

8. **Predicting:** The students have to predict the causes, effects, or outcomes of events.

There are different types of listening comprehension activities and the criterion for choosing them must be the degree to which relate to teaching rather than testing objectives.

Post-listening

Post-listening activities complete the sequence begun in the pre-listening phase. The preview prepares the students for the task, the review provides feedback on how well they have understood the text. Post-listening activities might deal with a) linguistic purposes: looking for parts of language e.g. phrases used in agreement or b) non-linguistic purposes: focusing on meaning. The follow-up activities might deal with possible answers to pre-listening questions or provide additional practice.

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Web watch

In case you have access to the internet, the following links might be of help to you:

- <http://www.esl-lab.com/>
- <http://www.englishlistening.com/theory.phtml#section4>
- <http://www.unc.edu/cit/iat-archive/publications/noblitt/noblitt3.html>
- <http://www.veen.com/veen/leslie/Curriculum/listening.html>

then dictates one word from each such set, which the students have to identify by marking in some way.

Writing the Right Word

A series of words is dictated and the students are asked to write them down provided that they are already familiar with the sounds of English language and their correspondence to conventional written forms.

Listening for Comprehension

Listening aided by Visuals

In this type of exercise, learners look at visual materials while simultaneously following a spoken description of it. A simple, large, clear drawing can be used, put up on the board, or a number of small pictures can be distributed among the learners.

Pictures

The descriptions can simply be based on what is seen around: the classroom environment. Or the teacher can describe a particular object in the class (a vase of flowers) or a member of the class.

● Diagrams

Maps, plans, grids, family trees and so on can be used: their content can be described and the students can be asked to link the spoken description with what they see. With diagrammatic material; however, the activity is slightly more challenging, more appropriate for older students. Following a route on a map is a good example of this type of activity.

● Songs and stories

If the students are listening to something entertaining, then they are likely to attend and get full benefit from the listening experience.

Moreover, the occasional introduction of pleasurable components like songs and stories into English lessons can improve student motivation.

● Listening and making short responses

In these exercises, the students are given commands, and show comprehension by complying with them. Commands may be as simple as: stand up, sit down, put your hand on (something), etc.

● Picture Dictation

Drawing a picture from verbal instruction is an activity that is more readily done by younger learners.

According to Richards (1983:235), there are different types of listening comprehension activities:

1. *Matching or distinguishing activities*: Students have to choose a written/visual response; e.g., they listen to an advertisement and choose the product described.
2. *Transferring activities*: The students receive the information orally and transfer it to other forms e.g., listening to a phone call and drawing a map.
3. *Transcribing*: Here the students listen and write down what was said e.g., taking message from a roommate.
4. *Scanning (specific information)*: The students, for instance, listen to news cast to find about the results of an election.
5. *Label-extending*: The students listen to segments of conversation and try to provide the missing parts.
6. *Condensing*: Here the students listen to reduce what is heard to an outline.
7. *Answering*: The students have to answer questions about the content.

methodology, the focus is on including unknown words and grammatical patterns and having students recover their meaning in the context.

2. *Background information*: Listeners activate relevant schemata and use background knowledge to comprehend what a speaker is saying. The teacher should make sure the topic is familiar to all.
3. *Interest*: The teacher should resort to proper materials in which the students are interested and introduce the topic after warm-up stages.
4. *Motivation*: the students should be interested in the topic. They should have a specific task to accomplish. And they need to feel that they are equipped with the abilities necessary to complete the task.
5. *Purpose*: The teacher should establish a communicative purpose for the listening activity.

Listening

Understanding foreign speech is a complex activity involving a large number of different skills and abilities. It follows from this that classroom listening practice is also complex, and that no one type of exercise—nor two, nor half a dozen—can possibly satisfy the needs of most foreign language students. The teacher should therefore have at her/his fingertips a large battery of different exercises designed to give practice in most, if not all, of these various skills. Moreover, listening should be practiced very frequently, so that such exercises will be in constant use, Penny Ur (1991).

