

Citation

Matsuoka, Y. (2009). Possible strategies for listening comprehension: Applying the concepts of conversational implicature and adjacency pairs to understand speaker intention in the TOEFL listening section. *Accents Asia* [Online], 3 (2), 27-56. Available: <http://www.accentsasia.org/3-2/matsuoka.pdf>

Possible Strategies for Listening Comprehension: Applying the Concepts of Conversational Implicature and Adjacency Pairs to Understand Speaker Intention in the TOEFL Listening Section

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Introduction

Recently, reflecting the growing needs of young people who intend to become more competent in the English language and plan to go abroad for study and work, not only universities but also more high schools in Japan have started to conduct preparation courses for English proficiency tests such as TOEFL (Test of English as a Foreign Language) and TOEIC (Test of English for International Communication), in addition to ordinary English classes. Also, the Ministry of Education, Sports, Science and Technology in Japan (MEXT) has encouraged high schools to enhance students' communicative competence in foreign language education so that they can play an active part in international society. I currently teach a preparation course using TOEFL ITP (an assessment tool composed of previously administered TOEFL tests) at a co-educational high school attached to a university in Tokyo. A pre-course questionnaire shows that many of the students who enrolled in this elective class are eager to improve their overall English ability, especially listening and speaking, and some of them are planning to study abroad in the near future. Furthermore, according to the questionnaire, many of the students expressed their preference of learning listening to reading and writing, though they acknowledged listening is the skill most difficult to master.

Listening is essential not only as a receptive skill but also to the development of spoken language proficiency (Rost cited in Nunan and Miller, 1995), and my own experience as a learner of English shows that the skill of L2 listening requires a lot of time and effort for Japanese learners to acquire. All these factors led me to give priority to studying listening comprehension compared with the structure and reading in TOEFL. In this research project I



focused on Part A of TOEFL listening comprehension because the part includes a several short conversations, which expose students to a variety of authentic spoken English language (Brown, 2001). This is important in the process of acquiring communicative competence but rarely takes place in Japanese high schools.

In the beginning of the course in April, I carried out my listening instruction by teaching vocabulary and grammar with repeated CD listening, focusing on listening to key-words. Then, after an actual TOEFL ITP test was conducted inside the school in June, my students' negative reaction against the test led me to attempt new strategies applying conversational analysis to the study of TOEFL listening. A post-examination survey filled out after the actual TOEFL showed that students were overwhelmed by the difficulty and time length of the test. In particular, they expressed difficulty with dialogues in Part A, which contain speaker's primary intention and implication concealed under the surface meaning, and showed confusion in selecting correct choices, which requires deep understanding of the dialogues. It was obvious that not only practicing listening to key words and phrases but also analyzing conversations is necessary for the better interpretation of TOEFL listening. In an attempt to apply *conversation analysis* to the new strategies for listening comprehension, I selected three topics and incorporated them into three lessons: the identification of types of speech, conversational implicature, and adjacency pairs. *Conversation analysis* refers to "a research tradition evolving from ethnomethodology which studies the social organization of natural conversation by a detailed inspection of tape recordings and transcriptions" (Richards & Schmidt, 1985), in which the emphasis is "on the close observation of the behavior of participants in talk and on patterns which recur over a wide range of natural data" (McCarthy, 1991), and various aspects of spoken interaction have been investigated. *Conversational Implicature* can be interpreted as what is implied, suggested, or meant by saying something, studied by linguists such as Grice (1975), Searle (1969), and Austin (1962). Understanding conversational implicature might give learners deep insight into spoken discourse, which often includes speakers' hidden intention and implication under the words and expressions uttered verbally. *Adjacency pair* refers to a pair of utterances which are mutually dependent (e.g., greeting- greeting, and apology- acceptance) and such relationships are often found in ordinary talk (McCarthy, 1991). The three lessons were implemented to the whole class in different weeks in September. Students' improvement was examined by comparing the scores between two mock tests, Mock Test 1 in April and Mock Test 2 in November, including entirely different exam questions but the same format. The efficacy of the strategies and the



effects of strategy training were examined through the data of class-discussion and the evaluation of a questionnaire.

In addition, the fact that there have been few studies investigating the efficacy of conversational implicature to enhance Japanese high school students' communicative competence was another cause for me to start this research. Though some experimental studies have been done (see Bouton, 1992; Broersma, 1994; Kubota, 1995; and Taguchi, 2007), the subjects of their research were university students and immigrants. Few people seem to have examined students' development of communicative ability in Japanese high school. This paper will attempt to investigate possible strategies in current secondary education in Japan in light of the following research questions: 1) Is strategy instruction applying the concepts of conversational implicature and adjacency pairs to the listening comprehension feasible in a TOEFL preparatory course in a Japanese high school? 2) Can the strategies help students to understand the speaker's intention in the short conversations of TOEFL listening?

Review of the Literature

Strategy Training

In language learning, the use of strategies “has been observed to produce a positive effect on student achievement” (Flaitz & Feiten, 1996, pp.211). The term *learner strategies* refers to “language learning behaviors learners actually engage in to learn and regulate the learning of a second language” (Wenden, 1987, p.6), and also refers to what learners know about the strategies they use and what they know about other aspects of their language learning (Wenden, 1987). According to Rubin's classification of three kinds of strategies used by language learners, *learning strategies* directly contribute to the development of the language system which the learner constructs to affect learning, while *communication strategies* and *social strategies* are indirectly related to language learning (Rubin, 1987). On the other hand, O'Malley et al. (cited in O'Malley & Chamot, 1990) classified learner strategies into three categories depending on the type of processing involved: *cognitive*, *metacognitive*, and *social/ affective*. Metacognitive strategy refers to “a learning strategy that involves thinking about or knowledge of the learning process, planning for learning, monitoring learning while it is taking place, or self-evaluation of learning after the task has been completed”, while cognitive strategies refer to “one that involves mental manipulation or transformation of materials or tasks and intended to enhance comprehension, acquisition, or retention”



(O'Malley & Chamot, 1990, pp.229 -230). Social/ affective strategies include cooperative learning, asking questions, and self-talk. Researches of strategy training (O'Malley & Chamot, 1990; Oxford, 1990; Rubin, 1987) suggest that both the metacognitive and cognitive strategies are essential for learners to improve. In fact, O'Malley (1990) concludes that "Students without metacognitive approaches are essentially learners without direction and ability to review their progress, accomplishment, and future learning directions" (p.8).

