Exploring Effective English Teaching Method using film scripts among poor learners of English
Pilot Study

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1. Introduction

These days, films are often chosen as an authentic materials, since we can expect that authentic materials will increase learners' motivation: Rost 1991, Horne 2004, Kimura 1997, Imai 2004, Kono 1980. For instance, Rost (1991) states Introduce your class to other speakers of English --- personally or through use of video and audio tapes. Horne (2004) also states that teachers should search for student-friendly materials in different varieties of English spoken around the word, not only British and American English. One popular source is cable TV. Dales (1954) mentions that they supply a concrete basis for conceptual thinking, and they have a high degree of interest for students. Kono (1980) also mentions that films arouse learners' interest, and learners challenge to understand what the actors are talking in films.

However, films often turn out too difficult to poor learners. Authentic materials will be used by high proficiency learners. Harmer (2003) states that "*real* language that they have to work hardest to understand. Authentic material is language where no concessions are made to foreign speaker. It is normal, natural language used by native – or competent – speakers of a language. This is what our students encounter (or will encounter) in real life if they come into contact with target-language speakers." (Harmer, 2003:205).

In order to comprehend spoken utterances, knowledge of sound system will be necessary. Brown (1981) states that the loss of training in phonetic changes impinges not only on the teaching of pronunciation but also on the teaching of listening comprehension (1987). Balasco (1969) stresses the importance of teaching the mechanism of connected speech to learners in early stages "in the initial states of internalizing basic phonological, syntactic patterns of the language, and sandhi-variation patters of the language". Rixon (1986) mentions, spoken words do not await a listener, and real utterances include a lot of phonetic changes, which might make listening very difficult. Ur (1992) also states that most of the discourse in TV dramas, interviews, most classroom exchanges we hear is quite informal, being both spontaneous and colloquial in character, and some of the skills the learner needs to develop are closely bound up with the peculiarities of spontaneous and colloquial speech.

However, the teaching of sounds system in phonetic changes seems to be insufficient in Japanese English classes. Japanese learners need to be taught these basic phonetic changes systematically (Miura, 1998; Kosuga, 2005; Azami, 2005; Kawajiri, 1993). Miura (1998) states

that college students seem not to be taught phonetic knowledge sufficiently, and that it is necessary for them to learn English phonetic rules, otherwise, they cannot listen to even easy words. In order to make learners understand listening effectively, teachers need to teach basic sounds of phonetic changes. Kosuga (2005) also states that there are many students who don't know or not being taught how linked words change the sounds, and that those learners tend to read a sentence word for word.

Moreover, only a few researches clarify to what extend and how prosody influences on learners L2 acquisition (Pennington and Richards, 1986; Hahn, 2004; Kajwairi, 1993). Hahn(2004) states that "Numerous pedagogical resources on ESL/EFL pronunciation advocate teaching nonnative speakers (NNS)s suprasegmentals to improve the intelligibility of their speech. However, little empirical support exists for such claims." (Hahn, 2004:201).

Except for English majors, quite a few Japanese students who continue to reveal low proficiency in English generally are forced to English upon entering junior or university. Since these students who already have six years of grammar-translation experience throughout junior and senior high schools, the grammar-translation method of teaching would make them demotivated. In order to motivate them in English, films as an material will help their motivation. If learners understand the basic system of the sound variations, their listening skills will be promoted.

2. Purpose

This pilot study aims to compare two types of film scripts, film (natural colloquial) and the same film read by an male American speaker (careful reading), and to find out the degree of difficulty for the learners in terms of phonetic changes. Additional aim is to examine if film is an adequate material for low English proficient students when we teach them phonetic changes as an important component in listening comprehension practices.

3. Research Question

The following research questions were set up.

1) To what extent students have listening difficulties in listening when a film script which consists of natural colloquial utterances, compared with the same script read carefully by an male American speaker?
2) Do phonetic changes occur more frequently in the film script, compared with the same script read carefully?
3) How difficult do students feel in the words and phrases with phonetic changes?
4) In what type of phonetic changes in the film script do students feel difficult, compared with the same script read by a native speaker?
5) Could the film script be used as a material in improving students' listening comprehension in

English for low English proficient students?

In order to compare the film script difficulty with the same passage read by an male American speaker, following two type tests were conducted. The two tests took 20 minutes in a 90 minutes lesson.

Type A Test: (FILM) Prerecorded film script was given to students and they took down. It took 10 minutes in a 90 minutes lesson. Soon after the A Test, the answer sheets were collected.

