

論文

## An Interactive Approach to Effective Listening Strategies

阿部 ジョスリン

Joslynn Abe

### Abstract

At Hakodate University, students are required to take a variety of English language classes from first year in the International Department of the Faculty of Commerce. There are English writing, reading, speaking and listening classes, among others. These classes focus on individual skills for the most part, however skills are often integrated. Traditionally, reading and writing are taught as two sides of the same coin and speaking and listening are as well. For example, in order to develop and produce good writing skills, students are required to read essays and compositions. It follows that to further speaking skills, the development of good listening abilities is necessary.

The ability to understand spoken language allows students to interact with speakers of English. Nevertheless, developing strong listening skills in English can be a challenge as students are not familiar with many listening strategies to assist with listening. When students' English listening skills are low, they have difficulties performing well in tests, such as the TOEIC test (Test of English for International Communication) and the Japanese Step Test. Speaking activities also become more challenging. In order to increase students' awareness of listening strategies and assist them with improving their listening skills, a variety of activities were presented to a first year University class in the Fall 2019 academic year.

**Key words:** listening skills, listening strategies, linking sounds, grammar, phonetics

## Introduction

Through using various listening strategies which focus on sounds and linking sounds, students attempt to improve the test scores on the TOEIC test listening section. A condensed version of the TOEIC Listening test was administered during the first class. The test consisted of thirty (30) questions in total and all four (4) parts of the test were used. The four parts of the test include photographs, question/answer, short dialogues and short talks. All answers are multiple-choice. During the final class, the same test was administered to decipher whether students could improve their performance on the listening portion of the test. A dictation exercise was also part of the final test. The dictation included listening strategies studied and practiced in class. (See Appendix 4)

Twenty-three (23) first year university students were the subject of a class which focused on English Listening skills during the second semester from September 2019 until January 2020. There were fifteen (15) classes in total and attendance for classes averaged 90%.

Through a combination of focused listening training and main idea, detail and vocabulary listening activities, students had the opportunity to learn about why listening to native English is difficult and how to improve listening ability.

Traditional tests and classes utilize a passive approach to listening, where a teacher reads a text or plays a CD and students are asked to answer any number of questions regarding what they heard. In class, students are asked to fill in blanks, complete a cloze passage or take dictation. The students are tested mainly on main ideas, details and vocabulary. For the most part, tests are multiple choice with one correct answer of four possibilities. Such

testing practices are used in the TOEIC (Test of English for International Communication) test, the Japanese Step test and many university entrance tests. Since these test results are often used in schools and workplaces in Japan, students are familiar with the style of testing. Students consider listening as a test to check comprehension, not as a means to communicate understanding.

There are several different types of listening which people do in their native language every day. Such types include:

*Listening for a main idea (watching the daily news)*

*Listening for detail (listening for a sports score)*

*Listening for sequence (listening to instructions or orders)*

*Listening for specific vocabulary (listening to a song)*

*Listening for cultural interest (attending a cultural event)*

*Listening for attitude or opinion (watching movies)*

*Listening for functional language (responding to requests)*

*Listening for inference (listening to what speakers are implying)*

Because of such variety in listening purposes, it is important to design listening tasks that ask students to adopt flexible listening strategies. It is also important for students to recognize that for most listening in the real world, they are active participants and are required to take part in the interaction. This is known as reciprocal listening. When students are only listening and not required to join the communication, it is called non-reciprocal listening. In real life, non-reciprocal listening is rare, yet it is the normal role for the student in the listening classroom. This leads to passive attitudes to listening and little enthusiasm for studying it.

Some tests of English language, such as the TOEFL (Test of English as a

Foreign Language) utilize an integrated approach to listening. Students are asked to listen to a lecture and then write or speak about what they have heard. Other questions ask students to read a passage, then listen to people discussing the reading passage, then write about the reading and listening passages. This kind of integrated approach more closely aligns with real life situations.

With a more integrated design in mind, I used a combination of real life listening (TEDTalks) and traditional CDs, as well as conducting the class completely in English. Each class was 90 minutes and there were 15 classes in the semester.

## Listening Strategies

### Linking Sounds

The first strategy was for students to notice sounds which are changed when linked together. This is known as assimilation in phonetics. Many of the example sentences involved the sound [j] as in you/your/use/year. Students listened to isolated samples such as ‘did you/needs you/meet you/all your/with you/has your’, then assimilation in sentences, such as ‘Did you go to Tokyo this year?/He meets you every Monday./Don’t use my car today.’ Next, the students took dictation of sentences with blanks and compared their answers with others. Finally, they created their own sentences in pairs or small groups and presented them to the class. (See Appendix 1)

The second strategy was to practice listening to words connected to prepositions (in/on/of/at/about etc.). Most of the prepositions began with a vowel and therefore the sound of the two words was linked so as to sound like a single word. Examples included: *Keep in touch./ Kind of/ good*

