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**“LISTENING STRATEGIES TO HELP STUDENTS
IMPROVE THEIR LISTENING PERFORMANCE”**

Tema de Investigación previo a la obtención del título de
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Tema:

**LISTENING STRATEGIES TO HELP STUDENTS IMPROVE
THEIR LISTENING PERFORMANCE**

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ABSTRACT

This work has to do with a receptive skill, which can be overtaken: Listening. We start by giving a brief overview of different methodologies through history of second language teaching. The basis for the methodology we use in this approach is Communicative Language Learning. We state the importance of *Listening* in the learning of a language. Listening is not just a task we have to do, just for its own sake. Listening has to do with communication. The focus is to help students be better listeners. We propose the importance of establishing appropriate goals for listening tasks, as well as we present a series of strategies for students improving listening performance. We propose three stages on the listening strategies: pre-listening, in listening and post-listening. We hope that these strategies will help any teacher accomplish his task in a more productive way.

RESUMEN

Este trabajo tiene que ver con una habilidad receptiva, la cual puede ser pasada por alto: Escuchar. Comenzamos dando un breve panorama de las diferentes metodologías a través de la historia de la enseñanza de un segundo idioma. La base que usamos para la metodología en este acercamiento es el Aprendizaje Comunicativo del Idioma. Afirmamos la importancia de escuchar en el aprendizaje del idioma. El escuchar no es una tarea que tenemos que hacer por el mero hecho de hacerla. Escuchar tiene que ver con comunicación. El objetivo es ayudar a los estudiantes a ser mejores oyentes. Proponemos la importancia de establecer metas apropiadas para las tareas de escuchar, así como presentamos una serie de estrategias para que los estudiantes mejoren su desempeño al escuchar. Proponemos tres fases en las estrategias de escuchar: una fase previa al escuchar, la fase de escuchar, y una fase post escuchar. Esperamos que estas estrategias ayuden a cualquier profesor a cumplir su labor en una forma más efectiva

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

1.1. Background details:

“Listening is the language modality that is used most frequently in daily life. It has been estimated that adults spend almost half their communication time listening, and students may receive as much as 90% of their in-school information through listening to instructors and to one another. Often, however, language learners do not recognize the level of effort that goes into developing listening ability. Far from passively receiving and recording aural input, listeners actively involve themselves in the interpretation of what they hear, bringing their own background knowledge and linguistic knowledge to bear on the information contained in the aural text. Not all listening is the same; casual greetings, for example, require a different sort of listening capability than do academic lectures. Language learning requires intentional listening that employs strategies for identifying sounds and making meaning from them. The complexity of the listening process is magnified in second language contexts, where the receiver also has incomplete control of the language”¹

So we can state that listening is the most important receptive skill for language students since the ability to understand meaning from what is

¹ “Listening in a foreign language” by Ana Maria Schwartz, in *Modules for the professional preparation of teaching assistants in foreign languages* (Grace Stovall Burkart, ed.; Washington, DC: Center for Applied Linguistics, 1998) as cited on <http://nclrc.org/essentials/listening/stratlisten>

heard is a clue in the communication ability. Thus a concern for teachers is to train their students in 'enabling skills' — perception of sounds, stress, intonation patterns, accents, attitudes and so on, as well as 'practice' in various styles of listening comprehension.

As we are realizing, language learning depends on listening. Listening provides the aural input that serves as the basis for language acquisition and enables learners to interact in spoken communication. Difficulties in listening comprehension will result in difficulties acquiring the language. Given the importance of listening in language learning and teaching, it is essential for language teachers to help their students become effective listeners

1.2. Problem Definition

How does the applying of non innovative listening techniques applied in the classroom affect the students' listening performance?

1.2.1. Secondary Problems

- How does the limited contact with real English affect students in their communicative competences?
- How the lack of opportunities for effective listening practice impedes students to be good listeners?

1.3. Objectives

1.3.1. General Objective

Provide students listening strategies to maximize their comprehension of aural input

1.3.2. Specific Objectives:

To help students so that they can be able to understand the main points of clear speech on familiar matters regularly encounter in school, home, leisure, etc.

To help students so that they will improve their performance when doing listening tasks

To provide listening practice in authentic situations: those that learners are likely to encounter when they use the language outside the classroom.

1.4. Justification

Even though listening is an oral receptive skill, in no way it is passive. Understanding an oral speech is an active process, which requires a lot of attention to identify constituents (words or phrases) in a message. It implies to select and keep in mind important information about both the heard message and the situation and partakers in a conversation. Therefore

listening comprehension is an important factor in order to learning a language. Listening is the input part that allows students to perceive the sounds (segmental and suprasegmental) of a language. Because learners must interact with speakers of in the target language, a failure to understand the language they hear is an obstacle to interaction and learning.