Type B Test: (NATIVE) New test sheets were handed out. The same students were asked to take down the same film script which was read and prerecorded by an male American speaker.

4. Research question 1: To what extent students have listening difficulties in listening when a film script which consists of natural colloquial utterances, compared with the same script read carefully by an male American speaker?

4.1. Type A Test (FILM)

4.1.1. Method

4.1.1.1 Participants

A total of 30 junior college students participated in this study. They were first-year students majoring in Home Science and Information Technology. They are 18 and 19 years old who enrolled in an elective course of Basic English in 2004. In my questionnaire, asking their STEP level, a few of them answered level 3 and most of them answered level 4. Judging from this, their English proficiency is assumed to be low.

4.1.1.2 Material

Since the context of the script as a material to be used should be meaningful and the dialogues should be naturalistic and interesting, a passage from film *Titanic* was chosen. 10 sentences were extracted from the passage, which were prerecorded from the video *Titanic*, used as A Type Test (FILM) in this experiment (see Appendix 1).

4.1.1.2.1 Script analysis

1. Words in the passage: 56 words in 10 sentences.
2. Word level: between 1 and 4 according to JACET8000.
3. Speed:
   Film (natural speed): 148 w.p.m. without pause, 87 w.p.m. with pause.

Since Fulford (1992) stated that average conversational speed is about 125-150 w.p.m., this Film speed would be within the average speed.

4.1.1.3 Procedures

The outline of the script was explained briefly before listening test, so that they could use top-down processing during listening. Since some parts of the dialogues were written on the listening answer sheet, the students could predict the context to some extent through words and phrases in the dialogues. I told the students to take down the remaining parts of the dialogues in the test. They listened to the script dialogues prerecorded in a cassette tape three times. They were asked to fill in blanks as a form of partial dictation as in the following steps.

1. First, they listened to the full passage without taking down. While listening to it they were allowed to take memos during listening.
2. Second, each item was stopped to listen to and they took down.
3. Third, they listened to each item and took down, correcting their mistakes.
4. The test sheets were collected.

4.2 Type B Test (NATIVE)

4.2.1 Method

4.2.1.1 Participants

The same first year 30 Junior College students participated in the Type B Test soon after the Type A Test (FILM).

4.2.1.2 Material

The same dialogue was carefully read by a male native speaker of English at a slower speech rate (113 w.p.m. without pause, 78 w.p.m. with pause). The dialog was tape-recorded.

4.2.1.3 Procedures

1. First, the tape was stopped after each utterance and they took down.
2. Second, they listened to each item and took down, correctly their mistakes.
3. The test sheets were collected.

4.3 Results and discussion

4.3.1 Comparison of raw scores of the two tests

The number of correct answers of the two tests were counted. Figure 1 compares the average correct scores of the two tests, which indicates that there is more than two times differences in their scores. Table 1 presents the result of statistical *t*-test, means, and standard deviation of the two

tests. t=2.3544 (p<.05) indicates that there is a significant difference between the two tests.

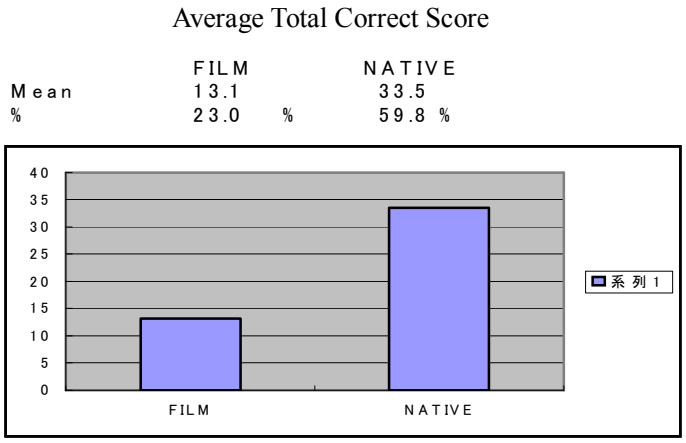

Figure 1. *Comparison of correct scores of the two type tests.*

Table 1. *Result of t-Test of the two test.*

Comparison of correct scores in the two tests

	N	Mean	Min.	Max.	SD	t value
FILM	30	13.1	7	25	4.25	2.3544
NATIVE	30	33.5	19	46	6.01	
					*p<.05	

