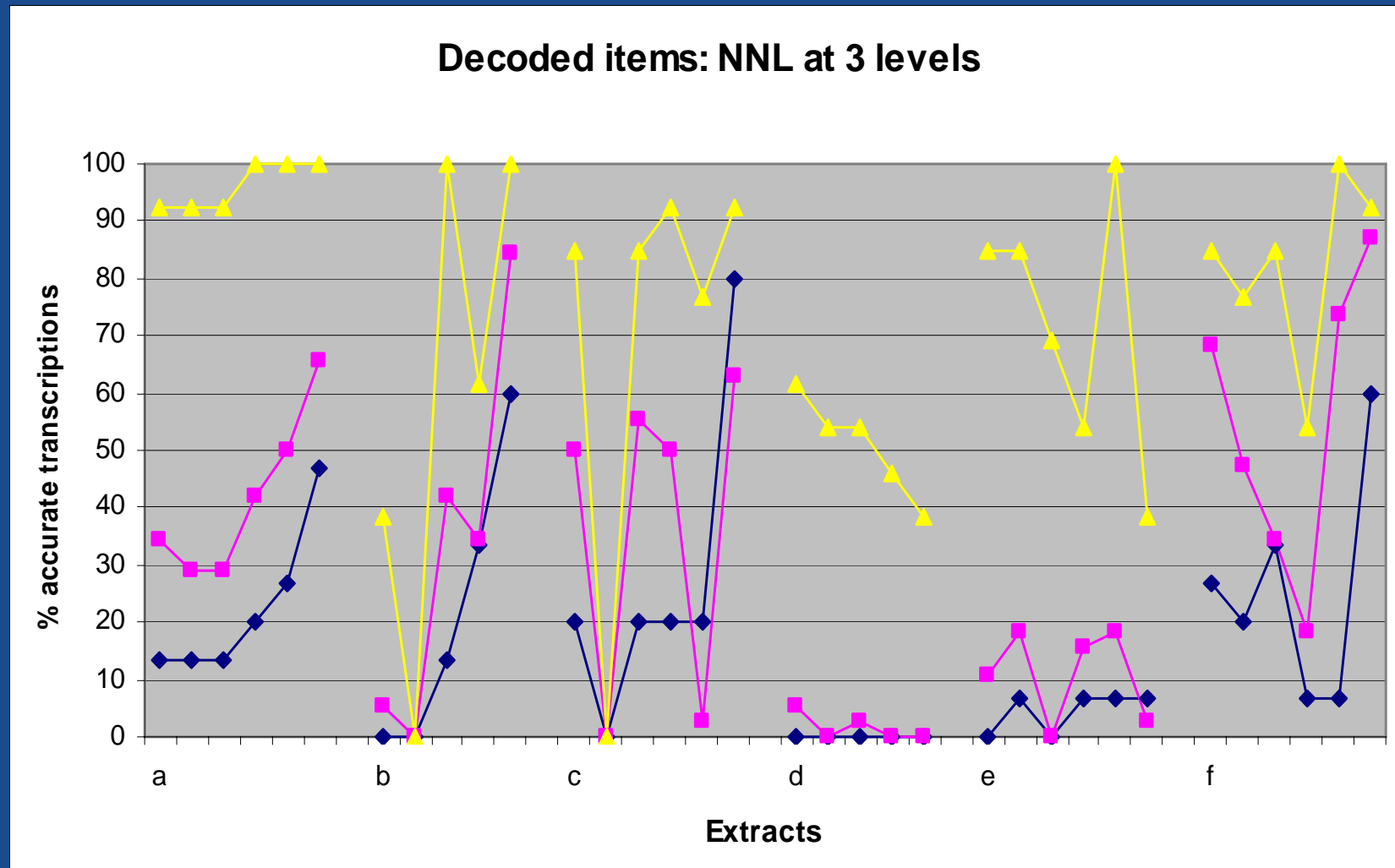


Target extracts

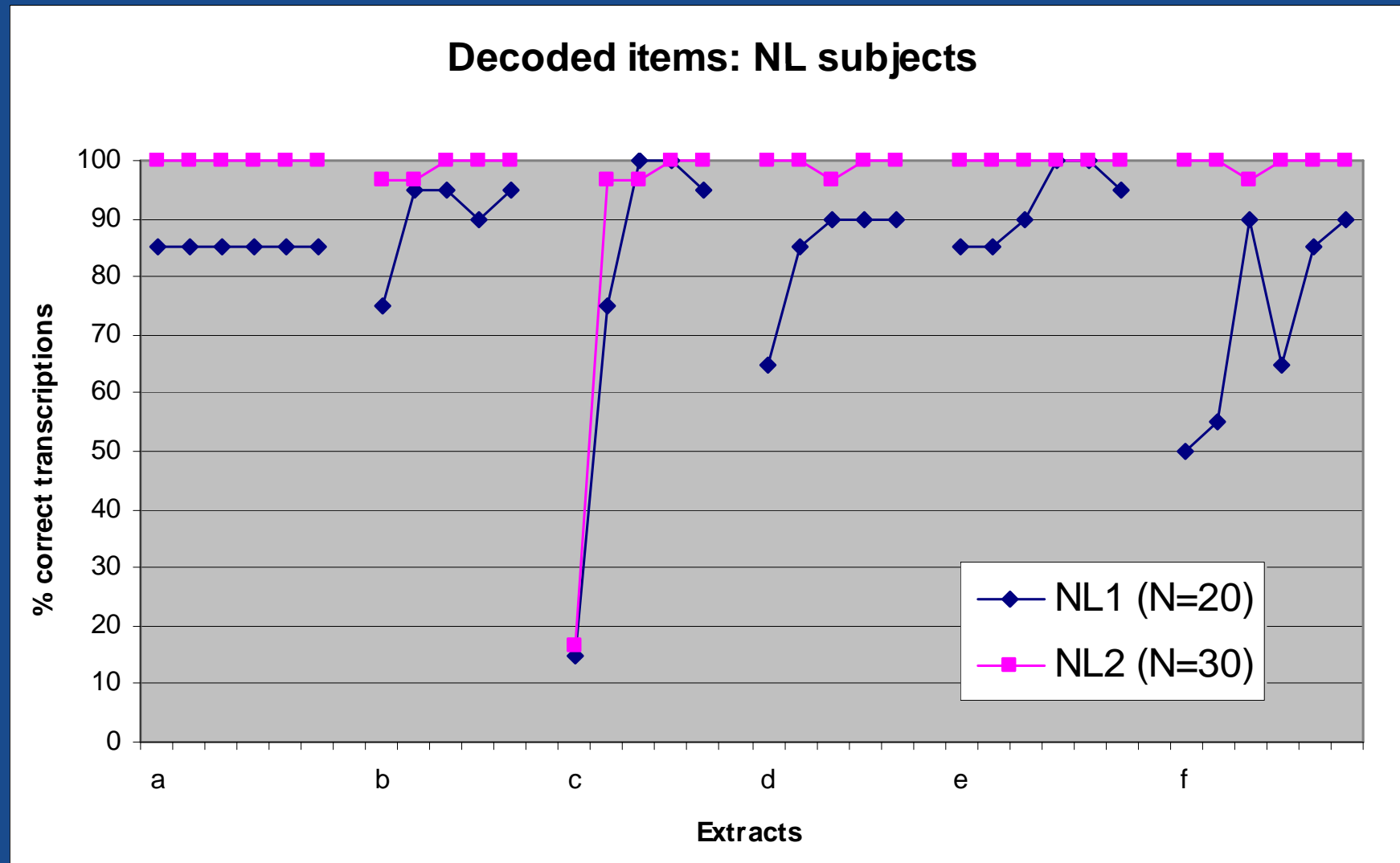
- a. [because] I thought it was clear
- b. [I found out] that the thud was the cat
- c. I'll go over to the butcher's shop
- d. and get rid of it somehow
- e. that I was on double yellow lines
- f. a yellow hat disappearing round the corner

How much perceptual info.?