The model of learning strategies of O'Malley et al. (cited in O'Malley & Chamot, 1990) seems useful to describe the strategy instruction in the present research. Since the teaching of the concepts of conversational implicature and adjacency pairs proposed in my paper can be the application of unwritten "rules" used commonly in society, the strategy instruction applying these rules may represent *deducing* or *deductive strategy* (applying rules to the understanding of language) in the sub-category of cognitive strategies presented in this model (O'Malley & Chamot, 1990). In deductive strategies, deduction is able to be made by schemata based on rules, and the learner can apply discourse rules and sociocultural rules, in addition to grammatical ones. In the beginning, these schema-based rules are part of declarative knowledge (information consisting of consciously known facts), but they may become procedural knowledge (knowledge of how to perform an activity) when students become able to use them in their study (O'Malley & Chamot, 1990).

Studies on strategy training (Chamot, Barnhardt, El-Dinary & Robbins, 1996; Yang, 1996; Oxford, 1990; Wenden, 1987) indicate that teaching learning strategies is effective in learner development and what students would not recognize unless instructed should be taught in training programs. Strategies for language learning can be taught in three ways: awareness or consciousness-raising training, one-time strategy training, and long-term strategy training (Oxford, 1990). Chamot *et al.* (1996) report that teachers who participated in their strategy research selected the strategies such as predicting the content of the listening text, selectively attending to key words and ideas, and memorizing for developing students' knowledge of vocabulary as most beneficial to students for listening comprehension, and this selection of strategies for instruction is "closely tied to task demands" (p. 185). In addition, it is suggested by Dornyei (2001) that in strategy training what should be done are creating the basic motivational conditions, generating initial motivation, maintaining motivation, and encouraging positive retrospective self-evaluation. Above all, what was particularly useful for me when designing the strategy instruction was



Oxford's *model of eight steps in the strategy training* (Oxford, 1990), which includes the following:

- Step 1) Determine the learners' needs and the time available.
- Step 2) Select strategies well.
- Step 3) Consider integration of strategy training.
- Step 4) Consider motivational issues.
- Step 5) Prepare materials and activities.
- Step 6) Conduct "completely informed training.
- Step 7) Evaluate the strategy training.
- Step 8) Revise the strategy training.

(I will explain these steps in relation to my lesson planning in the Methodology section).

Listening Comprehension

Listening plays an important role in communication as it is said that, of the total time spent on communicating, listening takes up 40-50%; speaking, 25-30%; reading, 11-16%; and writing, about 9% (Rivers 1981 and in Mendelsohn, 1994). Although the teaching of listening comprehension has long been "somewhat neglected and poorly taught aspect of English in many EFL programs" (Mendelsohn, 1994, p.9), listening is now regarded as much more important in both EFL classrooms and SLA research. Richards (2003) points out that the view of listening has changed from the mastery of discrete skills in the 1970s to new theoretical models of comprehension from the field of cognitive psychology in the 80s and 90s. Then the distinction between bottom-up processing and top-down processing was derived, listening came to be viewed as an interpretive process, and at the same time, the fields of conversation analysis and discourse analysis were revealing a great deal about the organization of spoken discourse and led to the realization that written texts read aloud could not provide a suitable basis for developing the abilities needed to process real-time authentic discourse (Richards, 2003). Both bottom-up and top-down processing have directed the attention of many researchers and educationalists. Top-down processing makes use of 'higher level', non-sensory information (e.g., learner's knowledge of the world) to predict or interpret 'lower level' information (e.g., words and sentences), while bottom-up processing makes use of the information present in the input to achieve higher level meaning (Richards and Schmidt, 1985).



Mendelsohn (1994) defines listening comprehension as “the ability to understand the spoken language of native speakers”(p.19). O’Malley, Chamot, and Kupper (1989, cited in Mendelsohn, 1994) offer a useful and more extensive definition that “listening comprehension is an active and conscious process in which the listener constructs meaning by using cues from contextual information and from existing knowledge, while relying upon multiple strategic resources to fulfill the task requirement”(p.19). Mendelsohn (1994) points out that, in listening to spoken language, the ability to decipher the speaker’s intention is required of a competent listener, in addition to other abilities such as processing the linguistic forms like speech speed and fillers, coping with listening in an interaction, understanding the whole message contained in the discourse, comprehending the message without understanding every word, and recognizing different genres. Listeners must also know how to process and how to judge what the illocutionary force of an utterance is- that is, what this string of sounds is intended to mean in a particular setting, under a particular set of circumstances – as an act of real communication (Mendelsohn, 1994). Also, according to Anderson and Lynch (1988), arguing what is successful listening, “understanding is not something that happens because of what a speaker says: the listener has a crucial part to play in the process, by activating various types of knowledge, and by applying what he knows to what he hears and trying to understand what the speaker means”(p.6). To sum up, it is widely admitted that listening comprehension is not merely the process of a unidirectional receiving of audible symbols, but an interactive process (Brown, 2001). In the eight processes of comprehension (adapted from Clark &Clark1977 and Richards 1983 in Brown, 2001), the hearer, after receiving the information, assigns a literal meaning to the utterance first and then assigns an intended meaning to the utterance. A key to human communication is the ability to match perceived meaning with intended meaning.

