Part 2: Inquiry into language learners

Developing autonomous habits with extensive listening

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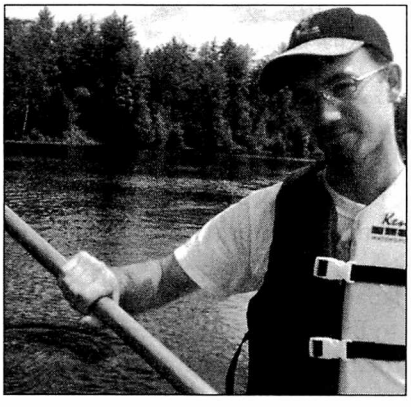

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About Matthew

I have taught English for seven years in Japan, first as an assistant language teacher, then as a cram school teacher, and finally as a university instructor. I have been trying to combine my two master's degrees (MFA and MEd) by helping students become more creative while improving their sense of autonomy.

最初は外国語指導助手、そして塾講師、現在は大学講師として、日本で教育に携わり７年になります。学生が自律性を高める一方、創造性も豊かになるよう、二つの修士号（美術学修士及び教育学修士）の活用を試みています。

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ABSTRACT

During the fall 2004 semester, 12 Japanese university learners in a Special English program weekly speaking/listening course were encouraged to set their own listening goals. In addition to English pronunciation and listening strategy training activities inside the class, learners were also asked to find listening materials outside the class, including keeping a weekly record of new words learned, strategies used, and problems encountered. At the end of the semester, learners submitted an extensive listening portfolio, which included cassette tapes of learner conversations in English, copies of their weekly listening records, and several essays asking learners to reflect on their goals and strategy usage for listening. Reflection essays and follow-up interviews indicated that while strategy use varied, the more successful learners used socially-oriented strategies and actively sought opportunities for English conversation outside the class, leading to a greater sense of personal autonomy in their English speaking and listening.

2004年秋学期、特別履修英語プログラムのスピーキング・リスニングコースの受講生、12人の大学生学習者は、リスニングについて目標を設定するよう促された。授業内での英語の発音及びリスニングのストラテジー訓練活動に加え、学習者は授業外でもリスニング学習材料を見つけ、そこで学習した新語、利用したストラテジー、直面した問題を毎週記録するよう指示された。学期末に、学習者はエクステンシブ・リスニング・ポートフォリオを提出した。ポートフォリオには、学習者同士の英語での会話を録音したテープ、毎週のリスニングの記録、さらにリスニングに関する目標とストラテジー使用を振り返ったエッセイが収集された。エッセイ分析及び確認のインタビューによると、ストラテジーの使用は様々である一方、より成功した学習者ほど、社会的ストラテジーを利用し、授業外で英語を利用する機会を積極的に求め、英語のスピーキング・リスニングにおける個人的な自律性をより感じていたことが分かった。

1. LISTENING COURSES: THE L2 INSTRUCTOR'S DILEMMA

In his final extensive listening portfolio reflection essay in the fall of 2004, a learner in this study voiced an often-heard EFL learner belief about English language listening:

> In my opinion, it is difficult to raise my listening skill in Japan, because I do not properly hear English in my daily life unless I intend to listen to English. I want to hear natural English…I am going to Australia on studying abroad course of the university in February. I am sure that it will be one of the largest chances to improve my listening ability. (Takeo[1])

The problem of access to L2 aural input in an EFL context is only exacerbated by learner beliefs such as Takeo's—namely, that study abroad is the only way to improve English listening skills. While it may be true that limited exposure to authentic oral/aural English is a daunting obstacle for EFL instructors and learners in Japan, there are actually many sources of English listening available to Japanese learners of English. NHK TV broadcasts a number of programs either in English or about the English language; English language music CDs and movies on VHS or DVD are available in most university libraries; and BBC and CNN news broadcasts can even be downloaded from the Internet.[2]

Unfortunately, it is not always possible for instructors to use these materials in class, nor are these materials always effective in class, particularly if learners have different levels of English listening ability or do not share the same listening genre interests. What instructors can do in the classroom is to expose learners to strategies useful for decoding aural English, while at the same time giving advice about listening materials and requiring learners to listen to English outside the classroom. This paper presents learner reactions to a listening class that combined inside classroom strategy and phonemic recognition skill training with outside classroom extensive listening through the use of an extensive listening portfolio.

