



HELLENIC REPUBLIC  
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# ELT Methods and Practices

## Unit 6: Dealing with Listening Skills

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# The situation with the listening skill

Skill	Order learnt	Extent of use	Order taught
Listening	First	First	Fourth
Speaking	Second	Second	Third
Reading	Third	Third	Second
Writing	Fourth	Fourth	First

The time an individual is engaged in communication: approximately 9 per cent is devoted to writing, 16 per cent to reading, 30 per cent to speaking, and 45 per cent to listening.



# Listening comprehension: the neglected language ability

For many years listening was neglected or poorly taught in the EFL classroom.

## Why?

- **Passive:** students' exposure to spoken language provides adequate instruction.
- **Easy** in comparison to speaking and writing, causing less anxiety to students.
- **Practical complexities** in bringing spoken texts appropriate for listening to the classroom.



# Listening instruction today: limitations

- It tests rather than teaches listening comprehension.
  - Purposeless listening to audio texts.
  - Responding to a series of course book activities without preparation.
  - Feedback is given in the form of the ‘right’ answer.
- It does not prepare learners for real-life listening.
  - Scripted texts written and recorded especially for teaching purposes.



# Why is listening comprehension an important ability? (1/2)

- It is vital for language learning as it provides essential input for the learner.
- It is necessary for communication “since we cannot communicate face-to-face unless speaking and listening are developed in tandem” (Anderson & Lynch, 1988: 3).



# Why is listening comprehension an important ability? (2/2)

- It is significantly different from the other three language abilities in view of characteristics that are unique to listening (i.e., speech rate, accent, elision, the placement of stress and intonation, redundancy and hesitation).



# Listening: True OR False? (1/3)

- Reading and listening comprehension require us to be passive, whereas speaking and writing require us to be active.
- Reception skills do not need to be explicitly developed in the foreign language classroom, since learners can transfer the comprehension skills they have developed by using their mother tongue.
- Oral interaction involves both listening and speaking as meaning making practices.



# Listening: True OR False? (2/3)

- Listening comprehension is more difficult than reading comprehension. It involves very complex skills.
- Listening and hearing are the same.
- Good readers are good listeners.
- Smarter people are better listeners.





# Listening: True OR False? (3/3)

- Listening improves with age.
- In our mother tongue, first we develop our reception skills and then we develop our production skills, whereas in second language acquisition it is the other way around.



# What is listening comprehension? (1/2)

- Listening is not a ‘passive’ skill but a “receptive” active skill. It requires as much attention and mental activity as speaking.
- Listening comprehension is the act of understanding an oral message. Listening comprehension is an extremely complex activity (Buck, 2001) that requires much more than simple perception of the acoustic signal.



# What is listening comprehension? (2/2)

- It involves speech decoding and comprehending.
- Listening comprehension is not something that happens because of what the speaker says, but “the listener has a crucial part to play in the process, by activating various types of knowledge and by applying what he knows to what he hears and trying to understand what the speaker means” (Anderson & Lynch, 1988: 6).



# How do we listen?

## **Bottom-up process**

We use our knowledge of language and our ability to process acoustic signals to make sense of the sounds that speech presents to us.

## **Top-down process**

We infer meaning from contextual clues and from making links between the spoken message and various types of prior knowledge which we hold.



# Bottom-up processes (1/2)

- Retain input while it is being processed.
- Recognize word divisions.
- Recognize key words in utterances.
- Recognize key transitions in a discourse:
  - Another interesting development was...
  - One of the problems was... / In contrast...



# Bottom-up processes (2/2)

- Recognize grammatical relations between key elements in sentences.
- Recognize the function of word stress in sentences.
- Recognize the function of intonation in sentences.



# Top-down processes (1/2)

- Use key words to construct the schema of discourse.
- Infer the role of the participants in a situation.
- Infer the topic of a discourse.
- Infer the outcome of an event.
- Infer the cause and effect of an event.
- Infer unstated details of a situation.



# Top-down processes (2/2)

- Infer the sequence of a series of events.
- Infer comparisons.
- Distinguish between facts and opinions.





# Listening skills

- Understanding single utterances.
- Understanding relations between utterances or parts of a text.
- Obtaining the gist or a general impression of the text.
- Extracting specific information from text.
- Deducing unfamiliar or missing meaning.
- Understanding information not explicitly stated.
- Understanding the text so as to perform a task.



# Types of listening (1/2)

## **Participatory Listening:**

- Interactional (for the purpose of engaging in social rituals).
- Transactional (for the purpose exchanging information).



