

Teleclass: An Innovative Tool for Effective Second Language Teaching¹

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The teleclass was developed in 1985 by the Hawaii Department of Education, and since then well over one hundred teleclass sessions have been administered between several Hawaiian high schools and their overseas counterparts, including schools in Japan, China, Korea, France, Germany and Spain. In a teleclass two countries are connected via videophone, and students "meet" and talk to each other in target languages. This article introduces the teleclass and provides a report on UCLA's quarter-long teleclass, incorporating the questionnaire and proficiency test results. While further research is required, this pilot study suggests many promising benefits of the teleclass medium, such as in motivating students in foreign language study and in teacher education.

Equipment

Both the Hawaii and UCLA teleclasses used the Mitsubishi Luma videotelephone.² It works like a regular speaker phone in principle, but it can transmit slow-scanned, freeze-frame black-and-white pictures in about five seconds. Close-up lenses also allow one to send small documents and pictures. In addition, a special printer can print out the screen contents, making the class more interesting and personal. Although the videophone's screen is small for class use, the video phone can easily be connected to a regular TV monitor. Similarly, an external speaker can be hooked up to amplify the volume of the receiver. For example, at one occasion, 600 Korean students in an auditorium participated in a teleclass session with a Hawaii high school.

The Hawaii Global Teleclass Project

The Hawaii teleclass project is a supportive program for Asian European and Pacific Language courses in Hawaii high schools, which was improvised to remedy decreasing enrollment and high drop-out rates. The major goal is to stimulate and motivate students to further study by providing a real, communicative environment. Another important goal is to help students build confidence in communicating in the

target language. Hawaii teleclasses are currently offered as special events in regular language courses, and they have been enthusiastically received by participating students and teachers. A typical session lasts about forty minutes and consists of four parts: (1) opening greetings by the school principals, mayors, teachers and so on; (2) self-introductions by students and questions asked in the target language which are then answered by partners in their native language; (3) open exchanges where students can freely ask questions in either native or target language; (4) closing remarks in target languages by the best student of each school.³

The UCLA Pilot Teleclass

The UCLA Japanese teleclass, an adaptation of the Hawaii project, was conducted during Spring 1988. It was unprecedented in being carried out at the college level and being conducted on a regular basis for one academic quarter.⁴ In addition to the two goals of the Hawaiian project, stimulating students to further study and confidence building, the UCLA teleclass aimed to develop friendships with foreign students and to familiarize the students with the culture of the target-language country. In achieving these goals, two forms of Cooperative Learning were stressed: first, among the students in their respective classes and, second, between the students in the two countries. For example, students worked in groups helping each other with vocabulary and grammar in and outside of the class. In addition, the cooperative efforts of the students in the two countries made the teleclass more productive and helped each other achieve a deeper understanding of both language and culture.⁵

Participants

A total of nine UCLA students, five male and four female, attended the course throughout the quarter. According to a questionnaire given to students, a personal interest in Japan primarily motivated them to study Japanese, but their reasons for attending the teleclass were more practical, such as to have an opportunity to put knowledge into practice and to gain confidence in spontaneous speech. Cultural aspects were not important in taking the teleclass. (Tables 1-3 provide relevant statistics.)

The Japanese participants consisted of students from three schools in Matsuyama, and only a few were regular attenders.⁶ English is a mandatory foreign language requirement in Japan beginning in the seventh and continuing on through the twelfth grade. A questionnaire was administered to the eleven students, five male and six female, who attended the first teleclass session. According to the questionnaire, most of

TABLE 1

**A Pre-session Questionnaire Results Administered
to Nine UCLA Participants**

1. Year			
	Freshman	.....2	
	Sophomore	.....5	
	Junior	.....	1
	Senior	.....1	
2. Major/submajor			
	Japanese	.....4	
	Political Science	.....	1
	Economics	.....	1
	Chemistry	.....	1
	Undeclared	.....1	
3. Ethnic backgrounds			
	Japanese American	.....	3
	Non-Asian American	.....	6
4. Reasons for studying Japanese			
	Interest in Japan	.....	9
	Like to Travel	.....5	
	Helpful for Major	.....4	
	Required for Major	.....	3
	Parents/relatives speak the language	.....	3
	Friends speak the language	.....	2
	Good skill to have for job	.....2	
5. Reasons for attending the Teleclass:			
	(The most important = 1; the least important = 6)		
		Mean	Standard deviation
	More practice in speaking and listening	1.7	0.7
	Gain confidence in communicating with native speakers	2.0	0.6
	Listen to the real native speakers	3.2	1.2
	Learn about culture	4.5	0.8
	Learn about Japanese college life	4.8	1.8
	Small number of students	4.8	1.1

