

## Listening Comprehension and Listening Strategies in Interactive Settings

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### Abstract

The present study reports on a part of a doctoral work (Tokeshi, 2003) conducted in Australia and Japan. The study investigated listening comprehension and listening strategies of Japanese junior high school students in interactive settings where interaction between the interlocutors took place. Nineteen Japanese junior high school students and a native speaker of English participated in the present study. Six participants out of nineteen were selected as case studies according to English proficiency and gender. Three types of interactive listening tasks were used. Video-taped task interaction observation and audio-recorded stimulated recall were the main data collection methods. The results showed idiosyncratic listening comprehension processes for individual listeners according to English proficiency, task type, and psychological factors. The study also identified 25 types of listening strategies used by the junior high school students.

### 要 約

本論文はオーストラリアと日本で実施された博士論文 (Tokeshi, 2003) の一部を報告する。本研究は対話者の間にインタラクションが発生した相互交流的な状況 (interactive settings) での日本人中学生の聴解プロセスと聴解方略を調査することを目的とした。19名の日本人中学生と1名の英語母語話者が研究に参加した。19名から6名が英語能力と性別により事例研究として選ばれた。3種類の双方向性のリスニング・タスクが用いられた。ビデオ録画されたタスクの観察と録音された stimulated recall が主要なデータ収集方法であった。調査結果は英語能力とタスクの種類、心理的要素などにより生徒独特の聴解プロセスを示した。また、調査は中学生によって用いられた25種類のリスニング方略を明らかにした。

### 1. Introduction

Due to globalization, there is a growing awareness of the importance of communicative ability in English in the fields of education, politics, and economics in Japan. The Ministry of Education (2002) proposed an action plan for "producing Japanese who can use English" to prompt Japanese learners to gain practical communicative competence in English.

Mutually intelligible communication rarely takes places when listeners do not understand what is said (Brindley, 1998). Rivers (1968) argues that listening

takes up about 40 % of the time spent in communication in real life. Thus listening plays a vital role in oral communication. However, listening is something that has been often taken for granted in communication (Turner, 1995). Very few researchers actually studied the conversation between native and non-native speakers from the point of view of listeners. Few studies have been conducted to examine listening while communicating in English.

The present study investigated the listening comprehension of Japanese junior high school stu-

dents in interactive settings. A number of empirical studies have attempted to investigate listening comprehension of Japanese advanced-level learners of English (e.g., Buck, 1990, 1991, 1994; Yoshida, 1983, 1999). However the listening comprehension of basic-level learners in Japan has received little attention from applied linguists. Therefore, this study will help to develop a listening comprehension model of Japanese basic-level learners of English.

The identification of listening strategies contributes to an understanding of how listeners actively attempt to comprehend spoken language. Second language (hereafter, L2) listening is an active process of inference and hypothesis testing (Buck, 1995, 2001). Current research indicates that listeners actively employ a variety of listening strategies to understand and interpret what is said. However, studies have not attempted to identify listening strategies in interactive settings with the exception of a few studies such as those by Rost and Ross (1991) and Vandergrift (1997b). The present study examined interactive listening strategies where the listeners were allowed to ask questions and receive feedback from the speaker. Interactive listening strategies are different from transactional listening strategies where listeners are not allowed to interrupt the speaker and passively continue to listen to what is said (often by using tapes).

This paper reviews literature related to interactive listening and listening strategies. This is followed by an explanation of research methodology for the present case study, an analysis of results, conclusion and implications.

## 2. Literature Review

L2 listening has been considered from different angles depending on theoretical orientation. Structuralists (e.g., Rivers, 1968) consider that language learning proceeds linearly. They maintain that language learning starts with aural/oral skills (listening and speaking) and moves later to those of the written medium (reading and writing). In opposition to the structuralists, Oller (1979, p. 212) claims that "the whole is greater than the sum of its parts". This view underpins communicative methodologies (e.g., Johnson & Morrow, 1981). Others (Krashen, 1980, 1982, 1985; Long, 1981, 1983b, 1985; Swain, 1985) stress the key role that listening as comprehensible input

plays in L2 learners acquiring a target language. More recently, investigation of this claim has turned to the recognition of output (e.g., Swain, 1985, 2000) and social interaction (e.g., Pica, Young, & Doughty, 1987; Ellis et al., 1994).

There are divergent views about listening processes, rooted in various theoretical assumptions. Firstly, the listening process is viewed as interactive processes taking place simultaneously between two levels (bottom-up and top-down processing) (Carroll, 1972; Faerch & Kasper, 1986; Hughes, 1989; Buck, 1990, 1991; Rost, 1990; Weir, 1993; Brindley, 1998). Secondly, listening is viewed as a sequential process, as in information processing often associated with short-term memory, working memory, and long-term memory (Clark & Clark, 1977; Anderson, 1985; Turner, 1995). Thirdly, the listening process is considered to take place simultaneously at different levels as in parallel distributed processing (Rumelhart, Hinton, & McClelland, 1987).

Another view is that listening is inference-based processing (Rost, 1990). The listeners' inference contributes to listening comprehension, although it may at times draw on false interpretation. Advanced listeners are capable of predicting the missing part, when they cannot hear the whole utterance. Oller (1979) calls this ability 'expectancy grammar'. Along with expectancy grammar, redundancy in English contributes to comprehension of a sentence which contains noise distraction and unknown words. Rivers (1968, p. 138) claims that about 50% of English contains redundant information.

