TEACHING LISTENING SKILLS IN SECOND LANGUAGE CLASSROOMS

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ABSTRACT

This article describes the importance and methods of teaching listening skills in the second language classroom. Teaching listening has been a neglected area as many language instructors believe that this skill is learnt automatically while teaching the other skills i.e. Speaking, Reading, and Writing. Listening is a major component in language learning and teaching. It is an important aspect not only as a respective skill, but also for the development of the spoken language proficiency. In many institutions, instructors use audio tapes or video tapes to engage the students in listening or while away their time. Learners equally apprehensive about and indifferent towards the listening skills as they feel the accent they listen to most often is that of native speakers which is beyond their comprehension. This paper aims at solving the challenges simultaneously, guiding the instructors and learners towards a motivating level and finally reaching a successful teaching and learning atmosphere.
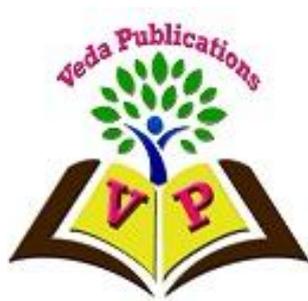
BACKGROUND

Listening is a major component in language learning and teaching. In the late 1970s with James Asher's (1977) work on total physical response, according to which the role of comprehension was given great emphasis/prominence as learners were given great quantities of input to listen to before they are ready to respond orally. Similarly the natural approach recommended a significant silent period during which learners were allowed the security of listening without being forced to go through the anxiety of speaking before they are ready to do so. (Brown, 1994: 234)

For a long time, listening skills were considered a passive activity. Now, they are recognised as an active process due to the indispensable nature and constant use of the skill. Vandergrift (2004. P.1) opines that listening is "the least explicit of the four study skills, making it difficult to learn." Rankin (1930) took a special interest in listening as a field of study by commenting that "listening is the most frequent focused mode of communication among human beings". Between 1950 and the late 1970s, studies of listening focused on the pedagogical and assessment aspects of listening, such as listening comprehension and critical

listening (Feyten, 1991). In the 1980s, studies relating to listening strategies began to emerge.

The term skills and strategies are sometimes used synonymously to describe complementary behaviours. However, skills are usually associated with behaviour psychology, where they are routine habits acquired through practice and reception, while strategies are goal directed and deliberate behaviours. Thus, in order to become a good listener, and then turn to arrangement of answers and select from a set of options. This can involve decoding, making inferences, depending on the needs and purpose of the listener. Strategy is the action of turning to the range of responses to meet the need or purpose of the listener. (Afflerbach, Pearson and Paris, 2008).

1. GOAL OF TEACHING LISTENING

The goal of teaching listening is to develop the learners' ability and to make them listen effectively to the input. The input may be in the form of audio script, oral lesson or a speech or song. The learner has to do what he or she does in listening in their first language listening. as follows: "the main aim in teaching students how to understand English as it is normally spoken by the native English speakers must be to make the student aware of what signal they can depend on hearing in the stream of speech and to make them use those signals... and him to predict when only the tip of the iceberg is apparent what the shape the rest of the iceberg must be". So the statement contains two major components, the first concerns developing strategies to recognise the different signals provided in spoken English, for example paralinguistic signals, extra linguistic signals and linguistic signals. Paralinguistic signals include gestures and variations in the speed of speech.

The second component concerns training students in hypothesis formation, prediction `1qand in ference. For example, students need to be trained to think what they have understood to their world knowledge, to assist them to get the meaning. In other words, the instructor should hold in mind how to make his students familiar. "How to" means how to predict, how to listen correctly and how to get the meaning and so on.

Finally, the goals of teaching listening are that instructors try to produce students who, even if do not have complete control of the grammar or an extensive lexicon, can fend for themselves in communication situations and in the case of listening, this means producing students who can use listening strategies to maximise their comprehension of aural inputs and identifying relevant and no-relevant information.

2. THE IMPORTANT COMPONENTS OF TEACHING LISTENING

There are many important components that the teacher and the students come across during the teaching process and these components have to be taken into consideration by the teacher and he should treat them suitably and solve any problem that will face him in his teaching process. Brown and Yale (1983) argued that listening is a demanding process, not only because of the complexity of the process itself, but also due to factors that characterise it. Therefore, many factors are affecting the listening process and should be mentioned here.

A) The Listener

The listeners interest in a topic increases his comprehension, and vice versa.

B) The Speaker's Style

The use of colloquial language and contracted or short forms will impact comprehension and make it difficult.

Brown – Bakhtar (1983) provide extensive about, speakers style in the classrooms and they note five categories of style as follows:

I. Visual Speakers: full note and diagrams on the blackboard.

II. Exemplary Speakers: repeat main points, stress main ideas and frequently summarising.

III. Oral Lectures: Provide highly structured packages of information, explicit definition of terms.

IV. Amorphous Speakers: provide unstructured streams of consciousness and frequently abandon their original purposes.

V. Eclectic Speakers: tend to extemporise and frequently digress, taking up ideas that are related to the aim of the lesson.