*at/ how about/ go away/ go on a trip/ etc.* As in previous strategies, the students began with listening to the sets, then taking dictation and finally creating their own sentences using prepositions. (See Appendix 1)

A third linking sound set involved vowel connections. Some of the examples overlapped with the prepositions above and others concerned vowel plus vowel connections. Some examples were: *them all/ for example/ do it/ go away/ go on/ etc.* As in previous strategies, the students listened, took dictation and created their original sentences for presentation. (See Appendix 1)

Other linking sounds were discussed as well including:

*Liaison (nice school, with them)*

*Consonant + consonant (write down, big day)*

*Elision (stop playing, from many)*

### Weak Forms

Another listening task involved students becoming familiar with forms in English which are not stressed. These are known as weak sounds and are difficult to hear in naturally spoken English. Such words include:

***pronouns*** (*my/his/their/our/etc.*)

***be verb*** (*am/is/are/were/been/being/etc.*)

***auxiliary verbs*** (*can/will/should/may/must/do/etc.*)

***prepositions*** (*in/on/under/at/for/from/etc.*)

***articles and demonstratives*** (*a/an/the/some/any/this/those/etc.*)

Students were asked to listen to a cloze passage for the weak forms and then create their own original sentences. When reading their sentences, they were encouraged to not stress the weak form, as would be heard in naturally

spoken English. (See Appendix 2)

### Grammar

In addition to the above strategies involving focusing on sounds in sentences, I wanted to students to become aware of the importance of their grammar knowledge in listening to naturally spoken English. Oftentimes, students rely almost completely on their ability to listen, without considering the facts that much of spoken English is linked and many sounds are so weak that they become inaudible, even to native speakers. Therefore, knowledge of grammar is vital to a complete understanding of spoken English. (See Appendix 3)

Key grammar points that were discussed included:

**Negatives** (*I didn't go... versus I went...*)

**-ing** (*going versus go in*)

*plus other grammatical structures*

When listening to spoken English, it is important for students to rely on their existing knowledge of correct grammar to assist with comprehension. I encouraged the students to use their hearing ability for 80% and their grammar knowledge for the additional 20%.

Through such activities, students could realize that listening is a complex skill that is not at all passive. It requires concentration and processing of listening material. It requires understanding of vocabulary, grammar, in addition to knowledge of naturally spoken style.

### Real Life Listening

Students watched two TEDTalks to experience listening to natural English with the additional help of visuals, such as slides and photos. The first

TEDTalk was entitled Your Body Language Shapes Who You Are by Amy Cuddy (available at TED.com) and the second TEDTalk was How to Avoid Death by Powerpoint by David JP Phillips (available at TEDx Talks).

Both of the talks were divided into three parts due to the length of the speeches (each is approximately 20 minutes). The students were asked to complete exercises and activities after each listening and the activities became increasingly demanding. The students were encouraged to watch the TEDTalks as many times as they wished outside of class and they could also read the transcript in English. Subtitles in English were displayed while watching the TEDTalks and students could also access the subtitles in Japanese if they wanted to check their comprehension.

Exercises included summarizing one part of the talk using their own words. Other activities included taking notes after the talk and then discussing the contents of the talk in pairs or small groups. After listening to all 3 parts of the talks, students were asked to write a complete summary of the TEDTalks including their opinion of the contents.

For a winter vacation assignment, students were asked to watch an additional TEDTalk and write a summary of the talk including their opinion of the contents. The students could choose any TEDTalk from the TED library and they informed me which talk they would watch during the final class before winter vacation. (Of the 23 students in the class, 21 of the students completed their assignment by the first day after vacation.)

## Results

The purpose of this case study was to determine if students' knowledge of listening strategies, such as linking sounds, weak sounds and grammar would

improve their ability to understand naturally spoken English. In addition, by watching real life TEDTalks, students would have the opportunity to evaluate their own strengths and weaknesses in terms of listening.

In the final test, 18 of the 22 students received a higher score on the same condensed version of the TOEIC test administered in the first class (one student was absent for the final test.) The dictation exercise also was more successful in the final class.

### **Conclusion**

This listening class was only one of the English classes that students took during the Fall 2019 semester. There are other factors, such as motivation, amount of time spent on homework and other English work which could have affected the higher test scores. It is important to note that knowledge of strategies can help students become more aware of spoken English and they can use this knowledge to help them succeed further in their English studies.



## References

Funada, Shukei, Jessie Wilson (2016). *Listening Trainer for English Communication*. Nan'un-Do Publishing Co., Ltd. Tokyo, Japan.

Gattengno, Caleb (1976). *The Common Sense of Teaching Foreign Languages*. Educational Solutions Inc., New York, U.S.A.

Nunan, David (1999). *Second Language Teaching & Learning*. Heinle & Heinle Publishers, Boston, U.S.A., 199 – 224.

Sugino Kentaro, Lauer Joseph (2016), *English Listening and Speaking Basics for the New TOEIC-style Listening Test*. Asahi Press, Japan.

