

## **Lecture 4: II-Teaching the Four Language Skills**

### **2-Teaching the Listening Skill**

#### **Introduction**

Listening is significant in language learning because it provides input for learners and it plays an important role in the development of learners' language; hence, developing listening comprehension can help learners succeed in raising their English proficiency.

#### **1. Definition of Listening and Listening Comprehension**

The process of listening is often contrasted with hearing. Lundsteen considered hearing a physical act and listening a mental act. Hearing had to do with our physiological capacity to receive and process sounds (1979, p. xv). Hadfield and Hadfield (2008) considered listening as "the most challenging of the skills to master in a second language" (p. 77). To listen is to attach "meaning to the aural symbols perceived" (Nichols & Lewis, 1954, p. 1). According to Hornby (2005), listening is "to pay attention to somebody or something you can hear". Listening is "the active and dynamic process of attending, perceiving, interpreting, remembering, and responding to the expressed (verbal and nonverbal) needs, concerns, and information offered by other human beings" (Purdy, 1997). Rost explained that "a key difference between more successful and less successful acquirers relates in large part to their ability to use listening as a means of acquisition" (2001, p. 94).

The following are the characteristics of listening: (1) listening can be learned, (2) listening is an active process, involving mind and body, with verbal and nonverbal processes working together, and (3) listening allows us to be receptive to the needs, concerns, and information of others, as well as the environment around us (Purdy, 1997). Brown and Yule (1983) defined listening comprehension as "understanding what the speaker intended to convey" (p. 56). They further explained that it is the "process of understanding what we hear as a process of arriving at a reasonable interpretation of what the speaker intended to communicate" (p. 57). Listening comprehension is also called 'speech comprehension', 'spoken language understanding', 'speech

recognition', and 'speech perception'. Listening comprehension is defined by Vandergrift (1999) as:

[A]nything but a passive activity. It is a complex, active process in which the listener must discriminate between sounds, understand vocabulary and grammatical structures, interpret stress and intonation, retain what was gathered in all of the above, and interpret it within the immediate as well as the larger sociocultural context of the utterance. Co-ordinating all of this involves a great deal of mental activity on the part of the listener. Listening is hard work, and deserves more analysis and support. (p. 168)

In short, comprehension is related to decoding, decoding is defined by Cook as processing language to get the 'message' (Cook, 2008, p. 125). Decoding speech has the aim of discovering the message using processes that are already known since EFL learners cannot learn a language if they have never heard it before: the sounds, the words, the structures, have to come from somewhere. However, code-breaking is working out the language code/processes from the 'message'. Listening comprehension requires concentration and a quick understanding of the passage. The listener has to pay attention to context, facial expressions, silences, and body gestures to facilitate comprehension.

## **2. Types of Listening**

Barker (1971) divided listening into active and passive. Barker explained that active listening "involved listening with a purpose" while passive listening is "barely more than hearing" (pp. 9-13). An active listener is able to:

- 1-focuses on the speakers' main points (more global than discrete).
- 2-tunes out all potential distractions (or asks for time to remove them).
- 3-offers the fullest possible attention (manages any emotional reaction, especially if a particular word or phrase hits a nerve or touches on a sensitive area).
- 4-give signals that s/he is listening as objectively as possible (uses eye contact and notices nonverbal cues).
- 5-is flexible and open-minded when new topics or ideas are raised.
- 6-asks for clarification if anything is unclear.

7-validates the speakers' main points. (conveying that they are received, considered, and under review; such validation may be verbal, nonverbal, or both). (Arent, 2009, p. 7)

### **3. Models of Listening**

#### **3.1. Discrete listening (bottom-up)**

The bottom-up processing means that listening comprehension is based on the processing and sequencing of specific linguistic elements—sounds, words, clauses, and text, to arrive at the whole meaning of the input. Learners are required to pay attention to every exact detail of the input in order to achieve successful comprehension.

#### **3.2. Global listening (top-down)**

It refers to the involvement of background knowledge in facilitating comprehension. Listeners should be able to bring prior information and combine real-world knowledge to understand the information they hear and to make predictions of the coming one.

**3.3. Interactive listening:** it combines both bottom-up and top-down processing (Arent, 2009, p. 7).

### **4. Stages of Listening Comprehension**

According to Anderson (1985), there are three stages of listening comprehension: perceptual processing, parsing, and utilization.

#### **4.1. Perceptual Processing**

It relies on attention to the sounds that were temporarily stored in echoic memory. In this stage, the listeners' role was to pay attention to potentially meaningful sounds, keywords which lead them to meaning construction, and contextual information which assisted in the interpretation of meaning.

#### **4.2. Parsing**

Parsing is the process through which the mind works out the grammatical structure and meaning of the sentence (Cook, 2008, p. 125). Listeners use their linguistic knowledge to recognize the meaningful units; then, they transformed the incoming words into meaningful mental representations to be retained in Short-term Memory (STM). According to Bacon (1992), a number

of factors such as quality of the input, linguistic knowledge, and topic familiarity could influence the nature of the processing unit.

