Speed Rates and Amount of Time
Spent on Listening Scripts

Lee, Won-Seok*

〈ABSTRACT〉

The aim of this study is to examine speed rates and amount of time spent on listening scripts contained in middle school English textbooks (MSET) widely used in Korea. Of the 13 kinds of MSET written by the 7th National English Curriculum (7NEC), the top five sold are analyzed for this research. For this study, speed rates of listening scripts have been examined on the basis of the classification conducted by Tauroza and Allison (1990), relying on data collection measured with a stopwatch. The speed rates of the scripts was measured by the minute. The results show that the speaker of A2 delivers the script at the fastest rate, at 158 wpm. The average speed of the scripts played is 125 wpm. The total time measured in all the lessons of each textbook reveals that C3 has the most seconds with 1967, and E1 has the least with 762. The average time taken by the recorded scripts is 1282 seconds. In designing MSET, textbook developers and concerned English educators should consider this study as a reason to develop listening materials, in order to avoid greater deviations among MSET.

Key words: listening scripts, speed rates, average speed, listening comprehension

I. Introduction

The aim of this study is to examine speed rates and amount of time spent on listening scripts contained in middle school English textbooks (MSET) widely used in

* 중앙대학교 사범대학 영어교육과 강사
Korea. Of the 13 kinds of MSET written by the 7th National English Curriculum (7NEC), the top five sold are analyzed for this research (Lee 2007). For this study, speed rates of listening scripts have been examined on the basis of the classification conducted by Tauroza and Allison (1990), relying on data collection measured with a stopwatch. On the other hand, the amount of time spent on listening scripts does not have comprehensive and specific theories or materials based on listening per se, this study will present the results of time measurement that are not based on specified theories.

Listening is very important and a basic function among the four communicative skills (Asher 1977; van Els et al. 1984). Taking an example, listening is closely connected with speaking. White (1998) notes that “The role of speaker and hearer can become speakers at any moment, so learning how to listen in a second (or indeed a first) language is inextricably linked with learning how to speak. Good listeners make good speakers, and vice-versa.” (p. 6)

In Korea, the changed status of listening in recent years has been partly promoted by several national English curricula which have begun to emphasize the role of communicative input in triggering spoken language skills for language improvement. The national educational curriculum in Korea has undergone seven revisions since its establishment in August 1955. The current 7NEC was introduced in December 1997, and it focused on practical, everyday communicative English education for the purpose of maximizing English fluency, in accordance with the policy of the Ministry of Education and Human Resources in 1997.

Additionally, the English textbook remains the essential learning source, and the classroom is the main place for learning English for Korean middle school students within the existing EFL setting. Unfortunately, in spite of the importance of the textbook having been often noted (Brown 2001; Littlejohn 1998; Park 1991; Park & Suh 2003; Yu 2005), relatively little research on the listening scripts contained in Korean textbooks has been carried out (Cha 2006). 

In brief, the aim of this study is to examine speed rates and amount of time spent on listening scripts in order to offer a useful contribution to the literature pertaining to an overview of listening materials carried in MSET.

1) This study is an extract from the Ph.d dissertation (Lee 2007).
II. Theoretical Background

1. The State of Recording

In truth, the state of recording plays a significant role for learners. Thus, if the quality of the recordings is poor, learners will certainly have much less comprehension when listening. In this study, all 15 MSET examined were found to have good sound quality. Consequently, the quality of these recordings does have a considerable effect on various aspects of the listening process. If the sound quality is poor, learners will have difficulty in hearing and understanding what is said. In such cases later performance may not represent their actual ability. This has been a common problem with listening tests, since the difference between good recordings and poor quality ones is considerable (Buck 2001).

Taking another example, probably all second language listeners have had the experience of listening to something and not quite understanding it because it seemed too fast, or feeling they could have understood it better if only it had been a little slower.

Listener perceptions that speech is too fast are often due to a lack of processing automaticity, so as listeners get better, and as they learn to process the language more automatically, speech seems to become slower. Therefore, just because speech appears fast, it does not necessary mean it is. However, the actual speech rate does affect comprehension, and there is a whole body of research that looks at the relationship between the speech act and its comprehension.