The effect of background knowledge on comprehension is also accounted for by schemata, scripts, and frames. A schema (Rumelhart & Ortony, 1977) refers to background knowledge or prior knowledge. Researchers (e.g., Chiang & Dunkel, 1992) claim that background knowledge or schemata for what is spoken is crucial for comprehension. A script is "a structure that describes an appropriate sequence of events in a particular context" (Schank & Abelson, 1977, p. 422). Similar to the argument for schemata, scripts are considered to contribute to listening comprehension.

Next, the effect of interaction on listening is discussed since the present study focuses on listening comprehension in interactive settings.

The effects of modified input and modified

Table 1: Examples of speech modifications in NS-NNS conversations  
Source: Pica et al. (1987) p.740

NS	NNS
And right on the roof of the truck, place the duck. The duck. Duck.	I to take it? Dog? (a) Duck
It's yellow and it's a small animal. It has two feet.	I put where it? (b)
You take the duck and put it on top of the truck. Do you see the duck? (c)	Duck? (a)
Yeah. Quack, quack, quack. That one. That one that makes that sound.	Ah yes. I see in the-in the head of him Put where? (b)
OK. See? (c)	Truck? (a)
OK. Put him on top of the truck. The bus. Where the boy is.	Ah yes.

(a) Confirmation checks: Moves by which one speaker seeks confirmation of the other's preceding utterance through repetition, with rising intonation, of what was perceived to be all or part of the preceding utterance.

(b) Clarification requests: Moves by which one speaker seeks assistance in understanding the other speaker's preceding utterance through questions (including wh-, polar, disjunctive, uninverted with rising intonation, or tag), statements such as I don't understand, or imperatives such as Please repeat.

(c) Comprehension checks: Moves by which one speaker attempts to determine whether the other speaker has understood a preceding message.

interaction or negotiation of meaning on L2 listening comprehension have been one of the major interests for second language acquisition (hereafter, SLA) research over the past twenty years.

Three types of simplified input were found to assist comprehension of L2 learners. L2 research into modified input and interaction was at the outset influenced by research into first language acquisition. Researchers (e.g., Snow & Ferguson, 1977) investigated the language spoken by mothers or caretakers to their children, and this linguistically adjusted language was referred to as 'caretaker speech'. Moreover, 'foreigner talk' (Hatch, 1983) addressed to non-native speakers by native speakers identified simplified speech such as omission, expansion, and replacement or rearrangement. The simplified talk, 'teacher talk', used by L2 classroom teachers which has shorter, syntactically simplified speech as in foreigner talk and caretaker speech was also found to assist comprehension of L2 learners (Chaudron, 1988).

Others (e.g., Long, 1983a) argue that it is speech modifications which are more important for comprehension of input. Long (cf. *ibid*) recognized significant differences between the talk of NS-NS and that of NS-NNS with respect to language management and functions performed, which were different from caretaker speech or foreigner talk. In order to solve communication problems, NS-NNS pairs were likely to use speech modifications such as confirmation checks,

comprehension checks, clarification requests, and repetitions (cf. Table 1). Accordingly, Long (1985) proposed the Interaction Hypothesis as follows:

Step 1: Interactional adjustments (speech modifications) promote comprehension.

Step 2: Comprehensible input promotes acquisition.

Step 3: Thus, it is deduced that interactional adjustments facilitate acquisition.

Studies by Ellis et al. (1994), Loschky (1994), and Gass and Varonis (1994) supported Long's first step that interaction promotes comprehension. However, the interrelationship of input, interaction, and acquisition needs to be discussed with caution. Swain (2000) claims that "Virtually no research has demonstrated the greater comprehensibility achieved through negotiation" (p. 98).

The discussion above mainly concerns the role of the speaker in the interaction. Next the role of the listener in oral communication will be discussed as the present study investigated listening comprehension in interactive settings. Listeners are responsible for comprehension and confirmation checks, clarification requests (Lynch, 1995), queries (Rost & Ross, 1991) in order for the listeners and speakers collaboratively to maintain the conversation. Listeners give backchannelling cues verbally, such as "Oh, I see", and "Really?", or non-verbal signals such as head nods, furrowed brow, narrowed eyes (Rost, 1994) in order to

indicate that they are following the speaker. "Successful conversation requires active cooperation on the part of listeners and successful listening involves far more than language processing" (Buck, 1995, p. 116). Furthermore in contrast to the view that speech modifications (Long, 1983b) affect comprehension, listeners' feedback may direct how speakers react to listeners since speaking and listening are interwoven in a conversation. Pica et al's study (1987) suggested that 50% of NS's checks and confirmations appeared to be initiated by NNS's moves. Rost (1994) also argues that listeners' moves can 'reframe' the content of a conversation or shift the topic of a conversation. SLA research has mainly been concerned with how the speaker's modifications affect listening comprehension. Investigation into how listeners can alter the conversation and direct the speaker's reaction can shed light on the understanding of interactive listening.

Lastly, listening strategies research is discussed as it is one of the focuses in the present study.

