

Learner Training in Listening Strategies

Barbara Fujiwara

Doshisha Women's Junior College

This paper is a description of the objectives, development, implementation, and results of a learner training project in listening strategies. The purpose of the project was to help students become self-directed learners able to make effective use of available sources of target language input. The project was part of a Listening Diary homework program for Japanese junior college students of Oral English. It was based on qualitative research of the listening strategies used by good learners in several classes. The components of the training were (a) experimentation with, and evaluation of, selected strategies, and (b) individual reflection on affective reactions and learning processes. Results showed that students had learned to use a greater variety of listening materials and strategies; had increased their awareness of the learning process; and had developed a more positive attitude toward listening.

リスニング学習方法による学習教育

本稿はリスニング学習方法を使って学習者教育をしようとする訓練プロジェクトの目標、開発、実施、及び結果について述べるものである。プロジェクトの目的は、学生が自主的に自己の学習方法を決定でき、周辺にある目標言語の学習材料を効果的に使うことができる学習者になることを助けようとするにあった。具体的には、オーラル・イングリッシュを受講した日本人短大生の宿題としてのリスニング日記の一部が訓練プロジェクトであった。それはいくつかのクラスの上位者が自己開発したリスニング学習方法について質的に調査したものに基づいて計画された。訓練の内容は、(a) いくつかの選択された学習方法を実験し、評価すること、(b) その学習方法に対する感情反応と学習課程について個人的に反省することであった。結果は、学生はよりバラエティのあるリスニング教材と学習方法を用いることを学び、学習課程に一層注意を向けるようになり、リスニングに対してより積極的な態度を身につけたことを示した。

LEARNER TRAINING IN LISTENING

1. Introduction

Dear Ms. Fujiwara,

Yesterday I watched a TV program of "Sherlock Holmes" as same as last week. As I've learned some special words that Holmes often used like: investigate, odd, inspection, etc., I could understand the story better than last time. Next time, I'll read the case in English and watch TV. I go on studying "My Fair Lady". I feel more I catch their conversation, more the play makes me fun. Now, I listen to cockney spoken by Mr. Doolittle. In my college days, at Prof. Oda's linguistic class, we studied a little about cockney and I was not able to find what it like. It wasn't enough for me to know it only reading. I learned the importance of listening again, through this study.

*Yours sincerely,
Aki Miyabe*

Almost every week, I get a letter like the one above from Ms. Miyabe, a graduate of the Japanese women's junior college where I teach. She is, in effect, continuing the Listening Diary homework of the Oral English II class she took with me. During that course, Ms. Miyabe demonstrated several characteristics of a good listener learner in her daily listening tasks. She listened to a variety of materials and experimented with different way of listening to them. Throughout the year, she continued to assess her own listening progress and work on her areas of weakness by choosing appropriate materials and tasks. In her listening diary, she reported her plans and strategies and made comments on how and what she had learned. This ability to direct her own learning has enabled her to continue studying English on her own after graduation.

Ms. Miyabe's letters were the inspiration for a qualitative research study of the strategies used by self-directed listening learners, and a subsequent learner training project. Learner strategies have been defined by Wenden (1987) as "language learning behaviors learners actually engage in to learn and regulate the learning of a second language" (p. 6). The research study and training project were an application of theoretical assumptions and educational goals (cited in Stern, 1975, and Wenden & Rubin, 1987)

to develop the listening strategies of learners in an EFL environment. Rubin (1987) notes the "growing interest in defining how learners can take charge of their own learning and in clarifying how teachers can help learners become more autonomous" (p. 15). The basic assumption was made that after being trained in the strategies of more successful learners like Ms. Miyabe, students would "become the best judge of how to approach the learning task" (p. 15).

The need for a learner training project became evident when I examined the different ways my Japanese junior college Oral English students approached their original Listening Diary homework—to listen to English 20 minutes every day and record their study. Some students tended to listen to a limited number of materials over and over again and write only affective reactions like, "*I like Madonna's voice. It's cute.*" Others had developed strategies for "selective" listening (Nida, 1957, p. 30), strategies that seemed to be very useful for false beginners in an EFL situation. These learners showed initiative in designing tasks for themselves, as well as insight into their own processes of learning.

The difference in student approaches suggested two specific questions in the area of learner strategies: (a) How do good EFL listening learners use available materials to improve their language ability? and (b) How can the strategies these learners have developed be transferred to other students? This paper describes the development, implementation, and results of a learner training project designed to answer these two questions. The participants in the project were 45 second-year junior college students with a wide range of English listening proficiency who had one 90-minute Oral English class a week with me for 25 weeks. During the training all the students experimented with activities based on strategies selected from the self-reports of good learners and reflected on the usefulness of these strategies for themselves.

