

LISTENING SKILL TRAINING

1. Role of listening

Since 1969 there have been shifts in teaching philosophy with

a) an important movement from a focus on teaching a language to learning a foreign language (from teacher centred to learner-centred)

b) a shift from structure oriented to communication oriented approach

None of the many facets of language study has been so much influenced than listening comprehension since the pragmatic skills focus on reading, writing and speaking expanded in 1980.

As early as 1966 RIVERS (pp.196, 204) advocated for more attention to listening comprehension. „Teaching the comprehension of spoken speech is therefore of primary importance if the communication aim is to be reached“.

On average we:

- a. listen twice as much as we speak**
- b. listen 4 times more than we read**
- c. listen 5 times more than we write**

The importance of listening must not be treated trivially in the language learning process.

2. Three Perspectives on Listening

2.1 Listening to Repeat

Listening and repeat is a technique used for

- a. pronunciation work (here the learner repeats a word, a sound)**
- b. intonation and rhythm (here the learner imitates the pitch and speech rhythm)**

This type of listening leads to excellent pronunciation and very often learners can do pattern drills and memorise dialogues. What they can often not do so well, is participate in a normal conversation.

2.2 Listening to Understand

Here the learners develop listening as a -skill-in-itself in order to understand the meaning of spoken language.

The most common learners` responses are:

a. The question- oriented response model (here learners listen to a text, then answer a series of questions)

Listen and take notes. Find out the following.

Where did Brian go?

Where did Christine go?

Who went with him?

Who went with her?

How did they get there?

How did they get there?

Where did they stay?

Where did they stay?

How long did they stay there?

How long did they stay there?

b. The task oriented response (here learners do various listening tasks)

Listen to the text and complete the sentences.

Archibald was very unhappy because _____

One day Archibald was able to get out of the chains because he _____

Archibald went back _____

The people in the castle said, "Now the _____

The people in the castle brought Archibald _____

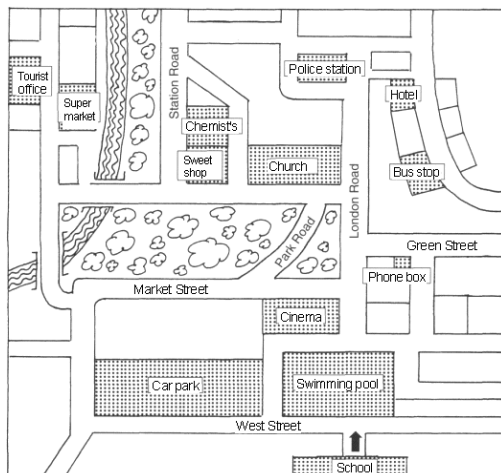
One Saturday Archibald _____

At midnight Archibald _____

After the dance Archibald _____

Dee put _____

Listen to Sylvia, Steven and Pam talking about how they get home from their school. Mark the routes on the map and write the children's names in their houses.



2.3 Listening as the Primary Focus to Language Learning

Here speaking, writing and reading are delayed and listening is seen as the major pre-stage to learning a language.

Continuing approaches to 'Comprehensive Approaches' resulted in several special systems of instruction:

- a. ASHER (TPR 1965)
- b. POSTOVSKY (1976, Delay in Oral practice)
- c. WINITZ (1973, Rapid acquisition by the avoidance of speaking)
- d. KRASHEN (1983, A natural approach to the acquisition and learning of language)

REFERENCE: _

RIVERS, W. M. Listening comprehension. *Modern Language Journal*, 50

ASHER, J. J. The strategy of the total physical response. An application to learning Russian. *MLJ*, 44

POSTOVSKY, V. Effects of delay in oral practice. *MLJ*, 58

WINITZ, H. & REEDS, J.: Rapid acquisition of a foreign language by the avoidance of speaking, *International Review of Applied Linguistics*, 11)

KRASHEN, S. D. & TERREL, T.D.: *The Natural approach*. Alemany Press.

Questions to discuss:

1. Describe the role of listening
2. How does listening compare with other skills in daily life
3. What are the 3 perspectives on listening?
4. Reference?
5. What types of listening and listening exercises have you experienced so far? (Jot down examples from didactic lessons and observation lessons)

3. Dimensions of Language and the Listening Act

3. 1. Listening is a Dynamic Process, not a Passive State

Listening is not only an active skill, but one that is very demanding. Learners will recognise that just as it is ‘work’ to become better readers, writers and speakers, listening, too, is ‘work’ and does not happen as an overnight process. Listening is still regarded as a passive skill in some quarters.

3. 2. Listening, in two-way-communication

This is an interactive listening process. Two or more active participants who take turns in speaker-role and listener- role as the face interaction moves along. (i.e. telephone conversation, booking a room at the receptionist` s)

3. 3. Listening in one-way communication.

We are surrounded by auditory input day by day. The input comes from conversations overheard, announcements, messages, news, instructions, media, lectures, music, etc. We hear but do or cannot interact. We may vocalise or sub vocalise responses.

3. 4. Self-dialogue communication

We sometimes internally speak and listen to ourselves in our own thought process. (i.e. planning a talk, learning a sketch etc.)