Listening strategies research has for the most part based its theoretical framework on research of learning strategies and communication strategies. The present study is fairly relevant to the studies by O'Malley and Chamot (1990) and Oxford (1990). O'Malley and Chamot (1990) consolidated their previous findings (O'Malley et al., 1985; Chamot & Kupper, 1989) and divided strategies into metacognitive, cognitive, and social/affective strategies. According to their classification scheme, metacognitive strategies include seven strategies; cognitive strategies include eleven strategies; and four strategies constitute social/affective strategies. Metacognitive strategies are conducive to the planning and monitoring progress, or reviewing accomplishment and future learning directions. Cognitive strategies are used during the execution of a task to facilitate comprehension or production. The social/affective strategies are not classified as exhaustively as Oxford's category.

The receptive strategies (e.g., Lynch, 1995) of communication strategies have much in common with the features of interactive listening. For this reason, interactive listening has been greatly influenced by communication strategies research (e.g., Vandergrift, 1997b). However, receptive strategies have received little attention. Receptive strategies (listening strategies) are "the Cinderella of communication strategies"

(Vandergrift, 1997b, p. 494), whereas the productive strategies of communication strategies have received considerable research attention (e.g., Tarone, 1981; Faerch & Kasper, 1986). Research into communication strategies has been based on two different major perspectives: a psycholinguistic perspective and an interactional perspective. The psycholinguistic perspective (Faerch & Kasper, 1986) includes changing the original communicative goal (reduction strategy) and maintaining the original goal by developing an alternative plan (achievement strategy) when communication problems take place. The interactional perspective (Tarone, 1981) considers communication strategies as joint work between an L2 learner and his/her interlocutor in order to bridge the gap between the linguistic knowledge of the two in real communication situations, whether or not there is a communication problem.

Identification of listening strategies has been more often made in transactional settings than in interactive settings. The studies of Vandergrift (1996, 1997a) are reviewed since these two studies are relevant to the present study. Vandergrift's study (1996) shows that the strategies used by high school Core French students are related to three broad categories: metacognitive, cognitive, and social/affective strategies. Of the total number of strategies reported by each student, the largest percentage was cognitive strategies. Following this study, Vandergrift (1997a) further investigated his previous listening strategy categories. The results show that metacognitive strategy use increases according to proficiency level. Comprehension monitoring appears to be reported most often in metacognitive strategies. He also reports that metacognitive strategies such as selective attention and comprehension monitoring, as well as cognitive strategies such as elaboration and inferencing, are reported more frequently and combined more effectively by successful listeners.

Listening strategies in interactive settings have received little attention. Only three empirical studies (Rost & Ross, 1991; Lynch, 1995; Vandergrift, 1997b) which investigated listening strategies in interactive settings have been recognized in SLA literature. Rost and Ross (1991) investigated Japanese learners of English. The study identified eight types of interactive listening strategies. They explain that low-level learners are forced to allot most of their attention to

specific word meaning and parsing the input into basic constituent structure. Furthermore, low-level learners with anxiety or in stressful settings selected low risk strategies. These results are very relevant to the present study as the study deals with basic-level Japanese learners of English. This study also suggests that the types of listening strategies used by listeners vary according to proficiency level.

Vandergrift (1997b) examined listening strategies of learners of French by using the ACTFL (American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages) Oral Interview Test. Vandergrift modified strategies classification based on the typology developed by Rost and Ross (1991). Four local reprise questions (lexical reprise, fragmental reprise, and positional reprise) were categorized into one category called 'specific reprise'. 'Continuous signals' identified in the form of non-verbal cues were referred to as 'backchannelling cues' and were coded separately, either as 'uptakes' or 'faking'. 'Global reprise' and 'hypothesis testing' were coded both in English (native language) and in French (L2). Moreover, 'kinesics', which was used to indicate non-comprehension, was also added to the coding list. Some strategies identified in Vandergrift (1997b) are used in the category of the present study. Lynch's study (1995) basically followed the typology of Rost and Ross (1991), but is not so exhaustive as the other two studies.

According to the studies just reviewed, what is crucial about strategy use is that effective strategies are contingent on L2 proficiency, the classification scheme, research methods, and other variables.

### 3. Methodology

The present study draws on analyses of qualitative research methods such as stimulated recall (Nunan, 1992; Gass & Mackey, 2000), video-recorded listening task interaction observation, follow-up interviews, and questionnaires. The research design and methods are discussed below.

Case studies were selected to arrive at in-depth understanding of listening comprehension and strategies in interactive settings and to interpret multiple events embedded in a particular group of students in Japan. Examined in this study were 'multiple case studies' (Miles & Huberman, 1994; Merriam, 1998) of junior high school students from a single classroom. In this study six participants were selected as multiple

case studies.

Three types of listening tasks were used in the present study. The listening tasks were designed by the researcher. Two difficulties in designing listening tasks in interactive settings were considered. Firstly, speakers and listeners generally exchange respective roles in normal conversation (Underwood, 1989). It was assumed that this would make it difficult for the researcher to examine listeners exclusively. Secondly, the topic of conversation is likely to change according to the interlocutors involved. Therefore, it was assumed that the loosely controlled listening text would increase construct validity of the data gathered as the focus was on the comprehension processes and strategies of listeners. Furthermore, the tasks were designed to reveal the listener's understanding or non-understanding without necessarily making verbal responses.

