



## Techniques to overcome difficulties in teaching listening

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**Abstract.** The given article is about listening techniques. It is well known, that the techniques of training to listening, in practice of teaching is not still profoundly developed. One of principal reasons to lack the attention to the problem of listening, the solution of these problems were given in the article.

**Key words:** Listening, tasks, to suggest, to draw, pupils' attention, auding, listen, to grasp, the main idea, questions, details.

Nowadays, when the knowledge of English language becomes wider (computer, economic and political terminology are all of English origin) and it is possible to speak about the English language as a language of the international dialogue, the purpose of teaching of a foreign language lies in the formation of the communicative competence.

According to prof. Lyahovitsky M.B., the basis of teaching of a foreign language is “the language environment, and all other means are auxiliary, and the main purpose lies in the creation more or less illusion of attaining the pupils to the natural language environment”.

Last years the problem of listening draws attention of methodologists more and more. To study this difficult process there were and are still being made serious theoretical searches. However, the ways out to the teaching of the foreign languages paying the great attention to the oral comprehension in teaching practice is not as significant as it is wanted to be.

Exercises which develop pupils' skills to understand a text under different conditions. Sound producing aids should be extensively used for developing pupils' auding, as pupils are supposed to understand not only their teacher's speech, but other people speaking the target language, including native speakers. Besides, sound producing aids allow the teacher to supply pupils with recorded speech different in speed and voice.

Before pupils are invited to listen to the text the teacher should ensure that all the words and grammar are familiar to the pupils otherwise language difficulties will prevent them from understanding the story. Thus, if there are some unfamiliar words, the teacher introduces them beforehand; he either puts them down on the blackboard with the mother tongue equivalents in the sequence they appear in the



text, or he asks pupils to pronounce the words written on the blackboard if he plans a talk on the text afterwards, and pupils are to use these words in their speech .

Then the teacher should direct his pupils' attention to what they are going to listen to. This is of great importance for experiments prove that if your aim is that your pupils should keep on talking on the text they have heard it stimulates their thinking and facilitates their comprehension of the text.

The following tasks may be suggested to draw pupils' attention to what they are auding:

- listen and try to grasp the main idea of the story. You will be asked questions later on;
- listen and try to grasp the details. You will have to name them;
- listen and make a plan of the story;
- listen to the story and try to finish it (think of the end of the story);
- listen to the story. You will ask questions on it afterwards;
- listen to the text. You will retell it afterwards;
- listen to the story. We shall have a discussion on it. Etc.

When pupils are ready to listen, the text can be read to them. If it is the teacher who reads or tells the story, he can help pupils to comprehend the text with gestures. If the text is recorded, a picture or pictures can facilitate comprehension. The pupils listen to the text once as is usually the case in real communication. Then the teacher checks their comprehension. If they have not understood it, they are told to listen to the text again. The teacher can use a dialogue to help pupils to understand the text after they have listened to the story for the first time, i.e., he may ask questions, make statements on the text for pupils to agree or reject them.

Skills in hearing must be built up gradually. The teacher begins with a story containing 3-4 sentences. He uses pictures, gestures to help pupils to understand it. Gradually he can take longer sections and faster speeds with less visual help and in more difficult language. The teacher must bear in mind that careful grading in all these ways is of the utmost importance. Texts, stories to be read or recorded should be interesting and fairly easy.

Listening is one of the more difficult aspects of the language arts to assess. It cannot be easily observed and can be measured only through inference. However, there are both informal and formal strategies and instruments that teachers can use to help them in their assessments. You can 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.



In order to provide authentic assessment of students' listening proficiency, 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. 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 weather report one might decide what to wear the next day; 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.

Use this response type as a base for selecting appropriate post-listening tasks. 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. (See *Assessing Learning* for more on checklists and rubrics.). For example, for listening practice you have students listen to a weather report. Their purpose for listening is to be able to advise a friend what to wear the next day. As a post-listening activity, you ask students to select appropriate items of clothing from a collection you have assembled, or write a note telling the friend what to wear, or provide oral advice to another student (who has not heard the weather report). To evaluate listening comprehension, you use a checklist containing specific features of the forecast, marking those that are reflected in the student's clothing recommendations.

Good listening lessons go beyond the listening task itself with related activities before and after the listening. Here is the basic structure:

#### Before Listening

Prepare your learners by introducing the topic and finding out what they already know about it. A good way to do this is to have a brainstorming session and some discussion questions related to the topic. Then provide any necessary background information and new vocabulary they will need for the listening activity.

#### During Listening

Be specific about what students need to listen for. They can listen for selective details or general content, or for an emotional tone such as happy, surprised, or angry. If they are not marking answers or otherwise responding while listening, tell them ahead of time what will be required afterward. (See Appendix

#### After Listening

Finish with an activity to extend the topic and help students remember new vocabulary. This could be a discussion group, craft project, writing task, game, etc. The following ideas will help make our listening activities successful.



Noise Reduce distractions and noise during the listening segment. You may need to close doors or windows or ask children in the room to be quiet for a few minutes.

