Current Perspectives on Teaching Listening: For University EFL Classrooms in Japan

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This paper reviews a variety of psycholinguistic, sociolinguistic, and pedagogical studies on L2 listening comprehension in order to gain current perspectives relevant to Japan's university EFL classrooms. The following research topics are included in this review; (1) text features of the spoken message, (2) a parallel processing model of language comprehension: top-down and bottom-up processing, and schema theory, (3) pedagogy: listening practice and/or strategy training, (4) classroom factors - social and psychological contexts: classroom as an ecosystem, gender, tolerance of ambiguity, and (5) current contexts of teaching English in Japan. The government action plan of 2003 to reform Japan's English education is also briefly introduced and discussed.

Key words:

listening comprehension, ecosystem, English education, EFL, Japan, university, top-down processing, bottom-up processing, curriculum, context, tolerance of ambiguity

Ⅰ．Introduction

Listening is probably the most important skill in communication. In the processes of the first language (L1) acquisition, listening is the property of linguistic competence picked up before anything else. As Peterson (2001) explains, "No other type of language input is as easy to process as spoken language, received through listening" (p. 87). Listening skills in a second language (L2), particularly in English, lingua franca of today, assume a major role in global communication in this heyday of electronic information exchange and the international traffic of people and commodities (e.g. Crystal, 1997; see also Burns & Coffin, 2001; Graddol, 1997; Husman, 2000). Perhaps it is worth recalling what Naisbitts and Aburdene (1990) maintained:

The most important factor accelerating the development of a single global lifestyle is the proliferation of the English language. Language is a great agent of

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homogenization; it is the frequency on which the culture is transmitted. (p. 140)

Lessons focused on listening in English as a second/foreign language abound throughout the world and the publishing and sales of textbooks and teaching materials have grown into a big enterprise in the international market (Gray, 2000; McKay, 2003; Pennycock, 2001). In the second language acquisition (SLA) field, listening is one of the most researched themes since it constitutes the form of input learners most frequently receive, arguably the major issue in SLA (e.g. Krashen, 1982; see also Long, 1985; Prabhu, 1987).

In spite of this socioeconomic, sociolinguistic and pedagogical significance of listening, Japan's education system has not successfully incorporated listening into its curricula and university education is not an exception. Not so many students, of Japanese middle schools, high schools, and universities, are regarded as proficient listeners or competent communicators, to our regret.

Preparing for entrance examinations has been one of the driving forces of Japan's school education and the grammar-translation (GT) approach the major method of teaching English (Beauchamp, 1992). Communicative aspects of the language have been for the greater part neglected and listening comprehension has been treated as a subservient activity. The longed-for reform of English education in Japan, therefore, should be started by recognizing the due significance of listening and by reorganizing the curriculum with listening as one of its center pillars.

With this socio-cultural context in mind, it is the purpose of this literature review to explore current research into L2 listening in psycholinguistics and pedagogy and to identify findings relevant to Japan's English classrooms, particularly at colleges and universities, where the students are freed from the entrance examination pressures and teachers have professional discretion in many aspects of instruction. It is the hope of the author that this paper will help nurture a better EFL (English as a Foreign Language) "ecosystem" at Japan's universities and colleges.

The areas of research covered in this review are as follows:

(1) Perspectives on Teaching Listening
　① Text Features: Spoken Message

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② Comprehension Processes: A Parallel Processing Model of Language Comprehension (Top-down and Bottom-up Processing, and Schema Theory)

③ Pedagogical Issues: Practice or Strategy Training （Teachability)

④ Student Factors:

    a. Classroom Ecology

    b. Gender

    c. Tolerance of Ambiguity

(2) Current Contexts of Teaching English in Japan: Ministry's Ambitious Action Plan of 2003 to Cultivate "Japanese with English Abilities"

Ⅱ. Perspectives on Teaching Listening

Listening is a complex process, which enables us to comprehend spoken language. As Rost (2001) illustrates, in most situations, listening is used with the other skills of speaking, reading and writing. It is not only a skill in communication, but also an important mechanism of acquiring an L2. "Listening is the channel in which we process language in real time - employing pacing, units of encoding and pausing that are unique to spoken language"(p. 7).

The first area to examine here is the text of listening; spoken message.

