**UMB, Biskra First Year LMD Students**

**Module: Study skills**

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**Lesson 04: Listening strategies**

**Introduction**

Listening plays an important role in the process of learning or acquisition of any language. In fact, developing listening skills is crucial for language learners because they need to be able to understand what people are saying to them in English, either face-to-face, or on any recorded media (TV, radio, cds, internet, etc.). Furthermore, listening is a key for effective communication as indicated by Harmer (2007, p. 133), “successful spoken communication depends not only on people’s ability to speak, but also on the effectiveness of the way they listen,”. However, given the complexity of the listening comprehension process, foreign language learners encounter many difficulties to cope with native speakers’ natural speech.

**1. Definition of listening and listening comprehension**

Listening is an unobservable mental process not easy to describe. **As defined by oxford (1990:206),** “listening is a complex problem-solving skill and it is more than just perception of sounds. Listeners engage in a variety of mental processes in an effort to comprehend what they are exposed to”.

This is confirmed by **Vandergrift,** 1999: 168) who states that listening comprehension is an 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 the above and interpret it with the immediate as well as the larger context of the utterances.

**2. Listening processes**

**According to 0’ Malley** et al. (1985: 19), “listening comprehension is an active process in which the listener constructs meaning by using cues from contextual information and from existing knowledge while relying on multiple strategy resources to fulfil the task requires. This means that listeners follow a complex cognitive process and use a set of strategies to understand oral messages. In order to achieve this, two kinds of cognitive processes may be used: the bottom up and the top-down. **2.1. Bottom up process**

On the one hand, the **bottom up process** involves constructing meaning from the smallest unit of the spoken language to the largest one in a linear mode (Nunan, 1998). In this case, the listener starts building up the meaning of the oral texts starting by decoding sounds, words, phrases and then sentences relying on grammatical relationships as well as stress and intonation.

**2.2. Top down process**

On the other hand, the top down process refers to the interpretation of meaning as intended by the speakers by means of schemata or structures of knowledge in the listener’s mind.

**3. Stages of listening**

The basic framework on which you can construct a listening lesson can be divided into three main stages.

1. Pre-listening, during which we help our students prepare to listen.
2. While listening, during which we help to focus their attention on the listening text and guide the development of their understanding of it.
3. Post-listening, during which we help our students integrate what they have learnt from the text into their existing knowledge.

**3.1.Pre-listening**
There are certain goals that should be achieved before students attempt to listen to any text. These are motivation and preparation.

1. **Motivation**
It is enormously important that before listening students are motivated to listen, so you should try to select a text that they will find interesting and then design tasks that will arouse your students' interest and curiosity.
2. **Preparation**
To do the task, we set students while they listen there could be specific vocabulary or expressions that students will need. It's vital that we cover this before they start to listen as we want the challenge within the lesson to be an act of listening not of understanding what they have to do.

**3.2.Whilelistening**
When we listen to something in our everyday lives we do so for a reason. Students too need a reason to listen that will focus their attention. For our students to really develop their listening skills, they will need to listen a number of times - three or four usually works quite well - as I've found that the first time many students listen to a text they are nervous and have to tune in to accents and the speed at which the people are speaking.

Ideally the listening tasks we design for them should guide them through the text and should be graded so that **the first listening task** they do is quite easy and helps them to get a general understanding of the text. Sometimes a single question at this stage will be enough, not putting the students under too much pressure.

**The second task** for the second time students listen should demand a greater and more detailed understanding of the text. Make sure though that the task doesn't demand too much of a response. Writing long responses as they listen can be very demanding and is a separate skill in itself, so keep the tasks to single words, ticking or some sort of graphical response.

**The third listening task** could just be a matter of checking their own answers from the second task or could lead students towards some more subtle interpretations of the text.

Listening to a foreign language is a very intensive and demanding activity and for this reason I think it's very important that students should have 'breathing' or 'thinking' space between listening. I usually get my students to compare their answers between listening as this gives them the chance not only to have a break from the listening, but also to check their understanding with a peer and so reconsider before listening again.

**3.3. Post-listening**

There are two common forms that post-listening tasks can take. These are reactions to the content of the text, and analysis of the linguistic features used to express the content.

**3.3.1. Reaction to the text**

Of these two I find that tasks that focus students reaction to the content are most important. Again this is something that we naturally do in our everyday lives. Because we listen for a reason, there is generally a following reaction. This could be discussion as a response to what we've heard - do they agree or disagree or even believe what they have heard? - or it could be some kind of reuse of the information they have heard.

