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Anyone who has spent much time watching Japanese television knows that quiz shows are very popular in this country. Actually, it may be more accurate to say that quiz *games* are popular because in fact many TV programs that are not *quiz shows* in the sense of the word contain segments where guests answer a series of questions. Indeed, sometimes it seems as though nearly every program broadcast has some kind of *quiz element*. As teachers who feel strongly that student motivation can be improved by interesting content, we would like to argue that given the popularity of quiz games in Japan, using trivia content in the classroom can be an excellent method for developing Japanese students' listening skills. In this paper, we will provide some background information on teaching second language listening and discuss the growing focus in the field on developing listening subskills.

Then we will explain how trivia content can be integrated into the listening curriculum by outlining several games and activities that can be used to teach three different listening subskills: listening to questions and responding, listening for specific information, and listening to descriptions. While the primary goal of this paper will be to describe the activities that can be used to teach these subskills, we also want to open readers' eyes to the possibilities of using trivia in the classroom. We feel that this will help teachers to think of games and activities that match their own classroom settings and learner needs.

Developing Listening Subskills with Trivia¹

第二言語リスニングの分野では、近年リスニング・サブスキルの開発に対する関心が 高まっている。リーディングのように、リスニングは質問を聞いて答えるために聞く、特定の情報を求めて聞く、描写を聞くなどのように様々なサブスキルに分けることができる。数年前から、リスニング・サブスキルを向上させる練習を組み込んだテキストが増えてきた。このような流れは歓迎できるが、ほとんどの教師は、サブスキル向上のためにはテキストだけでは不十分で、他のアクティビティも授業に取り入れなければならないということに気づいている。本論では、いかにtrivia contentがリスニング・サブスキルを向上させるためのゲームやアクティビティ開発の出発点になるかについて論じられている。第二言語リスニングを教えるための背景が論じられ、3つの聴解サブスキルを教えるためのtrivia-basedアクティビティがいくつか紹介されている。これらのアクティビティはすべて著者のウェブサイトからダウンロードすることができる。

Teaching Second Language Listening

The typical communicative approach to teaching listening comprehension to second language learners often involves these steps: (a) introducing a text of some kind (dialogue, story, etc.) with preview questions, (b) having the students listen to the text one or more times, and (c) then asking them to perform some kind of comprehension *check* to determine how well they have understood the text. Although this kind of activity is still widely used, it has become clear that as with reading, students need specific skill training to help them improve their listening (Field, 1998). As such, in the past few years, materials writers such as Richards (1997) have published listening textbooks that focus specifically on developing subskills.

Although the trend toward textbooks that develop listening subskills is a welcome one, most teachers understand that only using a textbook is

insufficient. For linguistic reasons, students need exposure to a large amount of listening input, more than a single textbook can provide. For affective reasons, students need a variety of engaging activities that encourage them to develop a positive attitude towards listening which encourages them to think of listening as a source of both information and entertainment (Rost, 1994). Accordingly, it is important for teachers to devise a variety of listening activities for their classes that can serve to supplement the core textbook for the class. An excellent springboard for developing these kinds of listening activities is trivia content.

Trivia Content in the Listening Curriculum: Applications for Teaching Listening Subskills

Trivia content can be used to teach a number of listening subskills. Most obviously, it can be used for teaching the subskill of listening to questions and responding, but it also can be useful for teaching the subskills of listening for specific information, and listening to descriptions. In the remaining sections of the paper, we will provide a brief overview of these three subskills and then explain how games and activities using trivia content can be used to teach them.

Subskill #1: Listening to questions and responding

For the purpose of interactional communication, listening to questions and responding is perhaps the most important subskill learners need to acquire. In teaching L2 learners, an over reliance on activities that separate listening from speaking may create passive listeners. To train learners to become effective communicators, listening and speaking must be seen as interdependent (Anderson & Lynch, 1988). A glance at most listening textbooks that employ communicative methodology reveals that instruction in this subskill is, in fact, given the priority it deserves. However, as was mentioned above, students need to get their noses out of the textbooks from time to time and try their skills out in a different type of activity.

