



CONSIDERING LISTENING AS A LEARNING STRATEGY

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ABSTRACT

It is no exaggeration to assert that listening facilitates learning. Listening is an essential language skill needed for the mastery of knowledge in all disciplines. It is therefore rightly called 'a service skill.' Moreover, Indian learners' problems with their speaking ability can be attributed to listening not being systematically taught. Since it involves a complex, cognitive process, it ought to be taught in English classes. It is often presumed that it need not be taught since it is not taught formally in L1. It is a fallacy, in fact. Irrespective of the skill being taught or not, it presents a lot of problems to the college students. The present attitude study investigates learner problems in listening and quantifies and describes them so that appropriate strategies and solutions can be thought of.

Keywords: *Listening Skills, Service Skill, Cognitive Process, Learner Attitude, Learner Problem*

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BACKGROUND TO STUDY

The problem of listeners has to be addressed because listening is so challenging that teachers has to wisely approach listening skills among the learners. Modern textbooks are awfully clever in the way they slip seamlessly from an interesting listening text into explanation and practice of a grammar point. It is hard to see how such a system could possibly be worse than just launching into a grammar point- until, that is, students have listened three times and still haven't understood enough to answer the first question, let alone move onto the final language point. The reasons why some people find listening in a foreign

language difficult vary just as much, so possible reasons why it might be so are given below, along with some ideas on how to tackle each point.

INTRODUCTION

Listening is the ability to identify and understand what others are saying. There also needs to be a cognitive awareness that understanding a speakers' accent or pronunciation, grammar and vocabulary, and grasping the meaning (Howatt and Dakin 1974). An able listener is capable of doing all these four simultaneously. This helps in the learning capability of the learner. Listening, the first skill of acquiring language needs to be developed by the listener. They should have better training to learn



listening. In teaching listening one must be careful not to go to extremes, either by being concerned to exclusively with theories without thinking about their application to teaching. Teaching listening should not follow the frozen routines like opening the text book and explaining new words, playing the tape recorder, and asking/answering questions. There should be a clear understanding among the teacher as well as the learner of what listening actually is.

HYPOTHESIS

The study for this paper is made to understand the learner problems in listening and quantifies and describes them so that appropriate strategies and solutions can be thought of.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

1. What is listening?
2. Why some students find listening difficult?
3. What can be the basic difficulties in listening?
4. What are the measures to rectify the problem of a listener?
5. How listening can be treated as a learning strategy?

WHAT IS LISTENING?

Listening is a skill that takes more of our waking hours than any other daily activity. Listening is a language skill which most teachers take for granted and the skill that many students spend less time on actively developing. This failure in the understanding of the difference between hearing and listening ends up in failure in the learning process. Mere hearing cannot be considered as listening which is misunderstood these days. Most people tend to be "hard of listening" rather than "hard of hearing."

Skills are factors of a language, which can be mastered for an effective communication in the specified language. Language learning depends on listening. Listening provides the aural input that serves as a basis for language acquisition and enables learners to interact. Effective language instructors show students how they can adjust their listening behavior to deal with a variety of situation, types of input and listening purposes. They help students develop a set of listening strategies and match appropriate strategies to each listening situation.

DISCUSSION

Listening is a language skill which most teachers take for granted and the skill that many students spend less time on actively developing. Listening is not a one way communication as it is the combination of hearing what the speaker says and at the same time involving with the speaker through gestures or replying through words. Research in the past three decades has demonstrated that good listening skills are fundamental to the development of the other language skills and the ability to develop good listening test is important. Listening leads to learning.

Turkish proverb: "If speaking is silver, then listening is gold."