**3.3.2. Analysis of language**

The second of these two post-listening task types involves focusing students on linguistic features of the text. This is important in terms of developing their knowledge of language, but less so in terms of developing students' listening skills. It could take the form of an analysis of verb forms from a script of the listening text or vocabulary or collocation work. This is a good time to do form focused work as the students have already developed an understanding of the text and so will find

**4. Ten bad listening habits**

**4.1. Calling the subject uninteresting**

The first bad listening habit is calling the subject uninteresting. Whenever we find ourselves in a listening situation, we determine almost immediately whether the subject is one we want to hear about or tune out. When we call a subject dull or boring, we set ourselves up for ineffective listening situation. To be an effective listener, look for something that will benefit you rather than dismissing the subject.

**4.2. Criticizing the speaker's delivery**

Ineffective listeners concentrate their attention on the delivery aspects of the speaker and criticize what he or she is doing rather than listening to the message of the speaker. Effective listeners on the other hand concentrate on the message of the speaker and try to overlook or block out the ineffectiveness of the speaker's delivery.

**4.3. Faking attention**

Some people pretend to be listening, but their minds are on other things. They might be looking directly at the speaker and even nodding their heads in agreement when, in fact, they are actually daydreaming, thinking about their own problems, or planning what they want to say in response to the speech. The speaker thinks the listeners are polite and interested, when they are really not paying attention.

**Cure**: do not just pretend to pay attention. Be sincere and take a real interest in the person speaking to you.

**4.4. Looking for distractions**

Some people allow themselves to be distracted by their surroundings. They might look out the window or at the wall, play with a pencil or hair clip, or observe how people in the room are dressed, etc.

Cure: concentrate! Refuse to allow distractions to take your mind off the speaker. Develop the willpower to ignore them.

**4.5. Concentrating on unimportant details**

Some people concentrate on specific details and miss the speaker's main points. For example, notice how the student missed the advisor's main point in the dialogue below.

Advisor: On Friday, May 10 , Miss Martin, the director of financial aid, spoke about applying for scholarship.

Student: May 10 was a Thursday, not Friday.

Advisor: i'll now summarize this important information for you....

Student: It's not Miss Martin; it's Mrs. Martin.

Advisor: Write to the address i gave you and send the application.

Student: What address? What application?

**Cure**: When listening, pay attention to the general purpose of the message rather than to thee insignificant details. Listen for the main point of the talk first; then take note of any supporting details.

**4.6. Reacting emotionally to trigger words**

Some people ignore or distort what a speaker is saying because they react emotionally to "trigger words" -words that cause positive or negative emotional reactions. When this happens, their ability to listen decreases because they allow their emotions to take over. For example, if a favorite subject is mentioned, some people begin thinking about it and want to express their opinions. Similarly, if unpleasant subject is mentioned, some people get upset or angry and stop listening to what the speaker is saying.

**4.7. Getting over stimulated**

Getting over stimulated is a bad listening habit. This bad habit describes a type of listener who tends to react so strongly to one part of the presentation that they miss what follows. To clarify, at the University of Minnesota teachers state that in the classes where they teach listening, they put at the top of every blackboard the words: **Withhold evaluation until comprehension is complete -- hear the speaker out**. It is important that learners understand the speaker's point of view fully before they accept or reject it.

**4.8. Trying to outline everything**

Trying to make an outline of everything we hear is a bad listening habit. There is nothing wrong with outlining speech if the speaker is following an outlinebut trying to outline the unoutlinable of the talks we hear is one of the most frustrating experiences .

Good listeners are flexible. They adapt their note taking to the organizational pattern of the speaker. They may make an outline; they may write a summary; they may list facts and principles, etc.

4.**9. Choosing only what's easy**

Listeners like to hear what they want to hear. Very often, those listeners think that they heard speakers say what they expected them to say. Further, they tend to accept only that part of the [communication](https://www.managementstudyhq.com/barriers-to-communication.html) which is consistent with their existing beliefs.

Alternatively, they refuse to hear what they do not want to hear and what goes against their beliefs and perception. Poor listeners tend to filter those parts of the message from their understanding which do not readily fit with their own frame of reference.

**4.10. Wasting the Differential Between Speech and Thought Speed**

Speed is the last very important bad listening habit. It is wasting the differential between "speak" speed and "stop" speed. On the average in the United state, we talk 125 words a minutes conversationally. The question to be put is How fast do listeners listen? Here is the problem. The listener should be able to hear everything a speaker's say, identify what he is saying, note what he does not say, listens between the lines, and so on.

