

Using ‘A Shadowing’ Technique’ to Improve English Pronunciation Deficient Adult Japanese Learners: An Action Research on Expatriate Japanese Adult Learners

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This action research aims to solve pressing day-to-day problems in communication faced by four expatriate Japanese adult learners who are residing in Sabah, Malaysia after retirement. The Japanese language sound system is different from that of the English Language. As such some of its prosodic features such as stress, intonation and rhythm interfere with Japanese learners’ pronunciation of English connected speech. We embark on improving one of these factors, i.e. English rhythms, after conducting our initial action research. The intervention dealt with in this study is a shadowing technique which was originally developed as a training technique for simultaneous interpreting. It is embedded in an information-processing model propagated by McLaughlin (1978) who viewed second language learning as two performance behaviors i.e. controlled process, or automatic process. Four adult Japanese learners of English participated as the respondents in this study. Data was collected through learners’ reflective journals, tape recordings of shadowing, and observation. Five action core research cycles were implemented until the learners achieved their goal. The finding shows recognizable improvement of the participants in their pronunciation namely English rhythms. This is to a large extent

attributed to the effectiveness of 'shadowing' technique used under close scrutiny using action research that created phonological awareness among the Japanese adult learners in this study.

Key words: Action research, Shadowing, English rhythms, Pronunciation, cycles and sound system

INTRODUCTION

"I would ra-i-ku to buy a chiketto for Ke Eru." This is a sample of a common spoken discourse uttered by a Japanese learner of English for "I would like to buy a ticket for KL." It is not surprising as most Japanese learners of English as a Foreign Language tend to pronounce their English this way. According to Stern (1983), language problems can be considered from psychological, sociological or linguistic perspectives. When focusing on the acquisition of pronunciation, a learner's mother tongue or first language (L1) is one of the most impeding factors. As shown above, the Japanese learners' speech is strongly influenced by their first language/mother tongue interference rendering it difficult for them to listen and speak standard or native-like English Language. Japanese learners basically lack the English rhythms, and it impedes clear comprehensibility in their oral communication in English with other speakers of English.

In Japan, students take English classes for eight to ten years from junior high school to university. Although they studied English Language for eight years, they are still not competent enough to communicate with foreigners in English. According to Tamai (2000), Japanese educators have focused too much on English grammar through reading and writing, and not on practical English such as listening and speaking skills. It is not surprising to find Japanese adult learners who allot each word an equal amount of stress regardless of the stressed or unstressed syllables in pronunciation. Sometimes they even placed stress mark on articles or prepositions where native speakers of English would not place a stress if the context did not require it. This

definitely causes an interruption of rhythmic English. Fortunately this kind of problem can be remedied with a shadowing technique whereby they tracked the recorded speech. However, they need consistent practice to completely master this differentiation.

Besides stress, intonation too changed according to the speaker's intention, and it cannot be generalized how the intonation should be, so learners need to understand the contents of the dialogue first. Japanese adult learners have to learn the importance of the intonation patterns that play an important role in conveying a speakers' intention to listeners. An irrelevant use of intonation can hurt listeners' feelings if it is spoken in boredom or uninterested tone instead of in a exciting and joyful manner. Intonation contains delicate propositions and learners should speak English with a much wider pitch range of intonation rather than using Japanese intonation which uses relatively monotonous sounds when speaking. The other difficulty is simplification in connected speech. When Japanese adult learners practice repeating chunks of phrases, they realize that certain rules are essential to create a stream of English speech, but this natural flow of sound is difficult for them to imitate and pronounce. In other words, if they master these rules it would become easier for them to listen and pronounce English. As Japanese syllable structure consists of open syllables, Japanese adult learners tend to put short vowels after each consonant to adjust to a Japanese syllable type. Therefore consonant clusters and closed syllables are the most difficult things for them.

Finally, there is the difficulty in pronouncing loanwords; they are quite troublesome to Japanese learners who are accustomed to open syllables. Loanwords are basically foreign words which allow both closed and open syllables and consonant clusters. However, Japanese pronounce loanwords with a pitch accent just like Japanese sounds but without a stress accent. The trouble is that Japanese learners expect that English speakers will understand them as they believe that they are pronouncing the loanwords correctly. However native English speakers do not understand them because of the adjustments. In order to improve our learners' English rhythms, we

implemented a 'shadowing' technique as an intervention in five action cycles to assist them in attaining the required level of spoken English. In this study, we intend to show that this 'shadowing' technique helps these pronunciation deficient adult Japanese learners to overcome their fear and pronunciation problems in enunciating intelligible English.

STATEMENT OF PROBLEM

We have been teaching English to Japanese adult learners who came to stay in Malaysia after retirement. They are the victims of a traditional education that had not paid much attention to listening and speaking although they can read and write pretty well, like many other learners in the same situation. They speak 'staccato-like English' which is hard for English speakers to understand (Ohata, 2004). They realized that they have problems with their pronunciation since moving to Sabah, Malaysia. They often feel that they cannot understand what was said by other English speakers and vice versa. There is a pressing need for them to learn correct pronunciation and proper rhythms to make it possible for them to communicate with English speakers with ease in their adopted home, Malaysia. They had not been given much opportunity to learn "listening and speaking" in English classes in Japan. Therefore, their basic competence in listening and speaking were inferior to their reading and writing skills. Incidentally, their mother tongue interference too creates some difficulties in learning to pronounce English intelligibly. As a result they have less sense of English rhythms when speaking the language.

Japanese pronunciation is quite different from that of English. The English Language has a lot of consonant and vowel sounds that differ or are non-existence in the Japanese language sound system. In a study conducted by Kadota (2007), he found that when listening to the English language, if first, the learners try to catch the incoming sounds not as they are, but by referring to similar Japanese sounds that exist, then they transpose the English sounds

into Japanese sounds. This happens naturally as they lack exposure to English sounds and as the result they pronounce English with a Japanese accent.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

It is obvious from the initial research findings conducted that the speech problem faced by our participants is their rhythm, the fundamental features of which acquired early by a child, are hard for an adult to change. According to Abercrombie (1967), two processes i.e. the syllable process and the stress process, are involved in making up the pulmonic mechanism that becomes the basis on which the rest of speech is built. In order to correct and refine their pronunciation, especially regarding of rhythm, we chose a shadowing technique that was comprised such mechanism, so as to refine their syllable and stress processes.