'Hearing' is a word used to describe the physiological sensory processes by which auditory sensations are received by the ears and transmitted to brain. 'Listening' on the other hand refers to a more complex psychological procedure involving interpreting and understanding the significance of the sensory experience. Listening is a skill that takes more of our waking hours than any other activity. There is a proven report that 70% of our waking moments are spent on communication. It says that we spend 9% to writing, 16% to reading, 30% to speaking and 45% to listening. So importance should be given on listening skills as we spent our maximum hours in the same. Most people tend to be "hard of listening" rather than "hard of hearing". There is also a proven fact that the listening capacity (that is with concentration) of human beings can last only up to 17 minutes. But in a classroom lecture which goes up to an hour is a real challenge for the student to listen and grab knowledge. Therefore, the effort of the teacher to produce knowledge completely fails in the rest of the minutes. Average listening rate of human is 500 words a minute. So the listening of a student also depends on the teaching speed of the tutor.

DIFFICULTIES IN LISTENING

There are few cognitive problems for students in listening that has to be discussed. Lack of sociocultural, factual, and contextual knowledge of the target language can present an obstacle to comprehension because language is used to express its culture (Anderson and Lynch 1988). Foreign-



language/L2 learners usually devote more time to reading than to listening, and so lack exposure to different kinds of listening materials. Even college students majoring in English have not even more than five hours' regular training per week. Both psychological and physical factors may have a negative effect on perception and interpretation of listening material. It is tiring for students to concentrate on interpreting unfamiliar sounds, words, and sentences for long periods. Physical Setting Noise, including both background noises on the recording and environmental noises, can take the listener's mind off the content of the listening sources. It is also because the listening material on a tape or radio results in lack of visual and aural environmental clues. Not seeing the speaker's body language and facial expressions makes it more difficult for the listener to understand the speaker's meaning. Unclear sounds resulting from poor-quality equipment can interfere with the listener's comprehension.

Students in Indian classrooms are with blinders that keep them fixed on a track which is known as the education policy. It is an unsaid rule that students have to listen to their teachers in a silent mode, that they could take in mind that which is taught to them. This is considered as a popular and effective pedagogy of teaching and learning by the Indian education system but which actually is 'the challenge' to the curriculum development of the students. The silence of the students in classrooms makes the teachers think that they keep their students in ease without any distractions to listen the class, so that they could gain knowledge on their lectures but which is actually false. They believe that mere hearing will help the students attain complete idea and knowledge of what is thought in the classroom. For instance, while walking on the road we hear lot of sounds of which some are pleasant and some noisy. But we listen only to that few grab our attention and stay registered in our memory. The same applies in the process of education where one cannot be expected to listen all that he/she hears in the classroom.

Teachers assume that they provide knowledge to the students through their lectures but this mere speaking cannot be considered as teaching.

The silence of the students in the classroom gives them a feel that the students are listening. In the view of students, they are controlled and compelled to sit silently and 'hear' the lectures. This mere hearing is certainly a failure in the education system which contributes less to the curriculum development of the students. But it is true that, when we listen, ideas begin to grow.

Listening lags behind when learners are trying to understand every word of the lecture. Despite the fact that we can cope with missing whole chunks of speech having a conversation on a noisy street in our own language, many people don't seem to be able to transfer that skill easily to a second language. Sometimes, the listener is left behind trying to work out what a previous word meant. This is one aspect of the problem above that all people speaking a foreign language have experienced at one time or another. This often happens when a listener hear a word, he or she half remember and find have completely lost the thread of what was being said by the time you remember what it means.

MEASURES TO RECTIFY THE PROBLEM OF A LISTENER

Most of the time, the listener just don't know the most important words being uttered during the conversation. The easier way to handle this is to load up the tasks even more by adding a logic puzzle or listening and writing task, so that just listening and trying to remember words seems like an easier option. Finally, spending a lot of time revising vocabulary and doing skills work where the listener/learner come into contact with it and use it, and show them how to do the same in their own time, so that the amount of half remembered vocabulary is much less. Again, doing vocabulary pre-teaching before each listening as a short term solution and working on the skill of guessing vocabulary from context can help the listener comprehend more easily.