(1) Text features: Spoken speech

Text in listening is the spoken message, not written. This fundamental fact generates a variety of characteristics that all listeners, native as well as non-native speakers, have to deal with. McDonough (1998) summarizes the spoken language features (Table 1):

TABLE. 1   Distinctive Features of the Spoken Language (Adopted from McDonough, 1998, pp. 324-325):

#	Area	Feature
1	Medium	The medium itself is sound and it therefore has a transience that the written medium does not; the listener has little control over the speed of input.
2	Information	Information presented in spoken form is less 'dense', more redundant, and more repetitive than in written form. The grammatical and discourse structure tends to be less complex, for example, in its clausal basis and types of cohesive devices used.
3	Informal speech	Informal speech is typically characterized by such phenomena as hesitation, pauses, false starts, half-completed sentences and changes of direction and of topic. It is also frequently ungrammatical.
4	Non-linguistic Features	Speech is usually accompanied by a number of supra-segmental, non-linguistic and paralinguistic features, such as intonation, tone of voice, gesture and the like which may act as aids to comprehension and which are integral to the formulation of speech acts.
5	Conversational speech	Conversational speech is cooperative; it is also constructed jointly between speaker and listener as roles shift and meaning develops interactively.

All of these features of the spoken message pose difficulties to L2 learners in one way or another. Yet, the ones that need special attention here are the features of the medium (1), the transience of sound and the speed of input.

Transience is the characteristic that not only differentiates listening from reading, but also distinguishes "real-world," "real-life" listening from recorded, "canned" listening materials: We cannot repeat what we said and what our listeners missed in exactly the same way, and even if we could the significance of the repeated message would never be the same as that of the original.

In relation to this aspect of listening, it is important for L2 learners to develop strategic competence, one segment of the "Communicative Competence" (Canale & Swain, 1980; Ellis, 1991; Hymes, 1971; Swain, 1985). Ellis (1991) explains the concept of strategic competence as follows:

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Knowledge of the verbal and non-verbal strategies such as paraphrase and ostensive reference that are required to deal with communication breakdown or to enhance communicative effectiveness. (Ellis, 1991, p.105)

When experiencing difficulties in understanding an incoming message, listeners have some options: they could ask the speaker(s) to slow down, or to repeat what is said. Or, the listener could take in only what he/she understands, neglecting any other information. Listening in real-world/real-life certainly requires this type of competence while in the classroom with pre-recorded, repeatable, material the students and the teacher cannot use or cultivate, for that matter, the strategic competence. This also underscores the lack of the co-constructing, cooperative, nature of real-life/world listening (No.5 Conversational Speech, in TABLE 1 above).

The other aspect of the spoken message that should be mentioned is the speed of input, or speech (speaking) rate, as it is often called (Derwing & Munro, 2001; Flowerdew, 1994; Griffiths, 1992; Tauroza & Allison, 1990).

Perhaps, it is truism to say L2 listeners have difficulties when interlocutors speak quickly, or at a normal speed. Yet, a current research suggests speech rate is not the issue. Reviewing studies on the relationship between speech rate and comprehension, Rost (2001) argues:

Findings clearly show that there is not an isomorphic relationship between speed of speech and comprehension. One consistent finding is that the best aid to comprehension is to use normal speaking speed with extra pauses inserted. (p. 10)

Derwing and Munro (2001) also raise caution that "[speech] rate is sometimes a scapegoat when other factors are more directly pertinent to communication difficulties" (p. 335).

Naturally, there are other topics that are beyond the scope of this review. They include the use of (a) authentic text (Widdowson, 1994), and (b) a variety of Englishes (Alptekin, 2001; Kachru, 1991).

(2) A parallel processing model of language comprehension: Top-down and bottom-up processing

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Listening comprehension is conceived as "a parallel processing model of language understanding" (Rost, 2001, p.7) or "a multilevel, interactive process of meaning creation" (Peterson, 2001, p. 88). This is one conception of language comprehension currently widely accepted in TESOL (Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages). At present, this parallel processing model is applied not only to teaching listening but also to the other language skills of reading, writing and speaking (Hinkel, 2006).

When listeners try to understand spoken discourse, it is assumed that different processes work simultaneously on a variety of levels to arrive at a comprehension of the incoming message. These different comprehension processes can be summarized as two major processes of bottom-up processing and top-down processing:

TABLE 2. Two Types of Comprehension Processes (Summarized from Rost, 2001)

Process	Explanation
Bottom-up Processing	Listeners attend to data in the incoming speech signals.
Top-down Processing	Listeners utilize prior knowledge and expectations to create meaning.

