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behaviour of a voter is influence by several factors such as religion, caste, community, language, money, policy or ideology, purpose of the polls, extent of franchise and the like political parties and groups make use of these variables for the sake of winning the battle of the ballot box. It is therefore, imperative that the use of these determinants should be avoided and elections should be conducted in a very free and fair manner. It also depends upon whether the system allows freedom of thought, expression and association to the people.

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10

THE CHALLENGES OF TEACHING ENGLISH LISTENING SKILLS

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Abstract

For many years, listening skills did not receive any priority in language teaching. This position has been replaced by an active interest in the role of listening comprehension in second language acquisition when Krashen's (1982) comprehensible input gained importance. Rost(1994) also points out that listening is vital in the language class room because it provides input for the learner. Listening is not the same as hearing. According to Nunan, (2001: 23) listening is a six-staged process, consisting of hearing, attending, understanding, remembering, evaluating and responding. There are two possible ways of performing this task: the top-down listening process and the bottom up listening process. Bueno, Madrid and McLaren (2006) establish a pattern for teaching listening with pre-listening, listening and post-listening. It is useful for teachers because it helps to analyze particular difficulties the students could have with the list general listening types. Listening is not easy and there are a number of obstacles that stand in the way of effective listening. An outline of a framework that can be used to design a listening lesson will develop students' listening skills. Listening activities based on simulated real-life situations are more motivating and interesting.

Key words

Listening skills, language teaching, hearing, ways of performing, pattern for teaching, listening types, obstacles, framework, and real life situations.

process ceases.

Finally, we have responding, a stage in which, according to the response, the speaker checks if the message has been received correctly. This stage requires that the receiver complete the process through verbal or non verbal feedback, because the speaker has no other way to determine if a message has been received. Therefore, it is sometimes complicated as we do not have the opportunity to go back and check comprehension (Nunan; 2001, 23).

When dealing with the listening process, it must be mentioned that there are two possible ways of performing this task: the top-down listening process and the bottom up listening process.

The top-down listening process: It consists of understanding the general meaning of a listening selection without paying attention to specific structures, words and so on. It is like a general overview where the listener gets a general view of the listening passage while still understanding the general idea. On the other hand, experts talk about the opposite process.

Bottom -up listening process: In this case, Bueno, Madrid and McLaren stand out its linguistic quality: Bottom up processing is essentially a linguistic process in which we try to make sense of acoustic signals by using knowledge of language. According to this model, sound is assumed to be decoded by accretiation and in a linear fashion- from phonemes, to words, to phrases, to utterances, to complete meaningful texts- whereby "meaning itself is derived as the last step in the process. (2006: 286)

The difference between them is the following: For the top-down process, students take into account the context and do not need to pay attention on specific details while in bottom up listening process, students have to pay attention because here, specific details are very important to understand the whole meaning of the conversation or another kind of listening activity. The listener focuses on individual words and phrases, and achieves understanding by

stringing these detailed elements together to build up a whole. Understanding the exact word is more important. In real life listening, students use a combination of the two processes, giving more emphasis to one or the other depending on their reason for listening. According to Lindsay and Knight, people have four different purposes when they listen: We listen for a purpose, but this purpose can be very different depending on the situation; listening for specific details, listening for general meaning, listening for the general idea or gist. There is also a difference between listening: for information; for enjoyment or social reasons; to learn new language (2006: 46). However, from the point of view of Anderson & Lynch, the purpose when we are listening can be either: transactional, where "the main purpose is to achieve a successful transfer or exchange of information", or it can be interactional, "the use of language for establishing and maintaining social contact" (1988:15). When we are working listening in the classroom the best option is to think about how we think about how we listen in real life. Teachers should give students the opportunity to listen actively providing different accents, useful and different topics, as well as situations that students can use in their real world.

A good teaching method would try to combine both purposes and it is taking this aim into account that this study proposes some activities in the proposed suggested approach. When teachers are teaching listening, apart from the purpose, it is very important to follow a pattern. Bueno, Madrid and McLaren establish the following pattern:

1) Pre-listening would be the first stage, where the context is established. The teacher creates motivation and students do some activities with the purpose of preparing them for what they will hear.