‘Shadowing’ was originally developed as a training technique for simultaneous interpreting in Europe and has gained much interest among language educators in improving the listening and speaking competence of learners as ‘shadowing’ requires competence in both listening and speaking (Yajima, 2001). It was introduced in full-scale in Japan in the 1970s. It took twenty years for it to be implemented pedagogically in the field of language education and has garnered more interest among second/foreign language educators recently. It is also embedded in an information-processing model propagated by McLaughlin (1978) who viewed second language learning as two performance behaviors, i.e. controlled process, or an automatic process that formed the theoretical basis for the ‘shadowing’ technique. He explains the processes as follows: the speakers first begin slowly, haltingly, sometimes with a great deal of conscious awareness and then, in the course of time, they are able to automatize the whole process and execute the relevant programmes and routines swiftly and without reflection. Although such a model is heavily rejected by Krashen (in McLaughlin, 1990) who claimed it to be a mere speculation, the shadowing techniques used in this study will

show otherwise. In our daily life, when we try to remember a phone number, we repeat the number in our mind or say it in a low voice. Baddeley (1986) termed it 'sub vocalization' which is incognito to Mclaughlin's information-processing model along lines favored by cognitive psychologists. Tamai (1997) defined 'shadowing' as, "...an act or a task of listening in which the learner tracks the heard speech and repeats it as exactly as possible while listening attentively to the in-coming information" (p. 20). Baddeley (1986) proposed a Working Memory Model that illustrates clearly the mechanism of retaining memory and recognizing sounds to fit into this study.

Based on this model, 'shadowing' is a high cognitive action rather than a mere automatic memory action or parroting. When speech input is received, firstly it goes to a phonological short-term storage where it will be retained only for 2 seconds and then will disappear. If speech input is sub vocalized within the 2 seconds, the speech information can be retained in a phonological loop (Figure 1) which is one of the sub-systems in the working memory.

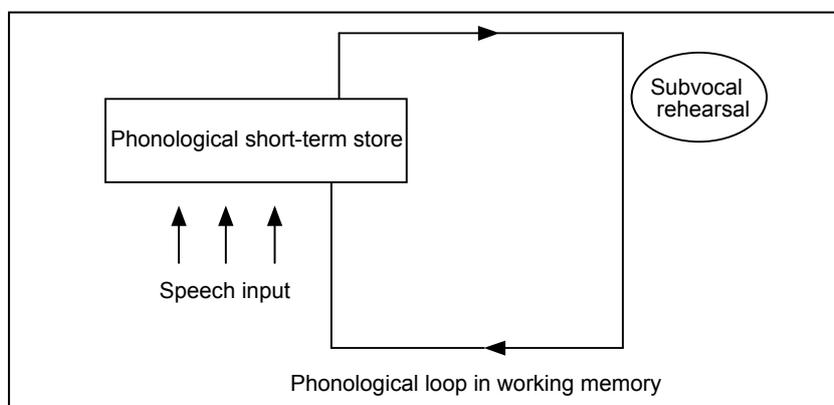


FIGURE 1
Structure of Phonological Loop (Adopted from Gathercole & Baddeley, 1993)

In other words, the faster a person sub vocalizes his/her speech input, the

more information s/he can retain in a phonological loop and understands the meaning of it. This is illustrated in Figure 3 which shows the comparison of the sentential quantities that listener *A*, *B* and *C* can produce within 2 seconds while listening (Nitani, 1999). *A* pronounced the whole sentence, “I’m really tied up today” the fastest: within 2 seconds. This means the whole sentence would be retained in *A*’s phonological loop and understood the whole sentence. However ‘*C*’ was the slowest and pronounced only “I’m really.” This means that the rest of the sentence “tied up today” has already disappeared from *C*’s phonological loop. ‘*C*’ would not understand what the speaker says with only “I’m really”.

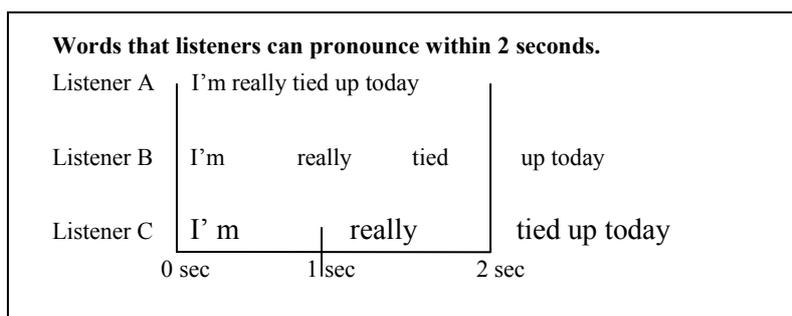


FIGURE 2
Comparison of Pronounced Sentence between A, B and C within 2 Seconds

Based on the structure of the phonological loop, ‘shadowing’ is a task that entails deliberate sub vocalization of speech input. A person must remember speech input and reproduce it in real time. It requires listening and speaking competencies to function at the same time in order to be effective in improving his/her skills in listening comprehension, speaking, and conversational activity. This is the premise that will form our concern when implementing the shadowing technique in this study.

METHOD

Objectives of Study

This research intends to fulfill the following objectives:

1. To examine the difficulties in pronouncing English among the participants (four Japanese adult English learners) in this study.
2. To assess the improvement in the participants' spoken English, after undergoing a 'shadowing' technique.

Research Questions

1. What are the difficulties in pronouncing English sounds among the participants (four Japanese adult English learners) in this study?
2. How effective will the 'shadowing' technique be on improving Japanese adult learners' English rhythms?

Participants

The participants in this study are four retired expatriate Japanese adult learners who are currently staying in Malaysia as their second home. They were born in Japan, and their mother tongue is Japanese. They graduated from various universities in Japan almost forty years ago and had not attended any formal English Language course since. They retired a few years ago and came to stay in Malaysia. They lack English rhythms in their spoken English and are thereby having trouble communicating with English speakers in Malaysia in their daily life. Their heavily Japanese accented English is causing a break in communication with other non-Japanese English speakers. They were purposively selected (extreme sampling). They have problems with their pronunciation of Standard English. They have been taking English lessons out of necessity since they came to Malaysia. Their goal is to

communicate with English speakers in Malaysia. They are highly motivated learners hoping to speak English as fast as possible, and all of them voluntarily agreed to participate in this study that used 'shadowing' technique to improve their spoken English rhythms i.e. the sense of movement in speech, specifically the stress, quantity, and timing of syllables.