Conversational Implicature

The key ideas of conversational implicature were proposed by Grice in the Williams James lectures at Harvard in 1967 and still only partially published (Grice, 1975, 1978, cited in Levinson, 1983). Implicature can be interpreted as what is implied, suggested, or meant by saying something. Grice (1989) developed the concept of implicature in theory of how people use language, in which a set of guidelines for the efficient and effective use of language for conversation, namely conversational maxims were proposed. The four maxims include the maxims of Quality (be true), Quantity (be informative as is required, but do not make it more



informative than is required), Relevance (be relevant), and Manner (be perspicuous, and especially avoid obscurity of expression, avoid ambiguity, be brief, and be orderly) (Grice, 1989). These maxims or general principles underlying the efficient co-operative use of language jointly express a general co-operative principle. The cooperative principle describes how people interact with one another, and states, “Make your contribution such as it is required, at the stage at which it occurs, by the accepted purpose or direction of the talk exchange in which you are engaged” (Grice, 1989, p.26). According to Levinson (1983), who admits the conversational implicature to be one of the single most important ideas in pragmatics, the study of language usage, the reason for linguistic interest in the conversational maxims is that they generate inferences (or conversational implicatures) beyond the semantic content of the sentences uttered. Conversational maxims are often broken and it is here that implicature, i.e. what is meant, but not expressly stated, becomes significant (Linfoot-Ham, 2006).

The notion of conversation implicature can also be associated with Speech Act Theory in conversation analysis, the study of talk-in-interaction (Psathas, 1995). Both Speech Act Theory and Pragmatics share logico-philosophical perspective on conversational organization by focusing on the interpretation rather than the production of utterances in discourse (Eggin & Slade, 1997). Questioning an old assumption that to say something is always and simply to *state* something, Austin (1962) argued that in some cases *to say something is to do something*. The utterances in those cases are called *performatives* or *performatories*. Some performatives have, according to Austin, “the grammatical make up of statements on the face of them, but are distinct from statements in that they are not utterances which could be ‘true or false’, which is traditionally the characteristic mark of a statement.” For instance, in the course of a marriage ceremony, in saying the utterance ‘I do’ (take this woman to be my lawful wedded wife), one is performing an act, namely marrying, rather than reporting something. Austin (1962) pointed out that some conditions are necessary for the smooth and ‘happy’ functioning of explicit performatives, otherwise, something goes wrong and the act such as marrying, betting, or bequeathing is at least to some extent a failure (the doctrine of the Infelicities). Similarly, Searle (1969) argues that speaking a language is engaging in a rule-governed form of behavior and all linguistic communication involves linguistic acts. These acts performed by speaking language are so-called “speech acts”, and include making promises, asking questions, and giving commends (Searle, 1969). Searle proposed five macro-classes of illocutionary act (an act performed by saying something):



representatives, directives, commissives, expressive, and declarations (Coulthard, 1985). For example, think of a following exchange between two people, X and Y. X: “*Let’s go to the movies tonight*”, Y: “*I have to study for an exam.*” The first move is directives, in which both the literal and surface meanings are X’s proposal to go to the movies. On the other hand, as for the second move (representatives) uttered by Y, its literal or surface meaning is Y’s assertion that he/she must study for the exam, but primary or indirect meaning hidden under the surface is Y’s rejection to X’s proposal. This kind of analysis seems to be useful in understanding common conversations, such as found on the TOEFL exam, because in daily conversation it is rare to express one’s refusal directly. Instead of saying, “*No, I wouldn’t*” or “*No, I don’t want to do that*”, people usually use more indirect ways of denial as seen in Y’s response, in order to maintain harmonious communication.

There are few studies regarding the effectiveness of conversational implicature to enhance high school students’ communicative competence in foreign language education in Japan. For instance, Kubota (1995), claiming the lack of studies dealing with the teachability of pragmatic knowledge, stated in the study of Japanese EFL students in university that teaching conversational implicature through explicit explanations of rules and consciousness-raising tasks is highly facilitative. Another experiment was done by Broersma (1994) to the student subjects with high proficiency of English in the University of Illinois, exploring whether ESL learners can learn implicatures through explicit teaching using the materials resembling to the ones by Nicholls (1993). Taguchi (2007) investigated development of pragmatic comprehension ability across time, and Cohen (1988) showed that there existed positive effects for instruction in apologizing on written tests in class. The research relating to conversational implicature can also be found in the works in Bouton (1992), who compared the ability of non-native speakers to interpret English implicature appropriately over several years while living in America, while Montserrat (1992), explored the production of English apology strategies by Spanish speakers studying English. However, it seems that existing studies and reports have neither investigated the efficacy of the strategies which introduce conversational implicature and some elements of conversational analysis for the listening comprehension nor examined students’ development of communicative ability in Japanese high schools.

Adjacency Pairs



Pairs of utterances such as greeting-greeting and apology-acceptance are called adjacency pairs, and are often mutually dependent (McCarthy, 1997). To examine the nature and function of a pair of utterances, (i.e., a minimum unit of conversation), is particularly useful for my teaching and helps my students understand the listening comprehension of the TOEFL test, since every dialogue in Part A of the section is composed of a pair of utterances by two participants — that is, minimal, basic unexpanded form of an adjacency pair (Schegloff, 2007). Schegloff and Sacks (1973) explain that adjacency pairs consist of sequences which properly have the following features: (1) two-utterance length, (2) adjacent positioning of component utterances, (3) different speakers producing each utterance. Furthermore, these two turns are (4) relatively ordered — that is, they are differentiated into “first pair parts” (FPPs, or Fs for short) and “second pair parts” (Spps, or Ss for short), and (5) pair-type related; that is, the FPP and SPP come from the same pair type to compose an adjacency pair; the pair types are exchanges such as greeting-greeting, question-answer, offer-accept/decline, and the like (Schegloff, 2007). In addition, as for the pair-type relation, the two parts may be either discriminately related or in a relation of conditional relevance (Psathas, 1995). According to Levinson (1983), the adjacency pair has been suggested to be a fundamental unit of conversation by Goffman (1976) and Coulthard (1977), as well, and such a view seems to underlie the speech act models of conversation he presents.