In bottom-up processing, by attending to sounds, words, and sentences in the incoming speech, listeners try to build up an understanding of the entire message. In top-down processing, listeners utilize prior knowledge and expectations to interpret the meaning of the incoming message. Good listeners can make use of both top-down and bottom-up processing. The two processes interact with each other and "lack of information at one level can be compensated for by checking against information at the other level" (Peterson, 2001, p.88).

When undertaking bottom-up processing, many basic-level learners of English, including a majority of Japanese university students, often find it difficult to segment the incoming stream of sounds into recognizable units of meaning, such as words, phrases, or clauses. In other words, it is not easy to identify word or phrase boundaries. McDonough (1998) lists major causes of this difficulty in bottom-up processing:

(1) the phenomenon of linking sounds, where a word may be perceived as running into the next and thus misidentified (*'he's in'; 'an egg'; 'some onions'* are simple examples).

(2) a number of other localized features of the spoken language, particularly clause and sentence boundaries, contracted forms (such as *'I'd've done it if I'd had time'*)

(3) patterns of stress at both word and sentence level, including so-called 'marked' stress

(4) supra-segmental aspects such as intonation (McDonough, 1998, p. 325)

Rost (2001) points out that stress (No.3 the patterns of stress) is "often reported to be the most problematic in L2 listening." Rost also argues that Japanese listeners of English have a particular difficulty in the stress patterns of English because of the difference between Japanese and English. English is a stress-timed language while Japanese is a syllable- (mora-) timed language. A stress-timed language is a language with a rhythm of stressed syllables recurring at regular intervals, and a syllable-timed language refers to a language with a rhythm of all syllables recurring at regular intervals. (A *mora* is a rhythmic unit based on length.) This specific difficulty of Japanese learners of English is common to other learners whose native language is also syllable-timed (e.g. Spanish).

In top-down processing, listeners utilize prior knowledge and expectations to create meaning. In this process, listeners are supposed to activate "their knowledge-based schemata, such as cultural constructs, topic familiarity, discourse clues, and pragmatic conventions" (Hinkel, 2006, p. 117). A schema is a mental framework constructed upon knowledge and experience and it is used to promote restructuring of linguistic data gained through bottom-up processing, so that the incoming message as a whole can make sense.

This conceptualization of using schemata in top-down processing is labeled "Schema Theory" (e.g. Carrell, & Eisterhold, 1983): "A schema (plural, schemata) is a mental framework based on past experience developed as a means of accommodating new facts, and hence making sense of them" (Johnson, 1998, pp. 282-283). In other words, when listeners are not familiar with the topic of the spoken message and do not have the pertinent mental framework necessary to make sense of the incoming linguistic data, their level of message comprehension is limited. In fact, it is also

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pointed out that activated relevant schemata enable the listener to bypass some aspects of the bottom-up process and to accelerate the comprehension processes (Morley, 2001). Therefore, the lack of schemata also results in slow processing. This is particularly true with learners in EFL (English as a Foreign Language) situations like Japan, where English is not used outside the classroom and learners are not familiar with the topics of native speakers of English (Alptekin, 1993); "deficiencies in cultural background knowledge create learning difficulties" (Tseng, 2002). It is also worth noting that only when language learners are successful in bottom-up processing, can top-down processing be performed effectively, for only then learners can make time available for utilizing schemata (Ellis, 2003).

To conclude this section, it might be useful to mention what Peterson (2001) states about the compensatory functions of the two processes:

> Listening in their native language, people never hear all the information in a message, and they do not need to; proficiency in comprehension is the ability to fill in the gaps and to create an understanding that meets one's purpose for listening. (p. 88)

What L2 learners need to do is, naturally, to cultivate both types of processing.

（2）Pedagogy: Practice or Strategy Training?

It is becoming increasingly obvious that L2 learning is largely "a process of skill acquisition", which means "the importance of practice, or output, rather than mere input" (Crookes & Chaudron, 2001). This practice view of teaching listening comprehension, however, has also been criticized. Field (1998), for example, argues:

> Under the present 'comprehension' approach, success in listening is measured by correct responses to questions or tasks. Teachers focus upon the outcomes of listening, rather than upon listening itself, upon product rather than process. (p. 111)

Therefore, many authors of late advocate "a strategy-based approach", which is, in essence, strategy instruction; "the objective as being to teach students how to listen." Mendelsohn (1998) explains, "This is done, first, by making learners aware of how the

language functions and second, by making them aware of the strategies that they use..." (p. 87). It is suggested that the approach should be used with the current practice/comprehension approach in order to complement each other.