So teachers should look for ways to help students develop this skill which will be a valuable tool in being able to understand and communicate in the target language. Listening exercises provide teachers with the means for drawing learners' attention to new forms (vocabulary, grammar, new interaction patterns) in the language.

CHAPTER II

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

2.1. A Brief Language Approaches Review²

Second language learning is an old enterprise. For centuries, in language teaching, the Classical Method was used. It consisted in the teaching of Greek and Latin. It focused on the grammatical rules, memorization of vocabulary, verb declensions, and translation of texts. In the 19th century the name of the method was changed to Grammar-Translation Method, but it didn't make any difference as to students' communicative skills. In modern times there have emerge a number of different ways (methods) of dealing with the task of acquiring a second language. Let us see have a look of some of them.

At the turn of 19th the century a new method, the Direct Method was popularized by Charles Berlitz. The premises were: lots of oral interaction, spontaneous use of language, no translation and little or no analysis of grammar rules. Meaning was conveyed directly in the target language through the use of demonstration and visual aids.

In the time of World War II, the Army Method emerged due to the necessity USA had that its soldiers become proficient in the oral language of both the

² Larsen-Freeman Diane, "Techniques and Principles in Language Teaching." Oxford University Press. 2002

allies and the enemy. This method strongly emphasized aural/oral skills, pattern drills and conversation practice, and discarded translation. This oral method proved to be successful, so educational institutions adopted and adapted it. Then it arose as the Audio-Lingual Method. This Method had a firm ground on linguistic and psycholinguistic theory, next to behaviorist psychologists who advocated habit-formation models of learning. Even though this method was very successful, it failed to promote communicative proficiency.

In the 60's a land mark in the field of foreign language teaching methodology occurred. Researches on how languages are learned, studies on the structure of language and the nature of the cognitive processes began to flourish. A linguistic, Noam Chomsky, claimed that the mind had highly complex structures and that language development is generated when the person is placed in the appropriate environment. He claimed that all structures of a language are placed in what he called a language organ, "the Language Acquisition Device" (LAD).

In the seventies Holliday and Hymes proposed that the language system is appropriated when the learner relates the grammar to meaning in social contexts and behavior. Then, Wilkins adopted this idea to construct his notional-functional- syllabus. A notion is an abstract concept such as space, time, quantity, etc. A function involves "introducing oneself", "accepting/declining", "asking for/giving permission", etc. This syllabus hoped to promote communicative ability, but it was not a method, because it

didn't explain how to teach. In this decade other methods appeared as Community Language Learning (CCL), Suggestopedia, The Silent Way, The Total Physical Respond (TPR).

Community Language Learning advised teachers to consider learner as whole persons, that is, not only their intellect but also their feelings, physical reactions, instinctive protective reactions and desire to learn. Today, Community Language Learning (CCL) is not used as an exclusive method in a curriculum, however the principles of discovery learning, development of independence, students centered participation and anxiety free climate, in the classroom, are all applicable in all language classrooms.

Suggestopedia is a method whose underlying belief is that learning takes place on two different planes: a conscious one, in which learners pay attention to the linguistic aspects of language and a subconscious one that suggests that learning is easy and pleasant. Teachers must create a relaxed atmosphere with the help of baroque music, comfortable seats, very illuminated and colorful rooms, and students' childlike attitude.

The Silent Way method is a humanistic approach that is based upon cognitive principles such as problem solving activities and discovery learning. In this method teachers remain in silent most of the classroom time. They used a set of colored rods, the Cuisenaire Rods, which stand for words and sounds of the target language.

Asher proposed Total Physical Response (TPR) by arguing that the fastest and least stressful way to achieve understanding of any target language is to follow directions uttered by the instructor. The instructor provides commands to a few students, then he/she performs the actions with them. Next, the students demonstrate that they can understand the commands by performing them alone.

Nowadays there is a kind of general consensus that the emphasis must be placed on communication. It is impossible to talk about a language without referring to communication. Communication is a social process in which knowledge and experiences are exchanged by partakers who exert mutual influence. The main purpose of knowing a language is to communicate with other people in the target language. Now, just to know the structures and vocabulary of a second language is not enough for engaging in real communication.

