

## アクションリサーチによる 学生の思考を伴う聴解態度の育成

千 田 誠 二

### Action Research for Developing Students' Listening Attitude Combined with Thinking Ability

Seiji CHIDA

#### Introduction

This study was carried out for the purpose of making Japanese junior college students think creatively while listening to English.

In my oral communication class, I found they paid too much attention to language itself. In addition, they had difficulty in reacting to the questions which require them to think or infer the spoken content. This is the serious problem because creative output is based on listening ability combined with thinking. How can they get the habit of thinking while listening? I decided to take Action Research to solve this problem. As a concrete means, I focused on a certain approach about the input promoting students' creative thinking.

#### 1. Problem Identification

In my oral communication class of last year, the teaching procedure was as follows: Firstly, the students were required to obtain the information while listening to tape and filling out the blank. Secondly, they practiced key expressions in the textbook in pair/group work. And finally, they practiced them in a communicative environment such as games or problem-solving activities.

In an interview test at the end of the year more than half of the students could speak key expressions (e.g., "I like ..... about my hometown") very well. This class seemed to be successful to a certain extent in the light of memorizing them.

However, I had another problem. I found most students were at a loss for an answer when they were asked about their own idea or given inferential questions (e.g., "Why? Which point?"). The facts suggest that they paid too much attention to language itself without thinking deeply of spoken content. This is the question which this study dealt with.

#### 2. Preliminary Investigation

In the light of ideas I had gained thus far, I examined the following three points regarding their lack of thinking while listening.

- 1) What strategy did they use while listening to the teacher or tape?
- 2) Were their English classes during high or junior high school based on grammar and translation or communicative style?
- 3) How did I provide English input to the students in the light of quantity and quality?

For the first point, I used a questionnaire about which listening strategy the students had used. For the second point, they were asked to write an essay in 10 minutes about the way of learning English during high or junior high school. For the third point, I taped my speech during the interaction. Then I analyzed it in terms of the time I speak in English and the types of questions I gave to students.

### 2.1. Results of the questionnaire

I surveyed the listening strategies which O'Malley and Chamot (1990) introduced. Among them the two strategies were employed in the questionnaire. One was "inferencing" in which available information to guess the meanings of new items, predict the outcomes, or fill in missing information is used. The other is "auditory representation" in which planning back in one's mind the sound of a word, phrase, or longer language sequences takes place. The reason why I employed them was: Firstly, that early stage learners are likely to overemphasize language form. Secondly, they are presumed to have difficulty in paying attention to both language form and spo-

ken content. In the questionnaire freshmen were asked about which strategy was primary used while listening.

The results were that 65% of the students answered, "auditory representation" and 35% of those "inferencing" at the beginning of this semester (Table I). The fact suggests that most of them pay more attention to language form than spoken content. On the contrary, 78% of sophomore students answered "inferencing" and 22% "auditory representation". Additionally, I compared the results of freshmen with their scores of test given at the first class. Table II indicates which strategy each of three level students mainly use while listening.

**Table I : listening strategy used by students**

strategy type	freshman	sophomore
auditory representation	65%	22%
inferencing	35%	78%

It reflects that more early stage students use "auditory representation". And more revealing were that all of the high stage learners mainly used "inferencing". From these results it can be noted that early stage learners or those with few linguistic knowledge tend to use "auditory representation". In other words, they have difficulty in thinking of the spoken content while processing input.

### 2.2. Results of the timed essay

In essay writing, 62% of the students criticized the grammar focused or memorization - centered teaching during high school. Some of them are:

1) It was boring to memorize vocabulary and learn grammar rules.

**Table II : comparison between score of test and listening strategy**

strategy type	score	low	intermediate	high
auditory representation		82%	30%	0%
inferencing		18%	70%	100%

- 2) All we learned during high school was grammar. Because of that , I was very nervous when I was asked to answer in English.
- 3) I learned English only through translation. So it was not interesting.
- 4) I was taught grammatical accuracy rather than communication.
- 5) I wanted to learn expressions used in conversations at places like restaurants, airports and overseas.

This suggests that grammar-focused teaching still prevails in high or junior high schools. It leads them to overemphasize grammatical accuracy. Additionally, even in a communication class too much attention to grammar may give students the impression of a grammar-focused class. And

with regard to the way of processing input more students said they acquired key expressions through imitation or repetition. It was found that few students in my classes have learned in a communicative environment.