2) The following stage is listening, where learners do the mentioned tasks or find answers. There are two kinds of material and procedure. On the one hand, extensive reading helps students to acquire vocabulary and

grammar and it usually takes place outside the classroom. They do it for pleasure, so that their knowledge of the language improves and it makes students better readers. On the other hand, intensive listening is what students usually learn in the classroom, through audio CDs and activities such as answering questions, following a route on a map, making notes, etc.

3) The last stage is post-listening, the part where students have the opportunity to check their answers about they have been listening to, to give feedback and consolidate what they have learnt.

It is useful for teachers because it helps to analyze particular difficulties the students could have with the list general listening types: The two main types of listening - the foundations of all listening sub-types are:

Discriminative listening and comprehensive listening

Discriminative listening

Discriminative listening is first developed at a very early age – perhaps even before birth, in the womb. This is the most basic form of listening and does not involve the understanding of the meaning of words or phrases but merely the different sounds that are produced. In early childhood, for example, a distinction is made between the sounds of the voices of the parents – the voice of the father sounds different to that of the mother. Discriminative listening develops through childhood and into adulthood. As we grow older and develop and gain more life experience, our ability to distinguish between different sounds is improved. Not only can we recognise different voices, but we also develop the ability to recognise subtle differences in the way that sounds are made – this is fundamental to ultimately understanding what these sounds mean. Differences include many subtleties, recognising foreign languages, distinguishing between regional accents and clues to the emotions and feelings of the speaker.

Being able to distinguish the subtleties of sound made by somebody who is happy or

sad, angry or stressed, for example, ultimately adds value to what is actually being said and, of course, does aid comprehension. When discriminative listening skills are combined with visual stimuli, the resulting ability to 'listen' to body-language enables us to begin to understand the speaker more fully – for example recognising somebody is sad despite what they are saying or how they are saying it.

Comprehensive listening

Comprehensive listening involves understanding the message or messages that are being communicated. Like discriminative listening, comprehensive listening is fundamental to all listening sub-types. In order to be able use comprehensive listening and therefore gain understanding the listener first needs appropriate vocabulary and language skills. Using overly complicated language or technical jargon, therefore, can be a barrier to comprehensive listening. Comprehensive listening is further complicated by the fact that two different people listening to the same thing may understand the message in two different ways. This problem can be multiplied in a group setting, like a classroom or business meeting where numerous different meanings can be derived from what has been said. Comprehensive listening is complimented by sub-messages from non-verbal communication, such as the tone of voice, gestures and other body language. These non-verbal signals can greatly aid communication and comprehension but can also confuse and potentially lead to misunderstanding. In many listening situations it is vital to seek clarification and use skills such as reflection aid comprehension.

Basic modes of listening

Active or reflective listening: It is the single most useful and important listening skill. In active listening, the listener is genuinely interested in understanding what the other person is thinking, feeling, wanting or what the message means. The person is active in checking his understanding before he responds with his new message. The listener restates or

paraphrases our understanding of the message and reflects it back to the sender for verification. This verification or feedback process is what distinguishes active listening and makes it effective. Essentials of active listening are intensity, empathy acceptance, recognizing, and responsibility for completeness.

Passive or attentive listening: The listener is genuinely interested in hearing and understanding the other person's point of view. He will be attentive and will passively listen. The listener assumes that what he heard and understands is correct but stay passive and do not verify it.

Competitive or combative listening: It happens when the listener is more interested in promoting his own point of view than in understanding or exploring someone else's view. He either listens for openings to take the floor, or for flaws or weak points.

Types of listening based on objective and manner in which the listener takes and responds to the process of listening are:

Active listening is listening in a way that demonstrates interest and encourages continued speaking.

Appreciative listening is looking for ways to accept and appreciate the other person through what they say. Seeking opportunity to praise and alternatively listening to something for pleasure, such as music.

Attentive listening is listening obviously and carefully, showing attention.

Biased listening is listening through the filter of personal bias i.e. the person hears only what they want to listen.

Casual listening is listening without obviously showing attention. Actual attention may vary a lot.

Comprehension listening is listening to understand. Seeking meaning (but little more). **Critical listening** is listening in order to evaluate, criticize or otherwise pass judgment on what someone else says.

Deep listening is seeking to understand the person, their personality and their real and

unspoken meanings and motivators.

Discriminative listening is listening for something specific but nothing else (e.g. a baby crying).

Empathetic listening is seeking to understand what the other person is feeling demonstrating the empathy.

