

オーディオ機器使用のリスニングにおける 学習者の困難とストラテジーに関する一考察

A Study of Difficulties and Strategies under Audio-Aids Listening

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I. Introduction and Background

So far, the needs for learner strategies in order to facilitate learners' efforts in language learning have been argued by many researchers (e.g., Wenden, 1987; Oxford, 1989; O'Malley & Chamot, 1990; Cohen, 1998; Flowerdew & Miller, 2005). The educational implications in this field are to cultivate learners' autonomy (Wenden, 1987; Oxford 1989), for which purpose important matters are to collect strategies, share knowledge and give strategy-training to learners. At the same time learners' use of strategies are considered to depend on individual factors including personal traits, levels of proficiency, kinds of tasks at hand,

and environments, so that strategy training is conducted under the concept that each learner has freedom to select appropriate strategies (Oxford, 1989; Kyriacou, Benmansoure & Low, 1996).

Oxford (1989), the most prominent researcher in this field, created a tool to find out learners' favorite strategies: Strategies for Independent Language Learning (SILL). The items on SILL are categorized into two: direct strategies that is, memory, cognitive, and compensation strategies and indirect strategies including metacognitive, affective and social strategies. Oxford (1989) insists that based on the concept that strategy use is teachable, strategy training helps guide learners to become more conscious of strategy use and more adept at employing appropriate strategies.

Following Oxford, Vandergrift (1997) presented a strategy inventory confined to listening, with the on-going background that listening skills came to be considered seriously taught as communicative competence in class equally to the other three skills, speaking, reading and writing. Vandergrift's summary of strategies are categorized into three: metacognitive strategies, cognitive strategies and socio-affective strategies. Listening strategies listed here, however, are usable when interlocutors are both in and out of class. From the viewpoint of EFL countries like Japan, what is hoped to be added to the list is listening strategies helpful for audio-aids listening¹ which is frequently used as in-class listening tasks in Japan.

Compared to listening having interlocutors, there are some factors which make audio-aids listening difficult to be grasped. Firstly, listeners can't ask for help by saying "Would you please speak more slowly?" or "Could you say that again?" Listeners have no choice but to give in to the pace of recordings and continue to listen silently whether or not the contents are comprehensible. Secondly, listeners don't have any visual clues to facilitate their understanding such as gestures, facial expressions or situational backgrounds. When deprived of interactions that include visual cues, in what ways do students feel difficulties and how do they overcome those hardships so as to keep on listening? These questions are the focus of the present study. It is hoped that the present study contributes to facilitating audio-aids listening classes by providing strategy hints specifically for audio-aids listening.

II. Methodology

1. Study objects and goals

The purpose of this research is to explore:

- 1) In what ways do students feel difficulties and what strategies do they employ to overcome those difficulties during their audio-aids listening?

- 2) Is there any difference in the above-mentioned difficulties and strategies between lower- and upper-grade groups in their listening scores?

The study goals are to gain pedagogical implications for audio-aids listening classes.

2. Participants

The participants of this study were 36 Japanese private university students enrolled in two elective classes for the preparation of the TOEIC test and their majors were unrelated to English. Two classes, TOEIC B and C, participated: one aimed at achieving 550 points on the TOEIC test and the other aimed at 700. Therefore, the participants were considered to be at pre-intermediate or intermediate levels of English proficiency. Each class had 18 participants respectively. There was no placement test and students were free to choose either class. Classes met once a week for 90 minutes over a semester of fourteen weeks in fall, 2007.

3. Procedures

3.1 Listening test

At the earlier stage of the course, 30 listening questions² were given to the classes. Those questions were in the Part 2 type of listening for the TOEIC test, where students listened to a question followed by three responses and chose the best response. Those questions and responses were not printed on the answer sheet. Each statement ran for 2 to 3 seconds with 4 to 5 second pause time interval before answering, and was played only once.