Felt-made story making sets ("At the Beach" for Task A and "Blue's Clues" for Task B, produced by Learning Curve Incorporation, FELTKIDS series) were selected as the listening materials. Task A and Task B were both 'Story Completion Tasks' in which the participants completed the stories described by the native speaker by selecting or moving the objects being referred to. Task A (Appendix 1) was a story about a teenage boy/girl on the beach. After placing the sun, a flying bird, a coke bottle, a walking bird, and sunglasses on the felt board, the participants were asked whether he/she preferred beach volleyball or Frisbee. Then the participants were asked to choose the float. Finally, the native speaker asked the participants how the problem caused by a dog would be solved. Task B was a story about events in a house (Appendix 2). After placing a framed picture of a red sofa, a flying bird, a dog, and a baby on the felt board, the boy (girl) shook hands with the baby. Then the participants were asked whether he/she wanted to listen to the radio or play with the baby. Next, after answering the phone, participants were asked to receive a letter.

Through ongoing analysis of transcribed data and observation of interactive listening tasks, Task A and Task B did not appear to reveal much difference in performance between the low-level students and the high-level students. Therefore, Task C was designed (Appendix 3) as a supplement. It was designed to understand what was said about the shopping

appointment made between the native speaker and the students. The native speaker gave the students information associated with shopping, e.g., meeting date, time, place, and shopping place. The six selected students took notes on what was said by the native speaker. The context of what was spoken about in Task C was less concrete and took place in the future tense, while the contexts of Task A and Task B were immediate (here) and in the present tense (now).

The target group of the present study was ninth grade junior high school students in Japan. The junior high school selected as the site of the multiple case studies was Arume Junior High School in Higashi Village in Okinawa, the southernmost prefecture in Japan. The ninth grade class had 19 students (11 boys and 8 girls). An additional participant was a native speaker of English, one of the Assistant Language Teachers (hereafter, ALT) who were assigned to municipal or village boards of education throughout the country. The native speaker was a male Chinese Canadian who had been teaching English as an ALT at three schools in Higashi Village for five months since September of 2001. Arume Junior High School was selected because the students had relatively balanced language proficiency. At the time of the study, Arume Junior High School had 37 students in total. Large schools were not selected as teachers at these schools had 22 to 24 teaching hours of classes in a week so that there was a strong concern that the teachers could not spare time to participate in this study. On the other hand, the teachers at Arume school had only 12 to 14 hours of class time per week.

Out of the population (N=19), six participants were selected for case studies according to language proficiency and gender by examining the results of the STEP (Society of Testing for English Proficiency) 4th grade listening test, and by observing listening task performance. Kota (low level, male), Miki (low level, female), Jun (intermediate level, male), Eri (intermediate level, female), Yuji (high level, male), and Risa (high level, female) were the sample cases. Pseudonyms were used to describe the participants so as to preserve anonymity.

Research instruments in the present study included stimulated recall, listening tasks, the STEP listening test (20 questions), two types of semi-structured questionnaires, and follow-up interviews. The Type 1 questionnaire was provided to the

participants before the listening tasks were conducted. The questionnaire asked the participants questions as to difficulties with listening and their attitudes toward oral communication with an ALT. The Type 2 questionnaire was provided after the listening tasks were conducted. It asked the participants about task performance. Follow-up interviews were conducted in order to probe students' problems and the degree of comprehension, which the questionnaires could not identify.

Audio-recorded stimulated recall and video-taped listening task interaction were the main sources of data collection. The performance of listening tasks was video-recorded by using a Panasonic NV-C7. A video tape recorder was used by the researcher by remote control. Stimulated recall is a verbal report of task performance by the participants. The stimulated recall was conducted and also audio-recorded (Sony M-830). It took about twenty minutes for the students to finish their verbal reports. The participants were allowed to report on the task in their native language. While watching the TV screen which showed the listening tasks, the participants were asked to explain what they understood and how they interpreted the listening tasks.

Pilot studies were conducted prior to the main study. Six students in Australia participated in the first pilot study which aimed to examine the tasks to be used in the main study. Five students in Japan participated in the second pilot study which was intended to examine whether the listening tasks were suitable for Japanese learners of English.

There were four stages of data collection. In the first stage, participants took the STEP listening test to examine their listening ability and were provided the Type 1 questionnaire. In the second stage, listening tasks and stimulated recall were conducted during a 45-minute recess and after school. It took about 30 to 40 minutes for each participant to do Task A or Task B. The 19 participants did both Task A and Task B. The participants and the native speaker sat face to face. The participants attempted to complete the story explained by the native speaker. The task interaction was video-taped and stimulated recall was audio-recorded as explained above. In the third stage, Task C was conducted since Task A and Task B did not appear to reveal much difference in performance depending on English level. In the fourth stage, the

Type 2 questionnaire was provided to the students, and interviews followed.

Data collection and analysis sometimes proceeded at the same time. There were five stages of data analysis. Firstly, audio-recorded stimulated recall and video-taped task interaction were transcribed by word processor. Secondly, all the data of case study participants were coded to "note recurring patterns" (Miles & Huberman, 1994, p. 246) emerging from the data. Coding of the data was undertaken according to listening strategies, comprehension processes, and difficulties with listening. Thirdly, the coded data were analyzed to generate categories of listening strategies. Listening strategies were categorized on the basis of established categories, or new categories were added where necessary. Fourthly, at the stage of writing up the analysis, the present study attempted to analyze the data holistically in order to seek the emerging key themes. Lastly, specific key themes were thoroughly examined.