Trivia content is ideal for designing activities that work on the subskill of listening to questions and responding. Adapting trivia games such as those on TV for use in the classroom creates an exciting atmosphere where students listen attentively and are eager to respond. Because of its relatively simple format, the American TV quiz game *Jeopardy* can easily be adapted for use in the classroom. In our adaptation of this popular program, the teacher begins by placing 30 large-size index cards (with magnets attached to the back and mon-

etary figures from \$100 to \$500 written on the front) in 6 columns of 5 cards each on the board. Each column is a question category such as "Dracula," "Famous firsts," or "Words beginning with I" (Crawford, 2000a; Powell, 2000a). The students are told that the higher the monetary figure for each question in the category, the harder the question. Students are divided into 2 or more teams, and then play begins by having one team member choose a category and a monetary amount by saying something like "*Doraemon* for \$100, please."

The teacher then reads the question, and the student listens and responds. If the answer is correct, another member of the same team asks for the next question; otherwise, a student from the next team selects. We have found this simple adaptation of *Jeopardy* to be extremely popular in both university and language school settings, and have written some 200 categories from which questions can be selected based on students' ages, interests, and language ability.

A slight variation on the standard quiz game format that has also been successful involves the teacher dividing the class into teams and handing out information (in chart or prose form) on some topic of interest to the learners—the Academy Awards, for example. Each member of the team is given different information related to the main topic, which in this case could be chronological lists of (a) Best Film Awards, (b) Best Actress Awards, (c) Best Screenplay Awards, and so forth. After this information has been handed out, the teacher begins by asking a question such as "Who won the Academy Award for best actress in 1996?" The first student to raise his/her hand and answer the question correctly wins a point for the team. Like the more traditional quiz game described above in this activity the students usually become quite attentive listeners eager to respond.

Subskill #2: Listening for specific information

Utilized in both interactional and transactional communication, listening for specific information can come into play in a number of different settings. For L2 learners, some of the situations in the real world in which this subskill might be required include catching people's names during introductions, hearing a flight number announced at an airport, or listening to directions. Exercises that focus on these types of situations are not uncommon in textbooks, and although they can be useful, some of them tend to be too textbook-like and divorced from reality (i.e., using imaginary people

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for introductions and imaginary cities for directions, etc.). Using trivia content to work on this subskill can lead to activities better grounded in the real world, heightened motivation in students, and overall a more enjoyable lesson.

An excellent way to teach the subskill of listening for specific information is to create information gap activities with trivia content. Like those found in many textbooks in the market today, the information gaps can be designed as pair work activities in which two learners exchange information about a given topic. However, it is also possible to create information gap activities involving the whole class which essentially are conducted as *serial* pair work. Below, examples of each of these two types of information gaps will be provided.

Pair information gap activities are relatively easy to make, requiring only an interesting topic of some kind, and two sheets of paper which contain different information about this topic. To maximize participation, these activities should be tailored to the interests of the students and/or linked with topics that are included in the curriculum. One example of an activity that has proven to be quite popular focuses on major 20th century earthquake disasters in Japan (Powell, 2000b). In this activity, students exchange information about the dates, locations, and magnitudes of earthquakes. (Because many learners in Japan have experienced earthquakes, this often leads to post-activity sharing of personal experiences.) To cite another example, in a recent class a reading about Orson Welles' broadcast of "The War of the Worlds" led to a discussion about Mars and Martians, and from there to the names of the planets in the solar system. As most of the students did not know the names of the planets in English, in the next class students did a pair information gap activity; they exchanged specific information about the names of the planets, their orbital periods, the number of moons they have, and their average surface temperatures (Crawford, 2000b). At the end of the class, the students were challenged to come to class the following week having memorized the names of the nine planets (and somewhat surprisingly, 17 out of 20 students did so). The students seemed to have enjoyed learning the names of the planets and to have had an opportunity to practice listening for specific information.

Information gap activities involving the whole class require a little more preparation work on the part of the teacher, but they are still fairly easy to make. As mentioned above, these activities are conducted as *serial* pair work; in short, the students

walk around the classroom and exchange information with a number of different classmates. We have found that the best way to arrange these activities is to provide the students with a slip of paper or card with specific information to be communicated to their classmates, in addition to a sheet of paper on which they record the information they receive from their classmates. For small classes, it is possible to give each student different information, but if this is done for larger classes it will take quite a long time for the students to gather all of the information. For this reason, it is best to limit the number of different slips or cards to about ten. If students happen to pair up with a classmate with the same information, they can simply stop the exchange and find another partner.