### **4.3. Utilization**

The listeners make an association between the incoming oral input and the existing knowledge already stored in Long-term Memory (LTM) to construct meaning. According to O'Malley et al. (1989), the background knowledge exists in the form of schemata, propositions, and interrelated concepts. The seemingly dormant knowledge retained in LTM was known to be activated in this stage, so that the incoming information could be transformed in a way that interpretation of comprehension was guaranteed.

## **5. Stages of Teaching Listening**

### **5.1. Pre-listening**

Pre-listening activities are crucial to good second language pedagogy. During this critical phase of the listening process, teachers prepare students for what they will hear and what they are expected to do. First, students need to bring to consciousness their knowledge of the topic, their knowledge of how information is organized in different texts, and any relevant cultural information. Second, a purpose for listening must be established so that students know the specific information they need to listen for and/or the degree of detail required. Using all the available information, students can make predictions to anticipate what they might hear. (Vandergrift, 1999, p. 172)

### **5.2. While-listening**

During the listening activity itself, students continue to monitor their comprehension and make decisions about strategy use. They need to evaluate continually what they are comprehending for (1) consistency with their predictions, and (2) internal consistency, i.e. the ongoing interpretation of the oral text or interaction. Teacher intervention during this phase is virtually impossible, because of the ephemeral nature of listening. Periodic practice in decision-making skills and strategy use can sharpen inferencing skills and help students to monitor more effectively. (Vandergrift, 1999, p. 172)

### **5.3. Post-listening**

It consists of extensions and developments of the listening task. Students need to evaluate the results of decisions made during a listening task. The teacher can encourage self-evaluation and reflection by asking students to assess the effectiveness of strategies used. Students are encouraged to share individual routes leading to success, such as how someone guessed (inference) the meaning of a certain word, or how someone modified a particular strategy. (Vandergrift, 1999, p. 173)

### **6. Principles of Listening Comprehension in the Classroom**

- 1-Increase the amount of listening time in the class.
- 2-Listen before other activities to prepare them for speaking, reading or writing.
- 3-Include both global and selective listening, the former for grasping from the top level, the latter for catching details and increase accuracy.
- 4-Activate top-level skills at every proficiency level to evoke students' background knowledge.
- 5-Work towards automaticity in the bottom-up processing.
- 6-Develop conscious listening strategies. When teachers design the procedure of a class, they can refer to the six principles to think about when to insert listening part and how to integrate listening with other language skills on the basis of teaching materials. (Peterson, 2012)

### **7. Characteristics of Listening Comprehension Lessons**

- 1-Listening comprehension lessons should be carefully and gradually planned. Listening activities progress from simple to more complex while learners get in language proficiency.
- 2-Listening comprehension lessons should demand active student participation. Student participation is his/her written answer to the listening comprehension material and immediate feedback on performance that can keep students' concern and motivation.
- 3-Listening comprehension lessons should provide a communicative necessity for remembering to develop concentration. These two factors are very important in recalling and can be done by giving the students the writing task before listening to the material.
- 4-Listening comprehension lessons should focus on conscious memory task. One of the aims of listening is to reinforce learners' recall to increase their memory capacity. 'Listening is receiving,

receiving needs thinking, and thinking needs memory. It is impossible to separate listening, thinking, and remembering.

5-The focus of listening comprehension lessons is on teaching not testing. The aim of checking learners' responses is just feedback that is a way of helping learners to know how they did and how they are advancing. (Paulston & Bruder, 1976).

## **8. Goals of Incorporating Listening in the Classroom**

Morley (2012) listed six kinds of outcomes that teachers can refer to if they want to increase the amount of listening or incorporate listening into their classes:

- 1-Listening and performing actions and operations.
- 2-Listening and transferring information.
- 3-Listening and solving problems.
- 4-Listening, evaluating, and manipulating information.
- 5-Interactive listening and speaking: negotiating meaning through questioning and answering.
- 6-Listening for enjoyment, pleasure, and sociability.

## **9. Advantages of Effective Listening**

- 1-It ensures understanding the language thoroughly and develops accuracy and pronunciation.
- 2-It enhances learners' comprehension skills.
- 3-It affects the development of the other language skills.
- 4-It helps the learners respond to the speaker and gain more understanding of the content.
- 5-It enriches learners' vocabulary.
- 6-It helps the learners recall and build upon their prior knowledge when needed.
- 7-It enables the learners to develop strong listening skills that help them in real life communication.

## **Conclusion**

To conclude, listening comprehension is a highly integrative skill. It plays an important role in the process of language learning, by facilitating learning the other language skills. Therefore, the awareness and use of effective listening comprehension strategies can help students process the language input they are receiving efficiently.

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