Evaluative listening is listening in order to evaluate, criticize or otherwise pass judgment on what someone else says.

Inactive listening is pretending to listen but actually spending more time thinking.

Judgmental listening is listening in order to evaluate, criticize or otherwise pass judgment on what someone else says.

Partial listening is listening most of the time but also spending some time daydreaming or thinking of a response.

Reflective listening is listening, and then reflecting back to the other person what they have said.

Relationship listening is listening in order to support and develop a relationship with the other person.

Sympathetic listening is listening with concern for the well-being of the other person.

Therapeutic listening is seeking to understand what the other person is feeling.

Total listening Paying very close attention in active listening to what is said and the deeper meaning found through how it is said.

Importance of listening skill good listening skills make workers more productive. The ability to listen carefully will allow a person to: understand assignments in better way and find and what is expected from him; build rapport with co-workers, bosses, and clients; show support; work better in a team-based environment; resolve problems with customers, co-workers, and bosses; answer questions, find underlying meanings in what others say. Ways to improve listening skill hearing and listening are two different activities. Hearing is passive whereas listening is active. Listening is a psychological process. It can therefore be improved by regular practice. Listening is a very

helpful skill.

Barriers to Listening

Listening is not easy and there are a number of obstacles that stand in the way of effective listening, both within outside the workplace. These barriers may be categorized as follows.

Physiological barriers:- some people may have genuine hearing problems or deficiencies that prevent them from listening properly. It can be treated. Some people may have problem in processing information or retaining information in the memory.

Physical barriers:- These referred to distraction in the environment such as the sound of an air conditioner, cigarette smoke, or an overheated room. It can interfere the Listening they could also be in the form of information overload. For example, if you are in meeting with your manager and the phone rings and your mobile beeps at the same time to let u know that you have the message. It is very hard to listen carefully to what is being said.

Attitudinal barriers:- pre occupation with personal or work related problems can make it difficult to focus one's attention completely on what speaker is saying, even what is being said is of very importance. Another common attitudinal barrier is egocentrism, or the belief that the person has more knowledgeable than the speaker, or that there is nothing new to learn from the speaker's ideas. People with this kind of close minded attitude are very poor listeners.

Wrong assumptions:- The success of communication depend on the both the sender and receiver. It is wrong to assume that communication is the sole responsibility of the sender or the speaker and that listener have no role to play. Such an assumption can be big barrier to listening. For example, a brilliant speech or presentation, however well delivered, is wasted if the receiver is not listening at the other end. Listeners have as much responsibility as speakers to make the communication successful. The process should be made successful by paying attention seeking

clarifications and giving feedback.

Cultural barriers:- Accents can be barriers to listening, since they interfere with the ability to understand the meaning of words that are pronounced differently. The problem of different accents arises not only between cultures, but also within a culture. For example, in a country like India where there is enormous cultural diversity, accents may differ even between regions states.

Gender barriers:- Communication research has shown that gender can be barrier to listening. Studies have revealed that men and women listen very differently and for different purposes. Women are more likely to listen for the emotion behind a speaker's words, when men listen more for the facts and the content.

Lack of training:- Listening is not an inborn skill. People are not born good listeners. It is developed through practice and training. Lack of training in listing skills is an important barrier.

Bad listening habits :- Most people are very average listeners who have developed poor listening habits that are hard to say and that act as barriers to listening. For example, some people have the habits of "faking" attention, or trying to look like a listeners, in order to impress the speaker and to assure him that they are paying attention. Others may tend to listen to each and every fact and, as a result, mis out the main point.

Learning the skill of effective listening benefits personal growth and development in the following ways:

Effective communication – Clear and concise transmission of information is an important component of effective human interaction. Though the onus is often placed on presenting clear and concise written or spoken directions, the listener also bears a responsibility to hear and understand messages.

Fewer misunderstandings – Regardless of the clarity of written or spoken messages, the effective listener can prevent

misunderstandings and salvage what otherwise might be a miscommunication by practicing active listening skills.

Improved relationships – Relationships are damaged by misunderstandings that can lead to unsatisfactory business transactions as well as hurt feelings in personal relationships. Excellent listening practices tell others that they are important, special, and what they have to say is valued. That is very attractive and contributes to strong relationships.