TABLE 2

**Results of Pre-Session ETS Japanese Proficiency Test
Administered to Six UCLA Students**

	Mean	SD
Listening comprehension	39.0	7.7
Character recognition	43.5	7.3
Reading comprehension	46.3	5.9

TABLE 3

**Results of Pre-Session ACTFL Japanese Oral Proficiency Test
Administered to Six UCLA Students**

Intermediate-mid	2
Intermediate-low	4

them belonged to the same English Club and had occasional opportunities to speak English, but rarely to write, and few had ever visited the U.S. Differing from the UCLA students, the most common motivation of the Japanese participants was to develop a mutual understanding of, and to establish a friendship bond between, the two countries. Practical reasons such as to practice speaking English with native speakers were considered rather marginal. (Table 4 gives some background information.)

Limitations of the study

While the UCLA Teleclass was a unique and promising project, it had the following limitations and shortcomings: (1) There were only six contact sessions with the Japanese participants, and this was not long enough to determine if there were any strong changes in the student attitudes and abilities; (2) Whether or not to offer the teleclass depended solely upon approval to use the available funds, which were not released until the third week of the quarter. Therefore, little time was available for the class, nor for research, preparation and organization. Inconsistent attend-

Table 4

Background Information on the Japanese Participants

1. Major				
English/literature	4			
Political science/economics	6			
Science/engineering	1			
		often	sometimes	rare
2. Opportunity to write letters in English:	0	2	9	
Opportunity to speak in English:	2	7	2	
		Yes	No	
3. Have friends who are native of English:	4	6		
Have visited the U.S. before	2	9		
		Mutual understanding	English skill	Other
4. Expectations from Teleclass participation:	7	3	2	

ance at the beginning due to the late approval of the class was also a problem; (3) There was a schedule change due to the daylight-savings time change, and some students had to drop the class because of it, resulting in difficulty in organization and loss of participants;⁷ (4) The Japanese participants belonged to three schools, and it was difficult to contact them between classes, causing class and research organization difficulties; (5) Many of the Japanese participants attended only one session; therefore, it was difficult for the UCLA students to grow familiar and comfortable with them. Moreover, they had to repeat self-introductions for the new students, reducing the time for discussing scheduled topics. Also, this situation did not allow us to obtain student opinions on the long-term teleclass, as well as to examine their progress.

Activities

The two groups "met" six times for about one hour every Tuesday from April 12,

1988 to June 3, 1988, except for May 3, 1988, when Japan had a national holiday. Because of the time differences, there was not much choice available regarding the meeting time; 4 pm, LA time, and 8 am, Japan time, was chosen for the meetings. Although the UCLA participants said that 4 pm was acceptable, most of them could not meet after 5 pm. The problem of choosing a suitable meeting time for participating countries could be a drawback for any teleclass.

Discussion topics for each session were chosen to incorporate student preferences, although the UCLA students' limited vocabulary and grammar restricted the possibilities. An effort was made to make the best use of their knowledge and to incorporate the newly learned items in the regular class. While the current project indicated that teleclass can be successfully administered at an elementary level, in order to fully discuss the topics which students are interested in, it is recommended, at least for Japanese, that they have a minimum of two years previous instruction. The suggested length, of course, will differ depending on the language. The current topics were fairly well-accepted, as seen in the questionnaire results in the appendix. The dates and topics for each week were as follows:

TABLE 5

CLASS SCHEDULE AND TOPICS ⁸

1. April 12: Self introduction with the coordinators in Hawaii and Japan
 2. April 19: Self-introduction with the students in Japan
 3. April 26: My school and my town
 4. May 10: How we spend weekends and holidays
 5. May 17: Dating, *o-miai*⁹ and marriage; my future plans
 6. May 24: Education systems and the Japanese class at UCLA
 7. May 31: Summer plans and my experience in the teleclass
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Although most students wished to speak individually, it was felt that that would have been a little too difficult for the beginning students. Therefore, students were formed into groups and conversed in those groups. The number of students in each group was gradually reduced from four at the beginning to two by the end of the quarter. At the earliest stage, each group also prepared a short skit in the target language on the assigned topic and presented that over the videophone. Then students in the partner group asked questions about it both in native and target languages. While this arrangement made the conversation rather artificial, it was a necessary introductory step for students to get used to talking spontaneously in foreign languages over the phone. As

the course progressed and they became more interested in "what they are talking about" rather than "speaking with native speakers," the students reached the point of "truly conversing." This is very important, as it is felt that natural speech does not come "naturally," but only with experience.

Allocation of time to each group was problematic, and, according to the questionnaire, most students felt that they wanted to have more time to talk. Usually it took some time for the students to pick up the tempo of the conversation, and once having done so, they became excited and never wanted others to interrupt them, causing the class to often go over time. The tasks for students who were not on the phone was another problem: although they were encouraged to pick up and take notes of words and grammar points they did not understand, virtually none of the students did so. While the questionnaire results suggest that the students enjoyed simply listening to other groups' conversations, the time could have been better spent. Having follow-up sessions, where students could discuss their questions and problems, might encourage them to listen more attentively and take notes. For the present study, there was only a half-hour warm-up session immediately before the teleclass, and students were encouraged to visit the instructor and teaching assistants during their office hours for assistance. Well-organized preparation and follow-up sessions are recommended for future studies.

Letter Exchange

While teleclass is primarily a medium to develop oral and aural skills, pen pal activity was incorporated to foster writing and reading skills as well. Each student was matched with a pen pal, and they exchanged letters during the quarter. The letters were sent by FAX in order to avoid delays.¹⁰ It was also hoped that exchanging letters would help develop friendships and further stimulate the videophone conversation. While their vocabulary and grammar were limited, the UCLA students were encouraged to think and write in Japanese as much as they could and add more detailed information, which they could not handle at this stage, in English. Unfortunately, on the other hand, the Japanese participants' letters were written in English often with accompanying re-translated, unnatural Japanese. Incidentally, similar problems occasionally occurred during the tele-conversations as well. These suggest that instructors need to pay attention to students' lapsing into "foreigner talk" to prevent possible damage to their partners. Considering the small numbers of letters exchanged, the activity was still judged a great success: students were eager to both write and talk to their pen pals. Interestingly, many non-teleclass students heard of the letter exchanges and requested pen pals for themselves, too. This tells us that we should not only look at new technologies but also make good use of old concepts as well.

In addition to the pen pal activity discussed above, keeping a log of class activities and reading short materials on discussion topics in the target languages may be incorporated as reading and writing exercises. Students may also exchange opinions in class on world-wide "news" and later read related newspaper and/or magazine articles sent by FAX from the partner's country. Also, talking about movies and popular music

was found to be a favorite topic for the students in the current project. Exchange of video-recorded movies and music tapes in target languages may serve as motivating and interesting follow-ups for such topics.

Results

A short comprehension test was administered to the UCLA participants at the beginning and end of the quarter, and statistically significant progress was observed for the teleclass students ($z = -.212$, $p < .05$) but not for a control group ($z = -.635$, $p > .05$).¹¹ However, in order to draw any conclusions, more long-range, fully-matched group testing is required.

There was a slight positive change in the self-rating for motivation. Considering the short length of the project, improvement over the course of a longer project is to be expected. One participant, whose major had been undecided, chose to major in Japanese as the teleclass had increased her interest in her Japanese ancestry.

The UCLA students' overall rating of the teleclass was very high. They wished to attend similar courses, if available, in the future showing their satisfaction with the course. Initially, thirteen students attended the teleclass, but four dropped after attending only a few times. According to the follow-up interview, three of these four could not continue due to the schedule change required by daylight-savings time. The fourth student stated her reason for dropping that she speaks Japanese at home with her parents and relatives. However, she strongly recommended the teleclass to students who had little opportunity to speak Japanese and mentioned that even she learned some things about Japanese culture which she had never heard from her parents. Overall, the teleclass was considered valuable even by the students who discontinued attendance.