2. A SOCIAL THEORY OF L2 LISTENING

According to Rost (1994), listening is composed of psychological and social skills. Psychological, or cognitive, skills include the ability to recognize words, to parse speech into grammar components, and to process discourse according to underlying cohesion, logic, and cultural schema. Social skills include the ability to give and understand back-channel signals during conversations and to "repair" the conversation when misunderstandings occur. Based on the work of Ur (1984), Rost further breaks down cognitive skills into various "component" skills. Learners can focus on one skill at a time when practicing, but in order to improve listening overall, all the component skills must be integrated including:

- Sound discrimination
- Recognizing words
- Recognizing stress and groups of words
- Understanding functional words in conversation
- Making connections between intonation, stress, and gestures or objects
- Using background knowledge and context to predict or confirm meaning
- Recalling important key words, topics, and ideas
- Giving feedback to speakers
- Reformulating speakers' utterances (Rost, 1994, p.142)

One problem with this analysis of listening is that it assumes that learners have an interlocutor to whom to listen. Access to L2 speakers is "essential," argues Rost, because, "Spoken language provides a means of interaction for the learner" (p.141). EFL learners are at a distinct disadvantage when it comes to finding this access to natural L2 aural input. Without the social interaction that ESL learners in the U.S. or the U.K. might have, EFL learners in Japan encounter difficulty improving their listening ability because they cannot effectively integrate all the skills necessary for understanding naturally-spoken English.

Rost himself seems aware of this difficulty. In his opinion, L2 listening is harder than L1 listening partly because "once we have learned the basic objects and concepts in the world and have associated them with words, we have lost one of the principal motives to learn language—self-expression" (p.134). This is particularly true for older learners such as high school or university students; as L2 learning takes place at a more advanced level of cognitive and social development, L2 learning becomes more closely related to cognitive and social motives for learning. Because L2 input is not often available for older L2 learners, "it seems to be that the most successful learners will often be those who develop the social strategy of making friends who will provide them with the right kind of language input." (Rost, 1994, p.136).

If speaking and listening in L2 are related, and social skills are necessary to improve both, a key question is whether L2 learners in an EFL situation such as Japan can use social strategies to improve their listening. Contact time with native speakers in the listening classroom is often extremely limited: in this study, the students only saw the instructor 80 minutes per week for 13 weeks. They, do, however, see fellow classmates who are also learning English, and in a few lucky cases may have access to exchange students from English-speaking countries. Further, though it is possible for instructors to help learners with cognitive skills such as sentence parsing and stress patterns, learners also need to be exposed to much more spoken English in order to improve automatic ear recognition of English rhythms and intonational patterns. Due to the limited amount of time inside the classroom, students in Japan need to find sources of spoken English outside the classroom, using their own initiative. When the time came to design

a listening class, I theorized that I could help learners improve their listening through three main methods based on the above skills: inside classroom strategy training, inside classroom pair work, and outside classroom aural input gathering. These three methods were used with the participants in this study.

3. BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY PARTICIPANTS

Advanced Performance B for Listening and Speaking (APB) is a required course for all students enrolled in the Faculty of Foreign Languages at a small four-year private university in western Japan. All first- and second-year students are required to take at least three separate courses of English language instruction. Communicative English is a four-skills course that meets three times per week. Students are placed into six different proficiency levels, according to scores on TOEIC exams taken at the end of each semester. Advanced Performance A for Reading and Writing (APA) and Advanced Performance B for Listening and Speaking (APB) meet once per week; students are placed into these courses according to major, but are not streamed for proficiency. Communicative English is taught by native speakers of English, while both APA and APB may be taught by either native speakers of English or of Japanese.

The section of the APB course in this study was comprised of 12 second-year students who had been accepted into the Special English course of studies, a program designed to prepare students for a junior year study abroad in an English-speaking country such as England or Australia. The course met once per week for 80 minutes in a language lab, which was a computer room of immovable desks with individual tape recorders and headphones for students and a CD/VCR/computer monitoring station for the instructor.

Students in the APB course had already demonstrated a certain level of listening proficiency by virtue of being selected for the Special English program, and moreover had an average combined TOEIC score of 608 at the beginning of the second semester of the 2004 academic year. In addition to the APB course, students were also taking a weekly TOEFL preparation course that used a TOEFL listening text and CD. Because the class in this study was partially intended to prepare students for study abroad, I thought students should be encouraged to learn more about the process of listening by working both together in class and on their own outside the classroom. This entailed having a goal for learning, learning how to apply strategies to achieve their goals, and reflecting on their mistakes and their progress before setting new goals. In other words, I theorized that becoming more autonomous and self-directed would benefit students in APB far more than listening to a cassette and circling multiple-choice answers as one might normally have expected in a typical language lab situation.