This reality has been experienced by many people that have studied a second language. That's why in the teaching of foreign languages the emphasis can not be just on the linguistic skills, but also in how to use this knowledge in authentic communication, or what is known as *Communicative Competence*- knowing when and how to say what to whom. Thus Communicative Language Teaching makes communicative competence the goal of the language teaching.

Table 2.1. Techniques used by the different English teaching methods

Grammar Translation	Direct Method	Audio Lingual	Community Language Learning	Suggestopedia	Silent Way	Total Physical Response	Communicative Language Teaching
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Translation of a literary passage - Reading comprehension questions - Cognates - Deductive application of rule - Fill-in-the blanks - Memorization - Use words in sentences - Composition 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Reading aloud - Question and answer - Getting students to self correct - Conversation practice - Fill-in-the blanks - Dictation - Map drawing - Paragraph writing 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Dialog memorization - Repetition drill - Chain drill - Single-slot substitution drill - Multiple-slot substitution drill - Transformation drill - Question and answer drill - Use of minimal pairs 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Tape recording student conversation - Transcription Reflection on experience - Reflective listening - Human computer - Small group task 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Classroom set-up - Peripheral learning - Positive suggestion - Choose a new identity - Role play - First concert - Second concert - Primary activation - Creative adaptation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Sound-color chart - Teacher's silence - Peer correction - Rods - Self correction gestures - Word chart - Fidel charts - Structured feedback 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Using commands to direct behavior - Role reversal - Action sequence 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Authentic materials - Scrambled sentences - Language games - Picture strip story - Role play

Communicative Language Teaching doesn't refer to a strict methodology but it refers to a diverse set of rather general and uncontroversial principles. It can be interpreted and used to support a wide variety of classroom procedures.

Some of the main features of the Communicative Language teaching are³:

- The goal that Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) pursue is communicative competence, that is, that the students can communicate in the target language
- Whenever possible authentic materials should be used in the classroom, so that language could be used in a real context.
- Communication is a process which involves negotiating meaning, so in this process students' cooperative working will be necessary.
- Errors are tolerated. They are seen as inevitable and desirable outcome of the development of the communication process. Fluency is considered as being more important than accuracy
- Students' security is improved by cooperative interactions with their partners.
- Teachers' responsibility is to provide classroom activities that promote communication in which teachers act as facilitators and advisors.

³ Murphy Elizabeth, Communicative Language Teaching.
<http://www.mun.ca/educ/faculty/emurphy/CLT/>

- Students will be motivated to learn a foreign language because they'll feel they are doing something useful with the language

2.2. Listening in a Communicative Approach Perspective

The term listening refers to a complex process that allow us to understand spoken language. Listening is often used in conjunction with the other skills: speaking, reading and writing. Listening is not only a skill, but it is a critical means of acquiring a second language. Nowadays listening is assuming a relevant importance in foreign language classroom because it provides input for the learner. Without understanding input at the right level, learning can not begin. So teaching listening skills becomes a priority issue in the foreign language classroom⁴.

Listening skills teaching should be based on the idea that the goal of language acquisition is communicative competence: the ability to use the language correctly and appropriately to accomplish communication goals. The desired outcome of the language learning process is the ability to communicate competently, not the ability to use the language exactly as a native speaker does. In this communicative approach, teacher should provide models of listening strategies and provide listening practice in authentic situations.

⁴ Raúl López, Listening. "Methodology Handbook". Army Polytechnic School. Quito 2004

2.2.1. Goals for Teaching Listening⁵

The focal goal for teaching Listening is to produce students who are able to “defend” by themselves in communication situations. In other words, students should use listening strategies in order to attain understanding of oral input, identify relevant and non-relevant information, and go beyond word comprehension. Therefore teachers should set clear goals in the listening teaching process. Taking this into account let’s set the following goals:

- ***Listen for perception.*** We need to attain an accurate perception of the sounds of the target language. We need to know the sounds, rhythms, tunes and stress patterns of that language. It is the first stage which leads to comprehension. This means: discriminate sounds accents, intonation, recognize meaning of words, phrases structure and relationships among words.
- ***Listen for comprehension.*** Most of the exercises which students will do focus on listening comprehension that is, interpreting meaning from spoken language.
- ***Listen for developing skills.*** Students can get the most on listening practice if they are equipped with appropriate skills such as:
 - Predict what is going to be heard
 - Extract specific information (scan)

⁵ Ana Maria Schwartz, Teaching Listening , <<http://nclrc.org/essentials/listening/stratlisten>>

