

THE DEVELOPMENT OF ENGLISH LISTENING AND SPEAKING SKILLS

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Abstract:

This article clarifies the importance of listening and speaking in language development. Both represent two of the most difficult components of English language learning (English as a second language) learners to acquire listening comprehension is central to second language acquisition. It also appears to be crucially important for advanced level learners. The main aspect of speaking is communication it takes place when there is sharing of experience, expression of social solidarity, decision-making and planning.

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The Development of English listening and speaking skills

Listening and speaking play important roles in language acquisition and development. They also represent two of the most difficult components of English language for ESL (English as a second language learners to acquire). Listening is the ability to understand speech. Both are vitally important in human relations, international relations, and to academic and business success. Findings from researches in recent decades have influenced second language teaching and have resulted in the development of new methods which emphasize listening prior to speaking, reading and writing especially in the initial stages of learning.

This article discusses the roles of listening comprehension and speaking in English language development of ESL students as well as recommended instructional strategies.

Listening comprehension

Listening comprehension is central to second language acquisition. In the last two decades it has become increasingly

common to emphasize listening in early steps of second language acquisition. Listening is an active and conscious process. Not only is listening comprehension important at the beginning stages of second language acquisition, it appears to be crucially important for advanced level learners as well (Dunkel, 1991).

Rost (1990) suggests that second language listeners engage in the following processes while listening:

- a - estimating the sense of lexical inferences
- b - constructing propositional meaning
- c - assigning a "base (conceptual) meaning" in the discourse
- d - assigning underlying links in the discourse, and
- e - assuming a plausible intention for the speaker's

Utterances listening comprehension is a function of the listener's basic information - processing ability and level of cognitive complexity. Listening comprehension is enhanced through repetition of the material by speaker and the listener. Listeners need to employ cognitive strategies if they are to function effectively. Skillful listeners monitor their comprehension and infer the meaning of new words from context clues. Chamot and O'malley (1988) found that successful second language learners use the following three strategies in listening comprehension : (a) self - monitoring, (b) elaboration, and (c) inferring.

Classroom materials for listening comprehension should include those that emphasize strategies that convey factual or propositional information (a transactional purpose) as well as strategies to enhance social relationships (Richards, 1990) Figure 1 presents an example of a beginning level task in which listeners need to understand the message being conveyed to perform according to the factual information provided. The teacher will be given the instructions and the students will perform the task. It is important to have richness and variety in listening activities and processes. In the classroom, in addition to conversation activities. Such as listening to pre - taped weather forecasts, songs, and radio announcements can add considerable interest to a lesson.

Figure.1. Listen and do it.

Can You Do This?	
In the following examples students need to pay attention in order to listen and do what is asked.	
1.	Make a big house.
2.	Put three windows in the house.
3.	Put a red door in the house.
4.	Color the house brown and green.
5.	Make two trees beside the house.
6.	Color them green.
7.	Make red and yellow flowers in front of the house.
8.	Make a sun in the sky.
9.	Make a boy and a girl beside the tree.
10.	Make grass around the house.

Speaking in the ESL classroom

The main aspect of speaking is communication. Halliday (1978) suggested that communication takes place when there is sharing of experience, expression of social solidarity, decision - making, and planning. Spoken language is an important part of the identities of all participants and the second language learner plays an active role in speaking the target language to communicate, thus context and opportunity play a critical role in how much and how often LEP students use the English language. Spoken language is the medium by which students demonstrate to teachers much of what they have learned. Speaking allows individuals to express themselves concisely, coherently, and in a manner that suits all audiences and occasions, this ability to speak easily and well is important, because it facilitates interpersonal and public communication. The listening and speaking skills form a basis for developing skills in reading and writing. ESL students living in united states or other English language countries have the advantage of a language rich environment which teachers can draw upon. For those who do not have this advantage, providing it can be a major challenge.

In the past ten years the area of speaking in ESL teaching has been re-examined and through the process many views and concepts were developed. Views include: (a) the need for the

learner's involvement, (b) for learners to self monitor their speech, (c) the need for language materials to appeal to learner's cognitive involvement, and (d) the importance of meaning and contextualized practice. meaningful communication is important and necessary for LEP student's mastery of English, they need effective language use to help them not just to survive but to succeed in an English speaking environment. The 1990 has provided the environment for an emphasis on communication, on oral comprehensibility, making it of critical importance to provide instruction that enables students to become, not "perfect pronouncers" of English, but intelligible, communicative, confident users of spoken English for whatever purposes they need.