Based on my knowledge and previous class experiences, I decided that the best way to encourage students' goal-setting, strategy use, and reflection was through the use of a portfolio. While in the classroom, students could learn about individual English sounds, stress patterns, and intonational rhythms. However, I felt that students also needed time to test their listening skills on authentic English listening materials not found in traditional textbooks, i.e. materials such as music and movies that they would encounter in the real world. Students were required to find additional sources of listening materials outside the classroom, to maintain weekly records of goals and strategies used and vocabulary items learned, and to report and reflect on their experiences by using an extensive listening portfolio (ELP).

4. WHAT IS A PORTFOLIO?

Originally based on the portfolios used by artists to showcase their works to potential patrons, portfolios used for education purposes can be best described as a purposeful collection of a student's work. The portfolio is often used as an intermediate stage of coursework evaluation, but it can be an alternative evaluation to final exams (Brown & Hudson, 1998; Mineishi, 2002) and also as a teaching tool (Apple & Shimo, 2005; Shimo, 2003).

The ELP requirements in this study were designed to roughly conform to the concepts *collection*, *selection*, and *reflection* (Hamp-Lyons & Condon, 2000). *Collection* means that samples of a student's work, rather than all the work done, are included in the portfolio. *Selection* encourages learner autonomy by allowing students to choose which items to include in the portfolio. Finally, *reflection* involves learners actively engaging in the meta-cognitive processes of monitoring, self-evaluation, and self-correction, as well as for feedback from both the instructor and peers (Breen & Mann, 1997). Just before the midpoint of the fall 2004 semester, students were informed of the requirements of the final ELP. Students were also reminded of the requirements just after the New Year's break, with two weeks remaining in the semester. In addition, these requirements were available in electronic format on the instructor's classroom web page throughout the entire semester.

The ELP had four parts:

a) A cassette tape consisting of two items. The first was a series of short speeches individually recorded by students during each class meeting. The second was a short conversation of at least 10 minutes that students recorded in pairs outside class.

b) Two short reflection essays of about 50 to 100 words each. The first reflection essay asked students to write analyzing their speech improvement during the semester as recorded on the cassette tape. The second essay asked students to reflect on their listening goals: whether or not they achieved their goals, and if not, why.

c) A weekly goals log. Students handed in a goals and listening log each week detailing vocabulary learned, strategies used, and questions they had while listening to English.

d) A final reflection essay of about 250 to 300 words. Students were asked to consider their overall progress during the course, reflecting on problems in listening that they had overcome, which strategies they used to improve their listening, problems they still had, and possible ways to continue improving their listening skills.

This portfolio of listening goals and strategies was used as an assessment of the course as a whole in combination with attendance and participation in class activities. However, more than using the ELP as an assessment method, I viewed the ELP as a learning strategy unto itself: a recursive learning tool that would allow students to manage their own learning, think about their mistakes and their successes, and reflect on the process rather than the product of their study of English speaking and listening. Above all else, the ELP was designed to encourage students to become more autonomous by requiring them to choose their own extensive listening materials and to devise their own study methods without the teacher's direct assistance.

5. WHAT IS EXTENSIVE LISTENING?

Extensive listening was defined by Rixon (1986) as listening for pleasure without paying attention to the specific content or language being used. As opposed to intensive listening, i.e., searching for detailed information, exact words or phrases in short, controlled listening

passages, extensive listening gives learners more exposure to freer, more authentic forms of natural English as it is actually spoken. While learners may not be able to comprehend many of the words they hear in extensive listening (Field, 1998), extensive listening can help motivate students and can also give them more opportunities to notice pronunciation and intonational patterns.

On his Extensive Listening web page, Rob Waring (2003b) has defined EL as anything which involves "massive amounts of text," which learners understand easily and comfortably, at or below their current level of comprehension, without any questions or tasks. Waring's definition is based on his experience teaching and researching Extensive Reading (ER), defined as reading large amounts of easy texts at the *i-1* level (Day & Bamford, 1998). In Waring's view, the purpose of EL is not only to increase the amount of aural input for English learners, but also to improve recognition of the sounds of English (i.e., pronunciation of certain sound combinations and intonation patterns), encourage the automatic processing of "chunks" of spoken English, and to allow students to enjoy listening to English (Waring, 2003a). While Waring lists a variety of EL methods (See Table 1), "listening to graded readers" forms an important part of his definition of extensive reading. He also notes that students often feel comfortable listening to graded reader cassettes for books which are about two levels lower than the level of reader they can normally read with ease.