#### 4. Results and analysis

This section is divided into two parts: listening comprehension processes and listening strategies. The analysis starts with listening comprehension processes.

The data gathered from six case study participants were used to examine listening comprehension processes of three listening tasks in interactive settings. The analysis of the results is subsequently summarized. Firstly, the data show that the participants were more likely to pay selective attention to an individual known word(s) and to combine them in a way that made sense to the participants. Most of the participants did not have sufficient structural knowledge to process whole sentences. Therefore, they tended to interpret the acoustic input at the word or phrase level. That is, generally the participants relied on bottom-up processing by attending to individual known words (as shown in Table 3 below, the selective attention strategy was observed not only throughout Task C, but also throughout Task A and Task B. In addition, Table 3 shows that all six participants used the specific reprise strategy with which they focused on specific information). For example, Eri (intermediate level, female) paid selective attention to known words, one after another, and attempted to combine these words to make a reasonable interpretation (Example 1).

Example 1 (Observation transcript, N: Native Speaker; Eri's reprise is English)

034 NS: When you are swimming, a dog comes onto the beach.

035 Eri: Dog. (*Eri places the dog on the beach.*)

036 NS: And he takes your bag.

037 Eri: Bag. (*Eri moves the bag beside the dog.*)

038 NS: He takes your bag. He runs away with your bag.

039 Eri: Runs...run away?

040 NS: He runs away with your bag.

041 Eri: (*Eri shakes her head.*) No.

042 NS: The dog takes your bag in its mouth. (N makes a gesture of "biting the bag".)

043 Eri: Mouth?

Secondly, the data indicate that interpretation of the same utterances varied from one participant to another. Although the participants heard the same text, their interpretation varied depending on their personal background knowledge. In other words, most of the participants relied on top-down processing for comprehension by using their background knowledge (as shown in Table 3 below; the students except Yuji used inferencing strategies [4a, 4b, 4c, and 4d] frequently). For example, *Jun* (intermediate level, male) experienced great difficulty in sub-task 5, while other participants did not have much difficulty with this sub-task. Immediately after the NS said, "You see a bird walking in the sand", *Jun* activated his mental image and placed the boy "You" upside-down in a way that made sense to him. Stimulated recall indicates that *Jun* felt, on the basis of his world knowledge, it was strange to see a walking bird and attempted to make a reasonable interpretation in a way which made sense to him (Example 2).

Example 2 (Stimulated recall transcript, R: researcher)

012 Jun: 最初birdが歩いていると思ったけど、おかしいと思って、見ているのかと思った。

(First I thought the bird was walking, but I felt this was strange. So I thought I was looking at [the bird].)

014 Jun: 逆さまにしたら(飛んでいる鳥が)見えると思って。(If I was upside down, I wondered whether I could see the flying bird.)

015 R: walkingとlookingを勘違いしたの。(You took

walking for looking.)

016 Jun: そうです。(That's right.)

Thirdly, the data show that listening processing was contingent on the English proficiency of the participants. High-level students (*Yuji*, *Risa*) for the most part automatically processed the acoustic input by understanding the literal meaning of the utterances. Automatic listening processing was unavailable to the listener's consciousness or the researcher's observation as the speed of comprehension was too fast for the listeners to report to the researcher when they understood completely what was said. However, for most of the participants in the present study, listening comprehension included controlled processing. That is, listening was consciously processed with some degree of linguistic or non-linguistic support from the speaker, the context or the listener's strategies. Controlled processing was accessible to the participant's report and the researcher's observation.

Fourthly, interactive features of listening varied according to task type. The observed data indicate that there was an obvious difference in frequency of speaker's feedback and listener's responses between Task A (or B) and Task C (Task A and Task B being the same type). For example, with *Kota*, a large number of speaker's feedback (N=55) and listener's responses (N=12) were identifiable in Task B while, in Task C, there was a distinct decline in frequency of speaker's feedback (N=3) and listener's responses (N=2). Other students yielded similar results. This result is also obvious from a comparison of the means for speaker's feedback and listener's responses between Task A (B) and Task C. Mean speaker's feedback (N=26) and mean listener's responses (N=14.3) for Task A or B are considerably greater than their counterparts in Task C (mean speaker's feedback: N=5.3; mean listener's responses: N=10.8).

Fifthly, the data suggest that affective factors influenced listening comprehension. Nervousness (*Kota*, *Risa*) distracted concentration on listening and then led to poor performance or misunderstanding of the speaker. On the other hand, cautiousness (*Risa*, *Miki*) did not lead to critical misunderstanding. Further, the active listener (*Eri*), who had had personal contact with another native speaker, sometimes made misinterpretations even though she frequently provided backchannelling cues. On the other hand, the

less active listener (*Miki*), who often remained silent, conveyed implicit signals of non-understanding to the speaker.

Lastly, the data indicate that the social relationship between the listeners and the speaker also affected listening comprehension. Two participants (*Miki* and *Risa*) reported in their interviews that they had felt nervous about interacting with the native speaker of English. On the other hand, familiarity with the native speaker prompted *Eri* to provide frequent backchannelling cues.