# Types of listening (2/2)

## **Non-Participatory Listening:**

- Listening to live conversations without taking part.
- Listening to announcements to extract information.
- Listening to or watching films, plays, radio and songs where the purpose is enjoyment.
- Following instructions in order to carry out a task efficiently.
- Attending a lecture or following a lesson.
- Listening to someone give a public address.



# Task: Text- Purpose and Listening skills

Activity	Purpose	Skills
Listen to a lecture in class at the university.		
Listen to the evening news on TV.		
Listen to an announcement at the airport.		
Listen to football match on the radio.		



# Factors affecting listening comprehension difficulty (1/3)

- **The way information is organized.** For example, there are some indications that listeners/readers remember more of the content of an expository text when it has informative title and when the main points come before the illustrations of main points.
- **The reader's/listener's familiarity with the topic and way of delivery,** his/her concern with the issues involved and his/her interest in the topic under consideration.



# Factors affecting listening comprehension difficulty (2/3)

- **The reader's/listener's familiarity with the particular type of discourse and genre.**
- **Purposefulness of text** for the reader/listener.
- **The nature of the text.** Texts describing objects/giving instructions (“static”) are supposed to be easier to understand than texts that focus on people's opinions and ideas (“abstract”).
- **Processing load** (amount of information that needs to be processed and time available).



# Factors affecting listening comprehension difficulty (3/3)

- **Visual support** (graphics, photographs, tables) plays an important role in the interpretation of what readers/listeners are reading/listening to.
- **Type of reading/listening task:** Evaluative listening tasks (writing summaries or distinguishing fact from opinion) are more difficult than those involving immediate response.



# TASK: Listening for EFL learners

The features that cause problems to L1 listeners apply to L2 learners as well. However, the problems of L2 listeners are compounded by their limited proficiency in the foreign language. Based on your own experience as language learners, list some of the additional problems that foreign language listeners face when listening.





# How?

- How can we enhance our students' listening abilities in the classroom and at the same time prepare them for real-life listening experiences?
  - By incorporating **authentic oral texts**.



# Listening to authentic texts

Listening to authentic texts is **demanding** because:

- knowledge of the language is limited.
- not used to everyday language being spoken naturally.
- have little or no control over the speed of speech delivery.
- cannot refer back to the text so that all that remains is a memory of what was said.
- have very little time for working out meaning.



# Using semi authentic texts (1/2)

## **Simulated (semi-scripted) texts:**

- produced through improvisation on the basis of scenarios,
- exhibit features which have a high probability of occurrence in genuine acts of communication (Geddes and White, 1978: 137).



# Using semi authentic texts (2/2)

## Rewards for the learner:

- exposed to discourse incorporating features of authentic speech, but in a controlled manner.
- presented with learning and practice tasks designed with their level and abilities in mind.
- prepared for exposure to language in uncontrolled situations outside the classroom.



# Criteria for adjusting authentic listening input to the classroom (1/3)

- **Audio text repetition rate:** The lower the level the more times the students will need to listen to the texts.
- **Simplification of context** the role of pre-listening activities (i.e., preview key lexis, help students tune in).



# Criteria for adjusting authentic listening input to the classroom (2/3)

- **Length of input:** The **shortness** of a text simplifies the task of comprehension - chunking the input into manageable segments (one to three-minute segments).
- **Provide support:** use of visual stimuli (i.e., picture, map, diagram).
- **Topic familiarity:** choose passages that address your Ls' needs and experiences and lie within their field of interest.



# Criteria for adjusting authentic listening input to the classroom (3/3)

- **Type of language:** lexical difficulty & grammatical complexity.
- **Text type:** transactional vs. interactional speech (Brown & Yule, 1983).
- **Paralinguistic features:** accent, rate of speech, number of speakers, background noise.



# Usefulness of Lund's Taxonomy of listening skills & tasks

- Helps teachers plan their listening lessons.
- Guides teachers in structuring effective tasks at any level of language proficiency and any stage of the listening lesson.
- Allows for wide variation in task difficulty for any given text.
- Enables the use of authentic texts even at novice levels.
- Focuses on students' development of listening skills.





# Lund's Taxonomy of listening skills & tasks (1/3)

Listener Functions	Listener responses
<p><b>Identification</b> (recognition &amp; discrimination) Ex.: recognising familiar words, looking for categories of words, discriminating between phonemic pairs.</p>	<p><b>Doing</b> (the listener responds physically rather than linguistically), e.g. movement directions, build sth, pantomime a product).</p>
<p><b>Orientation</b> (tuning in; getting ready to process the message) Ex.: determining facts about the text, i.e., participants, their role, attitude, the genre, the context.</p>	<p><b>Choosing</b> (activities that involve selection), e.g. matching with pictures, placing pictures in order, selecting titles for a story.</p>



# Lund's Taxonomy of listening skills & tasks (2/3)

Listener Functions	Listener responses
<b>Main idea comprehension</b> (understanding main ideas in the message).	<b>Transferring</b> (receiving information in one form and transferring it into another), e.g. drawing a sketch, trace a route on a map, fill in a table or chart).
<b>Detail comprehension</b> (getting specific information from the text).	<b>Answering</b> (answering questions about the text).
<b>Full comprehension</b> (understanding main ideas plus details in a text), e.g.. understand a story to select an ending, understand a lecture and take notes) .	<b>Condensing</b> (reducing the message), e.g.. note taking, outlines, summarizing.