Apart from just being too busy thinking about other things and missing a word, common reasons why listener might not recognize a word include not distinguishing between different sounds in English (e.g. /l/ and /r/ in "led" and "red" for many Asians), or conversely trying to listen for differences



that do not exist, e.g. not knowing words like "there", "their" and "they're" are homophones. Other reasons are problems with word stress, sentence stress, and sound changes when words are spoken together in natural speech such as weak forms. Listening stamina can be built also by making the speaking tasks longer and longer during the term, and learner can practice the same thing outside class by watching an English movie with subtitles and taking the subtitles off for longer and longer periods each time.

Being able to cope with background noise is another skill that does not easily transfer from L1 and builds up along with students' listening and general language skills. Plan listening for when it will be quiet outside, e.g. not at lunchtime or when the class next door is also doing a listening. Cut down on noise inside the classroom by doing the first task with books closed and pens down. Boost the listener's confidence by letting them do the same listening on headphones and showing them how much easier it is. Finally, when they start to get used to it, giving them an additional challenge by using a recording with background noise such as a cocktail party conversation would end up as a greater solution increasing the listening proficiency.

Young people nowadays, they just can't cope without multimedia! Although having students who are not used to listening to the radio in their own language can't help, most students find not having body language and other cues to help a particular difficulty in a foreign language. To say, visual listening results much more than oral listening among the L2 learners. Setting the scene with some photos of the people speaking can help, especially tasks where they put the pictures in order as they listen, and using video instead makes a nice change and is a good way of making skills such as guessing vocabulary from context easier and more natural.

Though natural speech is hard to grade and it is difficult for students to identify the different voices and cope with frequent overlaps, grading listening materials according to the level of the students would provide the learner a proper authentication to the listening process. The materials should progress step by step that it displays most of the linguistic features of natural speech to total

authenticity, because the final aim is to understand natural speech in real life.

LISTENING AS A LEARNING STRATEGY

Designing task-oriented exercises to engage the listener/learners' interest and help them learn the listening skill subconsciously. As Ur (1984:25) has said, "Listening exercises are most effective if they are constructed round a task." Provide students with different kinds of input as Brown and Yule (1983) categorize spoken texts into three broad types: static, dynamic, and abstract. Texts that describe objects or give instructions are static texts; those that tell a story or recount an incident are dynamic texts; those that focus on someone's ideas and beliefs rather than on concrete objects are abstract texts. Brown and Yule suggest that the three types of input should be provided according to the difficulties they present and the students' level. They draw a figure, in which difficulty increases from left to right, and, within any one type of input, complexity increases from top to bottom.

Visual aids or draw pictures and diagrams associated with the listening topics can also make listening more interesting that it help students guess or imagine actively that having a better cognition. Good classroom activities can themselves be effective solutions to listening problems. The list covers a wide range of listening activities from simple to more sophisticated. It can be such as lectures, radio news, films, TV plays, announcements, everyday conversation, interviews, storytelling, English songs, and so on. There are appropriate approaches to teaching listening skills; it is first necessary to understand the nature of listening. The top-down model of listening, by contrast, involves the listener in actively constructing meaning.

Communicative approach can be an effective methodology in making the students listen the lecture. This approach attempted to account for listening and understanding in wide range of contexts. It takes as its main orientation into a demonstration by the listeners that they are able to do something with the information they have comprehended, that is apply to a wider communicative context. This approach tests the listening skill replicate as closely as possible conditions of actual performance. There is also a



need to identify skills and performance conditions of language use in specific contexts. Context also plays a vital role in the listening skill of a student. The context in which the speech or lecture is made also determines whether it is to be heard or listened.

Listening is an invisible mental process, making it difficult to describe. Listening is a complex, active process of interpretation in which listeners matches what they hear with the knowledge of what they already know. So the classes have to be made interactive so that the students can listen interestingly. Teachers can change their teaching methodology in order to draw the attention of the students. This could help in two ways such as: making the students active listeners and making them creative. Discussions and exchange of ideas make the classrooms livelier and would make the student involve in the activity of listening rather than mere hearing. This set up will make them good listeners as they also contribute to the class thus giving them an instinct to hold their view in the discussion. Listening competence is a complex skill that needs to be developed consciously.

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