- Use prior knowledge to help in understanding
 - Identify general and relevant aspects
 - Guess unknown words or phrases meaning from context
 - Understand different intonation models and different uses of the stress that allow know meaning and social context
 - Understand implicit messages such as speakers attitudes or intentions
 - Develop students' awareness of the listening process and listening strategies by asking students to think and talk about how they listen in their native language.
 - Evaluate their comprehension and their strategy use immediately after completing an assignment.
 - Know strategies that will work best for the listening purpose and the type of text. Know how and why one should use the strategies.
- ***Listen for real life.*** This can be by using authentic listening texts associated with everyday locations, situations or activities. These include listening to directions, announcements, weather forecasts, health documentaries, airport information, tourist guides, automatic telephone messages. Authentic materials and situations prepare students for the types of listening they will need to do when using the language outside the classroom.

2.3. Common Reference Levels of Language Proficiency

There does appear in practice to be a wide, though by no means universal, consensus on the number and nature of levels appropriate to the organization of language learning and the public recognition of achievement. It seems that an outline framework of six broad levels gives an adequate coverage of the learning space relevant to European language learners for these purposes.

“The establishment of a set of common reference points in no way limits how different sectors in different pedagogic cultures may choose to organize or describe their system of levels and modules. It is also to be expected that the precise formulation of the set of common reference points, the wording of the descriptors, will develop over time as the experience of member states and of institutions with related expertise is incorporated into the description. It is also desirable that the common reference points are presented in different ways for different purposes. For some purposes it will be appropriate to summarize the set of proposed Common Reference Levels in single holistic paragraphs, as shown in Table 2.2. Such a simple ‘global’ representation will make it easier to communicate the system to non-specialist users and will also provide teachers and curriculum planners with orientation points⁶. In addition, for the purpose of this study, the descriptors related to listening skills will be considered⁷.

⁶Common European Framework of Reference for Languages: Common Reference Levels

⁷ See descriptor tables on the Annexes section.

Table 2.2. Common Reference Levels: global scale

Proficient User	<i>C2</i>	Can understand with ease virtually everything heard or read. Can summarize information from different spoken and written sources, reconstructing arguments and accounts in a coherent presentation. Can express him/herself spontaneously, very fluently and precisely, differentiating finer shades of meaning even in more complex situations.
	<i>C1</i>	Can understand a wide range of demanding, longer texts, and recognize implicit meaning. Can express him/herself fluently and spontaneously without much obvious searching for expressions. Can use language flexibly and effectively for social, academic and professional purposes. Can produce clear, well-structured, detailed text on complex subjects, showing controlled use of organizational patterns, connectors and cohesive devices.
Independent	<i>B2</i>	Can understand the main ideas of complex text on both concrete and abstract topics, including technical discussions in his/her field of specialization. Can interact with a degree of fluency and spontaneity that makes regular interaction with native speakers quite possible without strain for either party. Can produce clear, detailed text on a wide range of subjects and explain a viewpoint on a topical issue giving the advantages and Independent disadvantages of various options.
	<i>B1</i>	Can understand the main points of clear standard input on familiar matters regularly encountered in work, school, leisure, etc. Can deal with most situations likely to arise whilst travelling in an area where the language is spoken. Can produce simple connected text on topics which are familiar or of personal interest. Can describe experiences and events, dreams, hopes and ambitions and briefly give reasons and explanations for opinions and plans.
	<i>A2</i>	Can understand sentences and frequently used expressions related to areas of most immediate relevance (e.g. very basic personal and family information, shopping, local geography, employment). Can communicate in simple and routine tasks requiring a simple and direct exchange of information on familiar and routine matters. Can describe in simple terms aspects of his/her background, immediate environment and matters in areas of immediate need
Basic User	<i>A1</i>	Can understand and use familiar everyday expressions and very basic phrases aimed at the satisfaction of needs of a concrete type. Can introduce him/herself and others and can ask and answer questions about personal details such as where he/she lives, people he/she knows and things he/she has. Can interact in a simple way provided the other person talks slowly and clearly and is prepared to help.

2.3.1. Receptive activities and strategies

These include listening and reading activities. In aural reception (listening) activities the language user as listener receives and processes a spoken input produced by one or more speakers. Listening activities include:

- listening to public announcements (information, instructions, warnings, etc.);
- listening to media (radio, TV, recordings, cinema);
- listening as a member of a live audience (theatre, public meetings, public lectures, entertainments, etc.);
- listening to overheard conversations, etc.

In each case the user may be listening:

- for gist;
- for specific information;
- for detailed understanding;
- for implications, etc.