To summarize the listening comprehension processes, both bottom-up processing and top-down processing take place for all the participants. Automatic processing and controlled processing of the listening input seem to depend on language proficiency. Interpretation of the listening text varies from one listener to another; therefore, the listeners' mental images appear to be very personal and idiosyncratic. Affective and social aspects affect listening comprehension processes as well. Task type also affects interactive features of listening task performance. L2 listening comprehension is a fairly complex process. Therefore, it needs to be accounted for by many variables such as the listener's linguistic knowledge, past experience, familiarity with a native speaker, context, task type, and current feelings.

Next, the analysis of listening strategies will be discussed. The data gathered from the six case study participants were basically used to identify listening strategies, where necessary, data from all nineteen participants were examined. According to the data collected, the present study developed a new listening strategy inventory which focuses directly on listening behaviors in interactive settings (cf. Table 2). Within the category of listening strategies, 'recalling' and 'non-understanding' were identified as new findings. The remaining listening strategies were modified and synthesized on the basis of the previous studies (Rubin, 1975; O'Malley & Chamot, 1990; Oxford, 1990; Rost & Ross, 1991; Vandergrift 1996, 1997a, 1997b).

The listening strategies were divided into metacognitive strategies, cognitive strategies, and social/affective strategies (Chamot & Kupper, 1989; O'Malley & Chamot, 1990; Vandergrift, 1996, 1997a). A cognitive strategy is like a worker who tries to complete a given task, while a metacognitive strategy is like the supervisor who tells the worker what to do,



Table 2: Listening Strategies Inventory

Strategies	Definition
Metacognitive Strategies involve thinking about the listening process, planning for listening, monitoring and evaluating the listening task.	
1. Advance organizer	Clarifying the objectives of an anticipated listening task and proposing strategies for handling it.
2. Selective attention	Deciding in advance to attend to specific aspects of the listening task and to ignore irrelevant distractors, maintaining attention while listening.
3a. Comprehension monitoring (L1)	Checking, verifying or correcting one's understanding at the local level using L1.
3b. Comprehension monitoring (nonverbal)	Checking, verifying or correcting one's understanding at the local level using a nonverbal method.
Cognitive Strategies involve interacting with the material to be learned, manipulating the material mentally or physically, and applying a specific technique to a listening task.	
4a. Linguistic inferencing	Using known word(s) in an utterance to guess the meaning of unknown word(s).
4b. Paralinguistic inferencing	Using tone of voice and/or paralinguistics to guess the unknown preceding utterances.
4c. Kinesic inferencing	Using facial expressions, body language, and hand movements to guess the unknown preceding utterances.
4d. Extralinguistic inferencing	Using contextual cues and concrete situational referents to guess the unknown preceding utterances.
4e. Inferencing between the parts	Using information beyond the local sentential level to guess the meaning.
5a. Personal elaboration	Elaborating the utterances on the basis of one's experiences and applying this to the context referred to.
5b. World elaboration	Elaborating the utterances using world knowledge and applying it to the context referred to.
6. Recalling	Repeating or mumbling the preceding utterances to reconstruct meaningful interpretation.
7. Transfer	Using knowledge of one language (e.g., cognates) to facilitate listening in another language.
8a. Global reprise (verbal)	Asking for outright repetition, rephrasing or simplification of preceding utterances, using L1 or L2.
8b. Global reprise (nonverbal)	Asking for outright repetition, rephrasing or simplification of preceding utterances, using kinesics.
9a. Specific reprise (L1)	Asking a question referring to a specific word, term or fragment that was not understood in the previous utterances, using L1.
9b. Specific reprise (L2)	Asking a question referring to a specific word, term or fragment that was not understood in the previous utterances, using L2.
10a. Uptaking (verbal)	Using verbal signals for the interlocutor to continue, signaling that he or she understands using L1 or L2. This includes minimum responses such as "Uh-huh".
10b. Uptaking (nonverbal)	Using non-verbal signals for the interlocutor to continue, signaling that he or she understands.
11a. Non-understanding (verbal)	Using verbal signals to inform the interlocutor that he or she does not understand.

11b. Non-understanding (nonverbal)	Using nonverbal signals to the interlocutor that he or she does not understand.
12. Good guessing	Using whole contextual cues or test-wiseness to reach the correct answer. Incidental understanding is included.
Social/Affective Strategies involve affective control to assist a listening task and self-encouragement for further listening.	
13. Self-talk	Reducing anxiety by using mental techniques that make one feel competent to complete listening tasks.
14. Faking	Using uptaking signals or noncommittal responses in order to avoid seeking clarification.
15. Self-reinforcement	Providing personal motivation by arranging rewards for oneself when listening comprehension is successful.

keeps an eye on the worker, and then inspects the completed product. Social/affective strategies are associated with the affective and social aspects of learners. According to Rost (2002, p. 154), these three categories have been considered to be "the most widely agreed-upon classes of language use strategies".

In this study a listening strategies inventory was devised and included 15 categories which were divided more specifically into 25 sub-categories. Within this inventory, metacognitive strategies include advance organizer, selective attention, and comprehension monitoring. Comprehension monitoring was divided into L1 (that is, Japanese) and nonverbal, as there was a distinct frequency difference between the two according to language proficiency. Cognitive strategies include global reprise (Rost & Ross, 1991), specific reprise, uptaking (Vandergrift, 1997b), good guessing (Rubin, 1975), inferencing, elaboration, recalling, transfer, and non-understanding. Several categories were divided into more specific sub-categories when critical differences between languages (L1 & L2), or verbal and nonverbal differences were recognized. Self-talk (O'Malley & Chamot, 1990), faking (Vandergrift, 1997b), and self-reinforcement (O'Malley & Chamot, 1990) constitute social/affective strategies. Although Vandergrift (1996, 1997a) included "asking for help from the interlocutor", such as requests of repetition and clarification in social/affective strategies, this study included these requests in cognitive strategies as global reprise and specific reprise.