Methodology

Participants and Setting

The participants for this research were 17 high school students, including 5 boys and 12 girls, who enrolled in the TOEFL preparatory class that I teach. In this high school, more than 95 percent of students are to proceed to the affiliated university without taking the entrance examination for outsiders, and TOEFL ITP is used as a placement test in the university to assess freshmen English proficiency in order to divide them into appropriate classes based on their competence of English. This one-year TOEFL preparatory class I teach takes two hours, once a week. It is one of the elective courses offered to prepare students for several English proficiency tests, such as distinct levels of Eiken, and TOEIC, offered by the school to meet MEXT’s plan of fostering students’ communicative competence and global understanding. During the course students are obliged to take the actual TOEFL test at least once a year, though it does not matter what scores they get on the test. Most of my students have passed the pre-second or second level of Eiken test before, but none of them had experienced the



TOEFL before. On the first day of this course in April, I conducted a pre-course questionnaire to investigate the aims and background of participants. The questions asked included:

1. Which of the following four skills of English do you enjoy studying: listening, reading, writing, and speaking? Choose one item.
2. Which of the following four skills of English do you feel are difficult to learn: listening, reading, writing, and speaking? Choose one item.
3. Why did you enroll in this TOEFL course? Check up to three reasons.

Table 1-a below shows the results of the questions 1 and 2 above, in which *listening* was selected by more than 30% of students as the skill they enjoy learning, at the same time, more students chose the skill as the most difficult to master. This contradictory, but noteworthy result made me aware of the importance of teaching listening.

Table 1-a:

Results from questions 1 & 2 of the pre-course questionnaire:

Students' preference in studying English skills in percentages

	Listening	Reading	Writing	Speaking
1.Skill that students enjoy studying	35(%)	30	23	12
2.Skill that students feel difficult to acquire	42(%)	23	12	23

Table 1-b shows the results of question No.3, which asks the reasons why they enrolled in this TOEFL class. The students were requested to circle up to three appropriate items from seven choices presented in the questionnaire. Of all the seventeen students, 24% of them chose three reasons, but the rest 76% chose only two reasons. It appeared that about 65%, the largest proportion of students, took this class in order to improve in their English study. Choice No. 2, *usefulness of TOEFL in the university*, was selected by about 41% of them, seemed to be the second most important reason for them. Moreover, it was found that about 35% enrolled both *to take credits at high school* and *for the interest in TOEFL*. Only 5.8% wanted to *challenge for a new test*, and no entry was written in the last open-ended space.



Table 1- b:

Results from question 3 of the pre-course questionnaire: Reasons to take the TOEFL course and the proportion of students who checked each reason (up to 3 reasons were allowed.)

Reasons	Proportion of students who checked the reason
1) to prepare for studying abroad in the future	23 (%)
2) because it is used as a placement test in the university	41.1
3) to take credits at high school	35.2
4) to challenge for a test that I have never taken	5.8
5) to improve my English ability	64.7
6) because I am interested in TOEFL	35.2
7) recommended by family and friends	17.6
8) other reasons	(no entry)

* Of all the students, 24% of them circled three reasons, but the rest, 76%, chose only two reasons.

Lessons Applying Conversational Analysis

I organized three lessons on strategies attempting to apply conversational analysis, taking into account Oxford's *eight steps in the strategy training model* (1990). Table 2 below shows the steps I proposed and the processes in which I planned and conducted the strategy training.

Table 2:

Oxford' model of *eight steps in the strategy training* and the process of organizing and implementing the three lessons following these steps.

Oxford's Eight Steps	Lessons for Strategy Training
1) Determine the learners' needs and the time available.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪Pre-course questionnaire (to get background information of students) ▪Post-TOEFL questionnaire (to find out learners' needs) ▪50 minutes were allotted to each of the three lessons
2) Select strategies well.	Three compatible and mutually supporting strategies (Oxford, 1990) are selected to help learners interpret speaker



	<p>intention.</p> <p>(Cognitive strategies)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Identifying various types of speech ▪ Recognizing adjacency pairs ▪ Recognizing conversational implicature. <p>▪ Employing these strategies when they actually listen to them.</p>
3) Consider integration of strategy training.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ When the strategy training is closely integrated with language learning (in this case, the study of TOEFL), it helps learners better understand how the strategies can be used in a significant, meaningful context (Oxford, 2001).
4) Consider motivational issues.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Creating the basic motivational conditions. (appropriate teacher behaviors; a pleasant classroom atmosphere; a cohesive learner group) ▪ Generating initial motivation. (generating students' interest; provide enjoyable tasks) ▪ Maintaining and protecting motivation. (making learning and tasks stimulating; setting learner specific goals; increasing their self-confidence; allowing learners to maintain a positive social image) adopted from Dornyei, 2001.
5) Prepare materials and activities.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Handouts were organized and distributed in each lesson. ▪ Activities were designed to promote students' recognition of the sociolinguistic aspects of conversation in our daily lives. ▪ Tasks involve group/ pair works to enhance cooperation of students.
6) Conduct "completely informed" training.	<p>Explaining why the strategies are important, in what situation they can use the strategies, how they should apply the strategies. L1 was used for better interpretation of students, while L2 was used for the terms such as 'adjacency pairs'.</p> <p>(Metacognitive strategy)</p>



7) Evaluate the strategy training.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Class discussion (Students evaluate the instruction, helpfulness, and the use of the strategies. Students are given an opportunity for group discussion.) ▪ Evaluation questionnaire (to give all students an opportunity to express what they think about the strategy training and strategy use.
8) Revise the strategy training.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Reflection on the questionnaire, teaching approaches, materials, and class discussion.

Table 3 below summarizes the purposes, procedure, activities, and materials of each of the three lessons.