# Lund's Taxonomy of listening skills & tasks (3/3)

Listener Functions	Listener Responses
<b>Replication</b> (reproduce the message either in the same or a different modality) e.g. dictation, transcription, oral repetition).	<b>Extending</b> (the listener goes beyond what is provided), e.g.. suggesting an ending to a story, predicting.
	<b>Duplicating</b> (the message is reproduced).
	<b>Modeling</b> (text used as a model), e.g.. role playing after listening to a model).
	<b>Conversing</b> (text used as a stimulus for conversation in the classroom).



# The three stages of a listening lesson

- Pre-listening :preparation stage.
- While -listening stage: actual listening & task response.
- Post-listening stage: feedback & remedial work.



# Planning a listening lesson: Pre-listening (1/3)

The purpose of the **pre-listening stage** is to prepare the learners for what they are going to hear by:

- activating existing prior knowledge,
- introducing necessary schematic knowledge,
- introducing the language which students will encounter.



# Planning a listening lesson: Pre-listening (2/3)

The pre-listening stage ensures a higher level of success and may lead to greater confidence. Pre-listening may involve reading, writing, speaking tasks or all three, in the target language or in L1.



# Planning a listening lesson: Pre-listening (3/3)

## **Objectives:**

- to contextualize the text.
- to provide any information to help learners appreciate the setting and the role relationships between participants.



# Activity types for the pre-listening stage (1/2)

- Predicting content from the title of a talk.
- Talking about a picture which relates to the text.
- Discuss relevant experiences.
- Discussing the topic.
- Answering a set of questions about the topic.
- Agreeing or disagreeing with opinions about the topic.





# Activity types for the pre-listening stage (2/2)

- Associate vocabulary about the topic.
- Predict information about the topic.
- Write questions about the topic.



# While-Listening Stage (1/2)

- The purpose of while-listening stage is to help learners understand the text.
- While learners listen they need to be given in an authentic purpose for listening and encouraged to attend to the text more intensively.



# While-Listening Stage (2/2)

The purpose of listening activities is to help them develop a variety of comprehension skills and elicit messages from the text. In training for listening comprehension, it is important to develop learners' ability to understand the message(s), not every single word of the text. Training often involves moving from extensive to intensive listening, with texts and tasks that are interesting for learners, considering their age, experiences, etc.



# While-Listening activities

- Ticking multiple-choice items.
- Filling in a chart.
- Complete a table, map or picture.
- Matching pictures with the text.
- Making notes.
- Answer questions.
- Complete sentences.



# Post-Listening Stage

- The purpose of post-listening activities is to help learners connect what they have heard with their own ideas and experience.
- Helps learners to move easily from listening to another skill.



# Post-Listening Activities

- Give opinions.
- Relate similar experiences.
- Role-play a similar interaction.
- Write a brief report.
- Write a similar text.
- Debate the topic.



# Types of listening tasks (1/2)

Task type	Example
Multiple matching	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Matching descriptions with pictures.</li><li>• Matching stories with titles / endings.</li><li>• Matching speakers with professions.</li><li>• Matching speakers with feelings.</li></ul>
Multiple choice (A, B, or C)	<ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>1. What do you suppose the relationship between the two speakers is?<ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>A. Boss and employee.</li><li>B. Brother and sister.</li><li>C. Doctor and patient.</li></ol></li><li>2. We are listening to a man:<ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>A. explaining the values of exercising.</li><li>B. giving advice on healthy lifestyle.</li><li>C. giving tips on healthy eating habits.</li></ol></li></ol>
Ordering/Ticking pictures	



# Types of listening tasks (2/2)

Task type	Example
True/ False / Not stated	This part of England is historically more important than any other.
Fill in	The story is about two vices: _____ and envy. The first man in the story wanted to become _____.
Short answers	What's the speaker's profession? What's the speaker looking for?
Listening close	Make sure that you've made sufficient time for this meditation and that you will not be (21) _____. During this exercise you will observe and (22) _____ different parts of yourself.
Note-taking	
Summarizing	





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End of Unit

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