In the last teleclass session, all of the UCLA students mentioned that their proficiency in Japanese had progressed considerably. In addition, they mentioned that they had learned much about Japanese culture and that they were very happy about this. These results indicate that the teleclass successfully helped the students develop confidence and cultural understanding. Overall, the participants were quite satisfied with the teleclass experience. A summary of the opinion questionnaire is found in the appendix.

Conclusions and Suggestions

While we have not seen results from any long-term, large sample projects yet, the results from the UCLA pilot teleclass suggest many advantages of this teaching strategy. The participants enjoyed learning about each other's country through their discussions, as well as practicing the target language, and much cultural confusion felt at the beginning of the course gradually disappeared. In addition, the students in Japan tended to speak less at first as they had had little practice in speaking due to the Japanese education system, which stresses reading and writing, as well as their reserved nature in speaking with unfamiliar people. However, the American students' willingness to speak with strangers and the excitement of using the newly-learned language made the

Japanese participants relax and encouraged them to talk more. Japanese participants commented that having many enthusiastic participants made the class interesting, and that American students made them feel at ease, proving the benefits of Cooperative Learning.

The teleclass sessions also revealed several unexpected benefits for teachers. Firstly, teachers were given ample opportunity to listen to their students' unguarded, spontaneous speech. In addition, by listening to the conversations teachers could recognize their students' interests. They could also learn about modern culture and language usage in the foreign country by listening to the target-language native students. Moreover, the conversations revealed vocabulary and grammar which were useful in daily conversations but not yet covered in most textbooks. This information is helpful for teachers in organizing their lesson plans, particularly in proficiency-oriented instruction.

For example, Japanese polite speech (*keigo*) systems are considered difficult and are not covered in most beginning textbooks. Yet, ironically, Japanese speakers are most likely to use the polite forms to strangers, including foreigners, and the Japanese participants actually did so in the first session. The UCLA students, due to their lack of familiarity with the forms, were unable to understand the utterances, which were very simple in meaning. However, with the introduction of a simplified honorific system, the UCLA students developed their comprehension ability and could converse without major problems by the end of the quarter. I would like to emphasize that this was possible because the UCLA students heard the Japanese speakers using the special forms in a real context every time they conversed with them. This tells us that we should not avoid an important feature of the language because its complexity appears to be difficult to master, but that we should repeatedly use them from an early stage.

For those who are interested in replicating the teleclass, I would like to recap some suggestions expressed above. Firstly, although it is possible to conduct a teleclass at a beginning level, it is mostly recommended for intermediate to advanced level students, particularly so for a long-term teleclass. This ensures that the students have enough knowledge to fully express themselves. A one-time only or short-term teleclass will pose few problems even for beginning students and still bring much benefit in motivating them for further study. Secondly, depending on the proficiency levels of the students, the need for controlling the amount of use of the target language arises. In the current project, the UCLA students' limited vocabulary and grammar in Japanese made switching from one language to another easy and natural, as well as controlling the time spent speaking each language. However, in the case where both students are fairly proficient in the target language, regulating the use of either language by topics, time or day will be necessary. In addition, the number of the students who actually participate in the conversation at one time may also depend on language proficiency levels. As I mentioned above, for beginners two to three students per group seems to pose fewer problems. The main problem with this arrangement is how to keep the attention of the students who are not on the phone. For advanced students, it may be interesting to form a larger group, providing multiple microphones, and have a debate. This will keep a

larger number of students feeling involved in the discussion, and keep them more awake and on their toes. Some suggested additional activities are exchanging of letters and newspaper articles, possibly via FAX, audio tapes, movie video tapes and music tapes. They will provide lively topics for discussion and stimulate reading and writing as well. Lastly, I would like to give a word of caution against foreigner talk. Whether in speech or writing, there is always much potential for students to use foreigner talk. It is important that instructors discuss beforehand with the students the goals of the teleclass, such as providing opportunity to talk with peer native speakers in a natural and real context. The students should be made aware that using foreigner talk defeats the whole purpose of the teleclass and that their partners want to learn the real language and be corrected when necessary. Again, the cooperative features of the teleclass play an important role. Overall, teleclass is an effective alternative and supplement to foreign travel, and its benefits are numerous.

