

Implicit and Explicit Listening Comprehension (1)

Focusing on Weak Forms

by

Noriko TAKAGI

(Received on October 5, 2000)

Key words : Listening comprehension, weak forms, and EFL Learners

キーワード : リスニング能力, 弱形, EFL 学習者

1. INTRODUCTION

Previous research shows that it is now generally recognized that listening comprehension plays a key role in facilitating language learning (Gary: 1975, Dunkel: 1991 and Feyten 1991). According to Rivers in Gilman and Moody (1984: 331), adults spend 40~50% of communication time listening, 25~30% speaking, 11~16% reading, and approximately 9% writing. It means that listeners need to understand what speakers say in general and understand the vocabulary to communicate with speakers. It is relatively important for EFL learners to improve their listening comprehension in order to continue communicating with speakers.

In respect to the psychological aspect, to place listening comprehension before speaking, EFL learners can reduce stress as to what they should say, focus on developing listening comprehension skill, and achieve a sense of success for acquiring other skills. Using a Language Laboratory (L.L.) is a useful tool for students because they open up more reliable and less frustrating routes to language learning success. Garrett (1991) mentioned that:

Learners often experience a difficult transition from hearing pedagogical audio to understanding natural spoken language; the computer and interactive technologies will allow teachers to select materials of all kinds, support them as learners' needs dictate, and use the visual options of screen presentation or the interactive capabili-

ties of computer control to help students develop good ... listening techniques. (Garrett, 1991:95)

EFL learners can study at their pace and listen to dialogs again and again when using a L.L. The use of a L.L. holds promise for advancing the efficiency of assessing EFL learners listening comprehension skill.

2. LISTENING COMPREHENSION VS. SUBSKILLS

As is often pointed out (e.g. Long: 1990, Kawai: 1997), the learner's existing knowledge is related to listening comprehension skill. Previous research (e.g. Richards: 1983, Lynch: 1983, and Field: 1998) divided listening comprehension into subskills. Richards (1983) classified his skill approach to listening into three: type of listening (for gist, for information, etc.), discourse features (reference, markers, etc.), and techniques (predicting, anticipating, recognizing intonational cues, etc.).

With respect to grammar perception, Green and Hecht (1992) examined how well German learners of English have learnt the rules and explicit grammar items they have acquired. The subjects were 300 German learners of English and 50 native English pupils. The 250 German subjects had studied English from three to twelve years and 50 subjects were university students. The native speaker subjects were third and fourth year secondary school students. They were asked to write the correct answer and to explain their reasons for the sake of enabling the person checking those errors to understand and correct the mistakes. They had already learned the grammar points before the questionnaire. However, in the

Table 1 : Outline content of the test

Item	Incorrect text	Correction	Generalization
1	lives my aunt	my aunt lives	S-P in declarative sentences
2	I've played	I played	preterite for focus on time of action in past
3	I show	I (wi)ll show	verb marked to show futurity
4	takes not	doesn't take	<i>do</i> -periphrasis with <i>not</i>
5	like to ride	like riding	gerund for general liking
6	I know	I (ha)ve known	perfect to link past with present
7	something	anything	<i>any</i> with negation
8	careful	carefully	adverb form usually marked
9	was coming	came	simple form for unmarked aspect
10	smoked	was smoking	progressive form to mark aspect
11	man which	man who	relative <i>who</i> for persons
12	an policeman	a policeman	<i>a</i> -form of indefinite article before consonants

(Green and Hecht, 1992:171)

questionnaire it said there was one mistake (underlined) in each sentence. These items are shown in Table 1.

Green and Hecht (1992) reported that some answers for the grammar rule in question were as follows:

a if the subject does not begin with a vowel, *an* if the subject begins with a vowel. (Item 12)

In questions *any* is required. (Item 7)

Firstly, it follows that the metalanguage might be partly in accurate without impairing the validity of the rule; secondly, the rule might be correct but not applicable to the item.

The result at the different proficiency levels is shown in Table 2 (see Appendix.) as well. Green and Hecht (1992) concluded that the German subjects could grasp the grammar points. For item 12 (*a/an*), 81% of the students responded with the correct rules and 95% of the students had the correct answers. In the question testing *some/any*, 56% of the students had the correct rule, 85.3% of the students had the correct answer. And for the *who/which* problem, 69% of the students

had the correct rules and 82.3% of the students had the correct answer. On the other hand, results of these items (gerund, perfect, and verb aspect) were not so high. Overall, the German students produced many correct answers even if there was no explanation for the rule. 96% of the native speaker subjects responded correctly, but only 42% had the proper grammar rule. These results show that the German subjects could get the grammar rule more often than the native speaker subjects. This study concluded that 'When our learners either did not give a rule or gave a wrong one, they were still largely able to produce the desired correction or whether the correction was effected by 'feel', which then prompted the rule.' (1992:178).

It is doubtful whether this conclusion would apply systematically to listening comprehension. Just because the students have some knowledge of the grammar, it does not mean their listening comprehension will be accurate. However, in reference to the learners' general analytic competence, Green and Hecht (1992)'s results relate to listening comprehension skill in a sense. Field (1983) related the misunderstanding cues in listening to the syntax and illustrated post-listening dictation

exercises which redress the misunderstanding in syntactic parsing.