It might be necessary here to clarify the term "strategy". Strategies in listening comprehension are "conscious plans to deal with incoming speech, particularly when the listener knows that he or she must compensate for incomplete input or partial understanding" (Rost, 2001, p.10). It is also pointed out that strategies are under learners' conscious control (Hinkel, 2006, p. 119). Three (3) categories of strategies have been identified:

TABLE 3. Three Categories of Strategies in Listening (Adopted from Mendelsohn, 1998, pp. 82-83).

#	Category	Explanation
1	Metacognitive Strategies	strategies concerned with planning, regulating, and managing learning
2	Cognitive Strategies	strategies that facilitate comprehension, like making use of prior knowledge
3	Social & Affective Strategies	strategies such as questioning and positive self-talk

However, the teachability of these strategies for listening has been questioned: Whether or not the strategies could be taught to students. Proponents of using strategies such as Mendelsohn (1998) and Peterson (2001) argue that strategies are teachable and the research shows "conclusively that strategy instruction can improve listening comprehension" (Mendelsohn, 1998, p. 84). Probably, however, many practitioners in Japan need more research findings, particularly of studies situated in Japanese contexts, before undertaking a full-scale adoption.

Other issues related to teaching listening, yet not dealt with here, include (a) information gap (Pica, Kang, & Sauro, 2006), (b) task-based listening (Ellis, 2003), and (c) teacher talk (Igawa 2002a).

(2) Students/Classroom Factors: Ecosystem, Gender, Tolerance of Ambiguity

a. Classroom as an ecosystem

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Classroom contexts hold an important key to successful listening comprehension lessons, as is always the case with teaching/learning in a classroom. Richards (2001) underscores the importance of contexts of learning and teaching English as:

English is learned and taught in a variety of individual and social contexts, and these contexts (i.e. the settings, participants, purposes and transactions that characterise a language learning situation) play a crucial role in shaping the processes and outcomes of learning. (p. 213)

In a similar note, Erickson (1996) advances the view of "social interaction as an ecosystem." Classroom interaction is also viewed as an ecosystem. Further, Erickson argues, stressing the interdependency of classroom participants:

...listening needs to be treated as a communicative activity in its own right, and that listener influence over speakers' performance needs to be considered together with more conventional conceptions of sociolinguistic competence in the educator's notion of fluency. (p. 302)

Emphasizing "the importance of timing and interactional rhythm in the conjoint articulation of speaking and listening in interaction", Erickson (1996) also reminds us of "the relation between speech style, audience relationships, and participation structure within the situation" (p. 302), which naturally impact what happens in the classroom.

This view of social interaction as an ecosystem leads to the review of teaching listening in the classrooms - with the participants' sociocultural and psychological features.

b. Gender

Generally in the literature on L2 learning, it is argued that male students utilize the classroom interaction as an opportunity for comprehensible output (Swain, 1993) and female students utilize it as an opportunity for comprehensible input (Long, 1983). In other words, males talk more and dominate the interaction while females listen more in a mixed-sex classroom (Shehadeh, 1999; Sunderland, 1992, 1994).

It is also pointed out that male students get more attention from the teacher in

the classroom. Sunderland (1992) mentions the tendency of "more time for the boys" as a common, yet not recognized, feature of secondary and tertiary classroom lessons, including EFL situations; "Lesson transcripts made from tapes have shown secondary- and tertiary-level teachers of mixed classes to pay more attention to male students" (p. 88). Igawa (2002a) examined the transcripts of English lessons conducted in English in coed classrooms at Japanese high schools and found the same tendency of "more time for the boys".

Possibly, these findings have significance in university EFL listening classes in Japan. Particularly, the finding that females listen more while males talk more reminds us of the cliche in popular psychology "Men don't listen" (Pease & Pease, 1998/2000). However, no substantial research has been done yet to investigate the situation in Japanese university EFL classrooms.

c. Tolerance of ambiguity (e.g. Coleman, 1997; Grace, 1998; Turula, 2002)

When learners listen to an incoming L2 message, they might feel uncomfortable because the message might contain some uncertain, unclear, and/or unknown elements. They need to tolerate the ambiguity in order to gain a global comprehension and to further develop their listening skills. L2 learners need to accept confusing situations with no clear definitions. This psychological state is called "tolerance of ambiguity". Ellis (1994) explains the term as follows:

It [tolerance of ambiguity] entails an ability to deal with ambiguous new stimuli without frustration and without appeals to authority. It allows for indeterminate rather than rigid categorization. (p. 519)

Although L2 learners constantly find themselves in a situation where tolerance of ambiguity is required, this psychological state, an essential for developing L2 listening competence, might be connected to persistence in language learning and to risk-taking attitudes (Coleman, 1997).