VI. The use of pre- recorded texts: it is very useful to use pre-recorded texts of native speakers oriented programmes in the classrooms.

M.C. Gregor (1986) notes "in order to bring the eavesdropper into the discourse framework –it is necessary to provide a frame of reference by which the listener can establish who the participants in the original exchange are and what they are perceived to be doing from their own point of view..

C) The Content

Any content that is familiar for the listeners will be easy to comprehend.

D) Visual Support

Visual support as video, pictures, diagrams, gestures, facial expression, etc. can help the listener comprehend better.

E) Authenticity

Authentic language is acceptable for class work. In communicative language teaching, the teacher can use tasks that allow learners access to authentic language samples in order to provide the best listening exercise. Ur (1984) stresses that real life listening is contingent upon the reality of the learner as listener rather than on genuine discourse input. In addition, he maintains that 1) real life listening allows the listener sufficient access to environmental cues. 2) Listening segments come in short chunks and 3) listening requires some shows of reciprocity and typically requires frequent listener response.

F) Text Simplification

This means changing or planning text features and topics in order to make the listening process more accessible to learners. So the following conversational strategies should be taken into consideration.

I. Phonology: slow down speech to allow the learner more time to process the language, and to identify ideal phonemes more readily.

II. Morphology: use verbs in base form so that the learner has less syntactic processing to perform.

III. Syntax: omit unstressed words, use topic re-in statement rather than anaphoric

reference in order to keep references clear and avoid complex construction.

IV. Text Structure: use paratactic connections rather than hypotactic connections; topicalize familiar items in order to be given new patterns of processing at key prepositions.

V. In Vocabulary: use high frequency words and provide paraphrase or simple definitions for new words.

VI. Communication strategy: use familiar topics, recycle topics frequently or mark any major shifts, structure short turns to ensure listener response.

VII. Paralinguistic features: use more of intonation range to provide contrasts to the listener and provide gestured cues for redundancy, (Rost 1990:163).

III.TEACHING LISTENING PROCESS OR METHODS

One of the most aspects in language teaching is the method or the process that teachers use for presenting their courses. If the method or process used is suitable for the syllabus and students level, they can get benefits in their learning process.

Mackey (1966) refereed to the suitability of the learner and the methods as follows. "The suitability of a method to learner depends on: his age, aptitude, second language level, interests, time he can devote towards language learning, the size of the group with whom he practices the language and the culture group to which he belongs to". Following are the listening methods or processes such as, Pre-listening Process, while listening, post-listening, top down process, bottom up processing.

Types of Tasks

There are three types of tasks such as online task which can be sub divided into open & closed tasks, retrospective and prospective tasks.

Open task: Note taking is done while listening to lectures. Chaudronets. al., 1988, Rost 1987, Dunkel 1988 have provided some relation between listener notes and text content as follows

-Topic relation notes: including topical zing, translating, copying, transcribing and schemating.

-Concept ordering notes: including sequence of cuing and relation ordering.

-Focusing notes: including highlighting and de-lighting

-Revision notes: including inserting and erasing.

Closed tasks: the listener selects strategies in real time and subject to the attention paradox that effects note taking. In other words the listeners should focus on the act of getting the essence merely from the listening text.

Retrospective tasks: the student should respond after listening to the text. So there are many representations that can be classified by the types of text cues such as verbatim representation and argument presentation.

Prospective tasks: this activity involves predictions with providing another indirect type of evidence of listener text representation strategies, so prediction involves using a context simplification strategy in which the listener projects schematic expectations onto the text, also the listener makes verbalised prediction that will reflect in writing and speaking strategies as well as text representation strategies.

CONCLUSION

Listening is regarded as an essential subject for foreign language acquisition. During a listening lesson it is important for the learners to understand and make interaction with what they are listening to, so without this interaction the learner may be lacking in learning a language. The most useful thing in learning listening is to let the students listen to spoken English of different varieties and accents better than just the voice of their teacher in order to notice the differences in the speakers style, pronunciation, speed, etc. authentic material of language can help learners to understand and use the language as native speakers do. Listening skills can help learners to learn language subconsciously in spite of their poor background about its characteristics. Taking these important aspects into consideration, teaching listening can be made easy and success is possible for both the instructor and learner.

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WEB LINKS FOR LISTENING ACTIVITIES

1. http://fog.ccsf.cc.ca.us/~1fried/activity/listening.html
2. http://www.forumeducation.net/tools/Quiztest/index.php?qid=273
3. http:// www.esl-lab.com/
4. http://caronlinebroenlisteninglessons.co