(Mixed L1: N =15/36/13)



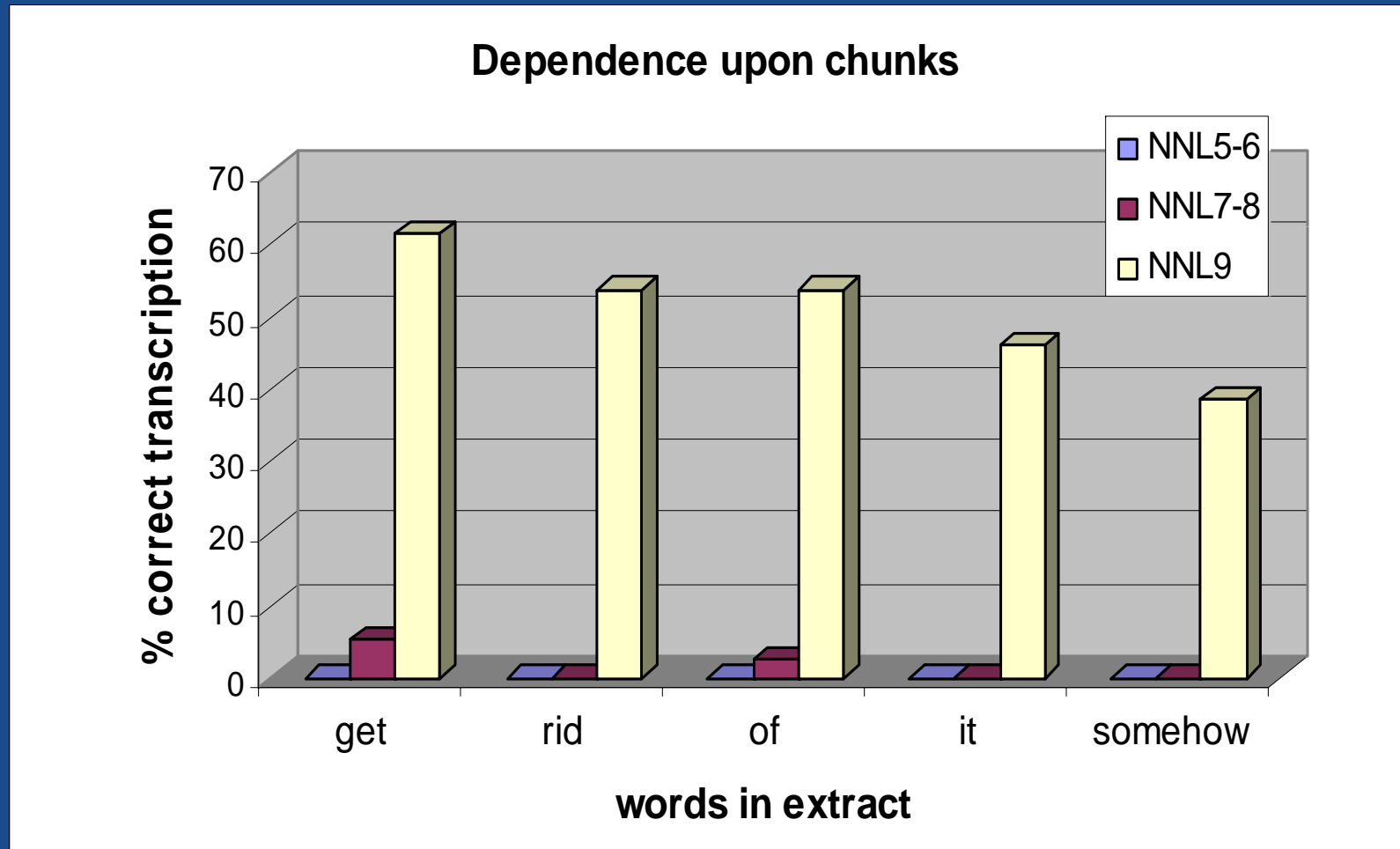
Decoding by NLs



What is most easily decoded?

- content words (vs function words, Field 2008b)
- words towards end of segment
 - focal stress / co-text
- multi-syllabic items
- Recurrent words occurring in different contexts
- items within a chunk

Reliance upon familiar chunks



Lexical uncertainty: the word THUD

I found out that the thud was the cat

the sound was the cat

the thing was the cat

I found out that the front was the cat

the fog of the cat

I found that the sun in the cat

I found out the frog and the cat

I found that was the cat

I thought it was a cat

in the front was the cat

I found out where was the cat

what I thought that a cat

Strategies for dealing with unknown words

- Leave **blank**
- Attempt **phonological transcription**
- Approximate **lexical match with known word**
 - May be contextually and syntactically inappropriate
- Approximate **lexical match plus restructuring of sentence**

Dealing with THUD (N = 111)

Null	25	
Approx known word	43	50%
Approx known word + revision	12	13.9%
Gap	27	31.4%
Phonological transcription	4	4.6%
$\chi^2 (1) = 13.39, p < 0.001$		

A view of lexical recognition

- Assumption: that L2 listeners identify novel lexical items and infer their meaning from context
- But L2 listeners' first recourse often seems to be to make an approximate match to a known word, even one that is contextually and co-textually inappropriate.