The answers were marked out of 30, and the mean of the listening scores was exactly the same between the B and C classes (Table 1), so that the two classes were treated as one group for collecting data.

Table 1. Listening test results in B and C classes

	N	Mean	SD	Mode
B class	18	15.72	4.23	14
C class	18	15.72	4.08	12

Full marks : 30

3.2 Questionnaire

After the listening test, an open-ended questionnaire was distributed. Students were asked to depict their difficulties from both cognitive and affective viewpoints. The questionnaire was completed using their real names for the purpose of follow-up in cases where fur-

ther clarification was deemed necessary. The participants were assured that any of their statements would not impact on their grading, but would instead be used for the purpose of facilitating their listening performance. The respective entries of the questionnaire were categorized into some groups with labels based on “ the KJ Method³ ”; while referring to Noro's “ A Construct Model of Listening Stress ” (Noro, 2006, p68).

III. Results of Questionnaire and Discussion

1. Cognitive domain of audio-aids listening

1.1 Cognitive difficulties

With respect to the cognitive aspects of listening difficulties the most mentioned difficulties were ‘ rate of speech (n31) ’; followed by ‘ vocabulary (n30) ’; pronunciation (n26) ’; sentence structure (n25) ’ and ‘ short-term memory (n23) ’.

The former three problems were consistent with the results of Noro's study (2006, p64) although his research was based on English communication experienced by Japanese university students during their stay in America. The participants 'English proficiency in his study, however, was thought to be almost the same as that of the present study, considering their average paper-and-pencil TOEFL score was 470. A problem with 'short-term memory 'retention was mentioned by 23 students, while this was not among the entries mentioned by the participants of Noro's study. In working on audio-aids listening followed by related questions, listeners 'short-term memory is required to seek for right answers. For example, one student said he found it difficult to stay focused until he solved the multiple-choice questions after listening to relating statements. Another student noted especially that statements including some figures were harder to be retained. As for 'pronunciation 'and sentence structure ', one student said, “ American accent is familiar, but English accent is not familiar to me ” and another said “ I don't know which part is important in each statement. ”

1.2 Strategies for cognitive difficulties

Among strategies for the above-mentioned difficulties, 'inference (n27) ' came first, followed by 'changing mental attitudes (n14) '.

Contrary to listeners having interlocutors, audio-aids listeners have no choice other than to keep listening silently whether or not the contents are comprehensible. Given that, it is understandable that the most frequently used strategy was 'inference '. And the second largest number of entries turned out to be an affective strategy, 'changing mental attitudes '.

It appears that students can do nothing but to resort to affective strategies during audio-

aids listening which will not allow listeners to take time to think or to ask for help, which is again understandable. At the same time the results imply there is a need of instruction for cognitive strategies other than 'inference', such as 'using schema' and 'top-down processing', to help students. Furthermore, a strategy like 'paying attention to key words' has to be taught as a metacognitive strategy to be helpful for coping with cognitive difficulties.

2. Affective domain of audio-aids listening

2.1 Affective difficulties

In the affective aspects, 'lack of concentration (n29)' ranked at the top, followed by 'confusion (n25)'; 'tension or anxiety (n19)'; 'loss of confidence (n15)'; 'rushed feelings (n14)'; and 'unwillingness (n8)'.

It seemed that the number of students referring to 'lack of concentration' helped to point to the peculiarity of audio-aids listening. In particular, when listeners have only one chance to listen to recorded statements, 'concentration' affects their listening performance greatly. Not a few students articulated that the next questions had started while they were still thinking of the answer at hand, which made them panic. Some said they became tired, and others said they became sleepy as listening questions continued to play. The above reports all can cause them to reduce 'concentration'. Even students under good control of 'concentration' at the starting point began to suffer from 'lack of concentration' as time went by. Furthermore, some confessed that it was very hard to have 'concentration' on English sounds without visual cues.