Table 1. Types of Extensive Listening Practice (based on Waring, 2003a, 2003b)

Basic	Intermediate	Advanced
EL is not really possible	EL is possible	EL should be a major aspect of language learning
Bottom-up listening skills	Listening to graded readers	Watching movies, TV (with subtitles if necessary)
Word building	Watching easy movies with subtitles several times	Radio
Matching sounds and spellings	Listening to easy songs	Listening to songs
Use of phonemic alphabet	Free conversation practice	Lots of natural conversation
Controlled conversation practice	Listening to simplified lectures	

However, there are problems with relying on graded readers as a source of extensive listening. First, cassette tapes that accompany readers generally feature a single voice that reads the text of the graded reader in flawless English of only one or two accents at best. Contrary to the recorded, commercially-produced voice of the cassette, real spoken English comes in several forms, including television and radio news broadcasts, college lectures, and daily conversation. Even when there is only one person speaking, such as in a formal speech or college lecture, English speakers use hesitation devices, using non-words such as "um" and "er," as well as repetition and rephrasing of key phrases. English speakers often stop mid-thought or mid-sentence, combine words using elision, and use slang, colloquial phrases, and pronunciation that often differ widely according to the individual. Because of the complicated nature of

authentic spoken English, listening to graded readers on cassette may not help learners to understand the flow of English conversation, including turn-taking and intonational cues or other discourse markers.

Second, if the university or university instructor buys only one tape per class, students have few opportunities to listen to the cassette outside the classroom. Even if the university has the facilities to dub multiple copies of a cassette, copying a commercially-produced tape is, of course, against international copyright laws. Further, if instructors provide copies of the cassette for all students, students are not encouraged to search for their own materials. This seems to reinforce the reliance on the English listening classroom, despite the relatively small amount of time spent in class as opposed to in the real world, and may discourage students from finding sources of aural English in the real world. Once class ends, students may not feel the need to continue listening to English outside the classroom. In addition, use of the cassette solely during class time ensures that all students in class must listen at the same rate of English speech one time only. Zhao (1997) discovered that student listening comprehension and motivation improves as students were allowed control over the rate of speed of the listening material. If students were additionally allowed to listen multiple times to materials of their choosing, this might also prove beneficial.

Finally, listening to graded readers on cassette tapes is extremely time-consuming, while at the same time a somewhat boring method of listening to English. Extensive reading using graded readers may take years to improve students' reading comprehension and vocabulary levels; extensive listening done in the same manner may likewise take years, especially if students only listen to the cassettes in the listening lab. Only the most highly motivated students could possibly continue to listen to graded readers for one or two years, and even the most serious of students might find it difficult to enjoy a listening class after a matter of weeks. While I agree that listening to "massive amounts" of graded reader cassettes could be beneficial as a method of consolidating previous language learning, I believed that to help students come to grips with authentic, spoken English, another more autonomous method of EL that allowed for self-access to authentic materials had to be considered (Tomlinson, 1998).

6. CLASSROOM PROCEDURE

Instruction for the class in this study comprised techniques for use by the students as a whole inside the classroom and by each individual student outside the classroom (See Table 2). Inside classroom techniques included information about the sounds of English, such as individual phoneme and minimal pairs pronunciation practice, as well as information and practice using suprasegmentals (word stress, sentence stress, and intonational patterns). Using passages from the class textbook, *Let's Talk 2* (Jones, 2003), each week students received examples and instruction in two strategies. (For more about strategies, refer to Cohen, 1998; O'Malley & Chamot, 1990; and Oxford, 1990.)

I also gave short "mini-lectures" of about five to 10 minutes; students practiced taking notes, then compared their answers in pairs and groups. Finally, students recorded a short speech from their homework by speaking onto individual cassette tapes. Each week for homework, students wrote about 250 to 300 words in their notebooks, then brought their speeches to class the following week and recorded themselves using the built-in cassette recorder desks in the language lab. After recording their speeches, students first listened to their own cassettes, then exchanged cassettes with a partner and listened to their classmate's cassette. Finally, students offered both praise and advice to their partners about English enunciation and intonation.

Table 2. Comparing Instruction Techniques

Inside the classroom	Outside the classroom
Mini-lectures of 5 to 10 minutes; Students take notes and compare in pairs and groups	Students choose listening materials (movies, TV programs, music, conversation or test CDs, etc.)
Individual speech recording	Students write a short speech on a topic of their choosing
Pair and group work for discussion of text and/or newspaper article passages	Maintain a record of their weekly goals for listening, speaking, and vocabulary
Repetition of minimal pairs (2 different sounds per week)	Maintain a record of which strategies they used
Suprasegmentals (intonation and rhythm) instruction	Analyze their mistakes in listening or speaking
Strategy instruction (2 per week)	Learn at least six new words through listening and create new sentences

Outside the classroom students did extensive listening and used a weekly listening log based on goal-setting and strategy instruction ideas in Nunan (1996) and Nunan, Lai, and Keobke (1999). Each week, students wrote their respective listening, speaking, and vocabulary goals i the listening log, and then thought of strategies that they could use to achieve those goals. After listening to English movies, CDs, TV programs, or Internet listening files of their own choosing, students wrote at least six new words they had learned through extensive listening, and made new sentences using them. The sheet encouraged students to make notes on words they thought they had heard, sounds that they had trouble understanding or saying, and any questions about specific difficulties they had in their English extensive listening (see MAYA! website for Appendix 3A). By asking students to find sources of aural input outside the language lab classroom, I hypothesized that students would become more autonomous and would be able to apply themselves more rigorously toward achieving their learning goals.