Implications for teaching:

Language learners should be given the opportunity to develop their listening skills via both two way and one-way communication modes. Learners also should be encouraged to make use of the self-dialogue communication mode in its own right.

3. 5. Listening and Language Processing, Bottom-up and Top- Down

Bottom-up Processing of language is evoked by an external source, by the incoming language. Understanding is worked out proceeding from sounds, into words, into grammatical relations and lexical meanings.

Top-down processing: Here the processing of language information comes from an internal source. It is supported by prior knowledge and prediction. On encountering the topic ‘going to the restaurant’ we refer to knowledge about the participants in the situation, roles and purposes, and the typical procedures adopted by waiters, waitresses and customers.

Implications:

Take dual perspectives into account when you develop listening skills. Include in your listening tasks that focus on specific kinds of information such as time, space, grammar, vocabulary, pronunciation, intonation, etc. and on the other hand on top-down areas , focus on tasks such as predicting, inferring, explaining, comparing.

3. 6. *Interactional and Transactional Discourse*

BROWN AND YULE (1983) suggest dividing language functions into two major divisions:

- a. Language for interactional purposes*
- b. Language for transactional purposes*

a. Interactional Language Function

It is listener-oriented and not message-oriented. Some features of interactional language use are talking about ‘safe’ topics such as weather, at the restaurant, cafe, booking a room etc. expressing opinions, identifying with the concern of the other person, and in general, being nice to the other person and a little careful about detail.

b. Transactional Language Function

Here the purpose is to convey factual and propositional information. It is message-oriented with focus on content. Some features are: instructing, giving directions, explaining, describing, and ordering. relating, checking on the correctness of details etc. The message must be understood if the message is the reason for speaking. (BROWN/YULE, 1983, 13.)

RICHARDS (1990) has constructed the following four-part grid, which allows for a listening activity to be classified according to the functions involved:

I N T E R A C T I O N A L

B O T T O M U P	Listening to a joke (interactively) in order to find out when to laugh.	Listening casually to a party talk (Interactively) You are not so much interested in what he/ she is saying.	B O T T O M D O W N
	Listening closely to instruction during a first cooking lesson, or listening closely to instructions how to play a game	An air traveller who has been on flights several times before and who listens casually to verbal air safety instructions (transactive)	

T R A N S A C T I O N A L

References:

BROWN/YULE: Discourse analysis. CUP 1983
 RICHARDS, J.C. The language teaching matrix. CUP 1990

4. DEVELOPING LISTENING ACTIVITIES AND EXERCISES

In order to get learners' attention and to keep them actively and purposefully engaged in the task at hand, three principles are suggested:

- a. relevance
- b. transferability
- c. task-orientation

4.1. RELEVANCE

Both the listening content and the outcome need to be relevant to the learners' life and life-style. Content therefore should feature face validity which makes learners' ears really tune in.

Tip for teachers: Adapt published material where necessary and add activities if the material does not meet the needs of your learners.

4.2. TRANSFERABILITY

Relevant material is also likely to be 'applicable'. i.e. A story can be retold to others, or it can be just heard for fun.

A train arrival message over the loudspeaker can be passed on to a friend who couldn't hear the message. This external value is called '*communicative outcome*'. A list of such outcomes is listed on the following page.

4.3. TASK ORIENTATION

There are two major tasks of listening:

1. Language use tasks
2. Language analysis activities

Language use tasks: Here listening is not question-oriented but task oriented. Learners are provided with tasks to carry out during the listening period. They do something with the information immediately. (i.e. taking notes do something)

Examples:

- 1 Listen and perform actions (TPR, act,)
2. Listen and perform operations (draw, paint)
3. Listen and note-taking
4. Listen and summarise information
5. Listen and interact (reply, negotiate, develop a conversation etc.)

Language analysis activities: Here learners are asked to answer questions about the listening text. Activities can focus on one or two points at time and can include attention to a variety of features of grammar, discourse, markers, vocabulary, content, etc.

Examples:

1. Ask detailed questions on parts of the text
2. Analysis of grammar, links, chunks, phrases,
3. Describing the means of communication used in monologue- and dialogue exchanges

List of Communicative Outcomes (essential components in both two- way and one-way communication listening activities)

1. listening and performing actions/operations	
2. listening and transferring information	
3. listening and solving problems	
4. listening and evaluating information	
5. interactive listening	
6. listening for enjoyment	

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Notes:

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4. 4 Examples of communicative listening tasks

1. Listening and performing actions	2. Listening and transferring information	3. listening and solving problems
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • drawing pictures • locating routes on a map • carrying out instructions, such as cooking steps, rules of a game • performing body movements • operating equipment, such as telephone, recorder etc. • selecting a person, a thing from a description 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • taking a message by phone • filling blanks • completing forms • summarising the gist of short story • taking written notes about instructions (cooking i. e.) • taking notes of a lecture • dictation • jigsaw listening and passing the message on in writing or orally 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • listen and find an ending • listen and solve the mystery story • aural arithmetic • alibi listening notes • classroom versions of jeopardy, twenty questions • jigsaw mystery/secrets • riddles • logic puzzles