Let students Do most of talking

It is enjoyable for speakers to talk about subjects of interest, and, as English educators, teachers may like to discuss topics of interest to them. However, it is students who need speaking practice, not the teacher and in order to learn the language, students must use and practice English in meaningful situations. Many language teachers are inclined to talk too much and certain students, in order to avoid the hard work of learning, are skillful at "keeping the teacher talking" by asking endless questions.

Teachers should not let students involve them in lengthy explanations, arguments, or lectures. The best and most valid answer to the question "why do you say it that way in English"? is frequently, "Because that is the custom of the English language".

The sooner the students realize that English habits derive from custom and usage rather than from logic, the sooner they will get down to the serious business of mastering a new set of language skills. As a general rule, we may say that the teacher should do no more than 25 percent of the talking in class and that students should be permitted to do 15 percent of the talking. The teacher should speak to model correct pronunciation which students need to hear in order to learn. The good teacher is like the conductor of an orchestra who directs the musicians. The teacher introduces a topic, then by means of carefully planned activities, leads the class in numerous activities related to that topic. Often, the class responds as a group. Frequently, individual performers will be called upon to express their own point of view. The teacher insures that the interest is maintained, that there is a proper balance between all skills that are emphasized in the speaking activity.

Conversation

Speaking means that teacher must first identify the kinds of

situation which require effective communication and the kinds of speaking skills required by those situations (Rechards, 1990) the most obvious and common situation requiring speech is conversation. Conversation is simply talking together about something of mutual interest. Effective conversation requires: (a) using language others can understand, (b) using an appropriate tone of voice, (c) expressing ideas and responses clearly, (d) listening to others, and (c) being aware of the body and facial clues of oneself and of others.

Conversation often leads to discussion although the two are quite similar, discussion usually involves some degree of problem solving, it is more formal than conversation. Discussion requires focusing on an agreed - on topic. Effective discussion requires: (a) focusing on the topic and staying there; (b) listening carefully; (c) participating as a speaker and as a listener; (d) providing reasons for attitudes and / or opinions; and (e) encouraging others to contribute to the discussion.

Pronunciation

The acquisition of good pronunciation in the target language is commonly held to be the most difficult of all tasks in second language learning.

Pronunciation is an integral part of communication, not an

isolated drill. It is best learned through imitation and practice in situations that are of interest to the learner.

Meaningful practice, especially speech activity experiences suited to the communication styles and needs of learners real life situations, is recommended. Research emphasizes that meaningful communication is needed for acquisition to occur (Cazden 1988). Supervised practice needs to take into account the uniqueness of each ESL learner. Each second language learner will create his/her own personal pattern of spoken English influenced by many personal and communicative strategies as well as the input of instruction.

Vocabulary

Vocabulary acquisition is an interactive process that includes that learners cognitive processes as well as learning strategies (Brown and Perry, 1991). It is generally accepted that the larger the number of words learner have mastered, the better their English comprehension is. There is tremendous variety in the vocabulary strategies employed by second language learners. Among them are: (a) preparing vocabulary lists, (b) learning words in context, and (c) practicing vocabulary.

The English lexicon (words, meanings, derivation) need to be learned and it needs to be taught. Most important is the teacher's

ability to arouse in learners a genuine interest in vocabulary to develop the skills and the curiosity that will guarantee the growth of every student's vocabulary far beyond the temporal limits of the ESL classroom.

Strategies for developing listening and speaking skills

Role play, problem solving, magic tricks, the video cassette and video camera and production of a class news program are recommended ESL strategies.

Other Activities

Almost everything that goes on in the classroom helps develop language, especially listening and speaking skills. The following list of activities can be developed into structured activities for enhancing language.

1- Pictures, 2- Games, 3- Use of classroom as a source of language, 4- listening activities, 5- action routines.

There are many different ways to create listening comprehension and speaking experiences. ESL teachers use a variety of total contexts integrating basic skills with content that is interesting and meaningful to students. The extent to which teachers are successful may well depend upon their ability to recognize that teaching must include the learner's active

participation, requiring them to choose among relevant lexical and syntactical content. The teacher's role is to encourage active use of the forms they teach.



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