Table 3:
Purposes and procedure of activities for three lessons

	Purposes	Procedure/ Activities
Lesson 1: Types of Speech	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ To make students aware of different types of spoken discourse in our daily life (from casual conversation to formal lectures and rituals). 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Teacher explains and lists the types of speech. Students add examples they come up with. 2. Students are asked to recall the situation where they actually had a conversation with someone this morning and write them down. 3. Listening activity Students listen to a CD of short conversations between two people and identify who the speakers are, where the conversation is taking place, and what the speakers are talking about. <p>▪Material: Handout for ‘Types of speech’ ETS (1995).<i>TOEFL Practice Tests</i>.</p>



<p>Lesson 2: Adjacency Pairs</p>	<p>▪To make students aware of the mutual dependence of a pair of verbal utterances.</p>	<p>1. Teacher explains and lists the typical examples of adjacency pairs. Students are encouraged to give examples of paired conversation corresponding to those adjacency pairs.</p> <p>2. Practice on handout Students identify the patterns of adjacency pairs corresponding to the two-turn conversations presented in the handout.</p> <p>3. Speaking practice Students practice speaking in pairs, using these two-turn conversations as scripts, in order to confirm the meaning and the pair construction of each conversation.</p> <p>▪ Material: Handout for ‘<i>Adjacency pairs</i>’.</p>
<p>Lesson 3: Conversation Implicature</p>	<p>▪To make students understand the speaker’s primary intention, implication, and assumption hidden under the surface meaning.</p> <p>▪To encourage students to use the knowledge of conversational implicature in their production of speech.</p>	<p>1. Teacher shows an example conversation adopted from Grice (1991), and asks students to think over what is implied in the second pair-part.</p> <p>2. Practice in pairs: Students do exercises on finding out the hidden intention, implication, and assumption of the second speaker in each conversation presented in handout.</p> <p>3. Applying the knowledge to speech production: Students try to produce utterances,</p>



		<p>considering the situation where they should answer indirectly to what are asked.</p> <p>▪Material: Handout for ‘<i>Conversation implicature</i>’.</p>
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Conducting the series of strategy trainings to my students, I used their L1, Japanese, for the explanation of the form and purpose of the strategies, and this helped students to comprehend the strategies and draw on the use and patterns that are conventionalized in their L1.

Data Collection Instruments

Data for this research were collected through a post-TOEFL questionnaire, two mock-tests, class discussion, and an evaluation questionnaire. As the research focuses on the Listening Section Part A, descriptions and analysis for other sections in TOEFL ITP are not included in this paper.

Post-TOEFL Questionnaire

After the implementation of actual TOEFL ITP in the middle of June, this questionnaire was conducted to examine the results and reflections of students on the test. Students who expressed difficulty and disappointment with the test were asked to identify the factors that made the TOEFL Listening Part A so difficult for them and to choose three items from the choices presented in the questionnaire. At the same time, this questionnaire also functioned to determine the students’ needs for planning strategy training. The choices included:

- *difficulty in understanding the choices*
- *unknown vocabulary*
- *talking speed of people in the recorded conversation*
- *test conditions*
- *lack of continuing power of a candidate*
- *lack of time in reading choices*
- *inexperience with listening tests*
- *perplexity in deciding correct answers*
- *I was under test-taking stress*



Two Different Mock Tests

I implemented two different mock tests in April and in November, each of them including entirely different exam questions taken from the TOEFL preparatory textbook (ALC, 2006) assigned by the school. Among four complete mock tests involved in the textbook in the same format as the actual TOEFL ITP, I used Test 1 of the textbook for the mock test 1 in April, and Test 3 for the mock test 2 in November. The two mock tests were put into practice in the same format and time length. In both tests, Listening Section Part A included 30 full questions for the substantial data for my research. On the other hand, other sections were reduced to some extent because of the time limitation. Descriptions and analysis for them are not included since this paper focuses on the Listening Section Part A only. Outcomes were drawn by comparing the results of these two tests.

In the beginning of the course in April, I gave my class the first mock test for the purpose of capturing the students' current level of English proficiency. In addition, it seemed useful for beginners to become familiar with the test format of TOEFL ITP, though it was the shortened version. The second mock test was implemented in November, after three lessons employing strategies on conversational implicatures were carried out. The purpose of this test was to examine how these strategies helped students' understanding of the short conversations in the Listening Section Part A of the TOEFL-like mock test. Although not conducted in formal settings, these mock tests can provide essential data for my analysis because most of the students do not take the TOEFL twice during the course, and therefore, comparison of actual TOEFL scores is impossible.

Class Discussion

I provided time for a 20 minute discussion in the classroom after the implementation of the second mock test. The class was divided into four groups, three groups of four members and one with five. One representative student was chosen in each group and was charged to integrate what they discussed among themselves, then presented the results in front of the class. The issues I proposed to them for the discussion were as follows:

1. Were the series of listening strategies applying the Types of Speech, Adjacency Pair, and Conversational Implicature interesting to you?
2. Do you think they were effective to understand short conversations in Part A of TOEFL Listening when you took the second mock test?



Results

Data were collected and analyzed through a post-TOEFL questionnaire, two mock tests, class discussion, and evaluation questionnaire.

Results from Post-TOEFL Questionnaire

The results of the question asking to choose three biggest factors that made TOEFL Listening difficult are presented in Table 4. According to the Table, about 60% of students selected both *difficulty in understanding the choices* and *unknown vocabulary* as the most significant factors. *Talking speed of people in the recorded conversation* follows, selected by 53%. The reason concerning *test conditions* was selected by 33%, and 25% circled such factors as *lack of continuing power of a candidate* and *lack of time in reading choices*. Both the factors *inexperience with listening tests* and *perplexity in deciding correct answers* were checked by only a few students. There was nobody who thought he/she made mistakes *under stress*, and it is probably because the Institutional TOEFL is held at school, which is a familiar learning environment for students.

Table 4:

Factors that made TOEFL Listening difficult and the proportion of students who selected each factor as one of the biggest three.