Notes

1. This project was made possible by the collaborative efforts of the Department of East Asian Languages and Cultures, UCLA, and Matsuyama Shinonome Junior College, with funding from the U. S. National Security Agency (FY 1987 NSA-UCLA Contract, #MDA 904-86-H-0011) through Prof. Russell Campbell of TESL/Applied Linguistics, UCLA. The author is particularly grateful for valuable comments received from Wendy Snyder-Nakajima.
2. Cost per unit is approximately \$1, 100. An optional close-up lens kit and a printer are \$95 and \$400 respectively.
3. According to a recent report by Dr. Wollstein of the Hawaii Department of Education, only 10% of the students originally enrolled in foreign languages proceed to the third level. For further description on the Hawaii teleclass project, see the Hawaii Teleclass project, unpublished manuscript by Dr. John Wollstein.
4. Due to the limited instructor time available, the UCLA teleclass was offered only for honor's students as an additional weekly hour-long discussion session.
5. See Kagan (1988) for theory and practice of Cooperative Learning.
6. The three schools are Matsuyama Shinonome Junior College, Matsuyama University of Commerce, and National Ehime University. The instructor in Japan requested this arrangement in order to make this opportunity available to more students as well as to develop inter-college relationships.
7. Japan does not have a daylight-savings time schedule.
8. Video tapes of the entire sessions marked with an "*", and an edited nine minute

demonstration copy, are available from Prof. Noriko Akatsuka, Dept. of EALC, UCLA, LA, CA 90024-154003.

9. Japanese system of "the first date," arranged by parents, relatives and so on.
10. Some of the letters were sent by regular mail and took two weeks or more for delivery.
11. The test, Listening Comprehension Measure, was originally developed by Mary McGroarty for her research at UCLA in consultation with a Japanese-speaking linguist. The test consisted of ten items assessing ability to follow instructions (e.g., "Draw three small circles.") and twenty-four items requiring the students to select the appropriate picture for each sentence from an array of four choices, a total of thirty-four questions. The items are selected among a variety of possible questions to include those which students would be likely to learn during the course of the first year of instruction at UCLA. The test was tape-recorded by a native speaker of Japanese who read each item twice with a five-second pause between repetitions.

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APPENDIX**Post-quarter opinion questionnaire administered to nine UCLA participants**

The scale used for each question was as follows:

0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
N/A				Neutral			
	Strongly disagree	Moderately disagree	Slightly disagree		Slightly agree	Moderately agree	Strongly agree

1. About videophone conversation

<u>Mean</u>	<u>SD</u>	<u>Statement</u>	
6.7	0.5	I enjoyed the videophone conversations with the Japanese students.	
6.2	1.0	Seeing other people on the screen made the conversation fun than just talking to them on a regular phone.	more

2. Acceptability of equipment

<u>Mean</u>	<u>SD</u>	<u>Statement</u>
4.9	1.3	The quality of the TV screen was acceptable.
4.7	1.4	The quality of the audio was acceptable.

3. About class time

<u>Mean</u>	<u>SD</u>	<u>Statement</u>
5.3	1.7	I do not mind having this class at 4 o'clock PM.
3.3	2.0	I do not mind having this class at 5 o'clock PM.

4. About topics

<u>Mean</u>	<u>SD</u>	<u>Statement</u>
5.6	1.0	The topics we dealt with were informative.
5.2	1.3	I enjoyed the topics we discussed.

5. About preparation and follow-up sessions

<u>Mean</u>	<u>SD</u>	<u>Statement</u>	
5.3	1.4	I enjoyed the preparation and follow-up sessions.	
5.1	1.6	The preparation and follow-up sessions were useful.	
4.6	1.8	We should have spent more time in the preparation and up sessions.	follow-

6. About improving preparation and follow-up sessions

<u>Mean</u>	<u>SD</u>	<u>Statement</u>
5.9	0.9	I would have benefited more if we had discussed after the tele-sessions, the grammar and vocabulary which I could not express during my conversation with the Japanese students.
5.8	1.6	I would have benefited more from the preparation and follow-up sessions if more vocabulary lists had been given.
5.7	1.3	I would have benefited more if we had reviewed after the tele-sessions the grammar and vocabulary we had just learned through our conversation with the Japanese students.
5.6	1.2	I would have benefited more if we had discussed after the tele-sessions the grammar and vocabulary which the Japanese students used but we did not understand during our conversation with them.
4.8	1.4	I would like to watch parts of our videophone sessions on the VCR and go over the vocabulary, grammar, pronunciation, etc.