7. STUDENT REACTION TO SELF-SELECTED EXTENSIVE LISTENING MATERIALS

As a qualitatively conducted research study, I had no particular research questions in mind at the beginning. The essays for the ELP were already a requirement for the ELP, which were used to assess the students' progress in improving their listening skills. As I was considering how to compile data for this study, I was going to originally take data only from the student reflection essays in the ELP. However, since the ELP was designed in order to encourage students to set their own goals, use strategies to achieve these goals, and to become more autonomous in their language learning, I decided to conduct more in-depth interviews at the end of the semester, after the students had already handed in their essays. The interviews asked specific questions about goal-setting and strategy use, essentially asking students to verify in spoken words what they had written in their essays and weekly logs.

REFLECTION ESSAYS

Most students reported in their ELP reflection essays that, prior to the fall 2004 semester, they had rarely or never thought about their strategy usage. However, even after the strategy training in class, each student wrote that he or she used only two or three strategies while listening to English. The most commonly used strategy was shadowing, a variation of repetition in which the student repeats ("shadows") what he or she hears simultaneously with the listening (Murphey, 2001; Shimo, 2005). Two students mentioned note-taking of unknown words, and two mentioned literally copying down everything they heard (dictation). One student, Yuri, commented that she listened to music and tried to figure out the words before checking her comprehension by looking at the lyrics in the album liner notes.

The most frequently used listening material was movies, with eight of the 12 students commenting on their use of subtitles. Others (5) mentioned use of TV programs such as BBC or CNN news, and a few (3) discussed their use of commercial text book or English magazine CDs. Students noted that it made them more comfortable to watch their favorite movies or to listen to their favorite music, because they did not become tired or find their motivation lagging:

> I can choose my favourite movies to have enthusiasm. If I chose my favourites, I can listen to English words or phrases cheerfully and carefully. I have more interest to know what people say when I watch my favourite movies. (Maki)

> I watch [movies] without subtitles and then I write some unknown words. Next, I use subtitles and check these words. Movies are quite difficult to understand. However, animation movies are easier than common movies. So I watched Toy Story many times. (Yuri)

> According to my experience, I can hear my favorite tape again and again. But if it is not my favorite one, it is subject to give up. Therefore I think the best kind of material is which you can continue to listen to, not which various kinds of tapes. (Yoshihito)

Three students in particular who had watched news programs noted that although listening to English news was extremely difficult at first, they discovered strategies to help them better comprehend not only the overall meaning of the program, but also the individual words. Interestingly, each student chose a different technique. Eri wrote that she woke up at 6 a.m. each day in order to watch BBC and ABC news on television, but experienced difficulty understanding the speakers. She decided that by simply leaving the TV on in the background, she could gradually accustom herself to the sound and rhythm of English:

> Through this strategy, I realized that it is important to watch the programs not so seriously at first, because in my case, the content and speaking speed were too difficult and fast to understand and catch, so I just turn on the TV and listened their voice, then I could understand what they are talking about in the program gradually.

Kimiko, on the other hand, realized that she had difficulty understanding the news in English because of a lack of background knowledge, or schema, about the issues themselves and also problems with her pronunciation. Her strategies for solving these difficulties were very different from Eri:

> [D]efinitely I'm lack of knowledge about world issue...I should watch CNN or BBC after I check the news in Japanese. It makes me easy to grasp the meaning of news in English...The correct pronunciation is "æsid rain," so whenever I was listening to news about acid rain, I didn't understand. Of course, I know what "acid rain" is already, but I completely misunderstood because of [my] wrong pronunciation.

Lastly, Azzurri wrote that she listened to the CD which accompanied a magazine called *English Journal*, especially issues containing interviews with well-known British actors and actresses. This was due to her desire to learn British English and to travel to the U.K. for sightseeing or study abroad. She noted that even after listening and doing dictations, she still couldn't understand what the actors were saying, because their pronunciation, "was very different pronunciations from English I used to hear." Although she persisted in listening to the magazine's CD and taking dictation repeatedly, Azzurri also adopted a new strategy:

> Also, I especially made a massive effort to speak British English. I did shadow following the speaker said. By doing that, I felt my pronunciation is getting better...Last semester, I always tried to talk with English without mistakes. That's why I couldn't really talk to anyone...Lately while I am talking to my friends, I sometimes say words in English. Besides, I get to have fun and be excited to learn English.

