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THE NECESSITY OF TEACHING LISTENING STRATEGIES

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Abstract Nowadays, knowing foreign language perfectly is the major thing of achieving high professional skill. The English language takes leading place among the other languages of the world, so we too forced to learn this language and it is not without reason that there was given separate attention for learning it. Today, we can see a lot of success, and new scientific approaches in using new pedagogical technologies in teaching English. Our education system achieved its high quality in this actual process. Such factors of finding out new technologies of teaching and preparing high quality specialists are the great importance of today. Free access to internet or other sources of evidence as well as other incentives, require adequate knowledge of foreign languages, especially of English, in order to use professional skills in different spheres of human activity.

Keywords: listening skills, speech activity, English language, method of teaching, foreign languages, pedagogical technologies.

A number of listening specialists have argued that listening strategies can and should be taught¹ Listening is an active process. It involves the processes of top-down and bottom-up listening. Active listeners can adequately manipulate the top-down and bottom-up listening processing skills when listening. Hence, van Duzer points out that the listening tasks had better offer “opportunities to develop both top-down and bottom-up processing skills” and encourage learners to develop their listening strategies.

From Rost’s study on English listening instruction, he outlines five fundamental listening strategies that successful L2 listeners tend to adopt when they encounter some uncertainty (p.21):

- a) predicting - using real expectations to generate predictions about what the speakers will say and what might happen;
- b) guessing - making inferences about what the speakers might have said or might have meant;
- c) selecting - focusing on key words, trying to select targeted information that is adequate to complete a given task;
- d) clarifying - monitoring one’s level of understanding and identifying questions that can be asked to supplement partial understanding or correct misunderstanding, and revising one’s representation of meaning;
- e) responding - reflecting or attempting to formulate an opinion, to interact with the speaker, to personalize the content, focus on what was understood; attempt to talk about the input or conversation in a comfortable way.

¹ Field, J. Skills and strategies: towards a new methodology for listening. ELT Journal.1998

Therefore, if instructors incorporate these strategies directly into the listening tasks, it will help learners gain control over the listening process. In this way, learners, more aware of language features, will become more active in a listener role.

What does one complete listening task look like?

Instructors have to have well-designed English listening tasks for learners to practice. One complete listening task contains three phases—pre-listening, while-listening, and post-listening parts. The sequencing of these three sections has been “a mainstay in the teaching of listening comprehension”² The goals of the three sections are not similar; therefore, learners will acquire different practices in each of these three phases. The following examines each section of a listening practice.

Pre-listening activity

Of the three phases of listening practice sequencing, the pre-listening part is the most important. Rost indicates that “Effective listening tasks often involve an explicit ‘pre-listening’ step, some activity that the learner does prior to listening to the main input in order to increase readiness” (p.20). Motivation and prior knowledge are the two main factors for the instructors to keep in mind when they design pre-listening activities. When creating listening activities at this stage, teachers need to add elements “to ensure successful learning experiences that will encourage deficient to learn the language” (Rost, p.19). Learners’ curiosity will thus be aroused and they will have the motivation to make a commitment to overcome obstacles and sustain progress.

Prior knowledge is the other factor that learners most depend on when they do listening. According to the review of English listening instruction done by Gilakjani and Ahmadi, there are two primary goals for pre-listening activities: the first one is “to help to activate students’ prior knowledge, build up their expectations for the coming information”, and the other is “to provide the necessary context for the specific listening task” (p.98).

Advance Organizers. An advance organizer is often regarded as the most effective strategy related to prior knowledge. The concept of advance organizers was firstly popularized by the psychologist David Ausubel (1968). He defined them in the following way: “Advance organizers are designed to bridge the gap between what the learner already knows and what he needs to know before he can successfully learn the task at hand.” Since then, lots of studies have researched advance organizers and tried to adapt them for instructional application. Mayer (2010) indicates that an advance organizer is “presented material that introduces the learner to what they will be learning, thus allowing the learner to utilize relevant prior knowledge.”

Applied in English listening instruction, an advance organizer is a power tool for retention as well. “Giving students a diagram before listening to a passage leads to better retention of material, recall was enhanced for conceptual information in the lesson” (Mayer, 2003). Listening comprehension requires short-and long-term memory. With the help of advance organizers, learners may learn English listening

² Field, J. Skills and strategies: towards a new methodology for listening. ELT Journal.1998

more easily. Therefore, it is necessary for instructors to incorporate this tool into English listening lessons.

