How to teach listening effectively?

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Learning Outcomes

In this workshop, we will:

* identify and explain the reasons behind teaching listening.

* discuss the strategies that good listeners use.

* recognize the appropriate sequence for teaching listening.

* provide some listening skills and activities.
Warming up activity

In groups try to discuss the following:

- Listening strategies or activities done by your students in listening lessons.
- Resources and materials used effectively during these lessons.
The importance of teaching listening

Listening comprehension is an important language skill to develop. Language learners want to understand target language of the speakers. Listening is not an easy skill to acquire because it requires listeners to make meaning from the oral input by drawing upon their background knowledge and produce information in their long term memory and make their own interpretations of the spoken passages. In other words, listeners need to be active processors of information.
Cognitive strategies are those that we use in order to complete an immediate task. For example, a student may find out about the topic before listening, in order to predict content.

Metacognitive strategies are related to learning in general and often have long-term benefits. For example, students might choose to tune in to a BBC recording once a week as a strategy for improving their listening.

Socio-affective strategies are concerned with the learners’ interaction with other speakers and their attitude towards learning. For example, they may choose to rehearse a telephone conversation with another student in order to develop confidence.

Good listeners use many strategies concurrently and in accordance with the task. They may listen regularly to a radio broadcast (metacognitive), take notes on the key points (cognitive) and then meet fellow students and tell them all about what they just listened to (socio-affective).
Listening Sequence

- Pre-listening
- While-listening
- Post-Listening
Pre-listening skills and activities

The pre-listening stage helps our students to prepare for what they are going to hear, and this gives them a greater chance of success in any given task. The first stage of pre-listening usually involves activating *schemata* in order to help students to predict the content of the listening passage. The second stage is setting up a reason to listen through setting questions beforehand “signposting questions”

*A schema “ plural : schemata “ is a mental model based on a typical situation. Ex: Imagine I say that I am going to the bank. Your mental model of this activity probably goes something like this: a person walks towards a brick building, pushes open a door made of wood and glass, and stands in a queue for half an hour. This is your schema for ‘going to the bank’.*
Four practical ways to activate the schemata (activating the listener’s prior knowledge)

1. Brainstorming

**Poster display:**
This activity involves students in groups making a poster based on a given topic then they will stick them on the wall. The teacher and students wander around the classroom looking at the posters. The listening passage will touch on many of the words/ideas in the posters. (word webs) are excellent for posters.
Four practical ways to activate the schemata (activating the listener’s prior knowledge)

2-Visuals (pictures – videos – diagrams)

3-Realia (magazines – menus – calendars – maps – brochures)

4-Opinions and ideas

KWL chart:
Students are given a topic and a chart with a K column, a W column and an L column. K stands for Know. In this column the students write what they already know about the topic. W stands for Want to know. Students write questions here that they would like answers to. L stands for Learnt. After hearing the recording, the students write what they have learnt about the topic.
The students hear the input once, probably listening for gist, although of course there may be occasions when they need to listen for specific information or listen in details. They check their answers in pairs or groups. This is to give them confidence and to open up any areas of doubt. They then listen a second time, either in order to check or to answer more detailed questions. It is important that the students should be required to do different tasks every time they listen.
While-listening skills and activities

- Listening for gist
- Listening for details
- While listening
- Note-taking
- Listen and do
On their first encounter with a passage in the classroom, students usually listen for gist - the main idea. Here are some examples of typical gist questions:

What problems are they discussing?
What does the speaker think of the topic?
Look at the pictures. Who are the speakers talking about?

A simple gist exercise is to ask for basic information under the headings What? Who? Why? When? Table, This works for most listening passages.
**Listening for details = selective listening.**

**Bingo:** in this activity, which is particularly enjoyable for young learners, the teacher writes a list of words on the board, all of which occur during the listening passage. These should be content words - nouns and some verbs. The students, working alone, choose and write down seven of these words. They then listen to the passage. Whenever their words come up, they tick them. They shout Bingo! when they have ticked all seven.

**Spot the difference:** the students look at a picture and listen to a description of it. The oral description contains a number of differences from the picture. The students listen for these differences, and mark them on the page.
**Guided note-taking:** instead of starting with a blank piece of paper, the students are given subheadings, numbers or unfinished notes to guide them. Here are some examples.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Listen to a lecture about Picasso and take notes under the headings.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Early work</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Blue period</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Hidden picture:** the students each have one picture of a person, which they keep hidden from their classmates. They describe the picture and their classmates take notes. Each set of notes describing an individual picture is numbered by the students. Afterwards, all the pictures are stuck on the board and the students have to match their notes to the pictures.
**Listen and do**

**Stand up if ...**: this is a very simple listening activity that can energise a class. The teacher simply says imperatives beginning with Stand up if you . . . . For example, Stand up if you are wearing blue/like potatoes/own a dog/have been to the cinema in the last month, etc.

**Grab the word**: choose about fifteen key words from the listening passage and write them on individual cards. Stick the cards on the wall or board, or if there are a lot of students, place the cards on the desks after making duplicate copies. The students listen and grab the words when they hear them. The winner is the person who grabbed the largest number of cards.
The whole class checks answers, discusses difficulties such as unknown vocabulary, and responds to the content of the passage, usually orally, sometimes in writing. This may be done as a whole class, pairs or groups. The post-listening stage is where students can reflect on their listening experience without the pressure of having to process real-time speech or do a task.
Discussion

**Personalise:** ask if the situation is the same for the students. How is it different? In multilingual classes particularly, teachers can ask if the situation is the same in the students’ various countries. Cross-cultural discussions of this nature are often very fruitful and motivating as many students enjoy learning about their classmates’ culture.

**Questions:** the teacher can devise a number of questions based on the topic of the listening passage. (Ex: Ss answer some questions after implementing the while-listening tasks as: Have you ever …..? / Is there any member of your family who……)

**Statements:** the teacher can devise a number of statements based on the listening passage. The students discuss whether they agree or disagree.
Creative responses

**Genre transfer:** one way to engage students in a deeper processing of a listening passage is to ask them to re-fashion the text, for example by transferring it to a different genre. This might involve turning a spoken text into a written version. A piece of conversation can be transformed into a news article. We can listen to a person chatting about their daily life and then write their diary entry.

**Write on:** the students listen to a story and then write a continuation. In order to do this, they must be aware of the main ideas and key features of the original input: its tone, style, characters and story line.

**Illustrate:** this activity is particularly enjoyed by children. The students listen - it might be to a situation, story or description - and then draw an image that represents the passage. They then explain their illustration in terms of its significance, and how it reflects what they heard.
Problem-solving

Listing
Example rubric: List all the ways to ... (get from A to B/save the whale/get fit).

Sorting
Example rubric: Put... (the words/food types/people) into groups.
Sorting demands that students see connections between different items and is good for vocabulary acquisition, in particular.

Ranking
Example rubric: Say which is the best, the second best, the worst, etc.
Ranking typically has no correct answer. Students need to justify their ideas, and the potential conflict may lead to good discussions.
Thank You!
References

- How to teach listening – JJ Wilson