2. The Strategies of Good Listening Learners

The original research (Fujiwara, 1989) on the strategies of good listening learners consisted of a case study of one first-year student and a detailed study of 23 specific strategies collected from the listening diaries of several second-year students over a period of two years and categorized according to Chamot's (1987, pp. 77-78) comprehensive classification of learning strategies. In their dia-

LEARNER TRAINING IN LISTENING

ries, the successful learners reported on both how and what they had learned through listening. They used strategies such as, to use Chamot's terms, selective attention, self-evaluation, note-taking, imagery, contextualization, and inferencing. They reported learning individual sounds, new words and expressions, syntax and discourse patterns. In this paper, the report of that research will be limited to the case study and those strategies chosen as the basis of the training activities.

2.1 Case Study

I became interested in doing a case study of Ms. Shibata, a student in my first-year Oral English class, when I listened to her tape as part of a tape exchange I was doing with the students. I was amazed at her fluency and accuracy in English. Her tape was about 30 minutes long, nearly 10 times as long as that of most other students, and she sounded almost like a native speaker. However, Ms. Shibata had spent only two weeks in an English-speaking country and during that time had lived with a family that wanted to practice Japanese. Despite having had very few opportunities for spoken interaction, she learned to speak through regular listening to authentic materials, reading, and writing. How did she do this? This is how Ms. Shibata explained her accomplishment:

You asked me how I'd learned English! To some of my friends, English was a killer subject and some of them really hated it! I have never hated it! I was so lucky because I found it very interesting to learn and I studied it with my own way! I did not study very hard in classes, you know why!? Because they taught me too much grammar and I hated it!! Well, I'd better say I didn't like it too much because I did it okay. What I hated is that they taught us all those useless expressions! So I didn't get into the English that was taught at school. Well, then what did I do? I saw so many movies! For example, I love this actor, Ralph Macchio, unfortunately, he's got married at last, . . . but anyway, I loved his movie, one of his movies "Karate Kid"! I taped it (a cassette tape) and listened to his lines so many times. Thanks, Ralph! That's how I learned the hints in following the native speaker.

In an interview with Ms. Shibata, I got a more detailed picture of her listening strategies. When she was 14, she saw a movie with Ralph Macchio and liked him so much that she wanted to listen every day to the tape she made from the movie. She was only able to comprehend a few words so she sent the tape to a pen pal and asked her to make a transcript. Then, for about a week, she listened to the tape while looking at the transcript. After that, she listened to it without the transcript for at least 30 minutes every day. She has continued this kind of listening practice since she was 14. She would tape other scenes she liked and transcribe as much of them as she could, asking her pen pal to correct and finish the transcripts. At 16, she could understand 50% and at 19, 70 to 80% of most movies without doing a transcription. Whether or not she does a transcription, she listens to the tapes of her favorite scenes over and over again. As she explains, that's how you get the rhythm and intonation of English. She guesses the meanings of words from the lines before and after. Sometimes she listens with great concentration; at other times, she listens while reading a magazine or doing something else.

This case study shows, first of all, that Ms. Shibata used a number of specific strategies, two of which, transcription and repeated listening, I used as training activities for my Oral English II (OEII) students. Ms. Shibata's case also shows the importance of the affective component that from the very beginning played a major role in her study of English. She wanted to listen to and understand people she liked, whether media stars or pen pals. There are certain materials she listened to voluntarily and enjoyably; there are others she listened to only if they were assigned for homework. As the objective of the training was for students to continue learning through listening after graduation, it seemed important that there be a large element of choice in the training tasks and exposure to a wide variety of materials, so that students could choose the ones they liked. Also, it seemed that authentic materials would give students the greatest possibility of continued learning, since such materials are available in great variety and offer an unrestricted challenge.

2.2 Training Project

The objective of the training project was to train students to

LEARNER TRAINING IN LISTENING

become autonomous listening learners who would be motivated and able to direct their own listening study after graduation. The total training program consisted of: (a) the pre-training Listening Diary assignment (April); (b) reflection questions on students' affective reactions and learning process (beginning of October and December); (c) the training assignments (October and November); and (d) self and course evaluations (January). Of these, only excerpts from the *pre-training* and *training assignments* will be given.

2.2.1 *Pre-training: Listening Diary Assignment (April)*

The following is the initial Listening Diary assignment in its entirety.