The second largest number of entries among affective difficulties was 'confusion'. Many students noted that they were suffering from an obsession with the previous questions. They continued wondering whether their past answers were right or wrong, which made them fall into 'confusion'. According to them, they knew they had to forget the past questions in order to perform well on the next question, but it was hard for them to abandon their preoccupation with previous questions. Other affective difficulties that were stated are as follows:

- (1) The feelings I have made a lot of mistakes cause me to be anxious.
- (2) I am strained under audio-aids listening at the thought of when the next question starts.
- (3) I feel tense during listening, so I get irritated by even a little noise.
- (4) Every time I encounter unknown words, I am gradually losing confidence.
- (5) The thought I can hear only once rushes me.

(6) As I am getting tired, I feel like giving up.

2.2 Strategies for affective difficulties

In terms of affective strategies, the following were mentioned: 'changing mental attitudes (n26)'; 'trying to concentrate (n17)'; and 'encouragement (n6)'. The below details students' reports and are categorized into 'changing mental attitudes':

- (1) It would be wise that I intentionally distract myself from on-going questions for a while in order to wait for recovery of concentration even though I give up a few questions.
- (2) I try to believe every answer I have chosen is right.
- (3) I keep answering even though I don't know at all.
- (4) I answer only when I understand.
- (5) I try not to mind making mistakes.

Concerning a means for 'trying to concentrate', there were two concrete descriptions: one is to take a deep breath, and the other is to close one's eyes. Furthermore, there were 6 students who said they were trying to encourage themselves by saying in mind, "You can do it". Students' listening performance is greater when they are calm. Strategy instruction for controlling their emotions will be requisite in audio-aids listening tasks.

3. Comparison between upper and lower groups

As mentioned earlier, TOEIC B and C classes were considered to be equivalent in their listening proficiency, so that all the participants were divided based on each listening test score: the upper with more than 16 points (n16) and the lower with less than 15 points (n20). Table 2 shows the results of the T-test between the averages of the upper and lower groups.

Regarding the numbers of entries related to difficulties including cognitive and affective viewpoints, statistical analysis presented no significant difference between the two groups of which results are displayed in Table 3. Figures 1 and 2 detail the difficulties mentioned by both groups respectively. The results indicated that both upper and lower groups similarly suffered most from 'rate of speech' and 'vocabulary' in cognitive aspects and 'lack of concentration' in affective aspects.

In terms of strategies, the finding was that the lower group used more cognitive strategies than the upper one as Table 4 explains, which is contrary to the common assumption that good language learners use a wide range of strategies in tasks at hand (O'Malley & Chamot, 1990). It is generally considered that better listeners actively try to involve them-

selves in communication, so that it is natural that they use more listening strategies than poorer ones. Compared to the situations with interactions, audio-aids listeners have to just listen patiently. The poorer they are as listeners, the more strategies they try to seek for understanding what they hear.

On the other hand, there was no statistically significant difference in the number of entries related to affective strategies between the two groups (see Table 4), whose results are consistent with the findings of Tatematsu's study (2003). The top among the entries was 'changing mental attitudes'. The more serious they are, the more patiently they try to struggle for right answers, which can cause them to miss the next coming question. Students having such experiences will try to avoid this vicious circle with 'changing mental attitudes'. Figure 3 accounts for their described strategies towards cognitive aspects and Figure 4, towards affective ones.