CHAPTER III

STRATEGIES FOR DEVELOPING LISTENING KILLS

As it has already stated in this work, listening is the clue skill to effective communication in the target language. That's why teachers should prepare carefully the activities to be performed in classes. We can divide the listening process into 3 stages;

1. Pre-listening
2. During (in-while) listening,
3. Post -listening

3.1. Pre-listening Strategies⁸

3.1.1. Word Association Tasks

Students can activate their prior knowledge before listening to the passage by responding to a key word or phrase such as "Healthy Food". They are asked to write down as many words and phrases as possible in five minutes' time related to this topic, or they may write freely on this topic. While they write, they should not worry about the words and sentences they write, just pay attention to the content. The whole process could take about ten minutes. Then the teacher writes down the main ideas on the board and

⁸ Ji Lingzhu, Listening Activities for Effective Top Down Processing. <http://iteslj.org/Techniques/Lingzhu-Listening.html>

he/she can use this information to help students to get ready for the listening task.

Another activity to activate students' prior knowledge consists of giving them three content words or phrases related to a topic and asked them to write anything that comes to mind when they hear each word or phrase.

We can also use the semantic webbing method. In this strategy, teachers help students to see the possible relationship between ideas discussed by connecting graphically the various concepts and key words about a particular topic on the board. We are not creating new knowledge, but making students aware of the knowledge they already have by giving structure to the content information. This process will enable them to relate what they are going to learn with what they have already known. This teaching process can be done as group work. Students can be divided into several groups to discuss the topic. Then the teacher can ask the groups to report their discussion results. Finally the teacher can select ideas which adjust the most to the listening task topic.

3.1.2. Questioning

An usual procedural is to ask questions after a listening activity. One interesting variation is to give students questions before the listening activity. This task resembles what happens in the real world. We often listen to the speaker to find answers to the questions in our minds, relating to a certain topic, or to confirm what we already thought to be true. Pre-listening

questions induce a selective attention strategy. Even if we use a pre-determined textbook, we can ask our students to read the questions that are planned to be discussed after the listening task. In this way, the students are compelled to show expectation for the topic to be heard. Thus, their prior knowledge can be activated and they can even have a framework of the organization of the passage to be read if the questions are arranged appropriately.

For instance, students are expected to answer the following questions before they listen to a passage.

- What are some animals in danger of extinction?
- What are the areas in the world with endangered animals?
- What are the actions that government are taken to protect them?
- What can we do in behalf of endangered animals?

Ask the students to read the questions carefully. They will know that the main idea of the passage is endangered animals, and the speaker will mainly talk about species in danger, the places where animals are more threatened, the governments concern about the topic, and what all of us can do to help save animals.

We can also make students generate the questions by giving them a topic, letting them ask questions about what kind of information they would like to know, and then asking their classmates to give answers to the questions. For example, before they listen to a dialogue between a waiter and a client, tell

them who the two speakers are, then ask what they may talk about. You may also ask the learners to role play the dialogue.

3.1.3. Making Lists of Possibilities, Ideas and Suggestions

When a listening activity that contains lists, even short lists of possibilities /ideas /suggestions or whatever, it is often a good idea to make students write a list of words related to the topic to be listened. This way the students can use their lists during the listening stage. While the students make the list, they can use the words and phrases they have already known, or they can ask their partners to help. Any checking type activity carried out while listening can then be limited to matching with known language. This can increase the likelihood of students succeeding with the task. So it is a very motivating activity, especially for the lower level students.

The list making activity is very good for pair or group work. Students can work it in a relaxed atmosphere because there is no right answer as to what should be on the list. In the beginning of the course, when the students are not very familiar with the activity, we may use list-making for the subjects about which people are very familiar since they are likely to have a lot of ideas. For instance, "the food people like to eat", "things children are afraid of", etc.

3.2. During (in-while) Listening Strategies⁹

3.2.1. Listening for Gist.

These tasks focus on general understanding rather than specific information. The first time learners listen to the text, they probably won't understand many details. Then the listening target should center their attention around the general idea of the listening text, what is usually called the gist of the text. For example, if the listening is a conversation between two people, students can listen for the topic, or for one character's opinion of the topic. A lot of listening in everyday life involves listening for gist.

3.2.2. Listening for Comprehension

Now that the students have the general idea of the listening text, and the instructor has asked them a few questions, learners can listen to answer more specific, harder questions. In a conversation about shopping, they can listen for the price of a specific article, or in order to describe one of the clothing pieces. There are some different ways to deal with comprehension.