**Cure**: Good Listeners can hear everything the speaker says; they can listen between the lines and do some evaluating as the speech progresses through the following three strategies:

1. **Anticipating the next point:** Good listeners try to anticipate the points a speaker will make in developing a subject for better understanding and remembering what was said.
2. **Identifying supporting material:** Good listeners try to identify a speaker's supporting material relaying on the sound evidence and argument.
3. **Recapitulating:** When the speaker stops to take a swallow of water or walks over to the blackboard to write something or even takes a deep breath, the experienced listener makes a mental summary of the talk.

**5. Why some students find listening difficult**

According to Azmi Bingol, Celik, Yidliz, and Tugrul Mart (2014), there are a lot of difficulties that learners may encounter in the listening comprehension processes and the purpose is to be aware of these problems and try to solve them. Some of these problems are as follows:

**5.1 Quality of Recorded Materials**

 In some classes, teachers use some recorded materials that do not have high quality. The quality of sound system can impact the comprehending of learners’ listening (Azmi Bingol, Celik, Yidliz, & Tugrul Mart, 2014).

**5.2 Cultural Differences**

Learners should be familiar with the cultural knowledge of language that has a significant effect on the learners’ understanding. If the listening task involves completely different cultural materials then the learners may have critical problems in their comprehension. It is the responsibility of teachers to give background knowledge about the listening activities in advance (Azmi, Celik, Yidliz, & Tugrul, 2014).

 **5.3 Accent**

Munro and Derwing (1999) expressed that too many accented speech can lead to an important reduction in comprehension. According to Goh (1999), 66% of learners mentioned a speaker’s accent as one of the most significant factors that affect listener comprehension. Unfamiliar accents both native and non-native can cause serious problems in listening comprehensionandfamiliarity with an accent helps learners’ listening comprehension. Buck (2001) indicated that when listeners hear an unfamiliar accent such as Indian English for the first time after studying only American English will encounter critical difficulties in listening. This will certainly interrupt the whole listening comprehension process and at the same time an unfamiliar accent makes comprehension impossible for the listeners.

**5.4 Unfamiliar Vocabulary**

According to Azmi Bingol, Celik, Yidliz, and Tugrul Mart (2014), when listening texts contain known words it would be very easy for students to them. If students know the meaning of words this can arouse their interest and motivation and can have a positive impact on the students’ listening comprehension ability. A lot of words have more than one meaning and if they are not used appropriately in their appropriate contexts students will get confused.

**5.5. They lack listening stamina/they get tired**

 Azmi Bingol, Celik, Yidliz, and Tugrul Mart (2014) stated that the level of students can have a significant role when they listen to long parts and keep all information in their mind. It is very difficult for lower level students to listen more than three minutes long and complete the listening tasks. Short listening passages make easy listening comprehension for learners and reduce their tiredness.

**5.6. They have mental block**

Graham (2006) said that there are some other factors that increase learners’ listening comprehension problems such as restricted vocabulary, poor grammar, and misinterpretations about listening tasks. Also, in some classes, teachers use some recorded materials that do not have high quality. The quality of sound system can impact the comprehending of learners’ listening (Azmi Bingol, Celik, Yidliz, & Tugrul Mart, 2014).

**5.8.     They are distracted by Speed of listening and background noise**

According to Underwood (1989), speed can make listening passage difficult. If the speakers speak too fast students may have serious problems to understand L2 words. In this situation, listeners are not able to control the speed of speakers and this can create critical problems with listening comprehension. additionally, recordings that include lots of hiss or worse, street noise, and noise inside and outside the classroom distract students to continue with the listening task and impedes comprehension.

**5.9.     Lack of images**

Lack of body language, images, video, or other cues could be a barrier to effective listening comprehension among EFL students.

**5.10. Hearing problems**

It is not very easy for listeners who have general difficulty in hearing to concentrate on and understand the listening text. They may need to be sat close to the cassette, or to read from the tape script as they listen.

**5.11. Pronunciation problems**

Bloomfield et al. (2010) and Walker (2014) expressed that one of the serious problems of listening comprehension is related to the pronunciation of words that is different from the way they appear in print. Due to the fact that the spoken language varies to the form of the written language, the recognition of words that make the oral speech can create some difficulties for students.

**Practice**

Draw two mind maps. One illustrating **bad listening habits**, and the other presenting **listening difficulties**. Use the information provided in this lesson.