Equipment If you are using a cassette player, make sure it produces acceptable sound quality. A counter on the machine will aid tremendously in cueing up tapes. Bring extra batteries or an extension cord with you.

Repetition Read or play the text a total of 2-3 times. Tell students in advance you will repeat it. This will reduce their anxiety about not catching it all the first time. You can also ask them to listen for different information each time through.

Content Unless your text is merely a list of items, talk about the content as well as specific language used. The material should be interesting and appropriate for your class level in topic, speed, and vocabulary. You may need to explain reductions (like 'gonna' for 'going to') and fillers (like 'um' or 'uh-huh').

Recording your own tape. Write appropriate text (or use something from your textbook) and have another English speaker read it onto tape. Copy the recording three times so you don't need to rewind. The reader should not simply read three times, because students want to hear exact repetition of the pronunciation, intonation, and pace, not just the words.

Video you can play a video clip with the sound off and ask students to make predictions about what dialog is taking place. Then play it again with sound and discuss why they were right or wrong in their predictions. You can also play the sound without the video first, and show the video after students have guessed what is going on.

Homework give students a listening task to do between classes. Encourage them to listen to public announcements in airports, bus stations, supermarkets, etc. and try to write down what they heard. Tell them the telephone number of a cinema and ask them to write down the playing times of a specific movie. Give them a tape recording of yourself with questions, dictation, or a worksheet to complete. When a word ends in a consonant sound and the next word starts with a vowel the words link together. The ending consonant "jumps over" to the next word.

This is one of the trickiest problems when listening to English. A basic listening skill is being able to pick out words, being able to understand words as words; being able to understand where the word boundaries are; where words start and finish. Liaison, the way English links together makes this tough.

The Weak Vowel. The Central Vowel. This is the most important vowel you can teach your students. The "upside down e" in their dictionaries. This is the central vowel. (see Appendix B(1)). Second language learners often have difficulty with English weak vowels. Although some languages do have a system of



weakening vowels, many languages do not. Students need to be taught about weak vowels. Many listening classes don't teach students about the central vowel. And students need to understand this to understand English!!

Sometimes when two consonant sounds come together, one at the end of one word and one at the beginning of another. They mix to form a new sound. (see Appendix B(2)). The "d" and the "y" mix together and make a new sound that sounds like a "j" sound. The sentence sounds like:

Words can disappear. Not only do sounds disappear but often entire words are not said. In casual speech auxiliary verbs in questions are often not enunciated. In casual speech the above might be spoken as: You got the time? This is called ellipsis and it's a common feature of casual speech. Perhaps if you were chatting with Queen Elizabeth you might not speak like this. However the average speaker certainly talks like this, especially if chatting with friends.

"Have you got the time?" becomes "Got the time?"

"Did you see her last night?" becomes "You see 'er las' nigh'."

You might think this is lazy English, or perhaps even bad English. But it's not. It's just plain old simple natural English. And our students need to know. Teach your students about ellipsis. Helping Sounds. When a word ends in a vowel and the next word starts with a vowel, a "helping sound" comes between them so they are easier to say (see Appendix B(5)). English uses helping sounds, usually a y (/j/), w or r. These sounds come between vowel sounds at word boundaries.

"Sea Otter" sounds like "Sea Yotter" "No agreement" sounds like "No wagreement" "Canada is" sounds like "Canada ris" (but this last one is more common with British English). Intonation drops when we finish a speaking turn.

Falling tones tell the listener that the speaker has finished (see Appendix B(6)). In the first example, intonation goes up, which signals that the speaker wishes to continue. In the second sentence, intonation goes down signaling that the speaker is giving up their turn. You don't need to hear/understand every word being spoken. We need to tell our students this! Prominent sentence stress signals that information is new or pertinent. Knowledge of stress and intonation prominence helps your students listen. Have students listen for the stressed words. These are the words with important meaning. Students do NOT have to hear and understand all the words in a sentence to understand. Say I listen to the following sentence, "They go to the lake at the end of the summer". But say I only hear. I can nonetheless understand the message being spoken. Teach your students about stress and prominence. And encourage your students to guess what they don't catch. Knowledge of how important words and grammar words are actually spoken will help. Your students need to know. Use your knowledge of grammar to guess what you don't hear. Grammar helps us guess what we don't hear clearly. Once



students have been taught about the schwa, (the weak or central vowel), they should next be taught to use their understanding of grammar to help them guess. It is impossible to hear clearly everything that is said, because often natural speech is NOT clearly enunciated.

When our students listen to English there are many holes, many places where they don't know what's being said. These holes are usually the grammar words, the function words that are pronounced weakly. (see Appendix B(8)).

In the above, the students hear clearly the meaning words, (the verbs, adjectives, nouns). But the middle part is not enunciated clearly. Well in the above sentence we know it's a question because it starts with "where", so we can guess what's missing easily. We're missing an auxiliary verb and a pronoun. Since it's "last night", we know we've got a past tense auxiliary. Students can easily guess what's missing here. To make listening more interesting and effective you can use a different interesting computer program connected with the Internet. Nowadays there are a lot of special sites including interesting and useful programs aimed at developing students' listening skills.

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