Research Design

This study employed an action research method. Action research is often described as being cyclical, participative, qualitative, reflective and responsive (Dick, 1993). McCutcheon and Jung (1990) regard action research as a systemic inquiry that is collective, collaborative, self-reflective, critical and undertaken by participants in the inquiry. These two definitions lean more on the problem-solving practical concerns that need quick and immediate remediation and action research render itself well to this study focus. Carr and Kemmis (1986) defined action research as a form of self-reflective enquiry undertaken by participants in social situations in order to improve the rationality and justice of their own practices, their understanding of these practices, and the situations in which the practices are carried out: which fits this study framework accurately.

The four steps proposed by Grundy and Kemmis (1981) for an action research project that is cyclically repeated for as long as necessary to change or correct the problem are adopted here. The steps are planning, taking action, observing and reflecting. Upon reviewing and contrasting several levels or cycles as found in the reviewed action research models, the four main elements were identified as pertinent to any study employing action research method. They are as follows: the general plan, the action implemented, the action observed, and the reflective critical evaluation that is necessary to revise the plan or problem (figure 3).

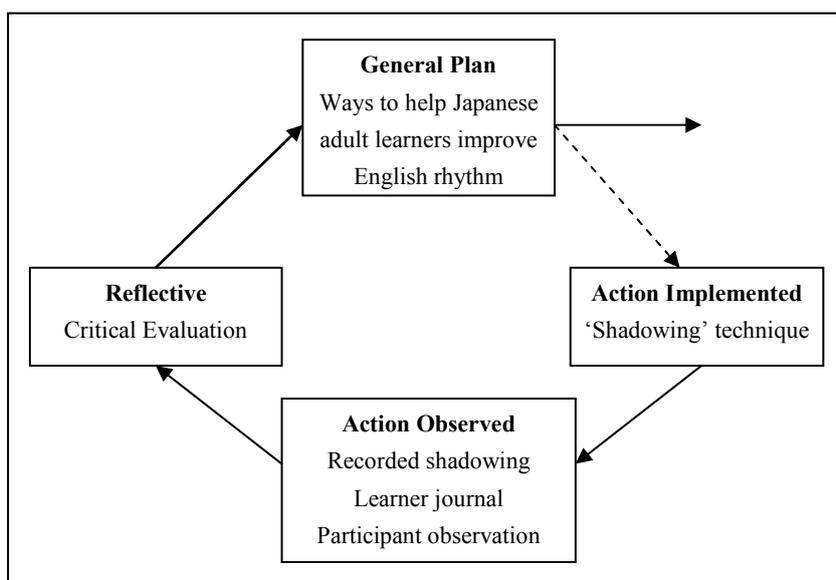


FIGURE 3
Action Research Model in this Study

In the general plan phase, the basic research theme was determined, i.e. to help Japanese adult learners improve their English rhythms in order to communicate clearly with English speakers in Malaysia. In the next phase, we use the 'shadowing' technique as the intervention element to achieve the goal followed by observation phase whereby the analysis was made on data collected from the recorded shadowing sessions, learner journals and participant observation notes. The last phase in the cycle reflected a critical evaluation whereby the action taken was evaluated to determine the impact before embarking to re-plan for the next cycle's action. A new intervention in the next action cycle was based on the findings from the evaluation conducted after each action cycle, as the conditions are not fixed but vary accordingly. Therefore, the result of each spiraling procedure helped us to seek the most effective way to keep on improving our learners' English rhythms.

The aim of this study is to solve the immediate and pressing day-to-day problems of Japanese adult learners as well as improve learning and teaching instructing action research lends itself as the most appropriate research design for this study, as the problem to be solved is implementing a teaching technique, ‘shadowing’, as way to improve these Japanese adult learners’ English rhythms.

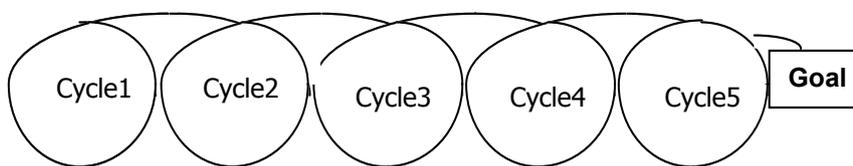


FIGURE 4
Action Research Cycles in this Study

Reflection-on-Action

Action research does not view problems as being fixed. As research proceeds, the problem may be seen in a new light, and a new definition of the situation may be required. It seeks to understand what effects have been realized and what has been achieved as a result of the action. By careful reflection on the action, the practitioner is doing an act of self-monitoring. It is crucial to stand back and reflect, particularly at the end of each cycle of action, and to describe, interpret and explain ‘what is going on’ (McKernan, 1991). Shadowing is a flexible intervention which is implemented according to the learners and situation, in various ways. After each action cycle, the learners and researchers will stand back and reflect. We need to judge the effectiveness and results of actions as a critical group. Analyzing data from the recorded tapes, learner journals and participant observation notes, we could evaluate the impact of the intervention on the learners, whether it managed to solve their problems and, how well they improved.

As this is a non-experimental research design concerning human endeavor, the findings will not be neat and accurate in quantitative terms. Therefore,

tables, diagrams and figures will be used to support the evidences in the absence of statistical measures.

Participant Observation

We were engaged in our roles as facilitators as well as involving ourselves as group members and joined in wholeheartedly with the activities of the group as participants throughout the study. This was to ensure that the study took place in the natural environment of the participants and the observer can take as much time as required to gain a representative sample of behavior (participant observation). According to McKernan (1991), participant observation bears the highest fidelity with the methodological purpose of action research and is the foremost technique. He states that the greatest benefits of participant observation are in terms of collecting authentic accounts and the verification of ideas through empirical observations. We were involved throughout in the intervention, i.e. shadowing, and helped the learners improved their English rhythms. Our involvement as participants allowed us to observe and take note of the whole event including any non-verbal behaviors such as facial expressions, body movements and gestures as suggested by Spradley (1980).

Research Procedure

Initial Action Research

We used a simple open-ended question to probe our Japanese adult learners' concerns. The question was as follows: "When do you have trouble communicating in English with people in Malaysia in your daily life?" Table 1 below shows a variety of answers. Basically, their answers are related to their basic daily interaction as can be seen in Table 1 below.