• Listening for Perception

The main aim of this type of exercise is to

give the learner practice in identifying correctly different sounds, sound-combinations and intonations. It is the only category where actual comprehension is a secondary consideration, the emphasis being on aural perception. Thus, in most of the examples, visual and contextual clues are eliminated or kept to a minimum in order to induce the learner to rely upon his ear.

• Word level

At early stages, students need practice in hearing and saying the sounds of isolated words. At this level, the listener's main problem is simply to identify the right phoneme(s) and hence the right word.

• Repetition

Exercises should be based on short, easily memorized words. The teacher says, or plays on the tape recorder, a word or two, asks individual students to repeat them, and corrects where necessary. For example, in practicing consonant-clusters (as in *string, risks, gentle, comfortable*), learner repetition can help the teacher make sure that the sounds have all been heard in the right order and without extra vowels.

Same or Different?

Using minimal-pair distinctions, the teacher calls out two words and challenges the students to say if they are the same or different. The teacher says, for example, 'pin, pin, bin, pin', the students say three.

Identifying the Right Word

The class is given duplicated sheets consisting of sets of two or three words with minor auditory differences between them. The teacher

8. Real communication occurs in real context. Teachers should prepare the students to listen by establishing a context within which the speech sample takes place.

According to Mendelson (1994):

1. Linguistic goals should be made explicit: the students should know what they are listening to and why.
2. Schemata building (exercises through which the necessary vocabulary and grammar is introduced) should precede listening.
3. Strategies for successful listening should be incorporated.
4. The listening tasks should provide opportunities for the listeners to play an active role.

According to Penny Ur (1984), most real language listening activities share some common characteristics. We listen for a purpose and with certain expectations. We usually can see the person talking and we respond to what we hear. Normally, we hear discourse in short chunks, and we have some visual or contextual clues as to the meaning of what is heard. Most heard discourse is spontaneous and therefore differs from the formal spoken prose in the amount of redundancy, noise and colloquialisms. Teachers should be aware of their responsibility to provide listening activities that conform to these general characteristics.

3. What Makes Listening Difficult

According to Dunkel (1991), Richards (1983), Ur (1984) et al, listening is made difficult due to:

1. *Clustering*: In written English we attend to sentences as units of meaningful analyses. The unit of analysis in spoken English in contrast are chunks. We should thus train

our students to attend to chunks rather than whole sentences.

2. *Redundancy*: A real listening practice is full of repetitions, elaborations, pauses and hesitations. Students must be trained to expect such redundancies.
3. *Reduced forms*: A major problem of our students is the fact that they have problems identifying reduced forms such as I'll.
4. *Performance variables*: Different speakers have different accents and personal styles and use different gap fillers.
5. *Colloquial language*: A major problem of our students is their lack of familiarity with idioms, slangs, etc.
6. *Rate of delivery*
7. *Prosodic features*: Our students often are not trained enough to stress, rhythm, intonation, etc.
8. *Cultural information*: According to Donaldson Evans (1981), lack of sufficient amount of shared cultural and linguistic (vocabulary and grammar) knowledge is a common cause of our students' failure in listening.

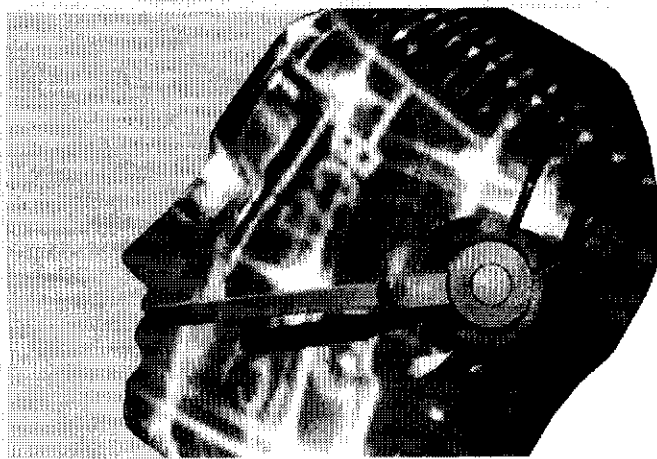
4. Classroom Sequence

A listening task usually consists of pre-listening, listening and post-listening activities.