Azzurri was not the only student to connect speaking outside class with listening outside class. Although nearly every student listed understanding "natural" or "fast" English conversation as one of their goals, only two students specifically wrote that they had made friends with international exchange students on campus. Yuri wrote that she and her foreign friends taught each other phrases in their respective native tongues, frequently code-switching during conversations. Sakura also wrote that she began to speak and to exchange emails with foreign friends on a daily basis. "Before that, I could not be used to talking because I sometimes felt hesitation if I made mistakes," she wrote in her reflection essay, noting that through such exchanges with international students she learned useful phrases used in daily conversation, which she believed helped her to improve her listening.

INTERVIEW RESULTS

The interviews were meant as a confirmation of the content of the reflection essays that students had written as part of the ELP, rather than as an assessment of English speaking ability. I originally intended to interview learners for about 15 minutes in a semi-structured interview style about their language learning goals, strategies, and beliefs concerning the roles of teachers and students. Since these were students that I had personally taught, many learners wanted to share personal experiences unrelated to extensive listening, with the result that several interviews become almost one hour long. Therefore, although all interviews were recorded in their entirety, only information that directly related to their goals, strategies, and beliefs about learning was transcribed.

In the interviews, learners revealed that they had approached their language goals quite seriously and felt that they had benefited from the goal-setting part of extensive listening:

- "Without some goals and purpose, I can't study. If I attain the goals, it's a kind of reward for me." (Kimiko)
- "If I make goals, I can working hard to that goal." (Maki)
- "If I have no goal, maybe I don't know what I should do, but I have a goal, even in the

class, I can come up with the idea for the goal, so I did." (Kenichi)

- "If I didn't set any goals, I think I would be confused what I should do." (Takeo)
- "If I had a goal or target, I can study hard to achieve the goal. So, it's a good thing to have a goal." (Takayuki)

On the other hand, a few students said that they hadn't reached their goal, and as a result felt that their original goal had been unrealistic. Eri commented, "Sometimes, the goal will change," and thought that some students felt the goal they originally set had been "too difficult" to achieve. Although she was eventually successful at listening to TV news programs, Kimiko noted that her original goal of listening to CNN was "vague" and said she had trouble because the speed of the broadcasters' speech was too fast. Many of the male students originally set the goal of being able to understand English language movies without reading subtitles; however, as Ochada noted, it was unrealistic to be able to understand all the dialog. As a result, many changed the goal to "I want to understand the content of the whole movie without subtitles." One male student in particular, Yuji, lamented his inability to reach his goal, which was to finish a Japanese book designed to improve English listening ability, "by just listen over and over again." He claimed that his English would have improved had he continued, but the book proved too difficult and in the end he simply "gave up."

Confirming what they had written in their reflection essays, all students in the study professed to having used a minimal number of strategies. However, the kind of strategies used and the ability to change the strategy if it seemed ineffective seemed more important factors than the number of strategies used. Students who seemed unable to reach their goals (Yuji, Takeo, Yoshihito, and Eri) had relied on strategies such as dictation and dictionary look-up, and preferred to work alone both inside and outside the classroom. They also tried to simply listen to English, whether on CD, in TV shows or in movies, for a certain amount of time each day. For example, Yuji's strategy was to listen to English "every day for 60 minutes without thinking." As he had previously written in his essay, Takeo insisted in the interview that it was "impossible" to learn English outside the classroom, "cause everybody speaks Japanese." Yoshihito's sole goal was to have a higher score on the listening section than his classmates. He said that the previous semester his goal had been to get a higher score than Kimiko; having failed to achieve that, he then changed his rival to Takeo, but in the end his use of movie script books didn't help him to overcome his classmate's test score for listening.

Surprisingly, although only two students had written in their reflection essays about the connection between speaking and listening, the students who reported in interviews to have reached their goals all shared the same strategy: that of speaking with friends in English outside the classroom. Other strategies varied from shadowing to summarizing to transferring skills from other classes. Kimiko claimed to have combined several strategies: first she took notes on what she heard in CNN or BBC news, next she looked up the words and tried to memorize their meanings, and finally she used them in conversation with friends on campus. Ochada said he tried to talk in English with Yuji and Takayuki on their way home from campus (Yuji and Takayuki did not mention speaking in English with classmates, so perhaps it was always a one-sided conversation!). One student, Kenichi, related meeting a Chinese tourist and giving him directions in English to nearby restaurants. He claimed to actively seek out foreign tourists near the JR train station so that he could practice speaking and listening to "real" English.