Your ongoing homework for this course will be regular listening practice, which I believe is essential to mastering a language. I expect you to listen to English at least 20 to 30 minutes every day and to record your listening practice in a Listening Diary. I recommend that you listen to a variety of materials and try to keep a balance among the different kinds. You can use our textbook tape, the A-V Center self-study listening materials, English songs, TV programs, and movies. You will hand in your Listening Diary at the end of every month. Write the following for each daily entry: (a) date, the time you began and finished; (b) kind of materials; (c) your listening strategies, reactions, and questions.

2.2.2 *Training Assignments (October and November)*

The listening activities I assigned in October and November were based on the strategies of the more successful learners, as reported in their listening diaries (Fujiwara, 1989). The strategies, with the Chamot label where applicable (see Chamot, 1987, pp. 77-78, for strategy descriptions), precede the assigned activities. In addition, the activities met some or all of the following criteria: (a) they used materials that students would have access to after graduation; (b) they used materials which students seemed interested in from the reports in their listening diaries; and (c) they represented a variety of listening purposes, for example, listening

for information, listening for language, and listening for interaction patterns.

Recent work on self-directed learning (summarized in Wenden, 1987) emphasizes the need not only for experimentation with learning techniques, but also for reflection on these techniques, and on the attitudes students hold toward learning. Thus, reflection was an important part of the total training program and the training assignment shown here. The reflection questions addressed both the affective and cognitive components of the activities and directed students' attention to the learning process itself.

"Learning from listening" is a combination of the two training assignments given at the beginning of October and November. Each assignment included instructions, five activities derived from those of successful learners, and reflection questions. Each activity is preceded by the learner strategy or strategies upon which it was based, as reported in students' listening diaries and collected during the research study (Fujiwara, 1989). These diary entries, printed in italics, did not appear on the printed assignments the students received. The Chamot strategy category (Chamot, 1987, pp. 77-78) follows each strategy number. The listening material is given in parentheses, before the diary entry. The activities "CONVERSATION" and "REPEATED LISTENING" were also based on Ms. Shibata's strategies.

Learning from Listening

In order to further improve your ability to learn English from listening, I would like to try a new listening program this semester and experiment with some of the following activities. Each month choose four of the five activities. If you can, try to do some or all of your choices more than once. Some of the activities may take a few days to complete, but please keep a record of the work you do each day in your Listening Diary. When you complete an activity, answer these questions about it in your Listening Diary: (a) How did you feel about doing this activity? and (b) What did you learn from doing this activity?

LEARNER TRAINING IN LISTENING

Learner Strategy 1a: Grouping (Material: Whitney Houston song)

Diary entry:

I like "Take Good Care of My Heart." She sings with Jermaine Jackson. Their voices are good combination. There is a very few rhyme in her songs. I try to find the word starts the same sound this time.

Learner Strategy 1b: Self-monitoring (Material: Pronunciation tape)

Diary entry:

After I listen to a line, I repeat the line but I can't repeat "r" (e.g., her, for, hour) like the pronunciation of the tape.

Derived Activity 1. SOUNDS:

Choose one or two sounds whose pronunciation you want to improve. Listen to a song several times and write down all the words with the sounds you have chosen. Check your guesses by looking at the lyrics. How did you do?

Learner Strategy 2: Self-management. (Material: Movie—*Young Sherlock Holmes*)

Diary entry:

I like this movie. After I saw it for the first time, I read all of the Holmes' sixty stories. I tried to dictate one of my favorite scenes. I could catch some sentences.

Derived Activity 2. CONVERSATION:

From a movie or a TV program you like, choose a 1- or 2-minute scene in which two people are talking. First, describe the people, their relationship, and the situation. Then, transcribe their conversation.

Learner Strategy 3: Note-taking
(Material: Movie—*Desert Moon Story*)

Diary entry:

Lovers misunderstand each other. Girl complains that boy goes out another girl. Boy saw the girl in the crowd on Saturday night. But the girl pretended not to notice him.

Derived Activity 3. STORY:

Watch a movie and summarize the plot of the story.

Learner Strategy 4: Inferencing
(Material: News)

Diary entry:

I found it's interesting to hear Sports corner. Though I don't like baseball very much, I sometimes listened to baseball games in English. As for such a program, announcers had to speak quickly and I couldn't understand detail but I was able to know outlines. And knowing outlines often helped me to imagine details. I felt it's important to hear speaking not as a line but as long sentences.

Derived Activity 4. ENGLISH NEWS:

Watch the news and write down the main topics discussed. Choose one topic and write down some words you remembered or learned while watching the broadcast.