4.3.2 Score difference of the two tests

To find the students' difficulty more precisely, the number of answers that they could not hear the words in both tests were counted (see Table 2). 'Could Hear Both' are those items which the participants could answer correctly both A test and B test. 'Could Not Hear' are those items which the participants could not answer correctly in ether A test or B test. This is different from the raw score comparison stated in the previous section, but the comparison of test scores the students could not hear the same words in two tests, that is, difficult phonetic changes common to the two different types of tests. In counting Could Hear Both, Could Not Hear, spelling mistakes such as *jast* instead of *just, pul* instead of *pull* were regarded as correct. The most Could Not Hear were blank answers, and only few misheard words were found, for example, *go on a* instead of *gonna.* Although Could Not Hear is more than that of Could Hear Both (18.6% vs. 10.10%), it statistically does not seem to be a big difference. Table 2 presents the result of t-test. t=0.1099 (p<.05) indicates that there is no significant difference between the two tests.

Table 2. *Score comparison in Could Hear Both Times and Could Not Hear.*

1		Just	give	me	your	HAnd .	Total
	Both F&N	1	5	9	4	8	27
	Neither F or N	0	6	2	1	0	9

2		I	II	PUll	BAck	over.	Total
	Both F&N	0	0	3	17	5	25
	Neither F or N	9	15	21	4	7	56

3		I	II	let	GO.	Total
	Both F&N	14	5	7	10	36
	Neither F or N	2	11	3	0	16

4		What	do	you	MEAn?	Total
	Both F&N	7	4	16	11	38
	Neither F or N	7	3	2	9	21

5		I	m	gonna	have	to	JUMp	in	there.	Total
	Both F&N	12	0	0	0	0	10	2	0	24
	Neither F or N	18	20	9	18	14	2	6	20	107

6		You	II	be	KILLed.	Total	elison	assim.	linking	contr.	devo	Total p.c.
	Both F&N	25	1	18	16	60						
	Neither F or N	0	18	0	3	21						

7		I	m	a	GOOd	SWIMer.	Total
	Both F&N	18	14	4	14	13	63
	Neither F or N	5	12	17	5	6	45

8		I	m	a	lot	more	conCERNed	about	that	WAter	being	so	COld.	Total
	Both F&N	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	13	13	26
	Neither F or N	14	18	24	24	18	29	18	30	20	30	4	3	232

9		FREEZing	Maybe	a	COUple	of	degrees	over.	Total
	Both F&N	18	13	0	0	0	0	11	42
	Neither F or N	6	1	15	19	23	26	3	93

10		COLdest	WINters	Total
	Both F&N	0	0	0
	Neither F or N	17	8	25

Note: Both F&N : Those items which the participants could answer correctly both A Test and B Test.
Neither F or N : Those items which the participants could not answer correctly either A Test or B Test.

Table 3. *The result of t-test on the total correct score of Could Hear Both and Could Not Hear.*

Score comparison in Could Hear Both and Could Not Hear						
	N	Mean	Min.	Max.	SD	t value
Could Hear Both	10	34.1	0	9	18.4	0.1099
Could Not Hear	10	62.5	63	232	68.2	

$*p<.05$

5. Research question 2: Do phonetic changes occur more frequently in the film script, compared with the same script read carefully?

5.1 Transcription of the film script

In order to examine if phonetic changes occur more frequently in FILM or in NATIVE, frequency of phonetic changes were counted. Further, to specify their difficulty in phonetic changes, two tests items (FILM and NATIVE) were analyzed (see Appendix 2). This analysis was not an acoustic analysis of speech using machine, but analyzed by a well-trained phonetician in this field. For analysis of the two types tests, American phonetic description written by Daniel Jones, in English Pronouncing Dictionary were used. Table 4 summarizes the phonetic changes in the data.

Table 4. *Phonetic changes in the data*

Question						Note: p.c.: phonetic changes
1	elison	assimilation	linking	contraction	devoicing	Total p.c.
FILM	2				1	3
NATIVE					1	1
2	elison	assimilation	linking	contraction	devoicing	Total p.c.
FILM			1	1		2
NATIVE	1		1	1		3
3	elison	assimilation	linking	contraction	devoicing	Total p.c.
FILM	2			1		3
NATIVE				1		1
4	elison	assimilation	linking	contraction	devoicing	Total p.c.
FILM		1				1
NATIVE		1				1
5	elison	assimilation	linking	contraction	devoicing	Total p.c.
FILM	2	3	1	1		7
NATIVE	2	3	1	1		7
6	elison	assimilation	linking	contraction	devoicing	Total p.c.
FILM				1	1	2
NATIVE				1	1	2
7	elison	assimilation	linking	contraction	devoicing	Total p.c.
FILM		1	1	1		3
NATIVE		1	1	1		3
8	elison	assimilation	linking	contraction	devoicing	Total p.c.
FILM	2		2	1	1	6
NATIVE		3	1	1	2	7
9	elison	assimilation	linking	contraction	devoicing	Total p.c.
FILM			3			3
NATIVE			3		2	5
10	elison	assimilation	linking	contraction	devoicing	Total p.c.
FILM	1					1
NATIVE	1				1	2