Some conclusions for EAP

- With less proficient listeners, processing will be mainly at content word level. This means that function words and general interword links may be lacking / inferred.
- Relationships between idea units or shifts of topic need to be marked clearly.
- End of utterance carries special weight. This may run counter to topicalisation:

Football I strongly object to on a Sunday; cricket I don't mind
On national boundaries, the two documents disagree strongly.

- Rephrasing serves to present important words in new contexts

- Q2: To what extent does test-based practice in EAP listening instruction (under washback pressures) engage listening processes like those employed in real-world academic listening?

Cognitive validity

the extent to which the types of listening behaviour elicited by a test correspond to those that a real-life environment demands.

See (e.g.) Weir 2005

Line of attack

- Seek evidence on-line, while a task is being carried out. Comparisons can be made between the behaviour of the L2 listener when performing the task under test conditions and the same individual's behaviour when the task is performed under conditions closer to those of the real life situation.

Three types of behaviour

- 1 Part of the **normal process**: behaviour which might be adopted by an L1 academic listener.
- 2. **Strategic behaviour** to prepare for a task, to maximise the amount retained or to compensate for problems of understanding.
- 3 **Task-specific behaviour** representing the user's response to features of the task.
 - a. processes **related to the task** but not part of the corresponding real-life activity
 - b. **strategies** where the learner attempts to exploit loopholes in the format of the task

The study

- **The Task condition:** listening once to a simulated lecture and undertaking a comprehension task.
- Reporting on the experience
- **The Lecture condition:** listening to a recording of another simulated lecture, making notes during listening and reporting what had been understood.
- Reporting on the experience

Materials

- **Lecture A.** A lecture on the effects of planting trees in urban environments. Tested by means of gap filling items.
- **Lecture B.** A lecture on the shark in Australia and the practice of shark netting. Tested by a combination of multiple choice questions and some gap filling items
- Participants (N = 15) reported on Passage A in the Task condition and Passage B in the Lecture;
- Subjects (N = 14) reported on Passage B in the Task condition and Passage A in the Non-Task.

Type of verbal reporting used

- In the Task condition, ask subjects to provide answers orally every 3 or 4 questions. Subjects report on why they chose these answers [answer = a memory trigger]
- In the Lecture condition, ask subjects to write notes, then report orally what they understood. Ask subjects to expand on account where necessary

Analysis 1: Correlation between scores

There was no correlation between scores on the Task and scores on the Lecture

AB group: $r_s = 0.43$, n.s

BA group: $r_s = 0.53$, n.s.

The results were checked by means of scattergrams which showed no correlational pattern

Analysis 2: Task-specific behaviour

The items in the gap-filling Task potentially provide a candidate with:

- An outline of what the recording covers
- A set of gaps to be filled that follow the sequence of the recording
- Key words with which to locate information
- One constituent of a collocation
- Sequences which echo the recording word for word

Attentional focus

- (1) [The main point was] preserve tree but I'm not quite sure because + every every time I use + I mean my my method to + listen to to do the [...] listening + yeah I just look at the words not focus what it is about (S1: 145)
- (2) So when I was reading the answering the first one she was maybe she had already finished the list no? + the other case is even if the words maybe were I made some mistakes in other parts I mean + but you have time to write to listen because when you were when I was writing er she was speaking about something else not important for the test. (AA1: 148)

Unfortunate consequences

- (3) I missed it because I didn't I didn't I didn't realise the 'frequency' has come so quickly (P1: 99)
- (4) Er when I try to get this answer um he he is already talking about the make cities cooler yes so I missed the answer (T1: 19)

Task-wise strategies

- Use words from written text to locate information
- Listen for one-to-one match
- Seek paraphrase for a written proposition
- Choose answer according to position in a list or sequence in the *written* text

The 'key word' strategy

- Instructors encourage learners to exploit the written material in a listening task by listening out for key words identified from the questions.
- The evidence suggests that this can be counter-productive. If a learner misses a given key word match, there can be a knock-on effect. The learner's attention continues to focus on the target and misses subsequent ones.