- Listen and write (short answers: false/true, yes/no, multiple choice, filling in spaces in a text or lyrics, partial dictation correcting information...).
- Listen and write (long answers: summarizing what was heard, take dictation, complete a story, answering or asking questions)

⁹ Pearson Education. "Fifty ideas to improve listening" <www.pearsonlongman.com/teaching-tips/pdf/improve_listening.pdf>

- Listen and answer orally: questions comprehension, or about discrepancies or inconsistencies in the text
- Make tasks: recipes, instructions to play, TPR answers, drawing a route or symbols, order events sequentially, point out some elements, discriminate things, dramas, debates, etc.

3.2.3. Listening for Specific Information.

In these tasks, students are prompted by a form or chart to focus on specific information within the text. This is *selective listening*, where the listeners ignores a lot of information to focus on the information you need. An example would be a national weather forecast which describes many different areas. The listener concentrates only on the information relevant to the local area. Other activities could be:

- Students are given the text of a dictation which contains specific mistakes. They must listen, identify and correct those mistakes. This activity is particularly good for very careful, precise listening.
- Students are given the text of the dictation which contains gaps. They must listen and complete the text. This is particularly good for focusing on the spelling of particular words.
- Students are given a series of sentences describing key events in a story. They listen to the story and mark the sentences in chronological order.

This and the following task, exploit longer texts than would normally be used for dictation.

- Students hear a text which is heavy in information -containing dates, dimensions, numbers, etc. Students take notes (particularly of key information) and then, perhaps working in groups, try to reproduce the text. At the simplest level, this could involve drawing a picture from a description. It can also involve following a route on a map or marking the rooms on the plan of a house. Students can listen to a story and link words or phrases to make a 'word map' of the story (an introduction to note taking). At higher levels, listen and draw can involve listening to a technical description and draw a diagram.

3.2.4. Dictation Task

This is a very interesting workgroup task. In standard dictation exercises, students have to write down everything they hear. This can be done first as an individual task. In this task teacher will dictate some selected texts, or play a Cd. Students will write what they hear individually. After completing the dictation, give students a few minutes to work together, exchanging ideas and making changes to their scripts. This sharing of ideas extends dictation from being a pure listening task to an even more valid language task. In this way they get feedback and can reflect on their work.

3.2.5. Use of Video

Before watching a video, the teacher gives a list of key words and discusses the topic that will be shown. Then students watch the video without sound.

While watching it they identify the kind of program (news, documentary, interview drama). Next they make a list of predictions about the content. Finally students watch the video with sound and check understanding.

3.2.6. Listening to Check a Written Task

After students have completed a quiz or written exercise, they listen to a recording to check their answers. This is 'easy' listening because the students are already familiar with the language, but it is valuable because the students are highly motivated to listen carefully.

3.2.7. Listening Authentic English Listening Materials¹⁰

Authentic listening materials are texts for native speakers, such as songs, weather reports, news clips, or videos from YouTube. These are authentic listening texts associated with everyday locations, situations or activities. These include listening to directions, announcements, weather forecasts, airport information, tourist guides, automatic telephone messages, etc. These recordings are used for *authentic tasks*, which are for the same purposes as you need to listen in real life. With a news clip, a teacher can use computers, if available, so that students can watch the news as well. This is one of the best ways to teach listening. Since newscasters tend to speak very quickly, some of the quick phrases, especially linked words, need to be pre-taught.

¹⁰ Welter Brian, ESL Teaching Listening with a Purpose.
<http://www.suite101.com/content/esl-teaching-listening-with-a-purpose-a192546>

3.2.8. Perception of Sounds

Accurate perception of the sounds of the language is the first stage which leads to interpretation and comprehension. When listening to a foreign language, we need to know the sounds, rhythms, tunes and stress patterns of that language. All the pronunciation work which you do will benefit the students' listening ability. Use minimal pair perception exercises (ship/sheep, ten /then) to help students learn the sounds of English.

3.3. Post –listening Strategies¹¹

We basically use post-listening activities to check comprehension, evaluate listening skills and use of listening strategies, and extend the knowledge gained to other contexts. A post-listening activity may relate to a pre-listening activity, such as predicting; may expand on the topic or the language of the listening text; or may transfer what has been learned to reading, speaking, or writing activities.

3.3.1 Real Life Use of Listening

A post-listening activity must reflect the real-life uses to which students might put information they have gained through listening. It must have a purpose other than assessment. It must require students to demonstrate their level of listening comprehension by completing some task.