Learner Strategy 5: Transfer.
(Material : VTR-Music TV)

Diary entry:

It's great fun for me to hear most of interviews in English. It's easy for me to understand about music in English because I have many knowledge of it (. . . I can't understand daily news so easily).

LEARNER TRAINING IN LISTENING

Derived Activity 5. INTERVIEW:

Listen to or watch an interview in English. What did you learn about the life or ideas of the person being interviewed?

Learner Strategy 6: Elaboration

(Material: Madonna songs)

Diary entry:

I don't have the words' cards of some of the songs in this tape. But recently I heard commotion meant a kind of fight or disturbance. I hear she was singing like this, maybe: "(You got a commotion). If we got together, we be causing a commotion." I don't think this is right but I know what she means.

Derived Activity 6: EXPRESSIONS:

Listen to a song you like and write down the interesting expressions you hear and what you think their meaning is.

Learner Strategy 7

(Material: Movie—*Peggy Sue Got Married*)

Diary entry:

Fourth time. Everytime I find new things. That's interesting.

Derived Activity 7. REPEATED LISTENING:

Audio or video record a short TV or movie scene with your favorite actor or actress. Listen to the scene at least 10 times over a period of several days. Each time write down something new you notice or learned.

Learner Strategy 8: Self-management.

(Material: Dial-the-News)

Diary entry:

I called the number of Yomiuri English News. As I didn't understand by listening one time, I listened same news again and again.

Derived Activity 8. TOURIST INFORMATION:
Call either the Kyoto (075-361-2911) or Nara (0742-27-1313) tourist information recording and take notes on the main events of the month. Check your notes with the newspaper or Japanese recording.

3. Results

The results of the training project show that almost all students benefited from the process of working with the strategies of good learners. As each student was involved in discovering the learning path that best suited her, there were no outstanding universal trends but rather indications of various kinds of changes.

The discussion of the results of the training project is divided into three parts: (a) a report of what happened, (b) my assessment of changes in students' listening diaries, and (c) students' own evaluation of their work. In some cases, it is difficult to decide which changes occurred because of the training, and which occurred because of the whole Listening Diary program. As much as possible, the description of the results is limited to those directly related to the training.

Of the 45 students in my two second-year Oral English classes, 41 handed in their October diaries and 38 handed in their November diaries. Only two of the 45 students did none of the training tasks. In their final evaluations, 36 of the students said they felt their listening had improved over the year and 16 felt the Listening Diary homework was the most helpful component of the whole course. In their plans for future study, almost all of the students mentioned continuing one or more of the training activities.

I compared the pre- (September) and post-training (Dec./Jan.) listening diaries and found the following changes, listed in order of predominance. Students (a) used the training strategies, (b) noted expressions learned, (c) wrote longer comments, (d) used a greater variety of materials, (e) did a greater variety of activities, (f) made more comments about the content of the material, and (g) did more evaluation of their own work.

In their self-evaluations, students confirmed these findings and also reported other changes in strategies, attitudes, and listening

LEARNER TRAINING IN LISTENING

proficiency. Students reported that the following achievements:

1. They expanded their knowledge of available listening materials and discovered which of these materials they liked:
As to Listening Diary, I have leveled up gradually. Before I mainly listened to Spoken American English and recently I often watched TV news and movies.
2. They learned new listening strategies and adopted the ones they found most helpful:
If I compare my April and December Listening Diaries, I will obviously notice the latter is better than the former, because in April diary I wrote only impressions after listening to English, but in December I listened to English many times to dictate it. I think dictation is one of good ways to ensure English I listened and remember it.
3. They became aware of what and how they were learning:
*In comparing my April and December Listening Diaries, in April I didn't know what I must write, so I was writing about my thinking, for example, "It is interesting," or "Not interesting," or "that actor is nice," but in December I was writing about what I learned new, for example, new words, expressions, pronounce.
However we may listen long time, it'll be useless or a waste of time. So we should listen many times, I think.*
4. They improved their ability to evaluate their own strengths, weaknesses, and progress:
In April diaries I heard only words but in December diaries I could hear almost contents. In April, I often listened songs as BGM or some stories as BGM. But in December, I heard carefully. I became to hear with enjoying.
5. They set goals and planned appropriate tasks to achieve them:
My goal's to achieve is to be conscious to world's situation (politics, economics and culture) and to speak my idea about economics and culture fluently. (Politics sometimes can be troublesome topic for communication so I should avoid it.) Speaking English is not the aim but means. I'll

watch news by satellite broadcasting system, record the news, write down what the caster says, look up the dictionary and learn new words.

6. They developed a positive attitude toward learning through listening:

My approach to listening changed. I became to listen willingly. When on TV or radio English Conversation, interview and movie, etc. are broadcasted, I became to listen carefully their English.