TABLE 1
Answers to Open-Ended Questionnaire for Initial Action Research

1	When I got a telephone call.
2	When I ask something to the car dealer. e.g. renewal of insurance.
3	When my car was run into from behind.
4	When I was invited to a neighbors party.
5	When I book a travel/air ticket.
6	When I ask something to the landlord. e.g. A washing machine was broken.
7	When I went to the doctor/dentist.
8	When I opened a bank account.

They also lamented that they always prepared themselves with the necessary words found in the Japanese English dictionary before going about their daily transactions, for instance at a bank, however the clerk still found it difficult to understand them. It showed that even though they could pronounce the words and phrases in English, it was not good enough to have others understand them due to their Japanese-like English Language pronunciation. The eight situations mentioned in Table 1 were used to design specific situations in our teaching instructions during the intervention in this study.

Core Action Research Project

Based on the findings from the initial action research, the core action research project was conducted from September, 1st, 2006 beginning with a pronunciation test and concluded on February, 29th, 2007 with a questionnaire. It was conducted in five action cycles during the study period. The pronunciation test was conducted to identify the specific weak points of each learner on the first day of core action project. A textbook by Keinan Iwamura (1996), *The First English Shadowing*, was selected as a target text in implementing the shadowing technique as it highlighted characteristics of English rhythms efficiently. The shadowing technique was implemented once a week for approximately 20 to 30 minutes out of 90-minute lesson. The learners' pronunciations were recorded while shadowing at the end of lesson

once after every two lessons. The lesson procedure used in this study was adapted from the lessons used by Hayakawa (2004) comprised of 10 steps:

TABLE 2
Lesson Procedure (Adapted from Hayakawa, 2004)

Steps	Focus	Procedure
1	Listening	Listen to the CD, grasping the outline of the contents without looking at the textbook.
2	Slash listening	Look at the textbook and learners mark the stress, unstressed, or other pronunciation points in the textbook using slashes etc. while listening.
3	Mumbling	Shadows the text (input speech) in a low voice so that learners' own voice does not disturb the speech sound.
4	Parallel reading	Look at the textbook while listening to the CD and check the textbook mainly focusing on the points that learners could not catch.
5	Understanding the meaning	If they have any vocabularies, idioms and construction of sentences that they do not know, they will look up the meaning or pronunciation in a dictionary. If there are any questions, they will be answered.
6	Prosody 'shadowing'	Practice 'shadowing' focusing on rhythm and pronunciation without looking at the textbook. Try to imitate particularly rhythm and intonation repeatedly until learners can shadow smoothly. They must pay attention not to pronounce with their own accent.
7	Contents 'shadowing'	The goal is to shadow smoothly with understanding the contents as well.
8	Recording	Record learners' 'shadowing' into a tape.
9	Listen and compare	Listen their shadowing and check with the script. Compare with the recording. If there is any weakness, they improve on it.
10	Review / Reflect	Review/reflect on today's lesson orally with learners.

Research Instruments & Data Analysis

The research instruments used in this study were a pronunciation test, learner journals, a questionnaire, observation protocol, and speech recordings.

A systematic analysis of pattern, coding and then categorizing coded data as proposed by Miles and Huberman (1994) was employed in each of the five action cycles. The diagram below illustrated the process in one of the cycles.

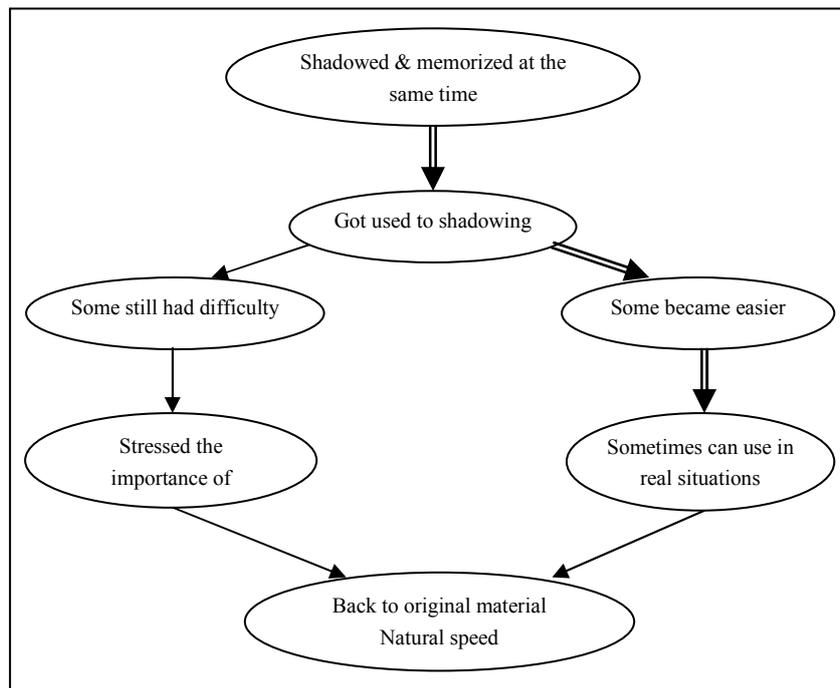


FIGURE 5
Analysis of Action

The data from the five action research cycles were duly analyzed using a constant comparison technique, and as for the quantitative data, frequency counts and percentages were used.

RESULTS

Action Research Cycle One

Action research cycle one (figure 6) began with the administering of a pronunciation test battery consisting of 35 questions based on the check list for English pronunciation. They read aloud the items and these were recorded on tape. We examined it to identify their problems. In the next lesson they started shadowing practice which was the first experience shadowing for the learners. We let them listened to the CD attached with the textbook, "*The First Shadowing*" and, proceeded with shadowing according to the lesson procedure. At first they had to listen to the CD to get the meaning of its contents without the script. As the contents were new and the rate of speech was quite fast, they were puzzled and become stressed. The learners were asked to replay the CD several times. This is in line with the advice given by Scrivener (1994) who advises playing the tape a sufficient number of times, as basically the learners found the materials a lot more difficult than the teacher anticipated. The shadowing practice was carried out according to the procedure planned on that day. They were upset and exhausted. Takizawa (2002) suggested that instructors should select the material carefully particularly for novice trainees. We decided to relieve their stress in order to motivate them again. Upon reflection, we decided to stop using "The First shadowing" as the learners were not ready for it yet. Instead we decided to use the conversation book with which they had already finished practicing prior to the introduction of the shadowing technique.