2.3. Results of the analysis of the teacher's

speech

The teacher's speech about the content of the text book was taped. I investigated how much I used English during the class. I found from the tape that I was much dependent on Japanese during the class. I used English only when I gave them the questions about the content of the text.

Table III : type of question during interacion

type	F	I	P
number	16	4	3

F : facts finding I : inferential P : Personal

Regarding the types of questions I gave to them, most of them were facts-finding type (e.g., "What did he eat?", "Where did he go?"). I gave them very few inferential (e.g., "Why do you think he went there?"), personal (e.g., "How about you? What would you do in his case?") questions (Table III).

From the results of these investigations I would raise the following three reasons for the students' lack of thinking: (1) Early stage students lack linguistic knowledge. It forces them to decode language with desperate efforts and makes it difficult for them to apply the meaning of input simultaneously. This viewpoint is similar to the result of Vanpatten's (1990) study. (2) Grammar - focused teaching which they experienced in the past has a great influence on their current way of listening. Due to this I can assume that they don't expect a kind of class in which they are asked to think continually. This can also be predicted from the result of the questionnaire in which 65% of the students expected a memorization-centered teaching in my class (3) The amount of English which I used during my class was insufficient. According to Sakai (1997), interaction in which Japanese teachers speak only English include more "evoking" (prompt learner

s reaction or output) as a feature of function and more negotiation of meaning. That indicates that a sufficient amount of English input is needed for the students to think or infer. Therefore, it would be required that I should give the students more English input and more inferential questions.

Among those three reasons, I'd like to place great focus on third point to solve the problem raised in this research . Generally, little linguistic knowledge (reason 1) is thought as a most important factor in the lack of thinking. But in fact there are often the case where students can't answer even for the linguistically simple question (e.g., "Why? Which point?") . Judging from it, the more important factor is their few opportunities to think given by the teacher rather than their linguistic knowledge. Therefore, sufficient comprehensive input and inferential questioning are needed to stimulate their thinking and inferencing. Due to this I decided to employ the MERRIER Approach (Watanabe, 1995) which explains about the desirable quality of input for students to becomes creative speakers.

3. Hypothesis

subjects: 81 freshmen at junior college (3 classes)

Students would be given a large amount of comprehensive input and many inferential ques-

tions. I assume it will make students develop their listening ability combined with thinking.

#### 4. Plan Intervention

According to Watanabe (1995), input based on MERRIER Approach has the following 7 features: Model/Mime: To give students a model by gesture or visualization Example: To make abstract expressions practical Redundancy: To paraphrase with other expressions or ideas Repetition: To repeat key expressions Interaction: To make efforts to have interaction with students Expansion: To expand the students' answers Reward: To praise their answers as often as possible

Among those features, Example, Redundancy and Interaction should be noted by Japanese teachers.

#### Example

About a picture of a beach in a textbook I used to give the students questions like "Where are they?" "Have you ever been to such a place?" But these kind of questions don't stimulate their thinking. More concrete images by giving them examples are needed for their creative thinking: "Seeing coconut palm trees in this picture, do you think this country is to the north or to the south of Japan?" "Well, what countries are to the south of Japan? Could you give me examples?" "If you come to such a place what would you do? Swimming?"

#### Redundancy

Paraphrase with as many different expressions or idea as possible. For instance: "If I come here I would eat a lot of fruits. How about you?" and redundancy are provided such as: "What things would you do here?" "Enjoy what?"

#### Interaction

It is important to note that teacher should not

have a one-way conversation. Interaction is necessary for the students to think during class. And it is also important that their anxiety must be reduced during interaction. In particular, asking an early stage learner for an answer in a longer sentence is not desirable. Therefore the teacher should ask them for response by gesture at first, and then it proceed with one or two words step by step.

Following is the arrangement of content of the text for interaction by MERRIER Approach.

Text: (Students are required to listen to tape and put correct words in blanks.)

Noriuki: What a beautiful day to go \_\_\_\_\_ !

Brian: Yeah, it sure is — nothing like the sunny days of southern California.

Noriuki: I sure am glad I decided to \_\_\_\_\_ this car. It's got a lot of power.

Brian: I know, but I'd be careful if I were you. The speed limit is only \_\_\_\_\_ miles per hour here.

Noriyuki: Stop worrying! I've \_\_\_\_\_ gotten a ticket.

Brian: Hey, Noriyuki. You'd better pull over.

Noriyuki: Why? Is anything \_\_\_\_\_ ?

Brian: Yeah. Don't you see those flashing red \_\_\_\_\_ behind us?

Noriyuki: Oh no! What's \_\_\_\_\_ to happen now?