¹¹ National Capital Language Resource Center (NCLRC). (n.d.). The essentials of language teaching. Retrieved April 23, 2007 from <http://nclrc.org/essentials>

To develop authentic assessment activities, consider the type of response that listening to a particular selection would elicit in a non-classroom situation. For example, after listening to a healthy food report one might decide to eat in a healthier way from now on; after listening to a set of instructions, one might repeat them to someone else; after watching and listening to a play or video, one might discuss the story line with friends.

You can then develop a checklist or rubric that will allow you to evaluate each student's comprehension of specific parts of the aural text. For example, let's consider the former mentioned topic –healthy food- for listening practice. We have students listen to this report. Their purpose for listening is to be able to advise a friend how to eat healthily. As a post-listening activity, we ask students to select appropriate items of food from a set we have assembled, or write a note telling his/her friend what to eat, or provide oral advice to another student (who has not heard the food report). To evaluate listening comprehension, you use a checklist containing specific features of the healthy food report, marking those that are reflected in the students' eating habits recommendations.

3.3.2. Deeper Analysis of a Topic

After students have understood the gist and some important details of a recording, analyze it in more detail and investigate the way in which speakers have expressed the ideas. How much have they revealed their mood, their opinions and so on? Analyze the speed and style of speech, the use of hesitation, repetition, false starts, paraphrasing, etc.

3.3.3. Checking for Their Own

Once students have completed a listening task it is usual for the teacher to give the answers; but this could prevent students think. Rather, let the students listen again 'to check' their answers. This extra work is very valuable for students.

CHAPTER IV

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

4.1. Conclusions

In this work we have stated that listening is the most important receptive (and learning) skill for foreign language students. An ability to listen and interpret many shades of meaning from what is heard, it is a fundamental communicative ability. Teaching listening involves training students in some enabling skills, so that they can successfully manage listening tasks. Fortunately, we can put into practice some innovative strategies in order to students achieve listening tasks successfully. We can make use of pre listening activities in order to activate prior knowledge and make the listening more comprehensible. In this work we have found available a series of different strategies to deal with listening matters. The challenging task for teachers is to prepare the listening tasks carefully by setting the appropriated goals to the listening activities, using varied and innovative strategies that effectively will help students improve their listening skills, and making an appropriate assessment of the process.

4.2. Recommendations

Teachers should establish regular 'procedures' for listening activities in which students will develop from general (gist) to specific comprehension through

repeated listening. Listening tasks give the students a reason for listening and focuses their attention. These listening tasks should be set before the students listen. We are practicing listening, not memory!

When writing is required in a task, keep it to a minimum during listening. Remember that the primary goal is comprehension, not production. The fact of having to write while listening may distract students from this primary goal.

Reduce the noise coming from outside the classroom by closing the door, or the windows while students are listening. The greatest source of noise which interferes with listening comes from the students themselves. Train them to keep quiet while listening by making sure that they have tasks which force them to listen carefully. Intensive listening requires intense concentration. We all know that students find it difficult to maintain this level of concentration for more than one or two minutes. If the recording is longer, split it into smaller sections.

Research has shown that students whose teachers speak only English in the classroom develop listening comprehension skills much faster than others. Students who listen to their teachers reading stories become better listeners and better readers!

When people are speaking extensively, they mark their discourse with phrases like 'firstly', 'next', 'on the other hand', 'as I said before', 'at the end of the day', 'finally'. These discourse markers indicate the 'paragraph'

divisions in what they are saying. These are very useful when students are learning to take notes.

We use our voices to express emotions in ways which are specific to our culture. Students need to be able to distinguish between anger, enthusiasm, fear, ironic humor, sarcasm, excitement, weariness, surprise, shock, satisfaction, relief, lack of interest etc. These emotions may be communicated simply by the tone of voice and not through the actual language used.

Native speakers can usually recognize many regional accents from their own country and can recognize many foreign accents. For example, most native speakers of southern British English can recognize Scottish, Welsh, Irish, South West British, Midland British, Northern British, Australian, Indian, South African and two different American accents (from Northern States and Southern States). Recognizing accents is much more difficult in a foreign language. If you 'know' an accent, it is much easier to interpret the different sounds you hear. So teachers can use listening records with different accents in class. In this way students will be aware of the real English they will encounter when they will have the opportunity to talk to native speakers.