Table 2. Listening test results of the upper and lower groups

	Upper (n16)	Lower (n20)	T	P
M	19.5	12.7	8.91	<0.01
SD	2.83	1.72		

Full marks : 30

Table 3. Audio-aids listening difficulties

		Upper (n16)	Lower (n20)	T	P
cognitive aspects	M	3.69	3.95	0.67	0.25 n.s.
	SD	1.35	1.0		
affective aspects	M	2.88	3.2	0.74	0.23 n.s.
	SD	1.36	1.28		

n.s. = not significant

Table 4. Audio-aids listening strategies

		Upper (n16)	Lower (n20)	T	P
cognitive aspects	M	0.94	1.6	1.7	0.0049
	SD	0.77	1.23		
affective aspects	M	1.31	1.5	0.47	0.32 n.s.
	SD	1.30	1.05		

n.s. = not significant

Figure 1. Cognitive difficulties of audio-aids listening

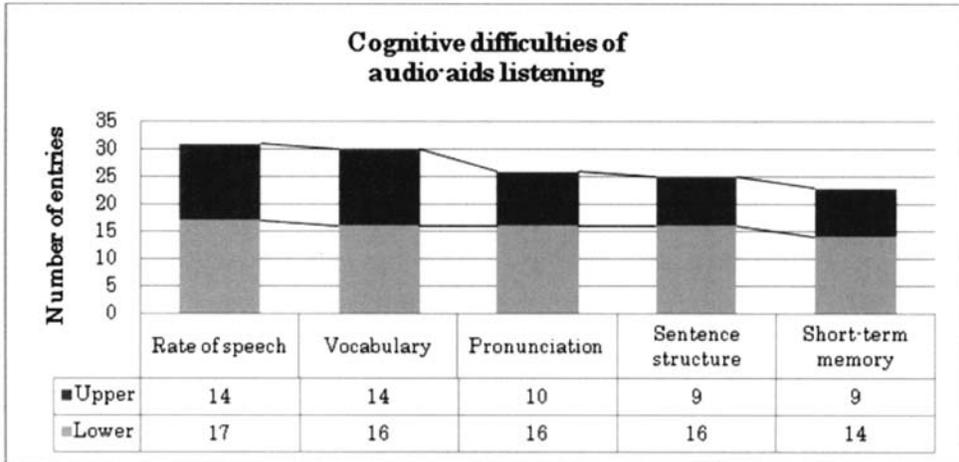


Figure 2. Affective difficulties of audio-aids listening

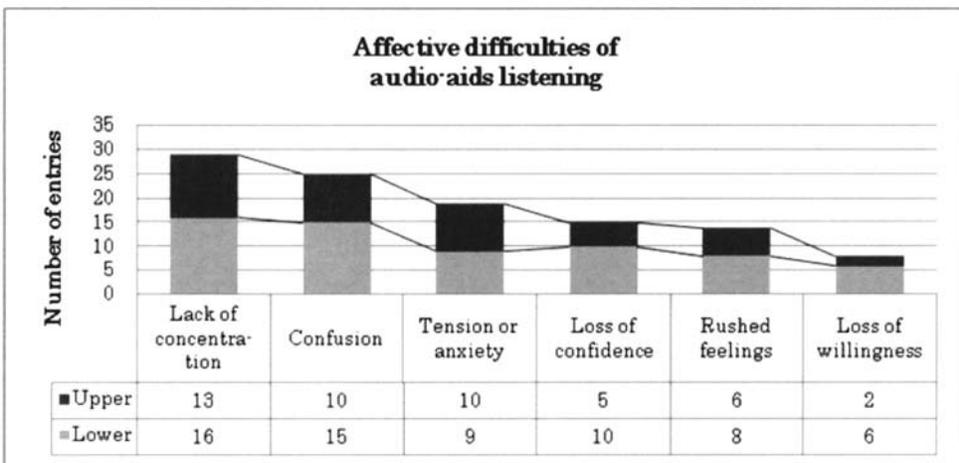


Figure 3. Strategies for cognitive difficulties of audio-aids listening

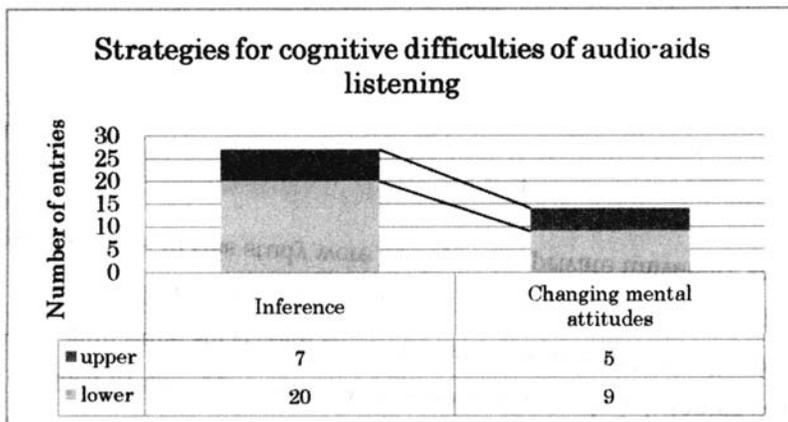
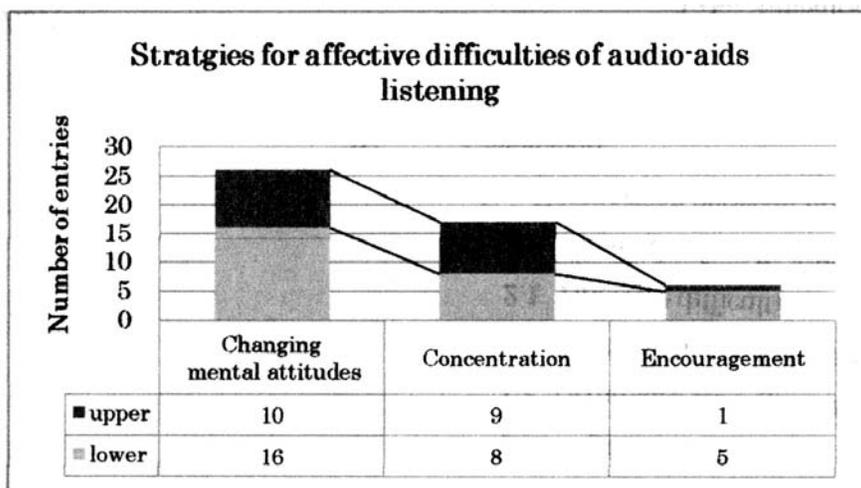


Figure 4. Strategies for affective difficulties of audio-aids listening



. Conclusion

The major suggestion here points to what teachers have to keep in mind in the use of audio-aids listening tasks. From a cognitive viewpoint, there is a need to get their students used to thinking in terms of English word order so as to keep up with 'the rate of speech' and to enrich their vocabulary. Moreover, in order that students may have a wide range of strategies for handling cognitive problems, strategy instruction has to be included in class. As for affective aspects, it is imperative to teach them some strategies for regulating their emotions. And what's required before that is consideration of the difficulties students stated. In other words, teachers have to create a friendly climate where students feel safe to struggle and share their feedback through questionnaires, diaries, interviews, class discussions or casual talks. Teachers' attitudes and consequent openness through trying to listen to their students' inner voices on audio-aids listening difficulties can be a first step to facilitate learning.

Considering cases like Japan where opportunities for out-class English communication are limited, in-class learning through audio-aids listening cannot be neglected. Further research conducted with more students and over a longer listening task will contribute to facilitating learning through audio-aids listening as well as leading to the creation of a list of strategies for more successfully negotiating this task. Especially for students whose future depends on TOEIC or TOEFL scores, study in this field is meaningful.

Notes

- 1 Audio-aids listening means listening through CD or tape recordings without visual cues.
- 2 This listening test was excerpted from the "TOEIC Test Shin Koushiki Mondaishu vol.2" published by the official institution of the TOEIC test: Educational Testing Service, in 2007.
- 3 "The KJ Method"; entries were categorized based on the similarity of the contents, by the repetition of which the entries were narrowed down to a small group with its own label.

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