Counting syllables for measuring speech rates is complex and time-consuming, whereas counting words per minute is relatively easy, so words per minute continues to be widely used. For a better understanding of this, it is useful to start by reviewing typical speech rates. Tauroza and Allison (1990) look at average speech rates for British speakers: radio monologues, conversations and interviews aimed at native speakers, as well as lectures intended predominantly for a non-native speaking audience. Table 1 summarizes their findings.
Judging from Table 1, it is clear that the average speech rate is about 170 wpm, or about 4 syllables per second(sps). It is important to remember that these are averages, and that there will be considerable variation among different speakers. The typical English native speaker normally speaks at about 230 wpm, which is very fast. Virtually every language learner initially thinks that native speakers speak too fast!

Interestingly, a study by Bone (1988) of native speakers shows that people often listen at only 25 per cent of their potential and ignore, forget, distort, or misunderstand the other 75 per cent. Concentration rises above 25 percent if they think that what they are hearing is important and/or if they are interested in it, but it never reaches 100 percent.

Stanley (1978) notes that what gave listeners the most difficulty when listening to everyday speech was those areas which were spoken most rapidly. He adds that when speech was faster, language learners “constantly failed to perceive individual phonemes and hence words with which they were already familiar.”(pp. 287-289) Griffiths (1992) looked at the effects of three different speech rates (127, 188, and 250 wpm) on the comprehension of second-language speakers, and concluded that comprehension was significantly better at the slowest speech rate and worst at the highest rate.

Unlike reading, where a person can stop and go back to reread, in listening the learner may not always have the opportunity to stop the speaker. Instead, the stream of speech will continue to flow (Brown 2001).

2. The Importance of Listening Education

Listening is very important and a basic function among the four communicative skills.
(Asher 1977; van Els et al. 1984). In this regard, listening competence is universally more extensive than speaking competence. However, it has taken many years to bring the language teaching profession around to realizing the importance of listening in second and foreign language learning. As observed by Rivers (1966), long an advocate for listening comprehension, speaking does not of itself constitute communication unless what is said is comprehended by another person.

In normal daily life, listening is used far more than any other single language skill. On average, we can expect to listen twice as much as we speak, four times more than we read, and five times more than we write (Rivers 1981; Weaver 1972). Brown (1990, 2000) notes that as soon as someone begins to speak, the co-operative human listener is actively trying to work out what he is saying, what he is likely to say next, and what he is likely to mean by what he says. Another important link is that between talking and listening. In order to be an effective participant in interaction, the L2 learner has to develop skills in both speaking and listening (Brumfit 1984).

More exactly, listening is closely connected with speaking, as was mentioned in the introduction. Giving an easy example, many deaf people cannot speak at all or properly because they cannot hear anything. Thus, speaking is dependent upon listening (Cha & Lee 1999). Being a good listener involves collaborating with speakers and taking an active role in asking for clarification when you do not understand what has been said (White 1998).

In other words, listeners are engaging in the process of constructing a coherent interpretation of the spoken word. This process, which involves selecting, interpreting and summarizing input, emphasizes the active and personal nature of successful listening. Thus, it is not appropriate to describe listening as a passive skill. By the same token, Anderson and Lynch (1988) also reject a conceptualization of listening as a passive act, calling it a listener-as-tape-recorder explanation (Celce-Murcia 2001). In this regard, much other scholarly work has been done on the activity of listening (Anderson & Linch 1988; Rivers 1981; Underwood 1989; Yates 1979).

Seen from this perspective, in language education, listening comprehension teaching must be the first consideration rather than other functions, because listening has a transfer effect on other functions. To put it more concretely, listening comprehension exerts a wide influence upon reading and writing as well as upon speaking. One view springs from the idea that language is a linear process, and that listening provides the learner with confidence in speaking. These two skills - listening and speaking - together
provide a backdrop for the subsequent teaching of reading and writing skills (Brumfit 1984).

Despite the importance of listening comprehension as mentioned above, Koreans made poor scores in listening comprehension when compared to grammar, vocabulary, and reading on TOEFL tests. The results of score analysis carried out by the Educational Testing Service (Sohn 2005) for two years, ranging from November of 2003 to July of 2004, 85,010 Koreans applied for CBT\(^2\), show them as the largest single group in the world. However, Koreans’ scores unfortunately show they placed 103rd out of 227 countries tested in that period. Their score remains an average 213, and 18th of 29 Asian countries.