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ANNEXES

Illustrative Scales for Listening

Annex 1

Table 3. Overall Listening Comprehension

C 2	Has no difficulty in understanding any kind of spoken language, whether live or broadcast, delivered at fast native speed. Can understand enough to follow extended speech on abstract and complex topics beyond his/her own field, though he/she may need to confirm occasional details, especially if the accent is unfamiliar.
C1	Can recognize a wide range of idiomatic expressions and colloquialisms, appreciating register shifts. Can follow extended speech even when it is not clearly structured and when relationships are only implied and not signaled explicitly. Can understand standard spoken language, live or broadcast, on both familiar and unfamiliar topics normally encountered in personal, social, academic or vocational life. Only extreme background noise, inadequate discourse structure and/or idiomatic usage influences the ability to understand.
B2	Can understand standard spoken language, live or broadcast, on both familiar and unfamiliar topics normally encountered in personal, social, academic or vocational life. Only extreme background noise, inadequate discourse structure and/or idiomatic usage influences the ability to understand. Can understand the main ideas of propositionally and linguistically complex speech on both concrete and abstract topics delivered in a standard dialect, including technical discussions in his/her field of specialisation. Can follow extended speech and complex lines of argument provided the topic is reasonably familiar, and the direction of the talk is sign-posted by explicit markers.
B1	Can understand straightforward factual information about common everyday or job related topics, identifying both general messages and specific details, provided speech is clearly articulated in a generally familiar accent. Can understand the main points of clear standard speech on familiar matters regularly encountered in work, school, leisure etc., including short narratives. Can understand enough to be able to meet needs of a concrete type provided speech is clearly and slowly articulated.
A2	Can understand enough to be able to meet needs of a concrete type provided speech is clearly and slowly articulated. Can understand phrases and expressions related to areas of most immediate priority (e.g. very basic personal and family information, shopping, local geography, employment) provided speech is clearly and slowly articulated.
A1	Can follow speech which is very slow and carefully articulated, with long pauses for him/her to assimilate meaning.

Annex 2

Table 4. Understanding Conversation between Native Speakers

C2	As C1
C1	Can easily follow complex interactions between third parties in group discussion and debate, even on abstract, complex unfamiliar topics.
B2	Can keep up with an animated conversation between native speakers.
	Can with some effort catch much of what is said around him/her, but may find it difficult to participate effectively in discussion with several native speakers who do not modify their language in any way.
B1	Can generally follow the main points of extended discussion around him/her, provided speech is clearly articulated in standard dialect.
A2	Can generally identify the topic of discussion around him/her, when it is conducted slowly and clearly.
A1	No descriptor available

Annex 3.

Table 5. Listening as a member of a live audience

C2	Can follow specialized lectures and presentations employing a high degree of colloquialism, regional usage or unfamiliar terminology.
C1	Can follow most lectures, discussions and debates with relative ease.
B2	Can follow the essentials of lectures, talks and reports and other forms of academic/professional presentation which are propositionally and linguistically complex.
B1	Can follow a lecture or talk within his/her own field, provided the subject matter is familiar and the presentation straightforward and clearly structured.
	Can follow in outline straightforward short talks on familiar topics provided these are delivered in clearly articulated standard speech.
A2	No descriptor available
A1	No descriptor available

Annex 4.

Table 6. Listening to Announcements and Instructions

C2	as C1
C1	Can extract specific information from poor quality, audibly distorted public announcements, e.g. in a station, sports stadium etc. Can understand complex technical information, such as operating instructions, specifications for familiar products and services.
B2	Can understand announcements and messages on concrete and abstract topics spoken in standard dialect at normal speed.
B1	Can understand simple technical information, such as operating instructions for everyday equipment. Can follow detailed directions.
A2	Can catch the main point in short, clear, simple messages and announcements. Can understand simple directions relating to how to get from X to Y, by foot or public transport
A1	Can understand instructions addressed carefully and slowly to him/her and follow short, simple directions.

Annex 5

Table 7. Listening to Audio Media and Recordings

C2	as C1
C1	Can understand a wide range of recorded and broadcast audio material, including some non-standard usage, and identify finer points of detail including implicit attitudes and relationships between speakers.
B2	Can understand recordings in standard dialect likely to be encountered in social, professional or academic life and identify speaker viewpoints and attitudes as well as the information content. Can understand most radio documentaries and most other recorded or broadcast audio material delivered in standard dialect and can identify the speaker's mood, tone etc.
B1	Can understand the information content of the majority of recorded or broadcast audio material on topics of personal interest delivered in clear standard Can understand the main points of radio news bulletins and simpler recorded material about familiar subjects delivered relatively slowly and clearly.
A2	Can understand and extract the essential information from short, recorded passages dealing with predictable everyday matters which are delivered slowly and clearly.
A1	No descriptor available