Richards (1990) discussed the two types of information processed in listening: 'top-down' listening (learners read information about a topic, then listen to a mini-talk on the topic and evaluate whether or not the information was mentioned in listening) and 'bottom-up' listening (learners identify the referents of pronouns used in a conversation). Teachers should be clear on how these processes relate to different kinds of listening.

Rivers and Temperly (1978) divided listening comprehension into 'perception' and 'reception'. 'Perception' is related to discrete cognition such as sound recognition or lexical, morphological and syntactic understanding (listening for language). On the other hand, 'reception' is connected with the entire comprehension of meaning of the message (listening for comprehension). Obviously, the initial weight for listening comprehension is 'reception'; however, 'perception' is needed also. 'Perception' is defined as acquiring the accuracy as to what is being said in an authentic scene.

Vandergrift (1996) illustrated some listening comprehension strategies. In his report, metacognitive strategies are divided into three: 'planning', 'monitoring', and 'evaluating'. For Vandergrift (1996), 'evaluating' is 'Checking the outcomes of one's listening comprehension against an internal measure of completeness and accuracy' (p.208). This might be related with grammar perception. Evaluating skill is needed for grammar skill. Listening comprehension is passive, but the listener should think about what the speaker said. Even if the students could not catch every word, they can predict what was said.

Miyanaga (1999) analyzed the listening comprehension strategies that Japanese university students used at different levels and reported high-level students used metacognitive strategies more than low-level students did.

Peterson (1991) proposed some task-based activities and listening goals for students at different proficiency levels. It follows that bottom-up processing for beginners means to discriminate between intonation contours in a message, for intermediate-level proficiency listeners bottom-up processing means to recognize unstressed function words in the speech stream, and for advanced-level listeners bottom-up processing means to use the lecture's volume and stress to identify important information for note taking. Top-down processing

goals for beginners means to identify the emotional state of the speaker, for intermediate-level proficiency listeners it means to identify registers of speech as formal/informal, polite/impolite, and for advanced-level listeners it means to listen to a statement and specify what further meaning can be inferred from the statement.

Task-activities are both micro and macro. Macro-task is a collection of micro-tasks. Both task-activities are needed to help EFL learners improve their listening comprehension skill.

3.ANALYSIS IN WEAK FORMS FOR JAPANESE

It is said that English rhythm is based on stress, and Japanese rhythm is not. This factor makes it difficult for Japanese to perceive sentences that include contractions, weak forms, elision, and assimilation. Yoshida (1971) analyzed Japanese college students' dictation and mentioned that there were more than double the mistakes in recognizing a function word in comparison with a content word.

Tuzuki (1998) investigated misspelt words that Japanese university students made in English dictation when using a L.L. About 36% of students answered correctly in a question testing 'for instance'. Some students had answers such as 'for a instant', 'for a stance' and 'for the stance'. It follows that some students made mistakes related to r-linking. This factor caused some students to interrupt with schwa [ə].

Asano, Sudo and Kiritani (1994) studied acoustic factors influencing the perception of English articles (a/the) by Japanese learners and demonstrated that:

for "a", lengthening of both the duration of articles and the closure period of the preceding consonants had an effect on the increase in the responses of "the". Conversely, for "the", shortening of the closure period and the vowel duration resulted in the increase in the responses "a" and "no-article" respectively.... (Asano, Sudo and Kiritani : 1994 : 47).

They concluded that Japanese learners of English cannot easily perceive each quality of sound in 'the' and 'a' accurately, and learners tend to depend on the durational features in listening.

4. THE PURPOSE OF THIS STUDY

This study centers around the weak forms which EFL learners answered in listening comprehension in the LL and would like to capitalize on what they can and cannot acquire. Errors can be of more significance than correct responses. The errors are examined with reference to some of the assumptions and expectations that lie behind previous research. Errors then will be investigated to see if there is any difference in listening comprehension level. To see explicitly what weak forms are understood or not, it would be useful to redress EFL learners' weaknesses and improve the EFL learners' listening comprehension skill. Furthermore, to follow up, I would like to present a sample lesson which may be helpful in improving the students' listening comprehension ability.

5. RESEARCH DESIGN

5.1. Subject

The subjects are 54 English female language and literature majors at Tokyo Kasei University. They are sophomore students. The subjects are divided into three proficiency levels: 'high', 'intermediate' and 'low' level on the basis of their scores in the STEP (THE SOCIETY FOR TESTING ENGLISH PROFICIENCY). All of them took the test in the first term in the year 2000.

High-level:

17 students who already passed the second grade of the STEP before and those who passed it this term

Intermediate level:

20 students in total. 10 of the students have not passed the interview test section of the STEP but passed the written section. The other 10 students have not passed either the interview or written part, but on the written section received an A score.

Low-level:

17 students who have not passed the second level of the STEP test, but scored B and C on the written part.