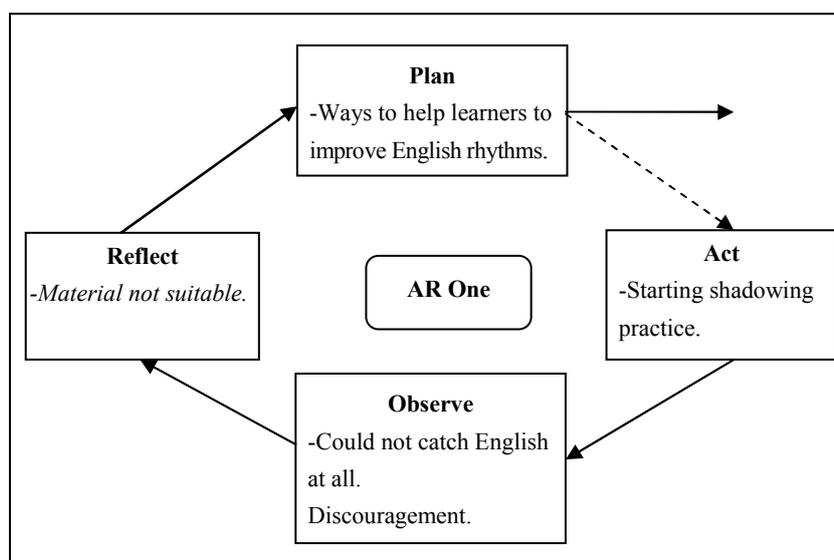


FIGURE 6
Action Research Cycle One

At first, the rate of speech was slow 100-120 words per minute and then it was increased gradually. We decided to suspend the use of the target book temporarily for one cycle to get them used to an easier conversation book and moved at a slower rate. One of prominent problems found in the pronunciation test was that they did not pronounce the ‘th’ sounds: /θ/ and /ð/. All of the learners did not pronounce them properly except respondent 3, who did not have trouble pronouncing /ð/ in the first syllable. The learners seemed to replace /th/ sounds with /s/ and /z/ respectively. Differentiation between /l/ and /r/ was also hard for the learners because the Japanese language only has /r/ and they did not even care about the difference between the two sounds when they pronounced English.

Action Research Cycle Two

We reflected on the learners’ attitude in action cycle 1, before moving on

to practice shadowing with an easier conversation book which they had just finished practicing before starting the action research cycle two (figure 7). This book consists of five parts: basic conversation, helpful conversation, friendly conversation, useful conversation, and various topics. In action cycle one, we recorded the conversations at a relatively slow rate of speech, as the main purpose was to let the learners imitate the English speech sound. With the recorded tape, the learners could reproduce the speech heard simultaneously. The learners practiced shadowing every four chapters in each lesson, and during the lesson, we taught pronunciation based on the weakness identified in the pronunciation test conducted earlier. The controlled practice focused mainly on /θ/ and /ð/, /l/ and /r/, /ə/, /ʌ/ and /æ/ and diphthongs sounds.

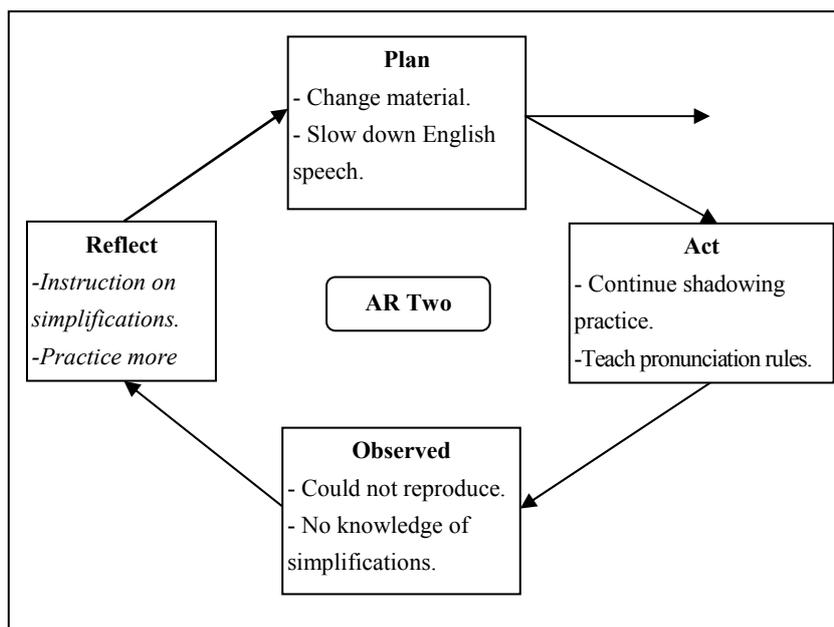


FIGURE 7
Action Research Cycle Two

Action Research Cycle Three

As the learners went on practicing shadowing, they seemed to get used to the rate of speech, so they were able to imitate and follow the tape slowly. In research action cycle three (figure 8), we encouraged the learners to practice shadowing every five chapters until they memorized them. This idea was mooted from the suggestion found in the reflective journal of respondent 1. As mentioned earlier, we stressed that the purpose of shadowing was to improve their pronunciation, not to memorize. We were cautious not to let the learners transpose English into a Japanese accent while memorizing without the tape. Therefore we told them to do ‘shadowing’ and ‘memorizing’ at the same time, to reproduce authentic English sound from the tape, without transposing into Japanese-like English, and then to memorize them. In this cycle too, we taught them rules of simplifications in more detail during the lesson. This is based on the reflection gathered in action research cycle two. Although the learners were able to listen to the taped conversation, it was still hard for some of them to reproduce it due to lack of knowledge about simplifications. Spoken speech is pronounced by chunks or phrases, not ‘word by word,’ and these chunks are simplified with certain rules when they are pronounced. This means that even if they can pronounce each word properly, it does not mean they speak English fluently. For instance, take “*I appreciate it*”, “*Would you do me a favour?*”, and “*It’s very sweet of you to...*” If a speaker phrased these sentences without the knowledge mentioned above, and pronounced a sentence or a phrase word by word, it would take more time for him/her to speak. Therefore we should give them instructions about simplifications in detail and the learners have to learn and practice more as well. Fraser (2001) believed that it helps learners when they are given some rules or principles of English pronunciation, and the learners appreciate anything that helps them.