The frequency of listening strategies used by individual participants in the three tasks (A, B, and C) was counted (cf. Table 3). A total of 252 strategies employed by the six participants was identified. The

use of particular strategies which led to misinterpretation was also counted in order to yield a detailed description of the results.

Care was taken to avoid confusion caused by including a strategy in two different categories. However, a sequence of behaviors was sometimes counted in different categories, (e.g., verbalization of non-understanding, "I don't know", accompanied by shaking of the head was counted separately as 'verbal non-understanding' and 'nonverbal non-understanding'). Additionally, unobservable and uncountable strategies such as advance organizer, selective attention and extralinguistic inference, which presumably took place throughout the tasks, were not counted (see the explanations of these strategies).

The overall view of the numerical data in Table 3 shows that the female students used strategies more frequently than the male students (males, N=99; females, N=153). This result is consistent with the results of previous studies (Oxford & Nykos, 1989; Kang, 1997). Moreover, female students used a greater variety of strategies than male students. Most listeners used fewer metacognitive strategies than cognitive strategies, which echoes the results of other studies (Chamot & Kupper, 1989; Bacon, 1992; Vandergrift, 1996; Kang, 1997).

This section illuminates some findings which are unique to this study in addition to similar findings which echo previous investigations. The highest level student (*Yuji*) appears to use the fewest strategies (N=17), if one excludes strategies 1, 2, 4d and 14. This finding is different from other studies (Murphy, 1985; Vandergrift, 1996, 1997a) which report that good learners use a larger number of strategies. This may

Table 3: Listening strategy frequency [Number in parenthesis indicates misinterpretation. Males: Kota, Jun, Yuji, Females; Miki, Eri, Risa]

Strategies	Kota	Jun	Yuji	Miki	Eri	Risa	Total
Metacognitive Strategies							
1. Advance organizer	Identified throughout all the tasks in all subjects						
2. Selective attention	Identified throughout Task C in all subjects						
3a. Comprehension monitoring (L1)	2	3	0	1	1	5	12 (5%)
3b. Comprehension monitoring(nonverbal)	7	3	0	5	0	0	15 (6%)
Cognitive Strategies							
4a. Linguistic inferencing	6 (4)	4 (2)	0	3 (3)	1	1	15 (6%)
4b. Paralinguistic inferencing	1	0	0	2	0	0	3 (1%)
4c. Kinesic inferencing	5	1	0	6	1	1	14 (6%)
4d. Extralinguistic inferencing	Identified throughout Task A & B in all subjects.						
4e. Between parts inferencing	1	2	0	3	2	0	8 (3%)
5a. Personal elaboration	2 (2)	1 (1)	1 (1)	0	2 (2)	0	6 (2%)
5b. World elaboration	0	3 (3)	0	0	2 (2)	0	5 (2%)
6. Recalling	0	2	0	0	1	6	9 (4%)
7. Transfer	1	1	0	0	1	0	3 (1%)
8a. Global reprise (verbal)	0	7	1	0	7	4	19 (8%)
8b. Global reprise (nonverbal)	2	0	0	1	1	2	6 (2%)
9a. Specific reprise (L1)	1	6	1	2	3	2	15 (6%)
9b. Specific reprise (L2)	5	2	0	2	18	4	31(12%)
10a. Uptaking (verbal)	0	2	7 (1)	0	11(6)	5 (1)	25(10%)
10b. Uptaking (nonverbal)	0	2	1 (1)	0	0	5	8 (3%)
11a. Non-understanding (verbal)	1	0	0	3	5	3	12 (5%)
11b. Non-understanding (nonverbal)	4	2	0	17	3	6	32(13%)
12. Good guessing	0	0	5 (1)	0	1	0	6 (2%)
Social/affective strategies							
13. Self-talk	0	0	0	0	0	1	1 (1%)
14. Faking	S12's strategy use was not counted.						
15. Self-reinforcement	2	1	1	0	2	1	7 (2%)
<b>Total (frequency)</b>	<b>40</b>	<b>42</b>	<b>17</b>	<b>45</b>	<b>62</b>	<b>46</b>	<b>252(100%)</b>

be because the highest level student comprehended for the most part the literal meaning of the utterances; any unconscious strategy use by him was not observable. As mentioned before, in this study only the strategies observed or reported during the listening

tasks were included. Therefore, a limited number of strategies were uncovered, and the data show mixed results. The students at intermediate level used the largest number of strategies within each gender (*Eri*, N=62; *Jun*, N=42).

The listening strategies found in this study were more comprehensive and exhaustive than those observed in the previous studies. "Recalling" and "non-understanding" were new findings in this study. Listening strategies adopted by good listeners as well as poor listeners were included in the inventory of listening strategies, although SLA studies have traditionally attempted to uncover listening strategies employed exclusively by good listeners. Moreover, this study divided a category into nonverbal and verbal, or L1 and L2, when there was a difference between these aspects, which other studies have not differentiated. Furthermore, the strategies which were not associated with listening behaviors were eliminated to make a distinction between this study and other studies (Vandergrift, 1996, 1997a; Kang, 1997) which attempt to apply learning strategies directly to listening strategies.