<u>Factors</u>	<u>Percentage of students who selected the factor</u>
▪ difficulty in understanding the choices	60(%)
▪ unknown vocabulary	60
▪ talking speed of people in the recorded conversation	53
▪ test conditions	33
▪ lack of continuing power of a candidate	25
▪ lack of time in reading choices	25
▪ inexperience with listening tests	6
▪ perplexity in deciding correct answers	6
▪ I was under test-taking stress	0

Results from the Two Mock Tests



Improvement of students was examined by comparing the results of two mock tests. Table 5 below shows the proportion of students who had higher or lower scores between the two mock tests. The results indicate that 23% of students could answer two more questions, about 30% could answer one more question, and 6% could answer four more questions in the second mock test than in the first one. However, no score change was seen in about 35 % of participants, and a one-point decrease was perceived in 6% of participants. To sum up, approximately 60 % of the students made progress at around 1.7 points on average, though the rest, 35%, made no progress and 6% achieved a lower score on the second test.

Table 5:
Score changes in 30 questions between Mock Test 1 and Mock Test 2 and the proportion of students corresponding to the change

Change of the number of correct answers between Mock test 1 and 2	Percentage of students
Students whose score increased +4	6(%)
Students whose score increased +2	23(%)
Students whose score increased +1	30(%)
Students whose score decreased -1	6(%)
Students whose score was not changed	35(%)

Findings from the Class Discussion

Students' discussion was carried out after the implementation of the second mock test, aiming to investigate psychological aspects of students' reflection to the strategy training. These appeared to play a significant role in supplementing the results illustrated in the two mock tests. In a 20-minute class discussion, four student representatives integrated and presented the opinions of each group to the class. I asked them to discuss such issues as whether the series of listening strategies applying conversational analysis was interesting to them, whether the strategies effectively helped them understand short conversations in Part A of TOEFL-like Listening in the second mock test, whether they thought the strategies were helpful to understand the structure and meaning of English conversation, and whether they regarded the strategies useful to improve their English ability. The discussion was done in Japanese, their first language. I wrote down some important points of students' comments in



my field notes, since tape-recording was not allowed in the classroom. Below are the English translated comments of student representatives based on my field notes.

Student Representatives' Comments

Kumi: student representative of Group 1:

“We all agreed that TOEFL is really difficult, especially in the listening section. Toru mentioned that while listening, recorded conversations run through quickly like a stream of water and they were hard to follow. The strategies offered in the three lessons were interesting and we all enjoyed them. For instance, studying ‘conversation in pairs’ attracted my attention a lot, because I had never thought about the structure and function of a pair-relation in those conversations. Miwako agreed with me and said that, as she came to understand the basis of conversation more clearly than before, she thinks these strategies can help her interpret listening comprehension in TOEFL.” (Kumi, interview, November 14, 2008).

Yoshiki: student representative of Group 2:

“The lessons offered were interesting and not similar to the other English lessons, since we were not forced to memorize the sentences and words, instead, we were asked to think over what we are doing and saying in daily life. It was comfortable for me” (Yoshiki, interview, November 14, 2008).

Rie: student representative from Group 3:

“Memorizing vocabulary is more important than thinking of people’s intention and implication in TOEFL Listening.” (Rie, interview, November 14, 2008).

Sota: student representative from Group 4:

“We could sit for the second mock test with less anxiety. I think this is because it was our second trial, and partly because we learned about conversational implicature, which allowed us to feel that we are prepared.” (Sota, interview, November 14, 2008).

Findings from the Evaluation Questionnaire

This questionnaire provided important numerical data to substantiate the results of the class discussion. Personal feelings and opinions of the students were also expressed in the last



open-ended question. Phased analysis was done in three steps: numerical results from the questionnaire in a chart in Table 4; proportion of positive and negative answers in the integrated data from the questionnaire in a bar-graph in Figure 1; and more synthesized picture in the form of a pie chart in Figure 2.

First of all, Table 6 shows the students' reflection in terms of the number of answers to nine questions selected by students, applying the Likert-type five-point scale which included: Strongly agree (SA), Agree (A), Undecided (U), Disagree (D), and Strongly Disagree (SD).

Table 6 : Results from the evaluation questionnaire					
Statements and the proportion of students corresponding to the scales					
Statements	Percentages of students				
	SA	A	U	D	SD
1. I could understand the strategies.	11.7%	47%	17.6%	23%	0%
2. I enjoyed studying the strategies.	11.7%	29.4%	35.2%	5.8%	17.6%
3. The strategies effectively helped me understand the conversations in the mock test.	0%	29.4%	41.1%	11.7%	11.7%
4. The strategies effectively helped me answer the questions in the mock test.	5.8%	41.1%	23%	11.7%	11.7%
5. The strategies are helpful for me to understand basic structure and meaning of English conversation.	11.7%	35.2%	35.2%	5.8%	11.7%
6. The strategies help me think more carefully about how I express myself in English.	5.8%	5.8%	41.1%	29.4%	5.8%
7. The strategies help me improve my English listening ability.	5.8%	23%	35.2%	5.8%	5.8%
8. The strategies help me improve my speaking ability.	0%	5.8%	41.1%	29.4%	11.7%
9. The strategies help my improvement in overall English study.	11.7%	35.2%	23%	11.7%	5.8%
* (SA – strongly agree; A – agree; U – undecided; D – disagree; SD – strongly agree)					

As for the last open-ended question, 10) *Express your opinion about the lessons freely*, some students made entries of their comments as follows:



“I learned a lot of things that I had not known before.”

“I think the strategy taught in the lessons are useful for TOEFL listening.”

“I enjoyed the lessons, particularly the pair-work for activities of pair-relation.”