Normal meaning building processes

Under an approach that is based narrowly on comprehension questions, a listener does not have to perform many of the processes which occur in real-life meaning building:

- Distinguish **main points** from **subsidiary** ones
- Distinguish **new propositions** from lecture-style rephrasing
- Recognise **argument structures** that link propositions
- Integrate incoming information into an **overall discourse representation**

Analysis 3: Perceived difficulty

- Hypothesis: Task condition will be found to be easier than Lecture condition.
- 30% of Participants reported that they found note-taking in the lecture easier than doing the task

Typical comment favouring Lecture

Did you find it more difficult to take notes or to answer the questions?

I think sharks um sharks is more difficult to answer the question because the question is is how do you say that? Um + um in the sharks there are some questions I can't catch it exactly.

(Q2: 40)

Another ...

Which did you find more difficult?

The first one + definitely. [...] Because um with this this test it it is um + how can I? It's + I have I have a lot of more stress with this sort of test because you um you don't want to miss any answer + but with this technique it's it is different + um even if you miss something er you you you will understand the the general idea what is talking about + but in this test sort of test um you when you miss miss the point then you get you get stress and then for er for the following questions it's harder and so it's quite difficult. [...]

... were you listening in a different way?

Um yes definitely +there's not the same way + yeah +because in the first part I'm just focusing on words not the general meaning + but in the second I focus on the the the general ideas + the most interesting points. (V2: 26)

A different view: Lecture < Task

Why did you find [the Lecture] more difficult?

Um + if + er if I have this something like this to ask me to do some do some test er maybe I can do it, but

So if you have ... an answer sheet it helps you.

Yeah yeah + er they can help me to um to get some key words and I use the key word to find the answer + but just listen and do some write I I find I think is more difficult. (R2: 45)

Interpretation

- What the hypothesis had not allowed for was the complexity of the processes demanded by gap filling and MCQ tasks

Evidence from reports

- *If I don't write now also I don't know if it is correct + and um it is hard to ... read all the tasks before listening + it is better because I when I am filling the first part I don't remember what is following + and when we listen for the next part I have while I'm listening I have to read and to know what do they want to do. (Y1: 122)*

Conclusions

- No clear correlation between Task and Lecture scores
- Heavy reporting of task-wise strategies (possibly influenced by instruction)
- Some performed badly on the task but well in note-taking. A third of subjects report note-taking easier than task

Cognitive validity can be questioned

- Q3: Do multiple information sources assist the EAP listener or do they impose heavy cognitive demands?

Multiple sources = additional demands

- Ferris et al. (2008) investigated Air Traffic Controllers who had met the language requirements of their profession in listening and speaking skills.
- They asked them to perform under real-life conditions (i.e. with visual input on a screen and consequent decision-making).
- They found that their speaking skills deteriorated with the increased cognitive demands

Divided attention

- Human beings have **limited attention capacity**. It may be exceeded on a single very demanding task – or it may be exceeded if it has to be divided between two tasks
- Conventionally, the demands of divided attention are said to be less if the language input is in **two different modalities** (i.e. spoken vs written language).
- In addition, neurological research shows how closely **visual input from gesture etc is integrated into listening**

On the other hand..

- For a second language learner, visual material is likely to predominate over auditory. Reason: it is more standardised and can be rechecked.
- Visual input (PowerPoint, handouts) thus potentially makes a greater contribution to the lecture outcome and shapes the way the spoken input is interpreted.

Implications for EAP presentations

- Ensure interaction between spoken and written text
 - Flying in on PP presentation
 - Gesture – indicating parts of a PP slide related to the lecture
 - Use graphics on PP and point
- Use a paraphrase of visual input in a lecture, not repetition or reading aloud
- Pinpoint the main points both visually and aurally
 - Colour + prosody + gesture
- Pay attention to connectives
 - Clear signposting of changes to topic (visual and auditory)
 - Linking facts clearly

Implications for EAP presentations 2

- Should we stop using handouts that simply replicate PPs?
Perhaps replace them with pre-lecture handouts that provide an **argument structure for the lecture**, often missing from a learner's representation of what has been said.
- Should we **discourage note-taking**, which adds a further cognitive demand (listening + reading + reading + writing)?
Perhaps replace it by a set of the lecturer's own notes available post-lecture?

Some references

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Contact details

j.c.field@reading.ac.uk