For this reason, it is necessary for students to be provided with proper listening materials in order to improve their listening comprehension. The final aim of teaching a foreign language is to understand each other, namely, to improve communicative competence, especially in listening skills through the target language.

### III. Method

For the analysis, 15 textbooks of currently available MSET under the 7th NEC were selected. Each series of textbooks includes three school textbooks named *Middle School English 1*, *Middle School English 2*, and *Middle School English 3*, written by the same authors. Textbooks which are not published in a series were not chosen because they are not suitable to a survey based on consistency.

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2) ETS (Educational Testing Service) has carried into effect CBT (Computer Based Test) for the TOEFL test since July 1998. CBT is composed as follows: Section 1 (Listening Comprehension); Section 2 (Structure, Written & Expression); Section 3 (Reading Comprehension Section); Section 4 (Writing)
Table 2: Five Kinds of Textbooks (Type: Textbooks)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Authors and Year of Publication</th>
<th>Publishers</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
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<tr>
<td>E</td>
<td>Lee, B-M., et al. (2001). <em>Middle School English 1.2.3.</em></td>
<td>Chunjae</td>
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</table>

The MSET series were respectively titled A1, A2, A3 in alphabetical order up to E1, E2, E3, according to school grade and the type of each textbook, as shown in Table 2. Of the 13 MSET revised by the current 7NEC, the top five sold are adopted for this research.

For this study, a stop watch was used to take exact measurements of the time spent on each script. Time was measured by the second, with only the genuine content of each script considered. In other words, the instructions and pauses given for the scripts were not measured along with the actual dialogues or monologues, because the instructions used in every textbook are so similar. For example, "Listen and choose the correct response," or "Listen and write the numbers in order." To make matters worse, they are not always written in the same language. Five textbooks have instructions written in English, seven textbooks are in Korean, and for the rest, three have both English and Korean (Lee 2007). Finally, when measuring the time spent in playing the scripts, if the script was recorded twice, it was measured only once.

1. Research Question

In an attempt to investigate speed rates on listening scripts in contemporary textbooks, the greatest concern is to survey the amount of time each script and speed rates on them from all 15 MSETs. Thus, in order to achieve the goal of the study, the
following research questions were addressed: 1. How much time is spent on each script? 2. What are the speed rates?

2. Data Collection and Analysis

Table 3 indicates that Lesson 7 of B3 takes longer when compared with the others as a 1st rank. It takes 196 seconds to be played. In contrast, Lesson 12 of E1 takes only 18 seconds. There is also a considerable difference between B3 and E1.

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</table>

(L: lesson, T: textbook.)

The total time measured in all the lessons of each textbook reveals that C3 has the most time spent on scripts with 1967 seconds, and E1 the least with 762 seconds. The difference is 1205 seconds between C3 and E1, as shown in Table 4 and Figure 1. The
average time taken by the recorded scripts is 1282 seconds. A2 and C2 closely approximate the average time.

<Table 4> Total Time Spent in All Lessons (time: seconds)

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[Figure 1]

The speed rate of the scripts was measured by the minute. The script was measured on the basis of only Lesson 1 of each textbook, although pauses and instructions between two numbered scripts were not measured. In counting words per minute, the first personal pronoun, I, articles, a, an, the, and reduced words such as I’ll, and can’t, were each treated as one word.
Table 5 and Figure 2 show that the speaker of A2 delivers the script at the fastest rate, at 158 wpm. This speed is close to that of radio monologues in Table 1. However, it must be remembered that pauses and instructions in A2 are not included. If the speed rate had included them, the number of wpm would have been much smaller. Table 4 and Figure 2 also show that the speech speed, in case of C, increases as the level rises.