5.2 Frequency of Phonetic Changes in FILM and NATIVE

Figure 2 shows that in total almost the same number of phonetic changes occurred in the two tests (31 vs.32) while the types of phonetic changes are not the same. Since the FILM talking speed (148 w.p.m.) is faster and includes more elision and linking than those of NATIVE (123 w.p.m.), their difficulty seems not come from the number of phonetic changes but the difference of talking style and speed effected by elision and linking. In the phonetic categories, elisions occurred more in FILM while assimilations and devoicings occurred more in NATIVE. It seems to be reasonable to assume that in more natural speech (FILM), linking and elision occur more frequently. Judging from the analysis, it could be assumed that even in the careful speech, phonetic changes occur almost as frequently as in the natural colloquial talking style.

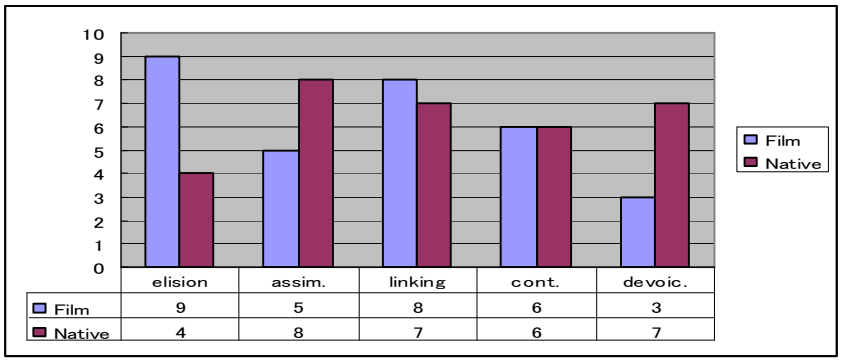

Figure 2. *Comparison of phonetic changes in FILM and NATIVE.*

6. Research question 3: How difficult do students feel in the words and phrases with phonetic changes?

6.1 Words and phrases with phonetic changes in Could Hear Both and Could Not Hear

In order to find out the affect of phonetic changes on the scores、the words on which phonetic changes affected were extracted and compared with Could Hear Both and Could Never(see Table 5).

Table 5. *Extracted scores with phonetic changes*

score%
Extracted scores with phonetic changes

	FILM	FILM	NATIVE	NATIVE
	Could Hear Both	Could Not Hea	Could Hear Both	Could Not Hear
contaction	11.1	18.9	11.1	18.9
elision	3.4	23.2	7.7	52.3
linking	7.1	19.2	8.7	23.6
assimlation	7.4	33.7	4.6	21.1
devoicing	20.6	43.9	8.8	18.8
av.	9.9	27.8	8.2	26.9

The correct scores of Could Hear Both, 18.1% and Could Not Hear, 54.7% may indicate that the students felt three times harder in the words with phonetic changes. Table 6 presents the result of *t*-test. t=0.0001 (p<.05), which indicates that there is a significant difference. Further, the score difference between FILM and NATIVE of Could Not Hear are compared. The almost same scores in FILM and NATIVE (27.8% vs. 26.9%), t=0.4500 (p<.05) may indicate that phonetic changes affect almost equally on FILM and NATIVE in listening.

Table 6. *Score comparison in Could Hear Both and Could Never Hear*.

Comparison of Could Hear Both and Could Not Hear in the scores of phonetic changes extracted

N	Mean	Min.	Max.	SD	t value
Could Hear Bot 10	9.1	3.4	20.6	4.7	0.0001
Could Not Hear 10	27.3	18.8	52.3	11.9	

$*p<.05$

The words and phrases the students made mistakes and Could Not Hear are more than three times than those they could answer correctly. Judging from the above analysis, it could be assumed that the students felt three times harder in the words with phonetic changes.

7. Research question 4: In what type of phonetic changes in the film script do students feel difficult, compared with the same script read by a native speaker?