When asked about the roles of teachers and students both inside and outside the classroom, 10 of the 12 students came down firmly on the side of learner autonomy. They expressed a desire to choose listening materials both inside and outside class, to be able to speak to classmates in pairs and groups in the class, and to be required to maintain records of their learning and

write reports outside the class. Teachers, they agreed, should be guides; teachers should give students techniques and strategies for learning, but students should be allowed to discover their own path to success:

- "I want you to show us something for listening. Give me some options. I want to choose. I want to have more opportunity for speaking English." (Sakura)
- "I think it might be better to spend more time in speaking with classmates, and the topic is anything, so we can choose anything. Maybe a group of two or three and decide the topic, and we discuss about the topic. And [the teacher] can go around each groups and listen the discussion and give us some opinion." (Ochada)
- "[The teacher should create activities] such as games, interviews together...Students should listening and speaking out loud to each other, because if we teach each other we can learn something different our views." (Yoshihito)
- "I think teachers should let students speak about their thinking...I want to listening to my friends' English and teacher's English." (Maki)
- "[The teacher] should teach us how to improve our English...introduce us some effective strategies and tell us that episode which you actually experienced. Students should trust teacher and try to use strategies with friends." (Kimiko)
- "Teacher gives students a big theme and at first students think about the big theme. I think there are students...students have each opinion and talk more deeply with each other." (Eri)
- "Classmates help each other. If there is a problem, teacher advises to students. Teachers and students try to think the best way to study, together. Teacher should tell the hint. They don't have to tell the way to study, just hint. Later, students think whether its work." (Takayuki)

Two students, Yuji and Takeo, continued to focus on native speakers as the final arbiters of English and seemed unable or unaware of their ability to be autonomous. They both talked about the necessity of listening only to native speakers, and both said students should "study hard" while the teacher should be "nice" and also "teach kindly and seriously." Their strong attachment to the valued belief in the roles of teachers and learners (Wenden, 1991, p.54) seems to have prevented both Yuji and Takeo from increasing their autonomy. In Nunan's terms, both students remained at the "Level 1" or possibly "Level 2" stage of learner autonomy (Nunan, 1997, p.195). Yuji and Takeo were aware of the goals of the class and had attempted to set goals on their own, but they were unable to shake their language beliefs. While claiming that students should study hard, Yuji said that as for himself, "I tried to study as hard as possible, but actually I just followed [the teacher's instructions]. I definitely need [to] practice."

8. Final reflections

Looking back over the results of the interviews and the reflection essays, I believe we can detect some definite patterns: students who set clear goals for their English listening chose strategies that worked, were able to alter their strategies when they didn't work, and willfully sought out opportunities outside the classroom for active engagement in English conversation.

So, what does this have to do with extensive listening? The 12 students in this study were taking several other courses, and they were exposed to spoken English by at least three different native speakers of English as well as two different native speakers of Japanese who used English in the classroom. However, not all students were equally successful at improving their English

listening: only those students who responded to the challenge of autonomous study reported having reached their listening goals. Moreover, they were able to combine independent study (independent not necessarily meaning "autonomous," cf. Little, 2001) with cooperative, social studying (cf. "critical collaborative autonomy," Murphey, 2001b).

Recall a main contention of Rost (1994): "[T]he most successful learners will often be those who develop the social strategy of making friends who will provide them with the right kind of language input" (p.136). Based on the self-reports in writing and in interviews, students in this study who actively sought English conversation partners, whether native speaker of English, Japanese, or even Chinese, were successful at improving their English listening skills. This finding supports what Little (2000) called "the power of distributed cognition," in which each learner interacts with other learners, and, "interweave with each other in a mutually supportive way" (Little, 2000, p.22). Although students may not have had access to L2 native speakers all the time, by conversing with "near-peers" (Dornyei & Murphey, 2003), students were able to improve their English speaking and listening through the interactive process of language negotiation (Pica, 1987). Working together both inside and outside the classroom with the help of peers was an important part of language development and improvement for students in this study.

Shortly after the interviews for this study were completed, six of the 12 students in the study headed overseas for study abroad programs in February 2005. Three joined ESL programs in the U.K., one for half a year and two for a full year. Three more entered universities in Australia, two of whom joined the regular university program. The remaining six students went to Australia for a six-week stay with a larger group of students from the regular university Communicative English program. Of those six students, one enjoyed his stay so much that he changed his mind about study abroad (he had originally decided against it) and successfully applied for a year-long university study in Brisbane, Australia, for the 2006 academic year. Six of the seven students from this study who managed to join a study abroad program (Eri, Kimiko, Maki, Sakura, Azzurri, and Takayuki) had had strong preferences for working both autonomously and socially inside and outside the classroom. At the end of his interview, Takayuki perhaps best summed up these learners' beliefs: "Nobody tells us the answer, so we try to search the goal. Sometimes difficult, but trying to achieve is a very good thing."

