

「パククン英検」のねらいと英語授業での活用

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Aim of “Pakkun’s English Test” and ideas for its application in English classes

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要旨：日本放送協会（NHK）制作のテレビ番組「英語でしゃべらナイト」内の1コーナーとしてスタートした「パククン英検」は、ある英単語の語義説明を英語で聞き取り、その英単語が何かを答えるというリスニングクイズである。本資料は、「パククン英検」に関して、番組制作上のねらい、および、出題の作成方法を明らかにするとともに、日本人英語学習者を対象にした英語授業において、「パククン英検」を補助教材として活用するアイデアの紹介を目的とする。

キーワード：英語教育、リスニング、語彙、疑似初心者、補助教材

Abstract：“Pakkun Eiken” (Pakkun’s English Test) is a simple English listening quiz on the TV program “Eigo de Shabera-Night” (Let’s Speak English Tonight), which is planned and produced by Japan Broadcasting Corporation (NHK). In this quiz, a sentence that explains an English word, like a definition of the word from an English-English dictionary, is read aloud, and the guests or the show hosts are encouraged to guess and answer the correct word. The purpose of this report is to clarify the aim of the listening quiz “Pakkun Eiken,” and also to describe the technique for preparing questions for the quiz. Another purpose is to consider what kind of methods are possible for applying “Pakkun Eiken” as a teaching aid in an English language class for Japanese people.

Key words：English education, listening, vocabulary, false-beginner, teaching aid

I. Introduction

The purpose of this report is to clarify the aim of the listening quiz—“Pakkun Eiken” (Pakkun’s English Test) on the TV program “Eigo de Shabera-Night” (Let’s Speak English Tonight), which is planned and produced by Japan Broadcasting Corporation (NHK), and also to describe the technique for preparing questions for the quiz. Another purpose is to consider what kind of methods are possible for applying “Pakkun Eiken” as a teaching aid in an English language class for Japanese people.

II. TV Program “Eigo de Shabera-Night”

“Eigo de Shabera-Night” started as a regular NHK General Channel TV program in March 2003. This program is positioned as an entertaining “English talk variety show” instead of just a language education show, so various themes related to English, English learning, and communication between different cultures are included. This is the first attempt at this kind of language variety program in the

history of NHK broadcasting. Though there have been some changes to the regular casts, such as the MC, this 30-minute program was continually broadcast once a week for six years, with the goal of the initial program plan remaining unchanged. Subsequently, since fiscal year 2009, the show has been broadcast now as a special quarterly program entitled “Eigo de Shabera-Night Returns” (Let’s Speak English Tonight Returns).

Centered on talks with the main guests in the studio, the program is composed of celebrity interviews with Hollywood stars, collected information related to language study, and other topics such as the English language situation in the Asian region and various other countries in the world, as well as cultural exchanges in Japan. The main guests invited on the program include actors/actresses, singers, entertainers, athletes, cultural figures, politicians, and other celebrities in various fields who have the image of playing an active role internationally using English, those who have experienced difficulties due to a lack of English skills, or those who have learned English using their own methods. On the show, they talk about their experiences including their failures, and their dealings with English.

“Eigo de Shabera-Night” is characterized by the following: spoken English is used with Japanese subtitles for about 60 to 70% of the 30-minute show, and even if broken English is used by someone on the show, which is conventionally judged to be inappropriate in school education or the like, it is broadcast as is without being corrected, because this program is positioned as a variety show; as such, the idea behind this show is clearly different from that of a typical language program on NHK’s Educational Channel. There is a clear stance that English is a communication tool and as such communication does not necessarily require correct grammar or style in speaking. The validity of this methodology has been proven by the immense support from viewers. The show has received comments such as “I learned that I don’t have to be afraid of making mistakes,” and “I have gained confidence to express myself in English in my own way.”

III. “Pakkun Eiken”—Pakkun’s English Test

One of the program’s popular segments that has been well received by viewers and has continued since the pilot show is “Pakkun Eiken,” an English listening quiz. For this segment, Mr. Patrick Harlan, an American comedian who performs in Japan and has been a regular on the program from the beginning, serves as one of the show hosts.

Specifically, in this quiz segment, a sentence that explains an English word, like a definition of the word from an English-English dictionary, is read aloud, and the guests or other show hosts guess what the correct word is. Preparation and supervision regarding quiz questions and explanations of words presented in this quiz are all entrusted by NHK to Taro Hirowatari, the writer of this report.