Personal growth – A person learns and grows by listening and understanding other viewpoints, differing ideas, and exploring conflicting viewpoints. Learning the skill of active and effective listening not only adds a tool to the personal development portfolio, but equips you to continue growing with tools for exploring new ideas.

Here are some of the tips which can help the person to improve his listening skill:

Face the speaker. Sit up straight or lean forward slightly to show your attentiveness through body language.

Maintain eye contact, to the degree that you all remain comfortable.

Minimize external distractions. Turn off the TV. Put down your book or magazine, and ask the speaker and other listeners to do the same.

Respond appropriately to show that you understand. Murmur ("uh-huh" and "um-hmm") and nod. Raise your eyebrows. Say words such as "Really," "Interesting," as well as more direct prompts: "What did you do then?" and "What did she say?"

Focus solely on what the speaker is saying. Try not to think about what you are going to say next. The conversation will follow a logical flow after the speaker makes her point.

Minimize internal distractions. If your own thoughts keep hornning in, simply let them go and continuously re-focus your attention on the speaker, much as you would during meditation.

Keep an open mind. Wait until the

speaker is finished before deciding that you disagree. Try not to make assumptions about what the speaker is thinking.

Avoid letting the speaker know how you handled a similar situation. Unless they specifically ask for advice, assume they just need to talk it out.

Even if the speaker is launching a complaint against you, wait until they finish defending yourself. The speaker will feel as though their point had been made. They won't feel the need to repeat it, and you'll know the whole argument before you respond. Research shows that, on average, we can hear four times faster than we can talk, so we have the ability to sort ideas as they come in...and be ready for more.

Engage yourself. Ask questions for clarification, but, once again, wait until the speaker has finished. That way, you won't interrupt their train of thought. After you ask questions, paraphrase their point to make sure you didn't misunderstand. Start with: "So you're saying..."

By developing their ability to listen well we develop our students' ability to become more independent learners, as by hearing accurately they are much more likely to be able to reproduce accurately, refine their understanding of grammar and develop their own vocabulary.

Outline of a framework that can be used to design a listening lesson that will develop students' listening skills and look at some of the issues involved.

The basic framework

Pre-listening

While listening

Post-listening

The basic framework on which we can construct a listening lesson can be divided into three main stages.

Pre-listening, during which we help our students prepare to listen.

While listening, during which we help to focus their attention on the listening text and

guide the development of their understanding of it.

Post-listening, during which we help our students integrate what they have learnt from the text into their existing knowledge.

Pre-listening

There are certain goals that should be achieved before students attempt to listen to any text. These are motivation, contextualization, and preparation.

Motivation

It is enormously important that before listening students are motivated to listen, so you should try to select a text that they will find interesting and then design tasks that will arouse your students' interest and curiosity.

Contextualization

When we listen in our everyday lives we hear language within its natural environment, and that environment gives us a huge amount of information about the linguistic content we are likely to hear. Listening to a tape recording in a classroom is a very unnatural process. The text has been taken from its original environment and we need to design tasks that will help students to contextualize the listening and access their existing knowledge and expectations to help them understand the text.

Preparation

To do the task we set students while they listen there could be specific vocabulary or expressions that students will need. It's vital that we cover this before they start to listen as we want the challenge within the lesson to be an act of listening not of understanding what they have to do.

While listening

When we listen to something in our everyday lives we do so for a reason. Students too need a reason to listen that will focus their attention. For our students to really develop their listening skills they will need to listen a number of times - three or four usually works quite well - as found that the first time many students listen to a text they are nervous and have to tune in to accents and the speed at which the

people are speaking.

Ideally the listening tasks we design for them should guide them through the text and should be graded so that the first listening task they do is quite easy and helps them to get a general understanding of the text. Sometimes a single question at this stage will be enough, not putting the students under too much pressure.

The second task for the second time students listen should demand a greater and more detailed understanding of the text. Make sure though that the task doesn't demand too much of a response. Writing long responses as they listen can be very demanding and is a separate skill in itself, so keep the tasks to single words, ticking or some sort of graphical response.

The third listening task could just be a matter of checking their own answers from the second task or could lead students towards some more subtle interpretations of the text.

Listening to a foreign language is a very intensive and demanding activity and for this reason I think it's very important that students should have 'breathing' or 'thinking' space between listenings. We usually should get the students to compare their answers between listenings as this gives them the chance not only to have a break from the listening, but also to check their understanding with a peer and so reconsider before listening again.

