

# Strategies for Listening Comprehension in English Language Teaching ----A Case Study of TOEFL/TOEIC Listening----

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## 1. Introduction

In many countries where English is learned as a foreign language, an element of listening has been introduced into the curriculum and the examination as an important driving force. Teachers realize the value of developing their students' listening skills to communicate with other people in the global world. It is true that listening skills are as important as speaking skills; we cannot communicate in a face-to-face interaction unless these two skills are developed.

TOEFL (The Test of English as a Foreign Language) data in 1997-98 shows that the total average score of Japanese students is the lowest in Asia, lower than any of those in Europe, and that their score in the listening comprehension section is lower than that of other sections of the test. TOEIC (The Test of English for International Communication) data in 1997 shows that the total average score of Japanese examinees is lower than that of the Koreans.

## 2. Purposes

The purpose of this paper is to explore the strategies for listening as a communicative activity, analyzing the error pattern of Japanese students on TOEFL/TOEIC listening. This paper aims to let students be successful in listening, and in communicating in English with confidence.

### 3-1 International Comparison of TOEFL Results

The periodical change of the TOEFL average scores of the Japanese students shows that they have never exceeded 500 during the period of 1964 to 1997. Korea, on the other hand, scored as low as 460 in the 1964 -1966 period, caught up with Japan between 1969 and 71, and has exceeded Japan since then, and now has 518.

	1969-71	1984-86	1992-93	1994-95	1995-96	1997-1998
Japan	470	490	484	493	494	496

### 3-2 Comparison of TOEIC Average Scores (Worldwide Data 1996)

	TOEIC Test			TOEIC IP		Mean(SD)
	Listening	Reading	Total	Listening	Reading	
Japan	298.2	260.4	558.6	237 (88)	202 (91)	439 (171)
Korea	286.6	281.9	568.5	237 (95)	228 (104)	465 (190)

### 4-1 Major Problems in Listening

- a) Students have difficulties in identifying different sounds, liaisons, assimilations, etc. 94 %
- b) Students realize the shortage of their vocabulary. 92 %
- c) Students believe that "foreigners speak too fast". 84 %
- d) Students lack the background knowledge of the context. 83 %
- e) Students try to translate what they hear into Japanese word by word. 82 %

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- f) Students find it difficult to grasp the meaning of the context by guessing. 80 %
- g) Students fail to respond to what has been said. 80 %
- h) Students find it difficult to concentrate themselves in listening. 52 %

**3-2 Data ----- Pattern of Students' Errors**

Error Pattern:	Speed	Liaisons	Signals	Vocabulary	Interpretation
Error Rate:	72.5 %	68.2 %	67.5 %	55.3 %	55.0 %

**4-1 Strategies for Listening Comprehension**

- a) Practice for aural perception
  - \* Pay attention to stressed words, speech rhythm, and intonation
  - \* Be familiar with liaisons, assimilations, and reductions of sounds
- b) Listening comprehension based on reading practice (guessing, skimming, and scanning)
- c) Listening focused on key words and key facts, recognizing the speaker's signals
- d) Listening followed by speaking practice
- e) Listening using the background knowledge of the cultural context of English

**4-2 Experimental Results of TOEFL ITP Tests**

- a) Term: 1st semester: April-July 2nd semester: Sept-Dec,1997; 90-min-class a week
- b) A Group: 1st year students who took TOEFL ITP Test for the first time
- B Group: 1st year students who practiced TOEFL Listening in my class (1st semester)
- C Group: 1st year students who practiced TOEFL Listening in my class (1st & 2nd)
- d) Date of Test: December 22nd, 1997
- e) Number of Examinees: A Group: 32 B Group: 33 C Group: 32
- f) Mean Scores: 404.32 450.72 513.38

**4-3 Students Survey Results Regarding TOEFL/TOEIC Score Improvements**

Improvement in a) being familiar with tests	32%	b) test-taking strategiers	21%
c) focusing on key terms	14%	d) willing to guess	13%
e) practicing aural perception	11%	f) other strategies	9%

**5 Conclusion**

Listening is an essential skill for successful communication. Students will become more proficient in listening to English if:-

- a) they apply the strategies for listening comprehension .
- b) they are aware of the use of liaison, stress, intonation, colloquial word-combination, etc.
- c) they guess what comes next, using their general knowledge and clues from what they hear.
- d) they have practices in turn-taking, being alternately a speaker and a listener.
- e) they increase their knowledge of the cultural context of English.

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