It seems, however, Japanese EFL students do not have much chance to nurture this tolerance of ambiguity, probably because their curriculum has not provided so many listening lessons in middle and high schools; and possibly because even when students do listen to English they are certain that the Japanese translation is sooner or later given and that there is no need to tolerate ambiguity (McConnell, 2000).

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Ⅲ. Current Contexts of Teaching English in Japan

Discussing why a large majority of Japanese university students had such difficulties in communicating in English, Richards (1993) pointed out as crucial their deficiency in listening skills caused by the lack of "real-world listening" in their high school English lessons. Richards also identified as possible causes the features of English lessons in Japanese high schools of more than 10 years ago. In essence, the features are as follows: (1) aural input Japanese high school students receive is critically limited in quantity and quality, (2) translation into Japanese too readily and often provided, cripples the students' motivation and efforts to understand English in English and hinders the development of their listening skills (and tolerance of ambiguity), and (3) the English input students receive is usually from commercially produced, "canned" media such as cassette tapes, recorded at slower-than-normal speed and read from a prepared script, which does not afford the spontaneity (or "transience" as discussed earlier) and the variety of "real-world listening".

Unfortunately, English lessons in Japanese high schools have not changed so much since then (Igawa, 2002b). Pointing out that listening and speaking are the areas of study that seem lacking, Igawa (2002b) summarizes the current situation of English language education in Japanese high schools: (1) English is offered to virtually all the middle and high school students at least three times (class hours) a week, for 6 years (7th grade to 12th grade), (2) the teaching method predominantly used is grammar-translation (GT) because it is believed to be the best suited for entrance examinations, and (3) the language widely used, Japanese, or English is not a means of communication, but an object of learning, in the classroom (p. 38).

In many high schools the situation remains unchanged even with the extensive deployment of ALTs (Assistant Language Teachers), who are native speakers of English (CLAIR, 2000), at an increasing number of junior and senior high schools in Japan, to help realize communicative lessons (Wada, 1992). In most cases communicative lessons team-taught with ALTs are sporadic and regarded as something extra (e.g. McConnell, 2000; Gorsuch, 2002; Greenfeld, 1999).

Most Japanese university students are therefore considered as "false beginners" in the light of communicative competence in English, even after 6 years of English

instruction. False beginners are learners who had some limited amount of instruction beforehand, but who because of limited language proficiency are classified as beginners of language study (e.g. Richards & Schmidt, 2002).

As to the contexts of Japan's university EFL lessons, two new features should be mentioned here, part of the government's ambitious plan to innovate Japan's school system and to cultivate Japanese with communicative competence in English. The first feature is the longed-for introduction of the listening section in the "University Center Test" (Academic 2005), the national standardized test, to sift candidates for higher education. Research is urgently needed on how this inclusion of listening is impacting on high school English lessons and students' listening competence.

In Academic 2002, for the first time in the history of school education, Japanese public elementary schools started to offer English language lessons geared towards communication. Many pros and cons of this educational innovation have been expressed from all quarters (Otsu, 2006). However, full-scale evaluation is yet to come and the real influence of this remains to be seen in the future.

Stressing the growing importance of English, Atsuko Toyama, then Minister of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology (MEXT), deplores the current lack of English proficiency of Japan's population and proposes a plan to overcome the national deficiency:

At present, though, due to the lack of sufficient ability, many Japanese are restricted in their exchanges with foreigners and their ideas or opinions are not evaluated appropriately … Cultivating "Japanese with English Abilities" is an extremely important issue for the future of our children and for the further development of our country. (Toyama, 2003)

Toyama announces in the "Action Plan to Cultivate 'Japanese with English Abilities'" seven (7) actions to realize the plan and among them two are directly concerned here: No. 4 and No. 5 (TABLE 4).