7.1 Difficult phonetic changes

The words of Could Not Hear were divided into five phonetic categories: elision, assimilation, linking, contraction, and devoicing so as to find out which phonetic changes were likely to be perceived difficult by the students. Figure 3 shows the difficulty of phonetic changes in FILM from the most to the least in the decreasing order, and Figure 4, in NATIVE as well. Figure 3 FILM shows that devoicing 43.9% seems to be most difficult in the phonetic changes, followed by assimilation 33.7%. It could be assumed that naturally spoken words with devoicing was pronounced weak and fast. In addition, those occurred at the end of word might have them harder to perceive. As for assimilation, since their sounds are different from the spelling and for its various sounds students seemed to have confused identify these phonemes. NATIVE shows that elisions 52.3% and linkings 23.3% are difficult for the students.

Devoicing and assimilation are found difficult in FILM while elision and linking are found difficult in NATIVE. Judging from the above difficulty order, it could be said that if the FILM is used as a material devoicing, and assimilation have priority to teach the students, while if the NATIVE is used, elision and linking have priority.

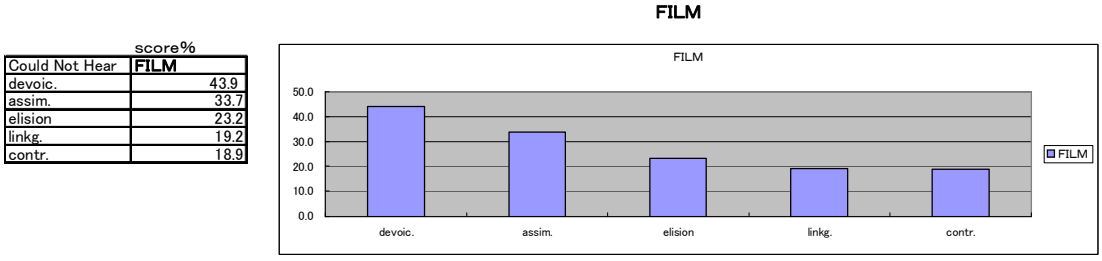

Figure 3. *Order of difficulty in FILM based on the score of Could Never Hear.*

	score%
Could Not Hear	NATIVE
elision	52.3
linkg.	23.6
assim.	21.1
contr.	18.9
devoic.	18.8

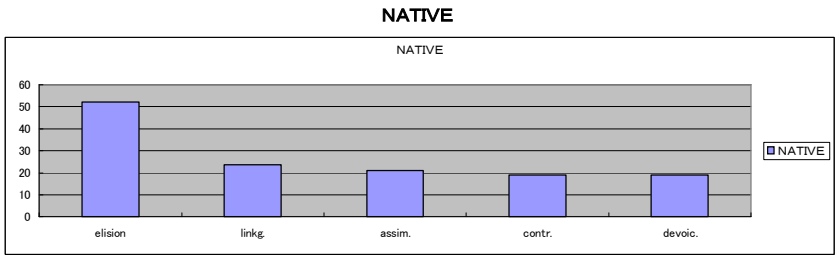

Figure 4. *Order of difficulty in NATIVE based on the score of Could Never Hear.*

8. Answers to research questions from 1 to 5

This section deals with our answers to the research questions from 1 to 5.

In response to research question 1, it can be said that there is significant differences between the FILM listening scores and the NATIVE listening scores read by the same passage by an American male speaker; The score in NATIVE is twice as good as those in FILM (23% vs. 59.8%, $t = 2.35443$, $p<.05$). It may infer that they felt more than two times difficult in FILM than in NATIVE**.**

As for research question 2, it is noteworthy that almost the same number of phonetic changes occurred in the FILM and NATIVE, 31 vs. 32, respectively. Of the categories, elisions and linkings occurred most in FILM while assimilation and devoicing in NATIVE**.** It may be assumed that talking styles of FILM is more natural, elisions occurred more frequently than those of the NATIVE. Contractions occurred the same number, 6 vs. 6, respectively in two tests. We may infer that two different talking styles seemed not to be affected by contractions.

As for research question 3, the number the students made mistakes in the words and phrases with phonetic changes is more than three times than those they could answer correctly, 18.1% vs. 54.7% (t=0.001,$p<.05$). However, the number of words and phrases they could not hear in FILM and NATIVE is almost the same, (27.8% vs. 26.9%, t=04500, $p<.05$). For this reason, it could be assumed that listening to the words with phonetic changes are very difficult even if they are spoken slowly and explicitly.