The average speed in combined scripts is 125 wpm, excluding pauses and instructions. This is much slower than lectures to NNS, as shown in Table 1, which is the slowest speed shown in speech rates, at 140 wpm. Considering that the latter may be recorded with pauses, the speed of recording for Korean middle school students should be a little faster, taking into account the speed rate of NS, at 170–230 wpm.
3. Limitation of the Study

As the analysis in this research is limited to five types of textbooks out of the 13 authorized by the Ministry of Education and Human Resources, the findings should not necessarily be generalized to include all the textbooks being used in middle schools in Korea. As such, it is only the beginning of a far-reaching textbook analysis. What is more, there have been many limitations in this survey as a data collecting tool for in-depth inquires. Measuring time spent on listening scripts was time-consuming and troublesome.

IV. Conclusion

This study sketched out speed rates on listening scripts contained in MSET widely used in Korea. Of the 13 kinds of MSET revised by the 7NEC, the top five sold have been examined on the educational basis of listening scripts, using a stopwatch. In this attempt to investigate listening scripts, the greatest concern was to measure the amount of time spent on listening and the speed rates, and then compare them in 15 MSETs in order to offer good advice on listening materials in organizing listening scripts.

For the present study, the author has examined the classification conducted by researchers (Tauroza & Allison 1990) who look at average speech rates for British speakers. From the findings, a conclusion may be drawn from the researches on the listening scripts in the 15 MSETs: The average speed rate is 125 wpm and the amount of time for recording listening scripts is 1282 seconds. This speed rate and this listening time are good averages which do, indeed, maximize listening comprehension for middle school students.

Griffiths (1992) looked at the effects of three different speech rates (127, 188, and 250 wpm) on the comprehension of second-language speakers, and concluded that comprehension was significantly better at the slowest speech rate and worst at the highest rate. From the findings, the average speed rate (125 wpm) is very close to the
slowest speech, 127 wpm (Griffiths 1992) that is appropriate for better comprehension. On the grounds of that, speed rates for listening scripts in MSET must be maintained to at least 125 wpm. Moreover, the average of 1282 seconds are adequate for the amount of time for recording listening scripts.

In language education, listening comprehension teaching must be the first consideration rather than other functions, because listening has a transfer effect on other functions. To put it more concretely, listening comprehension exerts a wide influence upon reading and writing as well as upon speaking. One view springs from the idea that language is a linear process, and that listening provides the learner with confidence in speaking. These two skills – listening and speaking – together provide a backdrop for the subsequent teaching of reading and writing skills (Brumfit 1984).

In designing MSET, textbook developers and concerned English educators should consider this study as a reason to develop listening materials, in order to avoid greater deviations among MSET. Finally, these professionals must also bear in mind the importance of listening comprehension.

To summarize, since the actual speech rate does affect comprehension, speech rate and amount of time for organizing listening scripts need to be balanced evenly to maximize efficiency in connection with acquiring listening skills, because it is clearly an important variable in listening comprehension.
Speed Rates and Amount of Time Spent on Listening Scripts

References


<List of English Textbooks for Research>


요약

듣기 대본의 속도와 소요된 시간

이 연구의 목적은 중학 영어 교재에 들어있는 듣기 대본의 속도 (speech rates)와 소요된 시간의 양을 측정해서 타교재와 비교하여 오차를 알아내고, 더 나은 듣기 자료를 개발하는데 도움이 되기 위함이다. 이 연구를 위해 제 7차 영어 교육 과정에 쓰인 13종의 교재 중 가장 널리 사용되는 5종의 교재, 15권을 선정하여 이 연구에 이용했다. 이 연구를 위해 Tauroza & Allison(1990)이 분류한 속도를 살펴보았다. 각 교재의 모든 과에서 측정된 총 시간의 길이는 초시계 (stopwatch)를 이용하여 초 (second)로 측정하였다. 그 결과 교재 C3이 1967초로서 1위이며, 교재 E1은 762초로 마지막 순위다. 전 교재의 듣기 대본의 평균 시간은 1282초다. 속도의 측정은 분 (minute)을 기준으로 측정되었는데 교재 A2가 158 wpm으로 가장 빠르다. 전체 평균 속도는 125 wpm이다. 결론적으로, 교재간의 편차가 너무 심하다는 것이 밝혀졌으며, 듣기 향상을 위해 이 연구에서 밝혀진 평균 속도와 시간은 최소한 유지되어야겠다.

주제어: 듣기 대본, 속도, 평균 속도, 듣기 이해