IV. Aim of “Pakkun Eiken”

The planning behind “Pakkun Eiken” reflects various ideas and demands from the TV production side, including the NHK producers and directors. First of all, I, Taro Hirowatari, in charge of preparing questions, had a strong personal desire to find a method to reduce a sense of distance between English learners and English-English dictionaries.

Many Japanese people who start learning English find it difficult to skillfully use an English-English dictionary. In particular, existing English-English dictionaries, excluding some learners’ dictionaries that are compiled for ESL/EFL learners, use meta-linguistic techniques that are peculiar to a dictionary for word definition explanations. As such, it requires a strong motivation to study and a certain level of learning experiences in order for learners to get used to descriptions unique to English-English dictionaries and use them routinely.

Skillful usage of English-English dictionaries enables Japanese learners of English to improve their

ability to distinguish differences in nuances and synonyms of respective English words, instead of just understanding the English words based on words translated into Japanese. In reality, however, not many students can reach this level of proficiency from their college liberal arts education.

I wondered whether this inability to use dictionaries among learners can be advantageous. Also, I wondered whether dictionaries could be used in reverse to create a listening challenge, as an activity to enjoy English. Specifically, learners listen to the definitions and guess the matching words. This is the idea behind “Pakkun Eiken.”

At the same time, I was able to predict the following from the planning stage: this simple methodology of listening to meaning explanations in English to guess basic English words that learners should already know, could easily motivate English learners to try; and because of the simplicity of this game-like learning experience, people of any level of English skill, from beginners with a low level of English ability to advanced learners, can take on this challenge while having fun. This concept matched the mission assigned to “Eigo de Shabera-Night,” which was to remove the sense of “studying” that is typical of conventional language learning, and to get used to English while enjoying it. My prediction was validated, as supported by viewers’ comments and the results of viewers’ questionnaires.

Also, the producers requested the following three points as preconditions: an explanation of complicated rules or a long commentary should be unnecessary so that the quiz segment lasts only four or five minutes; the correctness of a given answer can be immediately verified, and keywords closely related to the guests and themes of respective shows are used as answers in the quiz.

Another purpose I was strongly conscious of as a creator and supervisor of “Pakkun Eiken” is to strengthen listening skills and vocabulary. Each year, I hear first-year college students complain of their inadequate English skills. The most common complaints are “a lack of listening ability” and a “small vocabulary.” As soon as they are freed from studies for college entrance examinations, most of the English words they memorized based on Japanese translations disappear from their memory, and they feel ill-equipped for the practical English skills needed in a college language class because they had neglected the acquisition of listening abilities. Thus, I was convinced that “Pakkun Eiken” would be at least somewhat useful for meeting students’ needs.

In the quiz, the meaning of each word is explained by paraphrasing the word, and I thought that this quiz used as a listening exercise could naturally lead to an increase in vocabulary and a strengthening of listening ability. In each show of the TV program only three or four questions can be presented, but my personal plan was to apply this in my language class. By repeatedly asking a selected number of questions in each class, I fully expected that students could learn quite a bit.

V. Procedure for preparation of questions and actual examples

A quiz from “Pakkun Eiken” on the TV program is given each class through the process described below. By showing the quiz with specific examples, I introduce the flow of preparation and some of the changes in the preparation method.

1) Selection of words used for the quiz

- ・ First, the director in charge presents a selection of possible words to be used for the quiz, considering the appropriateness to the themes and guests of the program to be filmed.
- ・ As the preparer and supervisor of the quiz, I study the selected possible words and make the final selection, with reference to the following criteria.

(1) Everyday language or so-called basic words, which are included as entry words in the average English-English dictionary. Compounds should be avoided as much as possible.

(2) English words that are directly used as Japanese words in Katakana and not

Japanese English (made-in-Japan English terms).

(3) English words originally taken from the Japanese word.

(4) Even if a word does not meet the above conditions (1) to (3) but is related to a theme or guest on the program concerned, the word can be admitted to the quiz as an exception.

(5) A word that has not been used for quizzes on the program in the previous season.

(6) For each show, an effort should be made to use words of different parts of speech to present a well-balanced quiz centered on nouns, which tend to be easiest, followed by verbs, adjectives, adverbs, etc., in this order.

2) Preparation of quiz sentences

· Because quiz sentences need to be shown superimposed on the TV screen when a correct answer is shown, the number of English words should be as small as possible. The average length of a quiz sentence used in the program is as follows.

e.g.) A feeling of admiration, honor, or esteem for someone.

(correct answer: respect)

e.g.) To present a person by name to another person for the first time.