One activity that has worked well is an information gap in which the students exchange information about the names, capital cities, populations, and literacy rates of ten countries in Southeast Asia (Crawford, 2000c). The students are given a card with this information about one of the ten countries, as well as a sheet that has a place for them to record the information they get from their classmates, and a map of Southeast Asia. Another activity deals with the ten largest universities in the United States (Crawford, 2000d). In this activity, students exchange information about the names, locations, enrollments, and dates of foundation of the universities. In these activities, the students have a chance to exchange specific information in the form of names, large numbers, percentages, and dates, providing them ample practice with the target listening subskill, listening for specific information

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Subskill #3: Listening to descriptions

Although the subskill of listening to descriptions often involves longer pieces of discourse such as a news report describing an event or a lecturer describing a research study, this is not al-

ways the case. In normal everyday conversation, it is quite common for speakers to briefly describe other people, events, places, and so on. In the realm of L2 pedagogy, longer descriptions are usually reserved for upper-intermediate to advanced learners, while shorter descriptions are used for lower level learners. In both cases, trivia content is well suited to teaching this important subskill.

In order to practice listening to descriptions, the *Jeopardy* quiz game described above can be used with one slight modification: simply write the items for each quiz category as descriptions rather than as questions. Thus, in the category Brazil, for example, instead of writing a question such as "What is the

capital of Brazil?" one could write an item such as "This city, famous for its modern architecture and sculpture, is the capital of Brazil." Writing the items as descriptions works better for some categories than others, but it is fairly easy to do and there are a large number of possible categories. By modifying the length of the descriptions for each item, it is also possible to use the game for beginning all the way up to very advanced students.

In another type of activity that involves descriptions, students work in small groups to match the names of various things with their descriptions. To perform this activity, create 15 to 20 separate sentences that describe something. The sentences should be easily divisible into subject and predicate, i.e. the thing being described and the description. Teachers can write the sentences themselves, or they can use reference materials such as encyclopedias, almanacs, and dictionaries. The sentences are printed onto a piece of paper, and cut into subject slips and predicate slips. Keeping the subjects and predicates separate, shuffle the slips and hand them out so that each student gets two subjects and two predicates. One student then begins the activity by reading aloud a predicate slip. The other students listen, and if they think that one of their subject slips matches the predicate slip read aloud, they raise their hand, and read their subject slip aloud. If the other members of the group agree that it is a match, the person with the subject receives the predicate slip, places the pair on the table, and then another student reads a predicate slip and the game proceeds until all of the slips have been matched. At this point, if there is time, the students can take turns dictating the sentences to one another. An example of such an activity is "The Animal Kingdom" (Crawford, 2000e). In making this activity, we adapted descriptions of animals from *Isaac Asimov's Book of Facts* (1997). As the title of Asimov's book suggests, the information in the sentences is somewhat surprising (did you know that mosquitoes have 47 teeth?), leading to heightened interest from the students, and making the matching process more challenging. "The Animal Kingdom" was designed for intermediate learners, but by lengthening the sentences and making the content more difficult, one can adapt the activity to more advanced students.

Conclusion

In this article, we have introduced several activities that use trivia to teach three listening subskills. We have found these activities to be popular in both language school and university settings, and have been pleased to see our students listening intently

to us as well as to their classmates. Some of the activities presented here, however, may not be appropriate for some learners or learning contexts. In such cases, we hope that readers will recognize the potential for using trivia to teach listening subskills and will develop their own activities which target these, or even better yet, additional, subskills.

On a final note, it should be said that although we have found trivia-based activities to be extremely popular with our learners, this does not mean that we advocate the use of trivial content to the exclusion of more serious content areas. Rather, we believe that good pedagogy involves variety; including variety in the kinds of activities we have our learners do as well as the content they are based on. There should be time for seriousness and time for fun. If you are looking for fun, it is hard to go wrong with trivia.

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Footnotes

- (1) Those readers familiar with *Jeopardy* may know that in the TV program, the question is read in the form of a statement and contestants must answer in the form of a question. We have found this method to be appropriate for only the most advanced students.
- (2) This paper is an expanded version of a paper given by the authors at the *JALT2000* conference in Shizuoka.

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