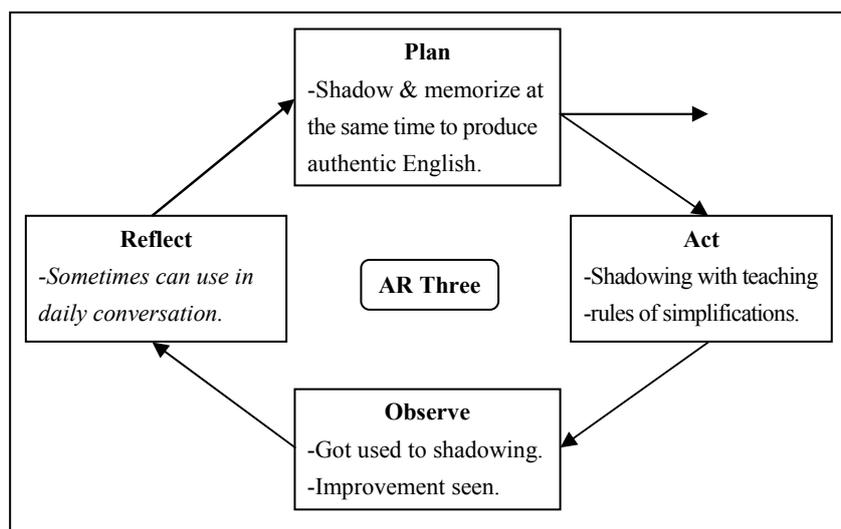


FIGURE 8
Action Research Cycle 3

Action Research Cycle Four

The learners completed practicing shadowing with the conversation book and proceeded to “*The First Shadowing*” in action research cycle four (figure 8). This material was difficult for them as the contents were new and the rate of speech of the attached CD was faster than the previous one. The shadowing lesson was conducted accordingly using the same procedure as in former cycles. Although the learners were trying hard, some of them were having trouble with the rate of speech and reproducing the sentences given one after another. When the rate of speech turned faster, the learners were losing their confidence and two of them almost gave up. They felt very embarrassed. They were frightened of falling and if not want to hold themselves up to possible ridicule by appearing silly. Brown (1994) warned that such an emotional factor should never be underestimated as adult learners often lack confidence for many reasons. In anticipation of such a factor, we allowed a brief pause after each sentence so that the learners could

recover after making mistakes and get ready for next sentence. Again, we strongly insisted that they should reproduce each sentence during the speech but not during the pause as it would be meaningless. The main reason was to avoid saving them transpose English into a Japanese accent during the pause.

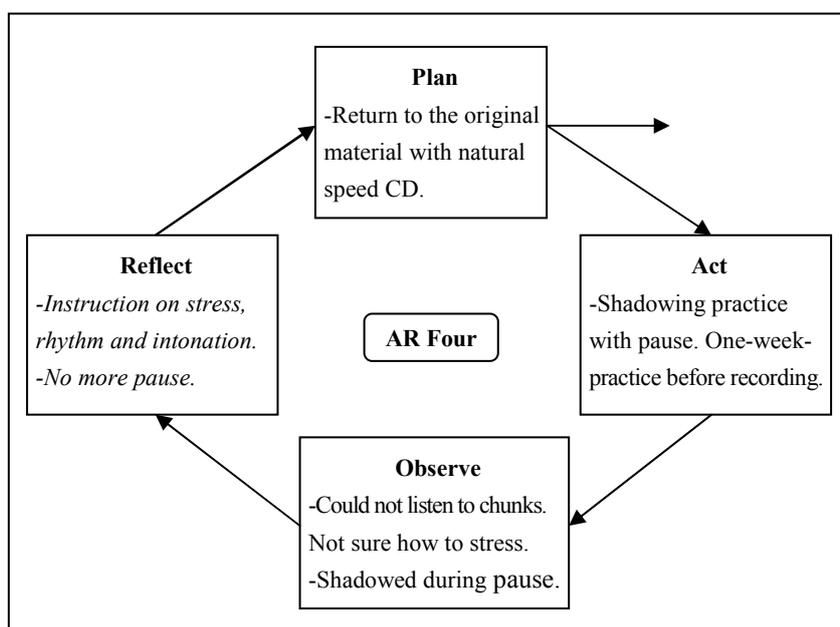


FIGURE 9
Research Action Cycle Four

Action Research Cycle Five

The final action research cycle (Figure 10) was initiated after reflecting on the learners' shadowing experiences in the last four cycles. As the learners were almost getting accustomed to shadowing with the new book, we stopped giving pauses as these might not help the learners who were reproducing the authentic speech sound simultaneously.

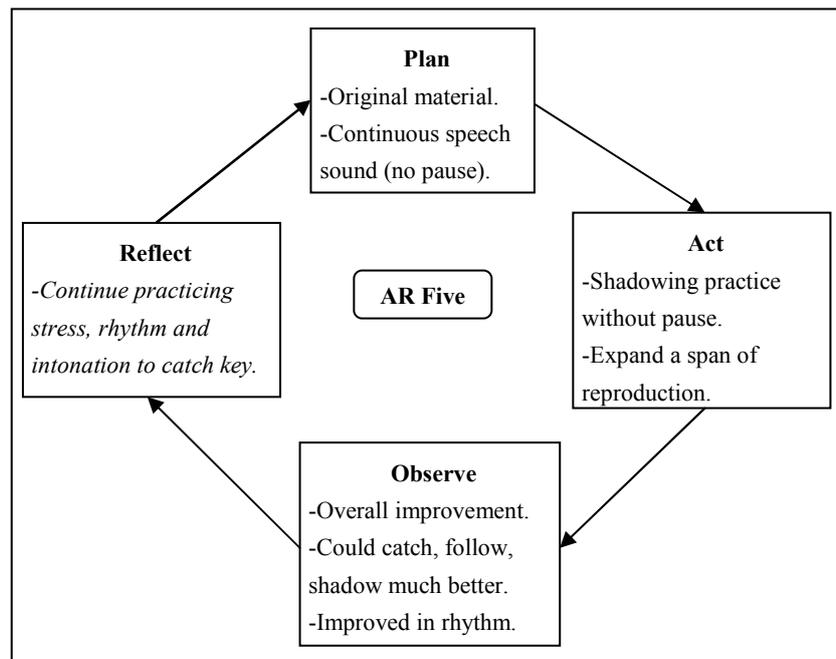
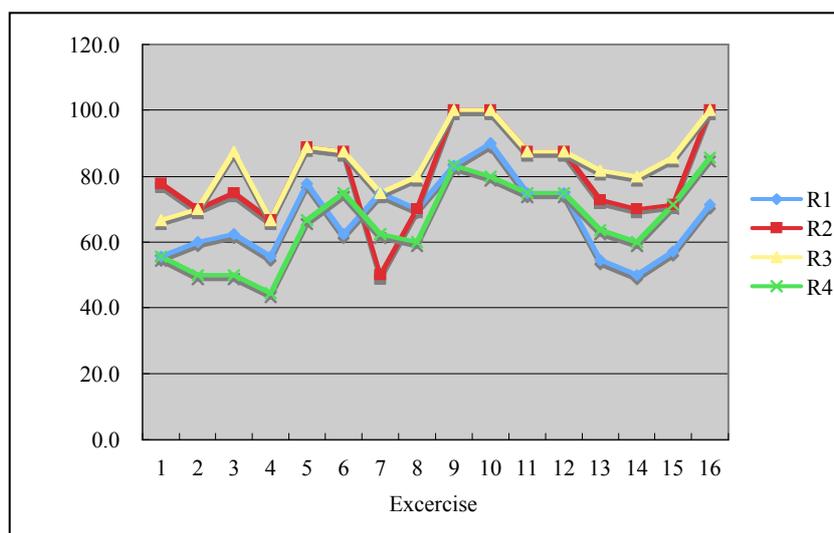