As for research question 4, devoicings and assimilations are difficult in FILM while elisions and linkings in NATIVE are difficult for the students. Naturally spoken words with devoicing was pronounced weak and fast, and those occurred at the end of words, which might have made them harder to perceive. As for assimilations, since their sounds are little different from spellings and for its various sounds students seemed to have confused and fail to identify these phonemes. It might suggest that if FILM is used as a teaching material devoicings and assimilations have priority to teach them while if NATIVE is used, elisions and linkings have priority.

As for research question 5 it could be answered from research questions 1 to 4**.** In research question 1**,** FILM is two times as difficult as NATIVE, research question 2, phonetic changes in FILM occurred as frequently as in NATIVE. This suggests that even in the careful talking style,

phonetic changes occur so frequently as in the natural colloquial talking style. In research question 3, the words and phrases with phonetic changes are about three times more difficult for the students to comprehend.

Summarizing the above five research answers, it could be concluded that with respect of teaching phonetic changes as an important component in listening practices, since FILM (natural speech) is three times harder than NATIVE, NATIVE including almost the same number of phonetic changes would be an adequate material for this specific group of students.

9. Concluding Remarks

By examining the two type of tests, the students' weak point in listening comprehension in both FILM and NATIVE are specialized. The two script test results show the significant differences between the FILM listening scores and the listening scores read by the same passage by an American male speaker. With regard to the phonetic changes, subjects had great difficulty in the passage including phonetic changes when spoken naturally in FILM. However, in the NATIVE reading, in spite of including the same number of phonetic changes, they could perform far better in answering the test. This may imply that although giving them teaching phonetic changes with FILM is too difficult for the students, with NATIVE reading which includes the same number of phonetic changes would be an adequate material for this specific group of students.

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Appendix 1 Test material

( ) : question number

○: word numbers

Titanic

Jack: Don't do it.
Rose: Stay back. Don't come any closer.
Jack: Come on. (1)Just give me your hand.⑤
(2)I'll pull back over.⑤
Rose: No! Stay where you are. I mean it. (3)I'll let go.④
Jack: No, you won't.
Rose; (4)What do you mean, ④ "No you won't"?
Don't presume to tell me what I will and will not do.
You don't know me.
Jack: Well, you would've done it already.
Rose: You're distracting me. Go away.
Jack: I can't. I'm involved now. You let go.
I'm, (5)I'm gonna have to jump in there after you.⑧
Rose: Don't be absurd. (6)You'll be killed.④
Jack: (7)I'm a good swimmer.
Jack; It would hurt. I'm not saying it wouldn't.
To tell you the truth, (8)I'm a lot more concerned about that water being so cold. ⑫
Rose: How cold?
Jack: (9)Freezing. Maybe a couple of degrees over.
You ever, uh... you ever been to Wisconsin?
Rose: What?
Jack: Well, they have some of the (10)coldest winters around. ②
Tch, I grew up there, near Chippewa Falls.

Appendix 2. Phonetic Transcription and the categorization of question 1 – 10.

Question

1	Just	give	me	your	HAnd .
					
FILM	○	○			□
NATIVE					□

2	I	ll	PUll	BAck	over.
					
FILM	*	*		☆	☆
NATIVE	*	*	○	☆	☆

3	I	ll	let	GO.
				
FILM	*	*○	○	
NATIVE	*	*		

4	What	do	you	MEAn?
				
FILM	△			
NATIVE	△			

5	I	m	gonna	have	to	JUMp	in	there.
								
FILM	*	*	○△	○△		☆	☆△	
NATIVE	*	*	○△	○△		☆	☆△	

6	You	ll	be	KILLed.	
					
FILM	*	*		□	
NATIVE	*	*		□	

7	I	m	a	GOOd	SWIMer.
					
FILM	*	* ☆	☆	△	
NATIVE	*	* ☆	☆	△	

8	I	m	a	lot	more	conCERNed	about	that	WAter	being	so	COld.
												
FILM	*	* ☆	☆	○		☆	☆	○				□
NATIVE	*	* ☆	☆	△		□	△	△				□

9	FREEZing	Maybe	a	COUple	of	degrees	over.
FILM		☆	☆	☆	☆	☆	☆
NATIVE		☆	☆	☆	☆□	□☆	☆

10	COLdest	WINters
FILM	○	
NATIVE	○	□

note: symbol

○	elision
△	assimilation
☆	linking
*	contraction
□	devoicing