Interaction between teacher and students ( ): students answer

"A beautiful day to go". What's the weather like? Is it fine day, rainy, snow?<Redundancy> (Rainy.) Oh, You think that it's beautiful day. You have good sense.<Expansion> Brian talks about Southern California. Do you think it's a hot place or cold place? (Hot place.) That's right. Southern California is a hot place and that place is usually sunny.<Expansion><Example →>In

Japan what's the weather like in this season? Which kind of season just now? <Redundancy> (Summer.) Summer? Just before Summer, I think. (rainy season.) That's right.<Reward> It is rainy season just now.<Repeat>

Brian is pointing something.What does Brian see on the street? (kanban.) That's right. Sign. <Example→>If your car runs at 60 miles per hour, is it O.K? (No.) That's right. It's not good. It's against the traffic rule.<Redundancy> If a patrol

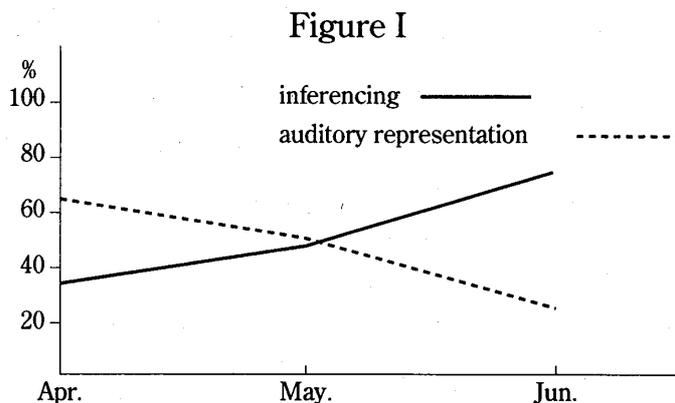
car is chasing you would you run away or stop? (running away).

### 5. Outcome

Two months later I used the questionnaire again to investigate their way of listening. The result indicates that more students began to use inferencing strategy (Table IV, Figure I). Furthermore they were giving faster responses.

Table IV : change of strategies used by students

strategy type	month	Apr.	May.	Jun.
auditory representation		65%	52%	24%
inferencing		35%	48%	76%



Most students answered '80%' to the question in the questionnaire, "How much of the content of my speech did you understand?". From this I assumed their satisfaction of being able to understand leads them to think. Moreover, they acquired the habit of thinking by becoming used to inferential questions. It made them try to find the answer by using their minds and not the textbook.

At the end of this investigation the students were asked to write a essay about this class.

affirmative reflection (80%)

- 1) I am able to understand the content of topics more than before.
- 2) I am able to infer the content meaning when I encounter unknown words.
- 3) I am able to enjoy talking in English .
- 4) I become used to listening to English.
- 5) I am able to concentrate more when using English.

negative reflection (5%)

- 1) I don't understand the intention of the teacher's questions.
- 2) There is no improvement.

From these results I think I can claim that most of the students improved their comprehension of input meaning and their thinking ability while listening. Besides, there was another interesting finding. In this class I especially focused on input and didn't give them enough time for their output. All they spoke were responses with only one/two words. Nevertheless, several students said they enjoyed speaking English. Probably, they were satisfied because their responses were the result of their own thinking or inferring. This never happens in a mechanical teaching class.

### 6. Conclusion

The objective of this study is to develop students' listening attitude combined with thinking. I used action research on the basis that: I noticed I myself needed to investigate carefully these exist-

ing problem in my classes. And my teaching experience was very short. Action research has the potential to improve teacher's teaching skill.

As a result of using the MERRIER Approach, I found the following: (1) Students' comprehension has been enhanced (2) It reinforced their habit of thinking of spoken content while listening (3) Their willingness to speak English improved. In this sense my study was successful. However, this result is included only my classes. It needs to be shared with another study dealing with the same issue.

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## APPENDIX

### QUESTIONNAIRE (translated into English)

1 Which strategy do you mainly use while listening to English ?

Auditory representation (planning back in one's mind the sound of a word, phrase, or longer language sequence)

Inferencing (Using available information to guess meanings of new items, predict outcomes, or fill in missing information)

2 Which do you think teachers especially focus on while students are answering in English?

their grammar

their pronunciation

their spoken content

3 How is your motivation for speaking English?

high

low

4 How is your anxiety for answering in English in front of the class?

high

low

5 Which way of teaching have you expected for English classes in this junior college?

memorization-centered practice of key sentences

contents-centered learning