FIGURE 10
Action Research Cycle Five

In the final action research cycle, we encouraged them to expand the span of reproduction of speech heard as much as they can within the 2 seconds. Their span of reproduction of speech heard within 2 seconds frame showed a gain whereby the respondents seem to be able to retain more speech input and therefore gained more information (Figure 11).



R: Respondent

FIGURE 11
Results of Recorded ‘Shadowing’

The respondents’ perception of shadowing was surveyed by means of questionnaire. It was administered immediately after the last cycle. Item 1 and 2 are questions related to English rhythms. All of them answered that they could understand English rhythms, and two of them answered that they could produce good English rhythms (75%, and 62.5%). Looking at items on speaking (3 to 7), they recognized that they could read or pronounce English faster. It means, their articulators can glide faster than before according to English phonics, e.g. question 3 (75%) and question 6 (75%). However, they had not yet reached the state that they could sub-vocalize unconsciously whenever they listened to a spoken English (question 4 (37.5%) and question 5 (43.8%)). Item 8 to 11 pertained to listening skill. They could retain and understand the sound (62.5%) but were some still having difficulty understanding without translating, getting every single word, and listening completely. As shadowing was implemented with the notion of getting them to be fluent in connected speech, the latter concerns are considered to be

insignificant.

DISCUSSION

The findings revealed that participants in this action research have improved in their bid for better spoken English pronunciation. They have also learned how to pronounce individual words as well as English sentences rhythmically. Improvement as a result of using shadowing techniques in classroom instruction can be seen in four main areas, namely: changes in the natural rate of speech, comprehension, involvement in shadowing, and confidence in each cycle.

Changes in Natural Rate of Speech

At first they had a hard time to reproduce the speech heard, even though they had already studied the contents of the book. As extension work, every learner was given a copy of the tape, and we encouraged them to practice it at home before coming to class. They admitted that they felt more comfortable with this conversation book. The change of material and rate of speech made the learners' impression towards shadowing a positive one. Once they became familiar with the content, their attitude became slightly positive. However, respondent 1 and 4 were still having trouble doing the shadowing. In their journal entry, although both of them were able to imitate the tape better than before they still could not do the shadowing well. Respondent 1 mentioned that if he had memorized the sentences beforehand, he might be better able to reproduce the speech heard. Respondent 4 wrote that she still could not move her mouth quickly enough. We understood that shadowing imposed upon the learners a new challenge of listening and speaking at almost the same time. Even though they practiced shadowing at home, they couldn't speak English easily. One of the probable reasons was that they did not understand the rules of pronunciation, especially clustering and reduced

forms that are crucial to proper pronunciation according to Brown (1994).

Overall the Japanese adult learners made progress in shadowing and listening as they reported in their journals. Their span of reproduction of speech heard within 2 seconds frame showed a gain whereby the respondents seemed to be able to retain more speech input and therefore gain more information. Their sense of rhythm had remarkably improved through this practice. The benefits of this practice spilt over into the learners' other speech, and they appeared to understand that rhythm was for the sake of both the speakers' and listeners'. In short, English rhythm is a great aid to comprehension for speakers (Fraser, 2001).

Comprehension

On reflection, the result of shadowing is greatly influenced by the contents of the conversation, and it also shows that it is important to accumulate a wide enough vocabulary. In addition, Brown (1994) pointed out that several factors make listening difficult such as clustering, reduced forms/simplifications, rate of delivery, stress, rhythm and intonation etc. and these should be instructed in the lesson. These factors were found in their journal as well. The learners were also having difficulty in catching the flow of connected speech rather than a single word, such as "the nearest subway station is?", "you should try and ask a...", and "won some money". Each word in these phrases was not so difficult but when they were pronounced in the flow of typical English rate of speech, the learners could not understand them. In the journal entry, respondent 4 wrote in her journal that after checking the script, she noticed that there were quite a few expressions she knew. Respondent 1 and 3 wrote in their comments that when they heard unfamiliar words or expressions, it was also hard for them to reproduce them, and they did not know how to stress the words/phrases.

Sometimes there might be a keyword in the sentence, such as "order" in "Let's order some pizza" (exercise No.9). Respondent 2 thought it meant 'a couple was eating pizza', but in fact they were ordering. In exercise No.7,

respondent 3 wrote that he understood that the children were talking about giving up swimming, but he could not catch the reason for them giving up. The key sentence was, "*If we go swimming we'll catch a cold and then our mothers will get mad at us.*" It was a relatively long sentence which was very difficult for him not only to listen but also to shadow. Both of the key sentences had typical English rhythms. Fraser (2001) explained that the best way to teach rhythm is to play natural speech, help learners pick out the stressed syllables or words within it, and then let them repeat it closely in small chunks till they can say it fluently and naturally. They repeat it repeatedly at first with the help of the script and then without. Their sense of rhythm remarkably improved throughout this practice. The benefits of this practice spilt over into the learners' other speech, and furthermore they appeared to understand that rhythms helped both speakers' and listeners' comprehension. In short, as mentioned by (Fraser, 2001), English rhythm is a great aid to comprehension for speakers in view of the spread of English as an international language today.