To be continued

References

- Dunkel, P. A. (1991). 'Listening in the native and second/foreign language: Toward an integration of research and practice', *TESOL Quarterly* 25/3:431~457
- Feyton, C.M. (1991). 'The power of listening ability: An overlooked dimension in language acquisition', *Modern Language Journal*, 75/2:173~180
- Field, J. (1998). 'Skills and strategies: towards a new methodology for listening', *ELT Journal*, 52/2:110-118 Oxford University Press
- Garrett, N(1991). Technology in the service of language learning: Trends and issues, *Modern Language Journal*, 75:74~101
- Gary, J.O. (1975). 'Delayed oral practice in initial stages of second language learning' in W.C. Ritchie (ed.), *Second language acquisition research: Issues and implications*, New York: Academic Press
- Green, P.S. and Hecht, K.(1992). 'Implicit and Empirical Grammar: An Empirical Study, *Applied Linguistics*, 13:168-184
- Kawai, Y. (1997) . 'Background Knowledge and Listening Comprehension', 『北海道大学言語文化部紀要』,第32巻 : 215~228
- Long, D.R. (1990). 'What you don't know can't help you: An exploratory study of background knowledge and second language listening comprehension', *SSLA*, 12:65~80
- Lynch, T. (1983). *Study Listening*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press
- Miyanaaga, C. (1999). 'The Listening Comprehension Strategies Used by More Proficient and Less Proficient Learners', 『言語文化学会論集』, 13 : 193~206
- Peterson, P. (1991). 'A synthesis of methods for interactive listening', in M. Celce-Murcia (Ed.) *Teaching English as a second or foreign language* (2nd Ed):106~122, New York: Newbury House
- Richards, J.C. (1983). 'Listening comprehension: Approach, design, procedure', *TESOL Quarterly* 17: 219~239
- Richards, J.C. (1990). *The Language Teaching Matrix*, New York: Cambridge University Press
- Rivers, W. (1984). 'What practitioners say about listening: Research implications for the classroom' in R.A.Gilman

- and L.M.Moody, *Foreign Language Annuals*, 17/4:331-334.
- Rivers, W.M. and Temperly, M.S. (1978). *A practical guide to the teaching of English*, New York: Oxford University Press
- Rost, M. (1990). *Listening in Language Learning*, Harlow: Longman
- Vandergrift, L. (1996). 'The Listening Comprehension Strategies of Core French High School Students', *The Canadian Modern Language Review/La Revue canadienne des langues vivantes*, 52,2:200~223
- Yoshida, K (1971). 'Text dictation and error analysis of Japanese college students', *Bulletin of Fukuoka University of Education*, 20:189~202 浅野恵子, 須藤路子, 桐谷滋 (1994). 「日本人英語学習者の冠詞聴取にかかわる音響的要因」、『音声学会会報』206号、pp47~52
- 都築正善 (1998). 「英語 LL Dictation に於ける Misspelling の誤答分析研究 (1)」、『愛知学院大学教養部紀要』第46巻第2号、pp87~102

Appendix

Table 2: Success rates

	German							English								
	School pupils					University students	All	School pupils								
	beg.	inter.		adv.												
	GYM	HS	RS	GYM	GYM											
N	50		50		50		50		300		50					
Item	R	C	R	C	R	C	R	C	R	C	R	C				
1	38	45	1	23	24	42	35	47	46	50	49	49	193	256	43	50
2	20	41	4	20	7	12	22	45	25	48	41	49	119	215	17	48
3	27	46	7	19	20	49	21	49	26	50	43	48	144	261	32	50
4	12	42	1	10	14	33	25	45	28	49	46	49	126	228	15	49
5	2	32	0	16	8	41	31	50	19	46	39	50	99	235	10	46
6	9	12	0	1	13	11	23	27	19	33	39	40	103	124	17	49
7	28	45	4	18	20	46	36	50	36	48	44	49	168	256	15	48
8	6	45	9	25	14	46	18	50	20	50	40	50	107	266	9	49
9	8	45	0	9	1	30	10	48	7	50	33	50	59	232	8	48
10	12	28	1	8	4	29	16	41	16	45	40	49	89	200	11	44
11	36	46	0	10	37	43	45	50	43	50	46	48	207	247	31	47
12	47	49	15	41	42	47	48	50	43	49	48	49	243	285	42	48
Total	245	476	42	200	204	429	330	552	328	568	508	580	1657	2805	250	576
%	41	79	7	33	34	72	55	92	55	95	85	97	46	78	42	96

Abbreviations: GYM = Gymnasium; RS = Realschule; HS = Hauptschule; N = no of testees; R = rule; C = correction.

(Green and Hecht, 1992:174)

要 旨

不明確なリスニング能力及び明確なリスニング能力(1)

弱形に焦点をあてる

高 木 紀 子

本研究では、日本人大学生のリスニング能力について考察した。先行研究より、日本人英語学習者のリスニングを困難にしている要因として弱形があげられる。様々な弱形に関して、日本人大学生がどの形式を聞取れているか、いないかを明らかにし、また弱形の聞取りについて日本人大学生の能力別に違いがあるかどうかも考察する。様々な弱形の理解度を知ることにより、日本人英語学習者のリスニング能力を伸ばす一因となると考える。