

THREE LEVELS OF LISTENING

When you are teaching a new language you should know that no other type of language input is as easy to process as spoken language, received through listening. You can have the most direct connection to the meaning of the new language, at the beginning level of language study by listening. Students can use spoken language to build an awareness of the interworking of language systems at various levels and in that way to establish a base for productive skills.

When students are refining the grammatical system of the language at the intermediate level, listening can be used to stimulate awareness of detail and to promote accuracy.

At the advanced levels, when language becomes a viable source of input, a regular program of listening can extend the limits of “students” vocabulary and use of idioms. Teachers can find listening activities to promote learning at every stage, because there is a wide range of listening tasks for different purposes and for every level of language study. We must pay attention to the fact that not only teachers’ talking at the lessons helps students, especially at the beginning level, but an increase in the right kinds of listening activities can work to make the students more active in the attempt to find the right proportion of listening to speaking for students at each proficiency level and they can benefit from direct instruction in the 3 different kinds of listening exercises: top-down, bottom-up, and interactive.

Students are lacking in bottom-up processing skills because they have not developed the cognitive categories yet. They perceive the new language as an undifferentiated noise. Students have no ideas about phonological rules, which change sounds in certain environments when they first must build a cognitive structure of important sound distinction and categories, breaking the code demands an interaction of bottom-up and top-down skills.

The voice stage is important for the development of positive attitudes towards listening. Students should be encouraged to tolerate uncertainty, to venture informed guesses, to use their real-world knowledge and analytical skills, to enjoy the success in comprehension.

Many teachers are not native speakers themselves, and the following suggestions are meant to encourage the important input such as:

1. Listening selections can be short, one-to 3 minutes in duration.
2. Teachers' monologs are the most effective at the beginning levels if they are developed in short, basic sentences, clear pronunciation, repetition of ideas, limited vocabulary and visual support for new words.
3. To add new vocabulary and structures gradually is the best while giving the new material.
4. Listening exercises, like short teacher's monolog can be given. In this case students can be kept active with a task to perform while listening, so they can be seen that are using it correctly.

One of the important usage of listening is the presentation of new material. Until the students are skilled readers, it is best to present new material aurally. Teachers may select any part of the lesson for a listening experience, or they may write their own short texts based on the lesson material. Introduction of new material through listening is common to many of the newer comprehension approaches.

Texts must be short, and preceded by a prelistening activity. Wherever possible, the theme and situation of the story should be presented visually by drawing on the blackboard or shaving on the screen. New vocabulary must be used in a personal way, supported by the context of the classroom, so its meaning is clear. Descriptive words, colors, numbers, sizes, shapes, action verbs, and spatial relations are easy to model and support with examples.

The prelistening stage should develop learners' curiosity about how all the phrases and words they have heard will fit together in a context, using normal speed, but with pauses between natural phrase groups.

Working with a few content words, students can use top-down processing to fill the gaps and guess the general meaning of the text. Comprehension of each function word and grammatical marker is really not necessary, when the main aim is to find the gist. It should be clear from the description of global listening that comprehension at the beginning level is not total, but neither depends on understanding every word. Students on the first day classes can understand some words of the story through remembering the words or being able to use them, but they will quite freely recognize the words when they hear them again and again in a familiar context. At the least, they have been exposed to 3-5 minutes to the language with its own distinctive sound system, intonation patterns, pause system and word order.

Intermediate-level students continue to use listening as an important source of language input to increase their vocabulary and structural understanding. They need practice in word recognition and in discriminating fine differences in word order and grammatical form, ways of speaking, and emotional tones.

Intermediate-level students can remember longer phrases and sentences. They are able to listen to short conversations or narrations. Students can get the gist, finding the main idea and some supporting details. At the intermediate level students need to hear texts with reduced forms, fast speech features, hesitations, errors, some nonstandard dialects, and variety of different voices.

At the intermediate level, students need a well-organized program of selective listening to focus their attention on the systematic features of the language. At this level, accuracy in discriminating grammatical features is very important. If students can not hear certain unstressed endings, articles, or functional words, they are less likely to incorporate them into their grammatical competence.

The intermediate level is an appropriate time to teach explicitly of interactive listening: how to use one's knowledge of formal grammar to check the general meaning of a speaker's statements. Students can be presented with sentences which vary slightly in structure and wording, and they can be asked to identify whether the meanings are the same or different.

As for advanced-level students there is evidence that a qualitative shift between cognitive and academic language proficiency. Advanced students are simply learning to listen, or listening to learn the language. They are listening in the language to learn about the content of other areas, to build toward the level, curriculum and program establish courses in English.

Advanced learners can listen to longer texts, from CD, TV programs, and academic lectures. Their vocabulary includes topics in current events, history, and culture. They can deal with a certain degree. Students begin to fill in gaps and can make inferences when the text is incomplete or

Many advanced learners are more skilled at reading by this time than they are at listening or even writing. This is obvious for the students who have learned their English in a foreign language context and whose teaching has emphasized grammar, vocabulary and reading and they may comprehend spoken discourse better if they can activate their knowledge first with a related reading selection.

Listening classes for many foreign students at the advanced level may need to include a systematic program of listening to reduced speech as well as a listening component to distinguish important from unimportant discourse features. A review of stress, pause, pitch, and intonation patterns can serve to unlock

mysteries of discourse structure, and point students toward recognition of organizational markets, cohesive devices, and definitions in context. As students learn to identify the important content words through knowledge of sentence stress, they will find that their note-taking skills improve. I want to mention that transition from written to spoken language is to use the transcripts in the initial stages of listening that cohesive devices, discourse markers, and important definitions to appear in the text, and slews the students how to recognize the concern with top-down and bottom-up skills at advanced levels. In this case I want to mention P.W. Peterson's words where he points to the international student population for advanced listeners assume, which needs to develop cognitive and academic language proficiency for effective study in English.

* * *

First, teachers must understand the main role, that listening plays in the language learning process to utilize listening in the way that facilitate rather than thwart the process.

Second, the complex interactive nature of the listening process and the different kinds of listening that student must do in order to provide an appropriate variety and range of listening experiences.

And finally teachers have to understand how listening skills typically develop to assess the stage of listening at which their students are, so that each student can engage in the most beneficial types of listening activities given the level to proficiency.