7. About videophone conversation

<u>Mean</u>	<u>SD</u>	<u>Statement</u>
5.8	1.6	I wanted more time to talk in each session.
5.6	1.2	I enjoyed listening to other group's presentations/ conversations.
5.4	1.4	I prefer to converse on a one to one basis, rather than in a group.
4.7	1.7	We should have had less students in the class than the current 10-15.
4.4	1.5	I enjoyed the group research projects.
3.9	1.7	The time given for each group was about right.

8. About letter exchange

<u>Mean</u>	<u>SD</u>	<u>Statement</u>
6.3	1.2	I enjoyed exchanging letters.
6.0	1.1	I wish to continue exchanging letters
5.8	1.6	Meeting with a pen-pal makes videophone sessions more fun.
5.6	1.5	I felt more eager to talk to my pen-pal.

9. Gain from preparation and follow-up sessions

<u>Mean</u>	<u>SD</u>	<u>Statement</u>
5.8	2.0	I learned about Japanese college life from the preparation and follow-up sessions.
5.7	1.9	I learned about Japanese culture in general from the preparation and follow-up sessions.

5.4	1.1	I learned communication skills especially useful for dealing with Japanese people from the preparation and follow-up sessions.
5.3	1.4	I would have enjoyed short readings on Japanese culture, etc. which were related to the topics we discussed in the tele-sessions.
5.3	1.5	I learned vocabulary from the preparation and follow-up sessions.
4.9	1.4	I learned grammar from the preparation and follow-up sessions.

10. Gain from the videophone conversation

<u>Mean</u>	<u>SD</u>	<u>Statement</u>
6.3	1.0	I learned about Japanese culture in general from the videophone conversations.
6.3	0.9	I learned about Japanese college life from the TV-phone conversations.
5.9	1.3	I learned communication skills especially useful for dealing with Japanese people from the videophone conversations.
5.8	1.6	I gained confidence in speaking Japanese from the TV- phone conversations.
5.4	1.3	I learned vocabulary from the videophone conversations.
5.0	1.4	I learned grammar from the videophone conversations.

11. Gain from the letter exchange

<u>Mean</u>	<u>SD</u>	<u>Statement</u>
5.5	1.3	I learned vocabulary from exchanging letters.
5.4	1.3	I learned grammar from exchanging letters.
5.1	2.0	I learned about Japanese culture in general from exchanging letters.
5.0	1.7	I learned about Japanese college life from exchanging letters.
4.9	1.2	I learned communication skills especially useful for dealing with Japanese people from exchanging letters.

12. Students' over all gain from teleclass

<u>Mean</u>	<u>SD</u>	<u>Statement</u>
5.7	1.2	I feel more eager to learn about Japanese culture now than I did before I attended this class.
5.6	1.5	I have a better understanding of Japan and its people than I did before I attended this class.
5.6	1.9	I feel more comfortable using my Japanese now than before I attended this class.
5.3	2.1	I became more interested in visiting Japan after attending this course.
5.2	1.7	I feel more eager to talk in Japanese now than I did before I attended this class.

13. Student opinion on teleclass

<u>Mean</u>	<u>SD</u>	<u>Statement</u>
6.3	1.0	I would attend a similar program in the future if available.
6.1	0.9	I learned something valuable through attending the tele-class project.
6.1	1.3	This kind of program should be offered in other languages.
5.9	1.1	I would enjoy a conversation course which utilizes the videophones.
5.3	1.4	I wish the TV-sessions were offered more often or for longer hours.
5.0	1.2	My expectations were met.
2.7	2.3	Teleclass should be offered only as an occasional activity (such as once a quarter/year.)