(correct answer: introduce)

· For a definition from a dictionary, however, another word can also be a correct answer in the quiz, even when the question meets the required conditions. When such a possibility is a concern, efforts should be made to prioritize the purpose of the quiz, such as by intentionally using a long explanation sentence or including synonyms in the question, to avoid the possibility of a word other than the one selected being given.

e.g.) A small, printed piece of paper showing the holder has paid for an activity, such as a train ride or entrance to a theater.

(correct answer: ticket)

e.g.) An automobile with a driver that takes passengers where they want to go for a fare; a cab.

(correct answer: taxi)

· Also, the idea of lowering the difficulty of the quiz by showing a part of the spelling of a word to the participants was introduced. With this, question sentences were made shorter and simpler.

e.g.) H□□□

A brave, fearless and very helpful person.

(correct answer: hero)

· In the manuscript writing stage, I prepare vocabulary to be used as hints in verbal question sentences, as well as supplementary explanations, to encourage the right answer. The TV directors often use this information in the editing stage after the show is filmed. The actual

manuscript is usually organized as follows.

T□□□□□

To go from one place to another, usually over a long distance.

(correct answer: travel)

【VOCABULARY】

go 「行く／進む」

place 「場所」

distance 「距離」

【JAPANESE TRANSLATION】

たいていは長い距離を、ある場所から別の場所へ行くこと。

【NOTES】

The origin of “travel” is an old French word *travailler*, which means “to suffer” or “to be troubled.” In addition, the word *travailler* is derived from *trepalium*, which means “torture rack” in Latin. In ancient times, people traveled at great risk to life and with tremendous difficulties, which is indicated by the origin of the word “travel.” Other nouns that mean “travel” include trip, journey, tour and voyage. The nuance of “travel” implies “long-distance travel” to visit various places and “overseas travel,” while “trip” means leaving and returning to the departure point in a relatively short period of time. “Journey” is often used to create the image of traveling by land particularly for a relatively long distance and time period. “Tour” means a “circular trip” where one visits various places for sightseeing or observation, while “voyage” implies “traveling far” by ship or airplane.

S□□□D□□□□

A list of planned activities or appointments to be done at or during a particular time.

(correct answer: schedule)

【VOCABULARY】

planned 「予定された／計画された」

appointment 「約束／（面会の）予約」

during 「～の間に」

【JAPANESE TRANSLATION】

特定の時刻や時間に行うよう計画された活動、または、約束の一覧。

【NOTES】

The pronunciation of “schedule” in American English has an accent on the first part of the word, and it is pronounced “*skejool*.” On the other hand, the pronunciation in British English is “*shedyoool*.” which should be noted. “Schedule” is used to refer to the “plans” themselves in addition to “a list of plans.” For a transportation schedule such as for a bus or train and list of class periods at school, “timetable” is used.

3) Work after quiz preparation

- ・ In order to avoid unnecessary misunderstandings such as the explanation sentences being a copy of existing English-English dictionaries, each question for a quiz is compared with

definitions, etc., from major commercial English-English dictionaries, and caution is used to not prepare question sentences, etc., that are very similar to the definitions listed in the dictionaries.

· After completion of the manuscript, Mr. Patrick Harlan checks it from the perspective of a native speaker of American English.

· However, when a guest is associated with British English or other English regions, and it is necessary to consider factors other than American English, the quiz sentences may change and supplementary explanations may be added.

C□□□□□/ B□□□□□□

A small, round, flat baked food that is usually sweet and crisp.

(correct answer: cookie (AE) / biscuit (BE))

【VOCABULARY】

round 「丸い」

baked 「焼いた」

sweet 「甘い」

【JAPANESE TRANSLATION】

たいていは甘くサクサクで、小さくて丸く平たい焼いた食べ物。

【NOTES】

What is called “cookie” in America and “biscuit” in England is not necessarily the same baked confectionary using different words. For sure, a crispy “cookie,” which is baked using flour, eggs, sugar, etc., and is also familiar in Japan, is called “cookie” in America and “biscuit” in England. However, a regular “cookie” in America is the size of the palm and large, and its moist dough is chewy and solid. On the other hand, in England, “biscuit” has the meaning of both crispy “cookie” as in Japan, and it also means nonsweet “bread” to be eaten with a meat dish, etc.

VI. Consideration toward application to a language class

It is relatively easy to apply “Pakkun Eiken” as a teaching aid at this point and introduce it in English language courses at colleges. This is largely because “Eigo de Shabera-Night” and “Pakkun Eiken” are widely known to Japanese students. Even if some students in the class know nothing about the show, they can immediately participate after some simple instruction. Once “Pakkun Eiken” is established as a class routine, there is little possibility of confusion when implementing in each class.