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TABLE 4. Action Plan to Cultivate "Japanese with English Abilities" (From Toyama, 2003)

#	Action
1	Improvement of English classes
2	Improving the teaching ability of English teachers and upgrading the teaching system
3	Improving motivation for learning English
4	Improvement in the evaluation system for selecting school and university applicants
5	Support for English conversation activities in elementary schools
6	Improvement of Japanese language abilities
7	Promotion of practical research

Goals are identified for each action and the one for Action 4 states, "Communication abilities, including listening and speaking, will be appropriately evaluated: Introduction of a listening test in the University Center Examination (targeted for implementation from 2006)" (Toyama, 2003). Similarly, one goal for Action 5 specifies:

At elementary schools where English conversation activities take place in the Period for Integrated Study, approximately 1/3 of these sessions will be guided by personnel, such as foreign teachers, those who are proficient in English and junior high school English teachers. (Toyama, 2003)

Some aspects of the plan seem promising. However, it is still too early and no substantial research has been reported as to the outcomes of this ambitious plan. And as is often pointed out, curriculum innovation does not take place in a social vacuum (Markee, 1997) and, as Doyle (1994) states, "The curriculum is what teachers and students experience" (p. 493). (See also Snyder, Bolin, & Zumwalt, 1994). Certainly, evaluation reports on these two actions are something we should look forward to.

Ⅳ. Conclusion

So far this literature review has covered a variety of perspectives and reviewed

current issues in teaching listening. The literature is reviewed here with a special focus on the relevance to Japan's university EFL classrooms. Naturally, this is not comprehensive. However, it was designed to be pertinent to the objective.

Listening is the most important communication skill for L1 and L2 speakers. L2 learners, particularly at the beginning level, should develop listening skills foremost not only because listening is such an important part of communicative competence but because it is believed that listening helps learners acquire the L2. University students in Japan are generally regarded as "false beginners" and Japanese university EFL listening lessons could be better informed and practiced.

The 'Text' of listening is sound, the spoken message, and it entails specific features such as (1) the transience of sound, which is opposite to the repeatability of the "canned" listening in the classroom, and (2) the speed of input, which cannot be controlled in the real world. L2 listeners should get more "authentic" listening and the strategic competence should be developed to deal with this unruly aspect of listening. Contrary to the popular belief, slowing down the speech does not contribute to comprehension but frequent pausing does, according to research.

Listening comprehension is conceived as a parallel processing of bottom-up processing and top-down processing. In bottom-up processing, listeners attend to sounds, words, and sentences in the incoming speech and try to build up an understanding of the entire message. In top-down processing, listeners utilize prior knowledge and expectations (i.e., schemata) to interpret the meaning of the incoming message. Both processes compensate each other to arrive at the understanding of the message as a whole. Word, phrase, and sentence boundaries are difficult to identify in English, which is a stress-timed language, while Japanese is syllable-timed. Cultural schemata should be introduced to help L2 learners activate them when necessary.

Listening strategies include (1) metacognitive, (2) cognitive, and (3) social and affective strategies, and many authors argue for the teaching of these strategies in conjunction with current listening practices, which are product- rather than process-oriented.

To view the classroom as an ecosystem is one current conceptualization of classroom reality and it is gaining more significance. Social and psychological aspects of class participants should be taken into consideration: Gender and tolerance of

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ambiguity are examples.

English education in Japan is going through many changes. The 2003 Action Plan by the Ministry of Education is a very ambitious attempt and it avows to cultivate "Japanese with English Abilities". The plan indicates such new directions for English education as: (1) the inclusion of a listening section in the University Center Test and (2) development of a communicative EFL curriculum for elementary schools. These aspects of the Action Plan, featuring listening comprehension at both ends of school education, seem promising. Yet, the outcome of this ambitious plan is still to be seen in the future.

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井 川 好 二

【要旨】

本稿は、言語心理学、社会言語学、英語教育学の分野における、最近の聴解（Listening Comprehension）に関する文献をリサーチし、聴解指導の方向性を探るとともに、日本の大学における英語教育の課題を考察する。扱った研究テーマは以下の通りである。(1) テクストとしての話し言葉の特質、(2) 言語理解プロセスとしての「トップダウン処理」(top-down processing) と「ボトムアップ処理」(bottom-up processing)、および「スキーマ理論」(schema theory)、(3) 聴解指導と方略訓練（strategy training）、(4) 社会的、心理学的な文脈としての教室環境（「生態系ecosystem」としての教室、ジェンダー、曖昧さ寛容度tolerance of ambiguity）、(5) 日本の英語教育事情。文部科学省の「【英語が使える日本人】の育成のための戦略構想」（平成14年 7 月）の、聴解指導に関わる部分も併せて考察した