The self-evaluations of the students show that each student gained something from the training, although the size and type of gains were different for each. There were attitude changes in which students began to experience the pleasure of learning from listening. There was also a great range of cognitive changes with some students only learning one particular technique while others improved their ability to assess and manage their own learning. But what does seem clear is that each student moved in her own way toward a more conscious understanding of how she could more effectively learn through listening.

4. Pedagogical Implications

Perhaps the most unexpected result of this project was that it forced me to reconsider some of my own teaching assumptions and gave me greater insight into the learning process. Carefully examining how my good learners learned through listening taught me how to teach this process. Reflecting on the reasons for the success of the training project has enabled me, in turn, to see more clearly why my previous attempts to help students were not successful.

The results of this project have shown the need to be very careful not to assume that a person is a poor learner because of lack of ability, intelligence, or motivation. It may be just that the learner lacks the necessary know-how of learning in that particular area and needs step-by-step guidance. The results of the training show the validity and worth of research on the conscious strategies of good learners because these strategies can provide the detailed guidance less autonomous learners need.

The good listening learners chosen for the study were those students who took an active approach to their own learning. They

LEARNER TRAINING IN LISTENING

learned through their ears by a conscious use of strategies that they were able to describe. Of course, each student had an individual approach and this individualization had significant implications for the design of the training. The study of learner strategies (Fujiwara, 1989) showed the great range of strategies from self-management (Learner Strategies 2 and 8) to small techniques for figuring out the meaning of a word (Learner Strategy 6). Some of the good learners used several different strategies with only one kind of material and activity. Others used a wide variety of both materials and strategies.

The results of the training showed that the strategies of good learners can help other learners. There are several reasons for this. The strategies were concrete techniques the learners could try. They had been developed by students on the same affective and cognitive wavelength, so to speak, and thus were much more likely to be appealing and helpful than those designed by a teacher. Several students mentioned in their self-evaluations that in April they hadn't known what to do. They had to try out the strategies of the good learners and individually experience different ways of processing aural input in order to learn what to do.

This project has shown the value of carefully examining the strategies of good learners to use as a basis for teaching other students how to learn. Learner training is an effective way of enabling students to become their own best resources.

This paper is a revision of my Independent Professional Project for the Master of Arts in Teaching degree from the School for International Training. I wish to thank the faculty and students of the School for International Training and of Doshisha Women's Junior College for the many insights they have given me into the process of learning and the art of teaching. In particular, I would like to express my gratitude to Bernard Susser and Claire Stanley for their helpful suggestions and comments on this paper.

Barbara Fujiwara is a lecturer in the Department of English at Doshisha Women's Junior College. Her interests include learner training, Suggestopedia, and intercultural communication.

References

Chamot, A. U. (1987). The learning strategies of ESL students. In A. Wenden & J.

LEARNER TRAINING IN LISTENING

- Rubin (Eds.), *Learner strategies in language learning* (pp 71-83). Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall.
- Fujiwara, B. (1989). *Helping students become self-directed listening learners*. Unpublished master's thesis, School for International Training, Brattleboro, VT.
- Nida, E. (1957). *Learning a foreign language: A handbook prepared especially for missionaries*. New York: Friendship Press.
- Rubin, J. (1987). Learner strategies: Theoretical assumptions, research history and typology. In A. Wenden & J. Rubin (Eds.). *Learner strategies in language learning* (pp. 15-30). Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall.
- Stern, H.H. (1975). What can we learn from the good language learner? *Canadian Modern Language Review*, 31, 304-318.
- Wenden, A. (1987). Conceptual background and utility. In A. Wenden & J. Rubin (Eds.), *Learner strategies in language learning* (pp. 3-13). Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall.
- Wenden A., & Rubin, J. (Eds.). (1987). *Learner strategies in language learning*. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall.

Maxwell Macmillan Proudly Presents

Family Album, U.S.A.

A Video Course in American English



Learn English with the Stewarts-
a typical American family,

Share their hopes and dreams
over twenty-six half hour
episodes.



For high beginners to low advanced,
all material is presented,
in a natural everyday
conversational style.



An Instructor's Guide provides
clear and concise suggestions
for maximizing the potential
of the video materials.

Available fall 1990.

For further information, contact :



MAXWELL
MACMILLAN
INTERNATIONAL

Tokyo Office:
Matsuoka Central Building 8F, 1-7-1 Nishi-shinjuku
Shinjuku-ku, Tokyo 160, Japan
TEL. (03)344-5201, FAX. (03)344-5202