In addition, by using DVDs of “Pakkun Eiken” segments that have actually been broadcast, the excitement of the show can be directly brought into the classroom and students can naturally engage in listening without feeling any sense of resistance or lack of confidence with English.

1) Examples of a quiz session using “Pakkun Eiken”

I usually conduct “Pakkun Eiken” as a warm-up using the first five to eight minutes in each class as part of an in-class quiz session that also serves to check attendance, particularly in a class with many students who have especially poor English skills. So far, according to questionnaires conducted after these classes, many students in each class gave favorable responses, such as “I enjoyed it,” and “I didn’t have to worry about my lack of confidence in English.”

When I conduct “Pakkun Eiken” as an in-class quiz session, I usually prepare about five questions

for a quiz, and use actual segments from edited material of “Pakkun Eiken” that has been broadcast. When a video is used, students’ response is excellent. When it is difficult to use a video, I prepare a sound tape of question sentences read by a native speaker, or they can be read on the spot by the instructor.

The specific procedure to implement “Pakkun Eiken” is as follows:

- (1) According to students’ English abilities, distribute a sheet of blank paper for writing down the five answers or a pre-printed answer sheet in which parts of the spelling of the respective words (e.g., S□□□D□□□) are included.
 - (2) Students listen to the quiz questions while watching the video of “Pakkun Eiken” and enter answers on their answer sheet.
 - (3) After completing the answers, students score their own quiz. A correct answer is worth two points with a one point reduction for incorrect spelling, and a total of ten points equals a perfect score.
 - (4) Students submit their answer sheets with their names and score results written on them.
 - (5) Prepare in advance a double-sided handout with a transcript of the respective question sentences on one side as mentioned earlier and supplementary explanations, etc., on the other side. This can then be distributed to students in exchange for their graded answer sheets. This handout can save both time and the trouble of detailed explanations each class.
- Furthermore, I plan to separately prepare score record forms exclusively for “Pakkun Eiken” and require each student to record their scores, with the aim of creating an environment of friendly competition until the end of the semester to further increase their enthusiasm for quiz participation.

2) A consideration of applying “Pakkun Eiken”

In today’s social environment in Japan, in which acquisition of English is mostly expected, many learners develop a sense of anxiety and frustration about their English skills, and they feel significant pressure and thus force themselves to study English. As a result, this learning turns into drudgery. Such tendencies can be found everywhere in the present school education environment. Under these circumstances, one of the roles required of English teachers is to promote a change from this thinking and help learners realize that learning English does not have to be dreaded work and that there are many ways to learn English while enjoying it. In this sense, it can be said that “Pakkun Eiken” is an example of this, which that enables learners to be exposed to English without thinking that it is studying and it specifically shows that they can learn while enjoying themselves.

Especially with listening, a conventional listening drill, where learners listen to English conversations and monologues spoken in fictional contexts, which may not be related to the learners at all, has already become a stereotype for first-year college students, who had studied only to prepare for college entrance examinations, TOEIC, etc. In addition, listening drills are nothing but a pain for many learners who have no confidence in English or for students who do not like English. In this regard, “Pakkun Eiken,” which questions English words taught at the junior and senior high school level, is effective in naturally engaging learners to listen to English without making them conscious of it being a listening exercise. Also, even though the word questioned is a basic everyday word, the sentence that explains the word may not necessarily be easy, which is another interesting feature of “Pakkun Eiken.”

Furthermore, the methodology of “Pakkun Eiken,” in which participants listen to explanations and guess the correct words, does not allow them to be passive and causes them to actively participate unlike in an ordinary listening drill. In other words, “Pakkun Eiken” can be said to be an approach that improves listening ability, an essential communication skill, because participants always need to listen

in order to answer the “Pakkun Eiken” Quiz.

In my personal opinion, whether learners with average English skills can succeed in a listening exercise or not depends on their ability to fill in the areas that they don't understand by using their imagination. This requires them to understand the meaning by efficiently using their imagination to gather information on the background, past experiences, etc., and to achieve highly accurate understanding, while responding to the need of listening. In order to achieve a higher listening ability, it is necessary for learners to actively engage and participate in listening activities.

Finally, when in-class quizzes using “Pakkun Eiken” are established as a class routine, the following ideas should also be considered as additional applications of “Pakkun Eiken:” having students look up the words taught in class in an English-English dictionary, and having students themselves prepare questions for “Pakkun Eiken.” These assignments can be very meaningful for them to build a foundation to become accustomed to the content of English-English dictionaries and be able to use them skillfully.

Literature related to “Pakkun Eiken”

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