Pre-listening

Here the students are provided with the necessary background and direction to achieve the objectives of the activity.

1. *Linguistic knowledge*: Even though the focus might be on top-down, meaning-oriented listening activities, the number of unknown linguistic forms and vocabularies often affect the listening comprehension of the students. Of course within the recent



Strategy (listening for...)

Example

Gist

Is the speaker describing a vacation?

Purpose

Is the speaker arguing? Or discussing sth?

Main idea

Did he like or dislike the movie?

Inference

What was implied by...?

Specific information

How much did the tickets cost?

phonemic distinction

Did he say 'I can' or 'I can't'?

Tone/pitch to identify attitude

Did she enjoy the wedding or not?

Stress

What's more important? *Where he bought the watch or when?*

2. Some Factors to Consider

Teachers should be aware of some important factors in performing listening activities. Chastain (1988:190) presents a list of such factors as:

1. The activities should be meaning -centered and the focus must be on content.
2. The activities should resemble those in real-language situations and those to which the students are accustomed in their everyday life.
3. Teachers should set their goals realistically. They should not expect the elementary students to be able to describe all that understand. Students often comprehend without being able to remember the content.
4. Listening practice should entail situations

with which students have some experience and the requisite background knowledge.

5. Teachers and students should be aware that the ability to comprehend the language will be at a higher level than the ability to produce it.
6. They should be aware that real language includes much redundancy and that trying to attend to every word is counter-productive. Teachers should teach them to avoid overloading their mental processes by focusing on linguistic elements.
7. Native speakers regularly make intelligent guesses as to the meaning of unknown elements in their language. Teachers should help the students to learn to make the same types of guesses.

1. Listening Comprehension

Under audio-lingual methodology, popular in the early 1960s, many SL programs and materials placed primary emphasis on the oral proficiency. However in the later years many educators recognized the need to introduce comprehension-based activities and materials into the curriculum. As Hadley (2003) points out "attitudes about the importance of comprehension skills in language acquisition have been influenced in large part by developments in L2 acquisition theory". Certainly Krashen's (1982) views about the need for comprehensible input in language acquisition have sparked interest in comprehension-based methodologies and materials. Potovsky (1981:171) also stresses individual internal mental processes as the basic component in L2 learning. He counters the audiolingual position that speaking is the primary means of language learning. He argues that students must have the ability to comprehend and process language before they can speak it. James (1986) advocates the direct teaching of listening skills for motivational reasons. He suggests that introducing more listening activities early into the learning process will be motivating to learners and allows them to experience success. Long (1986) argues that teaching oral skills is only teaching half of the process of communication, and adds that students gain a sense of confidence with the language when their listening abilities are well-developed. Feyon (1991) further comments that the field of language teaching has moved from a

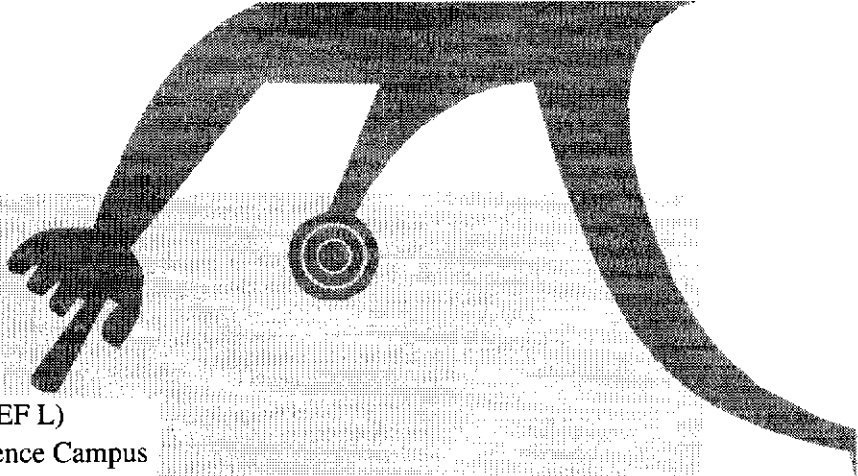
"response-oriented paradigm to one of the input or stimulus-oriented learning" (p.175), and adds that listening should not be thought of as an "activity" but taught directly as a skill in its own right (Hadley 2003:164).