## Appendix 1

## Linking sounds

### Words connected to 'you'/'your'/'use'/'using'

Did you ...

Would you ...

Mind your own business.

Needs you...

As you know...

Has your teacher...

Nice to meet you.

Last year...

### Words connected to prepositions (in/on/of/at/about, etc.)

Keep in touch.

Go on a trip...

Kind of...

Good at...

How about a...

Go away...

### Vowel connections

Good afternoon

All I know

Them all

For example

Do it

Go away

Go on

Could I

In an hour

Take off

Not at all

Stop it!

Good idea!

### Same/similar ending sound link

[p] + [p] = [p]

Please stop playing baseball here.

[b] + [b] = [b]

She joined the club because she liked the coach.

[t] + [t] = [t]

In my mind, Jim is the best teacher.

[d] + [d] = [d]

She was wearing a red dress.

[k] + [k] = [k]

Take care of yourself.

[g] + [g] = [g]

There's a big glass of water on the table.

### Similar sounds

[m] + [m] = [m]

Students are from many countries.

[n] + [n] = [n]

We are going to stay in Spain nine nights.

[I] + [I] = [I]

She will lend you money.

...

It's going to be a tough fight.

She drove very fast to get to the party on time.

This is a nice school.

Amy loves zebras.

I wish she would come tonight.

We received both things.

I will go with them.

## Let's try it out!

1. \_\_\_\_\_ tell me the way to the airport?
2. I'll never \_\_\_\_\_ kindness.
3. He will be 25 years old \_\_\_\_\_.
4. \_\_\_\_\_ tell us a little bit \_\_\_\_\_?
5. I'm \_\_\_\_\_ like it!
6. Sorry, but I'm \_\_\_\_\_ busy today.
7. It takes \_\_\_\_\_ ten minutes to get there.
8. How \_\_\_\_\_ cup of coffee?

9. Please \_\_\_\_\_ right away!

10. \_\_\_\_\_ have another  
cookie, please?



Appendix 2

## Weak Forms

I **bought** a **car** on **Tuesday**.

### Pronouns

my/his/them/their/our/us etc.

### Be verb

is/am/are/was/were/been/being

### Auxiliary verbs

can/should/will/have/do/may/might/must etc.

### Prepositions

in/on/under/at/for/from/by etc.

## Articles and Demonstratives

a/an/the/some/this/any/those etc.

## Let's try it out!

1. Where's \_\_\_\_\_ car?
2. My father wanted \_\_\_\_\_ to become a doctor.
3. Will you \_\_\_\_\_ here long?
4. We've \_\_\_\_\_ playing soccer for 4 hours.
5. What \_\_\_\_\_ that mean?
6. Where \_\_\_\_\_ you want to go today?
7. Where are you \_\_\_\_\_?
8. It's a complete waste \_\_\_\_\_ time.
9. No, I don't have \_\_\_\_\_ questions.
10. \_\_\_\_\_ used to be a big park here.

## Appendix 3

# Grammar

## Negatives

I didn't go...

versus

I went...

I haven't seen...

versus

I saw...

He wasn't there...

versus

He was there...

We can't go there...

versus

We can go there...

## ~ing

Coming sounds like come inGoing sounds like go inPlaying sounds like play in

## Final sounds are often not released

Watch out!

That's too bad!

This is my bag.

Get up!

## Let's try it out!

1. I lost \_\_\_\_\_ pen.
2. Is that \_\_\_\_\_ ?
3. Mike doesn't really like \_\_\_\_\_.
4. How is \_\_\_\_\_ to get to Tokyo?
5. \_\_\_\_\_ worst nightmare came true.
6. The Prime Minister \_\_\_\_\_ here.
7. I think Joslynne \_\_\_\_\_ at work last night.
8. The company has \_\_\_\_\_ losing a lot of money.
9. How \_\_\_\_\_ you know?
10. Japan's economy \_\_\_\_\_ been improving.

11. \_\_\_\_\_ you be here at noon tomorrow?
12. The president \_\_\_\_\_ give an important speech.
13. It \_\_\_\_\_ have snowed last night.
14. \_\_\_\_\_ shall we \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_?
15. You \_\_\_\_\_ have passed the test if you'  
d \_\_\_\_\_.
16. People \_\_\_\_\_ vote to cut government waste.
17. The price of oil is \_\_\_\_\_ an all-time high.
18. Why \_\_\_\_\_ you steal the money \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_?
19. I ran \_\_\_\_\_ I could.
20. \_\_\_\_\_ she is!

## Appendix 4

**Listening I Dictation**

1. John isn't going shopping because he's too tired.
2. I was absent last class because I was sick.
3. Emi didn't start learning English until she was 30.
4. I was thirsty so I went to a coffee shop.
5. This isn't an option, sorry.
6. I'm thinking about popular music.
7. The blue cars are in the garage being painted.
8. She didn't study science last night.
9. I couldn't go back home because I didn't have enough money.
10. You shouldn't park your car there.