Another interesting finding was that some of the strategies used lead to misinterpretation. For example, all of the personal and world elaboration strategy uses result in misinterpretation. About half of the linguistic inferencing strategy uses results in misunderstanding as well. For example, Kota made four wrong inferences out of six; Jun, two out of four; and Miki, all three (cf. Table 3). At the individual level, approximately half of the uptaking (verbal) used by Eri results in misunderstanding. As Rubin (1994) and O'Malley et al. (1989) argue, this may be accounted for by the assumption that the participants abandon bottom-up processing and rely solely on top-down processing (schema). That is, they do not use bottom-up processing and top-down processing effectively. On the other hand, the high-level student, Yuji misinterprets an utterance once, but manages to complete the task. Accordingly, Yuji's inference is classified as 'good guessing'.

There are some distinct features of listening strategies identified according to language proficiency and individual difference. Low-level students (Kota, Miki) are more likely to employ nonverbal strategies such as comprehension monitoring (nonverbal), non-understanding (nonverbal) and kinesic inferencing. High-level students (Yuji, Risa) tend to use uptaking (verbal) strategies to show their understanding to the speaker. Furthermore, distinctive features of listening strategies characteristic of individual listeners are also identifiable. In fact, the use of listening

strategies may be accounted for by the idiosyncrasies of individual students. For example, Eri uses numerous uptaking strategies (N=11) and specific reprise (L2) strategies (N=18), while Miki employs a great deal of nonverbal non-understanding strategies (N=17). Good guessing used by Yuji (N=5) exceeds that of the other participants. Moreover, there are specific strategy uses utilized by particular students (e.g., faking, self-talk by Risa). However, frequent use of a listening strategy may not necessarily mean that that strategy contributes to success in completing tasks. "Repeated use of a strategy may just be a sign that the learner is continuing to use a given strategy unsuccessfully" (Cohen, 1998, p. 148).

## 5. Implications and conclusion

Recapping the major findings of listening comprehension processes, firstly, listeners tend to pay selective attention to an individual known word(s) and interpret the acoustic input in the way that makes sense to them. Secondly, participants make inferences to interpret the listening texts when they have problems with the completion of the task. Lastly, all levels of listeners used, to a varying degree, both bottom-up processing and top-down processing. This suggests that bottom-up processing and top-down processing interact with each other in order for participants to comprehend listening texts.

This study generates a more comprehensive and focused inventory of listening strategies than those of previous studies (e.g., Rost & Ross, 1991; Vandergrift, 1997b). This study includes strategies used by poor listeners as well as good listeners, although applied linguistic researchers traditionally have pursued strategies used exclusively by good listeners.

The analyzed data show that the strategy use of the participants is contingent on various factors. The strategy use of the participants varies according to the English proficiency of the listeners. Affective factors influence the strategy choice of the participants. Familiarity with the native speaker (social factor) seems to prompt the listener to provide frequent backchannelling cues. Lastly, task type affects the selection of listening strategies.

Instruction in listening strategies instruction might help to increase listening ability, although many strategies researchers (e.g., Cohen, 1998) are still reluctant to conclude that strategy instruction

contributes to long-term learning because effective strategies are contingent on various factors. To this end, categorization of metacognitive, cognitive, and social/affective strategies would provide a very robust classification scheme for listening strategies. The goal of listening strategies instruction is to bring listening processes to learner's consciousness (Mendelsohn, 1994). For this reason, systematic guided exercises of listening strategies should be integrated into the classroom syllabus to facilitate autonomous and active listening.

It can be stressed that listening should not be taken for granted in oral communication. "Listening is hard work, and deserves more analysis and support" (Vandergrift, 1999, p. 168). It is my belief that interactive listening plays a vital role in achieving communicative purposes for basic-level students in interactive settings. For this reason interactive listening research needs to receive more attention in the future.

In spite of enormous theoretical and empirical support as the crucial role of listening for beginning level learners in communicative settings, how learning and teaching of listening will lead to the promotion of communicative language ability has not been fully investigated. To this end, a more robust theoretical framework and stronger empirical evidence of interactive listening are needed in further studies.

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Appendix 1: Task A. Beach story (beside the board are the distractors: bucket, sun oil, star shell, and Frisbee.)



Appendix 2: Task B. Story in the house (beside the board are the distractors: a picture of a boy, a sock, and a red sofa.)



Appendix 3: Listening Task Type C

Date: March 17, Sunday, after graduation ceremony

Time: Leave Arume at 9:20 in the morning (for Jusco in Chatan). Leave Arume at 1:40 in the afternoon (for San A in Nago).

How: By car

Place for shopping: You want to buy NIKE shoes. Choose Jusco in Chatan or San-A in Nago.

Returning time 4 p.m. from Jusco in Chatan from destination: 5 p.m. from San-A in Nago

Price of: 6,750 yen (Students need to bring money.) shoes

Message You will return home by 6 p.m. for parents:

Where you In front of Arume school meet:

Bring your friends: Two or three extra seats are available in your car.