Involvement in Shadowing

They were given a one-week-practice before their shadowing was to be recorded. This seemed to work well as they did not want to be embarrassed and, therefore they practiced much harder at home. It was clearly recognized that every learner worked harder at home than before, as they had to practice shadowing until they had the passage memorized. As a result their shadowing kept improving, and even they themselves were surprised. Respondent 2 wrote in her journal that she sometimes came across the situation in her daily life when she could use the memorized expression. According to Knowles (1973) and Fraser (2001), adult learners become willing to learn materials they need to know and be able to do in order to cope effectively with their real-life situations. She already recognized that their material fit in the real-life situations. In this sense her experience seemed to have stimulated her. It was good to know that respondent 3 wrote in his journal that he could do

shadowing easier than before unless there was a difficult phrase or a long sentence. We continuously stressed pronunciation rules that would help them pronounce English easier. Respondent 1 wrote in his comments that when he heard unfamiliar words, or when he could not catch the words, it will bother him during the shadowing, listening and thinking process of the following parts. The same kind of comments was given from other learners as well. Exercise No. 2's topic was about the lottery and the learners have never talked about this topic in English.

Confidence in Each Cycle

Prior to the shadowing technique induction in their classroom learning instruction, the learners indicated their interest in trying out this technique. However, the moment they started, they seemed to lose their enthusiasm completely. They became too cautious and uncertain whether they could do it, it was their first experience with as shadowing, and the speed of CD was too fast for them to pace. This jittery situation is common when the adult learners enter an unfamiliar situation; they feel fear, apprehension, and anxiety and do not want to appear foolish. It was obvious that all the learners were confused and felt stressed. Respondent 1 wrote in his journal, "I was shocked." Others wrote, "I didn't understand at all", or "it was very difficult to catch". The first obstacle they encountered was listening before they practiced shadowing. They could not follow as the topic was new and the rate of speech was too fast for them to catch up. According to Scrivener (1994), the teacher should not let the learners become discouraged and try to make sure that the task is just within their abilities. It should be difficult but achievable. Under such circumstances, the learners could lose their interest in shadowing.

It is true that they felt happy when they could imitate, understand and shadow authentic English much better than before and see the improvement themselves. Respondent 1 was passive toward shadowing at first, however as he practiced, he expressed his honest feelings and opinions and considered how to improve this intervention together. Respondent 2 and 3 reproduced

speech sounds more fluently than before and could see improvement in their English rhythms. Respondent 2 was positive toward shadowing from the beginning and always cooperative. She wrote in her comments that she was excited to find herself being able to understand most of the contents without looking at the script even from the first listening. She recalled that when she started shadowing, she could not catch much at all. Unlike her, respondent 3 was not so enthusiastic about shadowing at the beginning. At first his attitude was somewhat skeptical about the effectiveness of shadowing. But once he realized it was effective, he tried hard and led the other learners. He wrote that he was able to understand the meaning of English without translating it into Japanese while shadowing. When Japanese learners read or listen to English, most of them will translate it into Japanese. It is the way English language was taught in Japan, i.e. the "Grammar Translation Method." It took a while for respondent 4 to get used to shadowing as she could not follow the rate of speech at all when she first started. She lost her confidence, and that really concerned us very much. Fortunately, she somehow managed to improve cycle by cycle. It was unquestionable that she practiced hard at home and improved little by little. She reflected in her journal that she was proud of herself that she was making an effort to realize her dream which was to communicate with her friendly landlady.

CONCLUSION

This action research was conducted for a period of six months. The first four cycles saw participants experiencing trials and tribulations in their journey to complete the shadowing exercises. At the beginning they had trouble with listening, for they were not to the rate of speech and shadowing technique itself. If they could not listen, they could not shadow either, so we decided to use easier material at slower rate of speech. The explanation of English consonants and vowels were given in the first action cycle. Even though, they could pronounce each word correctly, they could not pronounce

chunks and phrases smoothly. As they got used to shadowing, they shadowed and memorized the material at the same time. The next instruction was about simplifications which helped learners imitate and reproduce speech sounds smoothly. Meanwhile the easy textbook was completed and they were back to the originally intended textbook with a natural rate of speech CD. Upon reintroduction of the new material, there was a momentary confusion due to the natural rate of speech (normal speech rate). We suggested two things to relieve their stress: one was to give some pause between each sentence in shadowing and another was to let them practice the material for a week before. Gradually, they were able to follow the natural flow of speech and enacted shadowing of a native speaker's speech in small bits. However when the sentence was long, some of them shadowed only during the pause and they did it with a Japanese accent. We noticed that the 'pause' caused difficulties for the learners, therefore we stopped using it. Besides those difficulties, practice of chunks and phrases and putting stress were also necessary to be practiced through shadowing. Participants were able to practice shadowing without an extra pause and were able to pick out the stressed syllables in the sentence in the final action cycle. They were given repeated close reading in small chunks until they were able to pronounce them fluently and naturally.

Every learner appeared to have improved in their speech rhythm through shadowing. Some of them were able to follow almost all the sentences with exception of long and difficult ones. They tried really hard to reproduce speech sounds just as they heard them so that their speech sounded natural. Consequently, they could understand the sound heard without translating it into Japanese. It is obvious that all learners had more interest in shadowing practice than before and seemed to become confident of catching the English sound far better and reproduced the speech heard more smoothly and rhythmically. After such great effort, their English rhythms improved significantly. This shows that they could automatize speech sounds in their minds after using controlled practices to reproduce a heard speech fast and smoothly. Consequently, they could retain more information in their minds

and understood more information quickly. This is exactly what the shadowing was aiming for. In sum, these shadowing exercises had helped every learner to show remarkable progress in their English rhythms. We are convinced that the 'shadowing' technique is one of the most effective interventions for Japanese adult learners with deficient pronunciation to learn English rhythms.

As this action research was conducted with a small group of expatriate Japanese adult learners of English staying in Malaysia, a larger sample such as school or educational institution in Malaysia or other Asian countries, of various age and groups such as primary school pupils, secondary school students, university undergraduates/postgraduates, and adults would be interesting subjects to test the effectiveness of using the shadowing technique in assisting them to attain an internationally intelligible standard of spoken English.

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