Listening as a Top-down versus a Bottom-up Process

Listening as a *bottom-up* process involves the decoding of sounds linearly. The phonemic units are decoded and put together to form words, phrases, utterances and texts. In a linear processing, which is also viewed as the tape-recorder view, meaning is derived as the last step. In *top-down* processing, the listener actively constructs the original meaning using the incoming sounds as clues. S/he also makes use of her/his prior knowledge of context and situation.

Types of Listening Activities

Listening activities are classified into different types according to different variables the listening purpose, the role of the listeners and the type of the listening text. A listening text might either be a monologue such as a lecture, news broadcast, or a dialogue which can be social, interpersonal or transactional. The listening purpose might either be looking for some general ideas, details or information. As far as listening is concerned, different task types can be classified according to a) the role of the listener (involved in either a receptive or non-receptive listening), b) strategies demanded of the listener which might include:



Mohadeseh Amini, Ph.D. Student, (TEFL)
Islamic Azad University, Research and Science Campus
E-mail: m_amin58@yahoo.com

Listening Comprehension

چکیده

برقراری ارتباط، در برگرفته دو فرایند ذهنی- شناختی فعال است. برای تولید گفتار، گوینده از دانش جهانی و دانش زبانی خود بهره می گیرد تا افکارش را در غالب زبان بیان کند. برای درک گفتار نیز، شنونده با توسل به همین دانش آنچه را که می شنود، به افکار تبدیل می کند. طبق چنین دیدگاهی، هر دو فرایند فعال و مستلزم درک شناختی هستند. به گفته ی چستن (۱۹۸۷)، برقراری ارتباط ممکن است در سطح تولید و یا درک، دچار شکست شود. درک شنیداری از این منظر دیگر نه تنها غیرفعال نیست، بلکه همانند مهارت های گفتاری جزو فرایندهای فعال به حساب می آید. همان طور که ریورز (۱۹۸۰) اشاره کرده است، سخن گفتن به خودی خود ضامن برقراری ارتباط نیست، مگر آن که تولید گفتار با درک شنونده همراه شود.

در این مقاله ابتدا نظری اجمالی بر فرایند درک شنیداری خواهیم داشت و سپس به ارائه ی چندین تمرین و فعالیت علمی در زمینه ی مهارت درک شنیداری خواهیم پرداخت.

کلیدواژه ها: درک شنیداری، پرهیب (نظریه ی تصورات)، دانش زمینه ای، فعالیت های پیش شنیداری، فعالیت های پس شنیداری.

Abstract

Communication involves active, cognitive conversion processes of two basic types. To produce a message the speaker uses world knowledge and language knowledge to convert thoughts to language. To receive a message, s/he uses this knowledge to convert language to thoughts. Viewed in this way, both processes are active, cognitive processes to create or to recreate meaning for some purpose. According to Chastain (1987), communication may break down at the point of production or at the point of reception. Listening comprehension, then, under this outlook is no more considered a passive decoding skill but it is as active and productive as the speaking process. As Rivers (1980) notes "speaking does not itself constitute communication unless what is being said is comprehended by another person."

In this paper, we would first take a brief look at the process of listening comprehension and then present a number of practical listening comprehension tasks and activities.

Key Words: Listening comprehension, schema (theory), background knowledge, pre-listening activities, post-listening activities.