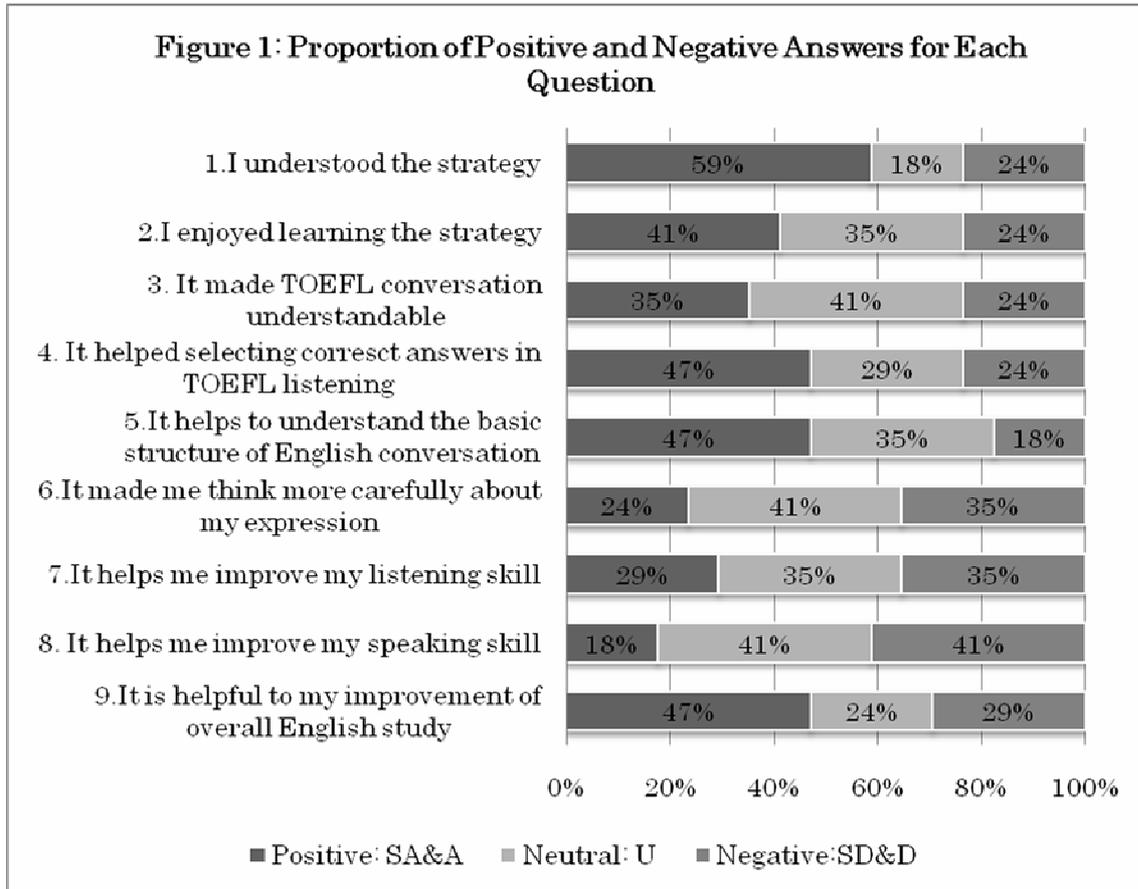
“The lessons were interesting, but I hope more study of vocabulary would be included.”

“I could sit in the second mock test with relatively peaceful mind, because my anxiety was reduced because I had prepared in the prior lessons of conversation in TOEFL listening.”

“TOEFL listening is really difficult for me.”

Secondly, in order to grasp a clearer picture, the results are integrated into a bar-graph in Figure 1. In the graph, the number of answers for “Strongly Agree” and “Agree” are combined to form the category of “*Positive Answers*”, while “Strongly Disagree” and “Disagree” are combined into “*Negative Answers*”. The results in “Undecided” are displayed unchanged in “*Neutral*” in the bar graph. According to the bar graph, nearly 60% of the students indicated they understood the strategies and more than 40% of them were likely to have enjoyed the lessons. 35% of them answered that the strategies made the conversations in TOEFL more understandable, while 47%, nearly half of the students, thought that the strategies were helpful in not only selecting answers in the TOEFL test, but also understanding the basic structure of English conversation and improvement in overall English ability. On the other hand, regarding statements 6) *the strategies help me think more carefully about how I express myself in English*, 7) *they help me improve listening ability*, and 8) *they help me improve speaking ability*, the percentages of positive answers are low at 24%, 29%, and 18% respectively, with the negative answers relatively high at 35% for statements 6 and 7, and 41% for No.8.

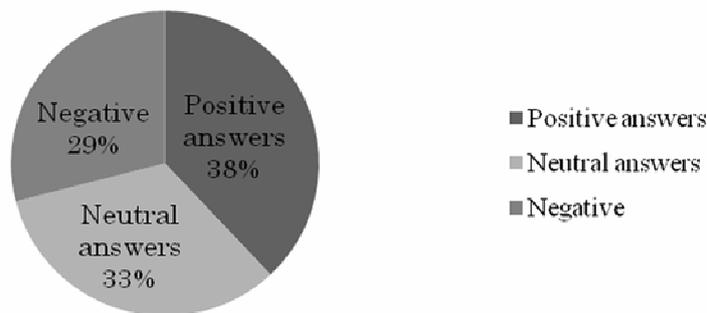




Finally, all the results are integrated in a pie chart in Figure 2 for the purpose of capturing the overall tendency of what my students feel about the new strategies they learned for the first time. The pie chart shows that about 38 percent of the students strongly agreed or agreed with the statements asking about the effectiveness of the strategies applying components of conversational analysis, and approximately 29% of them are in a neutral position, though 33% expressed a negative attitude towards these strategies. These results indicate that nearly 40 percent of the whole class members positively accepted the introduction of new strategies I proposed.



Figure 2: Summary of the Positive and Negative Answers in the Questionnaire



Discussion

The goal of this research paper was to examine whether or not the strategy training applying conversational analysis to the listening comprehension in TOEFL is feasible for high school students, whether or not the strategies can help them understand speaker intention in conversations in the TOEFL Listening Section, and whether or not the understanding of speaker intention will contribute to choosing the correct answers in the TOEFL Listening Section. The results indicate that the feasibility of the training was mostly evidenced. As for the helpfulness of the strategies, though the students were likely to understand and become able to use the strategies to some degree, it was not fully shown if they actually used the strategies in the real testing environment of the TOEFL.