4. listening and manipulating information	5 A variety of question types for interactive listening	6. listening for enjoyment and sociability
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • evaluating and combining and condensing information • Organising unordered information received • evaluating arguments in order to develop a position for or against 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Repetition: ‘Could you repeat the part about ...’ • Paraphrase: ‘Could you say that again (in other words)?’ • Verification questions: Do you mean...In other words’ • Clarification questions: Could you explain ...?’ • Extension questions: (To develop interactive listening) ‘And then ... What happened after that ..?’ 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • listen to songs, • stories • plays • poems • jokes • anecdotes • general chat • personal topics that interest • listen to guests (English guests, stars, sport stars, etc)

4. 5. Principles of Listening

a) Increase the amount of listening time

The listening should become the primary channel for learning new material. Make input comprehensible, interesting and supported by extra linguistic materials.

b) Use listening before other activities

Do not ask your pupils to read, speak and write before listening.

c) Include intensive, selective and global listening

Intensive listening helps the pupils to improve their intonation and understanding of form and tune, selective listening points them to more details and the global listening training develops the pupils` s gist.

d) Give advanced organizers

Call up the pupils` background knowledge (vocabulary, grammar etc.). Encourage top-down listening mode at every proficiency level. (i. e. small talk, stories where pupils can anticipate)

e) Practise bottom-up listening mode at every level

(jokes, instructions, refer to previous chapter),

f) Develop conscious listening strategies

Continuously raise pupils` awareness of text features and their comprehension processes. Use as many different ways of listening tasks and regularly practise interactive listening.

5. Developing Listening Skills

5. 1. The Difficulty of Listening Comprehension for Beginners

True beginners cannot segment the speech stream into word units, to tell where one word begins and another ends. The new phonemic system is an unbroken code. In order to decode the sensory data as a native speaker would, learners must first build a cognitive structure of important sound distinctions and categories. They lack structural competence, are not familiar with rules for word formation and their vocabulary is non-existent. This stage is of very short duration, though. Soon pupils will have plenty of opportunity to develop their listening skills. Teachers can help by attaching value to the students` progress in listening skills.

By the way, Have you ever heard anybody asking you “Do you understand English? “instead of „Do you speak English? “

Interactive communication can only be achieved through both listening and speaking skill training.

5.2 Suggestions for listening skill training for beginners

- At all stages use global listening techniques and keep the pupils active. Listening is no waste of time!
- Speak in a simplified mode with clear pronunciation, limited vocab. and visual support
- Train selective listening skills that focus on form, sounds, grammar, details of contents.
- Present new material aurally first and use visuals
- Teach vocabulary in the pre-listening stage
- Present the texts in normal speed but with pauses between natural phrase groups.
- Teachers must be aware that comprehension at the beginning stage is not total, but pupils can find the gist.

Tasks for teacher trainees:

Read with a partner through the listening script and develop your own questions

- 1.).....
- 2.).....
- 3.....
- 4).....
- 5.).....
- 6).....
- 7).....
- 8).....
- 9).....
- 10).....
- 11).....
- 12).....
- 13).....
- 14).....
- 15).....

16).....

6 Types of Listening Comprehension Tasks

6.1. Part 1: Listening for Gist

Skills and Objectives

This part of the examination, Listening for Gist, tests the candidates' ability to extract and understand the overall message of a text without getting too involved in the actual details and without necessarily being able to understand all the lexical and structural content of the text.

Test Format

The test format comprises live short authentic (i.e. non-simplified) recorded statements on one and the same topic. For each statement the candidates are given a sentence and the task is to decide whether this sentence reproduces the general message in the recorded statement. The candidates then indicate their choice by marking the appropriate box; (+) = true, (-) = not true on the answer sheet.

In the interests of authenticity, these statements are heard only once. In real life, you may be able to ask the speaker to repeat what she/he has said, but the actual language will never be identical. The time required for reading the sentences and marking the boxes is provided by pauses on the tape.

6.2 Listening for Detail

Skills and Objectives

This part of the examination, Listening for Detail, tests the candidates' ability to understand important details in a text.

Test Format

Part 2 consists of a recorded text (e.g. an interview, a report, etc.) with ten question items 46 - 55 based on important details in the text, i.e. details relating to the main purpose/topic of the text. The items are true/false statements and the task is to establish whether the statement is true (+) or not true (-).

The text will be heard twice. The time required for reading the sentences and marking the boxes on the answer sheet is provided by pauses on the tape.

6.3 Selective Listening

Skills and Objectives

This part the Selective Listening tests the candidates' ability to listen to short recorded texts for the information they need in order to solve a task, e.g. make a decision.

Test Format

The test consists of five short recorded texts (e.g. announcements, recorded information) from different topics and situations, e.g. airports, supermarkets, answering machines, etc. For each of the texts there is a situation 56 - 60 and the candidates are told in question form what to listen for. The task is then to find out from the information given in the recorded text whether (the answer to the question is yes (+) or no (-).