Post-listening

There are two common forms that post-listening tasks can take. These are reactions to the content of the text, and analysis of the linguistic features used to express the content.

Reaction to the text

Of these two we find that tasks that focus students reaction to the content are most important. Again this is something that we naturally do in our everyday lives. Because we listen for a reason, there is generally a following reaction. This could be discussion as a response to what we've heard - do they agree or disagree or even believe what they have heard? - Or it could be some kind of reuse of the information

they have heard.

Analysis of language

The second of these two post-listening task types involves focusing students on linguistic features of the text. This is important in terms of developing their knowledge of language, but less so in terms of developing students' listening skills. It could take the form of an analysis of verb forms from a script of the listening text or vocabulary or collocation work. This is a good time to do form focused work as the students have already developed an understanding of the text and so will find dealing with the forms that express those meanings much easier.

Real-life listening situations

In real-life listening situations, most of the spoken language we listen to is informal, spontaneous and can contain many features like slurred speech, colloquial vocabulary and incorrect grammar. Listeners usually know in advance something about what is going to be said as they expect to hear something relevant to the context in which they find themselves.

Speakers usually direct what they are saying at the listener and take the listener's character and intentions into account when speaking. Naturally, listeners are normally speakers as well as we usually respond to what we are listening to by taking part in the conversation or by answering questions.

Listening in the classroom

Classroom listening is not the same as real-life listening but is as realistic a simulation of real-life listening as possible. Listening activities should be training students and preparing them for effective functioning outside the classroom. They should also provide students with practice in coping with some features of real-life situations.

How to improve English listening skills

Listening activities based on simulated real-life situations are more motivating and interesting to do than working through textbook comprehension exercises, which quickly becomes boring. Try some of the following

listening texts and tasks that are likely to attract your student's attention.

Listening texts

Informal talk: Listening texts should be based on discourse that is genuine, improvised or spontaneous speech. Written text simply read aloud is likely to be stilted and won't incorporate characteristics of informal speech such as spontaneity.

Direct speaker-listener interaction: Instead of the conventional use of audio recordings, try to write some of the texts yourself or use a video as a positive contribution to effective listening practice.

Single exposure: In real-life listening situations, discourse can't be exactly repeated. So, try to encourage students to develop the ability of extracting the information they need from a single hearing. For students to master this ability, information can be provided more than once within the original listening text. As in real-life situations, students can ask for a repeat or explanation of what was said but the discourse should not automatically be played through several times if students do not ask for repeats.

Listening tasks

Expectations: Giving students an idea of what they are going to hear is the same as putting them in a real-life context where they will know what to expect due to the context they find themselves in.

Purpose: Explain what the purpose of the listening exercise is as this helps students to listen selectively for significant information.

Ongoing listener response: Encourage students to respond to the information they are looking for as they hear it, and not to wait for the end of the listening text.

Types of listening activities

There are three types of listening activities you can use to help improve listening skills in the ESL classroom:

No overt response activities: Students do not have anything to do in response to the listening text. Often students' facial expression

and body language will betray what they have understood. Activities of this type include storytelling, listening to songs or watching movies and videos.

Short response activities: Students don't only have to give responses verbally but can also respond by performing a task in response to instructions, ticking off items on a worksheet as they hear them being said, ticking off true/false answers in response to statements or writing down missing words from cloze exercises.

Long response activities: Students can engage in answering questions verbally about a listening text, taking notes from a mini-lecture by rewriting what you said in different words to the ones you used or writing a brief summary of a listening text.

If we follow these guidelines we can soon see a marked difference in students' ability to pick up information from a listening text and to respond to it as if in a real-life situation.

Effective listening enhances the communication quality. It makes all attentive. It encourages optimistic attitude, healthy relations and more participation. It leads to better decision-making in an organization. For our students to become proficient listeners they need to be exposed to tremendous listening input and they need training (especially at the lower levels of proficiency) on how to develop effective listening strategies. Be sure to: Allocate ample time for listening activities the same way you do for speaking or grammar practice. Engage the students in discussions of the strategies they use and allow them to learn from each other. Make listening a regular part of homework. Focusing on listening is one of the best investments you can make as language teacher, as it will help your students develop more confidence in their language ability. Listening is a challenging skill, yet, with constant practice, support, and encouragement, your students will develop both strategies and confidence.

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