Through the strategy training I offered, many of the students were likely to become familiar with the strategies I proposed and understand them to some degree. In fact, they were able to respond to the practice questions presented in lesson-handouts largely correctly. Particularly in the last lesson introducing conversational implicature, many of them could produce their own indirect answers under the specific situations using the strategies. For instance, according to my field notes, some of the publicly presented answers included: “*I’m sorry. I don’t have my purse now*” and “*I have to buy an expensive book for the class.*”(indirect refusal to lend some money); “*You look beautiful when you are dressed in bright colors*”(indirect opinion suggesting that dark colored dress does not suit the person well). They used not only conventional, typical refusal patterns such as *I’m sorry*, but also less-conventional implicature for refusal such as *I don’t have my purse now* and *I have to buy an expensive book for the class*, seemingly expressing their opinions in a less-conventional, indirect way.

The results from two mock tests, class discussion, and the evaluation questionnaire reported on in this paper have produced interesting data and indicated important points to discuss regarding the feasibility and effectiveness of the strategies applying conversational analysis. Overall, it was found that most of the students understood the strategies and many of them enjoyed studying through the training, according to the class discussion and the results of the evaluation questionnaire. Noticeably, some stated in the free space in the evaluation questionnaire that their exam anxiety was reduced because of the lessons. This might be because their negative task-expectation (cognitive component of anxiety) and the feelings of uneasiness (emotional component) (Eysenck, 1979 cited in Arnold, 2000) were reduced through the instruction previously given. Nearly half of the students think the strategies are helpful in determining the correct choices in TOEFL listening comprehension and understanding the basic structure of English discourse, and only a few students regard them as ineffective. All of these factors might contribute to heightening the proportion of respondents who think the strategies were helpful in their improvement of overall English. It is noteworthy that about 33 percents of the candidates positively accepted (understood and enjoyed learning the strategies, admitted the strategies as helpful for them to interpret the conversation in TOEFL, and thought they help their improvement in English study) the new strategies I introduced, judging from my analysis of the questionnaire and the students' comments. Students might have been unfamiliar with the terms and concepts of conversational implicature and adjacency pairs, since these items are seldom taught in high school English courses, particularly in listening classes. I suppose this is why the new strategies drew attention and interests of the students.

On the other hand, as the pie chart in Figure 2 shows, the proportion of negative answers against the strategies is still big. Many students think the strategies are not so helpful to improve their listening and speaking skills and do not let them think more carefully when expressing themselves in English. It seems these results are derived from the students' beliefs that repeated listening is more important than analyzing the text and that unknown vocabulary makes listening difficult to understand, as shown in the student's comments in the results of the evaluation questionnaire.

As for the achievements, there was a moderate increase from mock test 1 to mock test 2. However, any concrete evidence was not found to justify that this progress is solely the result of the strategy training I offered as any number of factors could have contributed to the results, such as the possibility that other abilities, such as vocabulary and grammar which had



been taught in class continuously, might have mixed in, and repeated listening and test format experience might have contributed to their improvement.

Some constraints became apparent throughout the course of the research. One main constraint was that of methodology. It was impossible to divide the class into two groups for an experiment because of the school policy, which requires teachers to teach all students equally. This limitation prevented me from explicitly proving the effectiveness of the strategies in listening comprehension to a test group only, for example.

Another constraint was the impossibility of comparing the scores of actual TOEFL tests, since most of the students take TOEFL only once during the course, according to the school's minimum course requirement. This constraint was, however, compensated by the implementation of two mock tests, which presented explicit numerical data to some degree.

Another constraint was that recording was not allowed in the classroom. Instead of tape-recording, I wrote down some important student comments in my field notes during the class-discussion.

Finally, reflecting on the group discussion, it seems to have some shortcomings in spite of providing students with a good opportunity to think over and discuss learning strategies. It is not unlikely to happen that comments of all the members of group might not be presented and that all the reports of student representatives might not be faithful representations of the group discussion but the results of their threatening to the good image of a teacher. The class size was not so big and I walked around from group to group during the discussion, which enabled me to listen only partially to what they actually said. However, the evaluation questionnaire was conducted anonymously to provide all the students with opportunities to express themselves and to gain more explicit data for the research.

Conclusion

Students' difficulty of understanding the short conversations and choosing a correct answer for each conversation in the TOEFL Listening led me to design and implement three lessons on the elements of conversational analysis, namely, types of speech, principles of adjacency pairs and conversational implicature. Scores were compared between two mock tests, and the data were collected from class discussion and a questionnaire. A moderate score improvement was noticed between the two mock tests, but sufficient evidence could not be drawn to prove that this progress was the sole result of the strategy training I offered. Returning to the purpose of this research, it can be said that feasibility of the strategy training



applying conversational analysis to listening comprehension was demonstrated, though the effectiveness of the strategies was not fully justified. Further research should be conducted on two groups, a control and test group, practicing the listening with or without the strategy training, and preferably over a longer period of time. Such enhancements should provide more clarified data. Furthermore, it is crucial in my future project to investigate cognitive processes - how students actually learn and become able to utilize the strategies in appropriate situations.

Overall, it seems that the instructions applying conversational analysis obviously aroused interest of and enhanced the motivation of many students in the study of TOEFL listening. These approaches can be taken into a wide range of EFL classes and may function better when carried out together with teaching vocabulary and grammar. Although the study of listening to spoken discourse has concentrated on repeated listenings with little analysis of the scripts, I would propose more analysis of conversation and listening comprehension in Japanese secondary school learning. It is important that discourse analysis be subjected not only to the scrutiny of applied linguistics but also in light of standardized testing and practical materials and classroom activities.



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