NOTES:

1 All names of learners in this paper are pseudonyms. All participants granted the researcher the right to quote their reflection essays and to use their comments in the interviews.

2 In addition to downloadable BBC and CNN news broadcasts, there are now (as of June 2006) a number of podcasts designed for EFL/ESL students available on the internet. English conversation iPod or mp3 player programs are also now on sale in computer stores. At the time the students in this study were engaged in Extensive Listening (fall 2004), podcasts were just beginning to appear. None of the students reported the use of portable mp3 players for English listening.

CRITICAL READER RESPONSE 1

TURID TREBBI

The author of this chapter presents an approach to self-directed language learning which relates to a specific cultural context in a very interesting way. The action oriented notion of self-directed learning is the counterpart of the theoretical concept of language learner autonomy (Holec, 1981). Learner autonomy and self-directed learning are two sides of the same coin, the former being a theoretical concept offering a definition that we can agree on regardless of differences in cultural contexts, whereas the latter is highly context sensitive. Learner autonomy refers to a mental state which is the capacity to take charge of one's own learning and self-directed learning is learner autonomy put into practice in ways that are relying on different culture dependent conditions.

The focal point of the chapter is awareness-raising regarding listening comprehension through learning to learn activities supported by ongoing listening experience. A noticeable feature is the organisation of this work in both inside classroom teacher driven and outside classroom student driven activities. It seems that there is no problem having the students accept this shared management, presumably because in a traditional setting students also work on their own when doing homework. At least in Norway, homework is less teacher dependent than classroom work. Are outside classroom activities probably a good starting point for developing learner autonomy? Here it seems to offer a plausible solution to the identified problem of limited exposure to the target language in the Japanese context. However, this solution could also stem from a certain disbelief in the feasibility of an alternative classroom developed as a resource center as described by Trebbi (Trebbi, 1995). In my experience in a Norwegian context, this alternative classroom is apt to solve the dilemma of different listening interests, abilities, and listening rates.

The author puts emphasis on the importance of the teacher role. The teacher creates what I would label an *open* learning situation or a *frame* within which the learners have the possibility to create their own learning space (ibid.). To enable the learners to benefit from this openness, learning to learn activities aiming at consciousness-raising have to be provided by the teacher. In Apple's example, the open learning situation is framed by a double initiative; both the portfolio, which serves the purpose of maintaining a record of learning processes, and the teacher's teaching of listening strategies.

However, the question is if we can actually *teach* strategies in a learner autonomy scheme. What I find interesting here is that most of the students seem to take teaching as *information* that can be used to search for their own material, explore and develop their own listening strategies. Instead of traditional teaching being seen as "transmission of knowledge," we seem to have teaching seen as supporting students' own knowledge building. Presumably the successfully designed combination of teacher instructions and the use of a portfolio leads to this positive effect and thus supports self-direction, or as the author puts it: " (The students) discover their own path to success."

CRITICAL READER RESPONSE 2

YOKO WAKUI

In recent years, there has been growing interest in the academic world in listening and an increasing number of teachers and researchers have sought useful ways to improve students' listening ability. In this respect, Apple's paper should significantly contribute to teachers and researchers. Also, many English teachers face the difficulty in adjusting to the huge gap among students' levels in class. His study, however, should help solve this problem if we are struggling with it. Lastly, I would like to express my appreciation for being given a chance to read this article as an inside response reader.

Nowadays, the importance of listening ability has been emphasized and entrance exams for colleges and universities in Japan often incorporate listening tests. Besides, I believe that listening ability is no less important than reading, writing, or speaking, because it would never be possible to communicate orally if you did not understand what information others are trying to convey.

Matthew's approach is quite unique in that he let his students record their own voices and exchange their tapes with other students. His students may have been excited to listen to their peers' voices. The students seem to have been motivated to do so and listened eagerly to their peers' voices. It may be because they were involved in the activity personally. I do not think they can be passive at all at that moment. He carried out extensive research into the students' reflections, which were insightful indeed, which proved how effective this approach could be. "The new brain theories suggest that our complex of intelligence is developed through social interaction with others" (O'Keefe, 1999, p.9).

One of the biggest problems in class is the level difference. If students were assigned to do the same-level training, it is possible that teachers will face problems. His paper, however, shows that individual work was assigned to each student. Each one chose his/her favorite materials to listen to, tried to find his/her own strategies, and filled in an extensive weekly listening goal-setting sheet. Students are expected to learn by themselves and to realize that it is they who should study with the support from the teacher. I agree with him without a doubt.