Functioning as scaffolding instruments, advance organizers are categorized into four types - expository advance organizers, narrative advance organizers, and graphic advance organizers, as well as skimming as a form of advance organizer. Here is a general description for each type of advance organizers:

a) Expository advance organizers

In either written or verbal form, these advance organizers describe the new content students will be exposed to, especially for information that may be difficult to understand.

b) Narrative advance organizers

A narrative advance organizer takes the form of a story. This kind of advance organizer helps students connect help students connect what they are about to learn to prior knowledge and focus on what is important (Schoene and Shelter).

c) Graphic advance organizers

Graphic advance directors can be effectively used as advance organizers. Intended to develop learners' active thinking, graphic advance organizers could be utilized to teaching listening comprehension as well (Schoene and Shelter; Lewier, p.57).

d) Skimming as a form of advance organizer

Skimming can help students become familiar with some of the patterns of information that they will soon learn more in depth. Skimming through lists of facts, photos, or maps might stimulate learners develop their active thinking. As they activate their thinking during the pre-listening activity, instructors "may help their EFL learners work on new vocabulary or other language area" (Lewier, p.57; Schoene and Shelter; Princess Anne Middle School instructional strategies training)

So it is highly recommended that instructors employ these four types of advance organizers as the instructional tools in the pre-listening phase. Lewier even indicates that "if the advance organizer technique is presented properly, the motivation of EFL students would be lifted because this technique draws upon the emotional involvement necessary for learning to take place" (p.60).

An advance organizer could maximize the listening effect; however, the instructors should not view it as the sole means of instruction (Daniel, 2005). Learners' English listening proficiency, as well as their background knowledge, have to be taken into consideration while instructors design the advance organizers used for listening comprehension instruction. Otherwise, this originally effective learning instrument could become a heavy burden for EFL learners.

In addition to advance organizers, there are various other pre-listening activities. Holden makes up a checklist of pre-listening activities for instructors to take as reference:

a) Use Visual or Environmental Clues

Strategies: activate background knowledge, infer, predict, selectively attend, provide context, associate

b) Brainstorm words and phrases you might hear

Approaches: direct attention, predict, activate background knowledge, selectively attend, infer, associate

c) Focus on Key Vocabulary

Strategies: scan, selectively attend, infer, evaluate, activate background knowledge, group, contextualize

d) Think of a Synonym (or antonym)

Strategies: brainstorm, activate background knowledge, infer, substitute, paraphrase, associate

e) Use the Vocabulary/ Rehearse

Strategies: activate background knowledge, plan and organize, use the language, infer, contextualize, predict, cooperate, send & receive info, repeat, practice

f) Personalize the Information

g) Think Ahead

Strategies: activate background knowledge, contextualize, predict, use mental imagery, use the language

h) Relate the situation to your own experience

i) Use Your Imagination

j) Use Textual Clues

k) Identify your Purpose

l) Specific goal: ID

While-listening activity

The purposes of while-listening activities are listed as follows: “to focus students’ comprehension of the speakers’ language and ideas; to focus students’ attention on such things as the speaker’s organizational patterns; to encourage students’ critical reactions and personal responses to the speaker’s ideas and use of language”. Listening strategies are clearly significant at this stage, so instructors had better include strategy-training elements. Here are the while-listening activities:

a) Ask yourself questions

b) Use grammar as a guide

c) Listening for groups of words

d) Control the input

e) Listen for emphasis/stress

f) Listen for the intonation pattern

g) Re-confirm your purpose

i) Think ahead

j) Substitute

k) Identify signaling phrases and discourse markers used to show the end of the speaking turn or shifts in topic.

l) Shadow

m) Take notes

n) Confirm and clarify your understanding

Post-listening activity

The post-listening stage is as important as the pre-listening stage. The activities conducted here should help listeners “to evaluate success in carrying out the task and

to integrate listening with the other language skills” (van Duzer). This is also the best moment for instructors to encourage their learners to do extensive listening outside of the classroom whenever possible. Holden lists some post-listening activities learners could employ (p.264-265):

- a) Confirm your Predictions
- b) Paraphrase
- c) Assess Your Success
- d) Note Down what you remember
- e) Read and Check
- f) Listen and Read
- g) Listen, Read and Repeat
- h) Organize and Record New Vocabulary
- i) Evaluate the Success of Your Strategies
- j) Evaluate Your Learning
- k) Use the vocabulary
- l) Confirm and Clarify Your Understanding

Holden indicates that “listening should be presented to learners, particularly beginners, as a cyclical rather than as a linear process”³ “The listening lesson should be constructed with careful step by step planning ... from simple to more complex as the student gains in language proficiency”⁴ The sequencing of pre-listening, while-listening, and post-listening is to ensure learners develop more control over the listening process. Clear given directions as to “what to listen for, where to listen, when to listen, and how to listen” are required as the listening task progresses. Instructors must clearly know the purpose of each listening task. When doing one practice, learners merely complete one mission at a time. They will thus concentrate on what instructors want them to do when listening. As learners learn how to adequately adjust themselves during the listening process they will gradually become skilled, active listeners.

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⁴ Gilakjani, A. P., and Ahmadi, M. R. A Study of factors affecting EFL learners' English listening comprehension and the strategies for improvement. 2005. p984

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