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## **THE STRUCTURE OF LISTENING COMPREHENSION AND TYPES OF ACTIVITIES**

**Umarova D.** *Teacher of department of foreign languages,  
faculty of agro engineering and hydro melioration,  
Andijan Institute of Agriculture and Agro technologies,  
Andijan, Uzbekistan*

**Abstract:** We have provided a methodological organization of the listening comprehension process and we have discussed the principles of developing receptive skills of the learner. All subtypes of listening provide a natural progression from activities that entail minimal verbal interaction to those that involve a maximum of interaction. The goal of any activity is to provide the optimal challenge for the students. Since learners' listening abilities vary, teachers should note how the activities could be adapted to the learners' capabilities.

**Key words:** effective method, language, listening abilities, development, comprehension, conversation.

We have stressed the importance of careful selection of practice material for testing listening skills of the learners. It is necessary to construct different types of practical exercises for students to experience language. Listening comprehension tests present an effective method for developing listening abilities.

The material for this will consist mainly of:

Stories, anecdotes, jokes, talks, commentaries (i.e., with one speaker only). Most learners need practice in listening to material with a single speaker only, so that they do not have the added difficulty of trying to identify the speakers when they cannot see them. The material may be recorded or improvised by the teacher.

Conversations, discussions, plays (i.e. with more than one speaker). The students will need to be given some background e. g. about the speakers. For plays they may actually need to follow the written text.

Problem-solving. For example, the students are shown pictures of 3-4 people, places, events and listen to one of these being described. Their task is to

decide which item is being talked about. Students may also be asked to categorise on a worksheet items mentioned in a conversation or discussion.

Extracting information. This is one of the commonest types of listening tasks. For this the students will probably need a chart of some kind, which they have to fill in according to specific instructions. For example, if they are listening to a broadcast they may be asked to note down the main topics or, on an easier level, decide in what order they occur in the talk.

For tasks, which involve extracting information, it is often desirable to define the role of the listener so that he has a clear purpose for carrying out the task [1,p.17].

The activities in this section are specially designed to lead on to activities involving other skills.

Ambiguous conversations. The students hear a short conversation (or an extract from a long conversation), which provides very few clues as to what the speakers are talking about. The students themselves have to decide who the speakers are, where they are, what they are talking about, and, possibly, what will happen next. This type of listening then, leads on naturally to discussion (and, if desired, writing).

Decision-making. The students are given some information e. g. about a town (places of interest, facilities etc.) in the form of a talk or conversation, on the basis of which they have to plan a visit. The planning involves discussion and note making. Decision-making activities can also involve, for example, making choices between places, events, activities, for which the background information is made available in recorded form.

Pre-reading activity. The students hear, for example, a conversation about the Loch Ness Monster, as a stimulus to listen to an article or book on the subject. Similarly they can be asked to listen to short reports on books before deciding which one they want to read.

Pre-writing activity. This can be in the form of a communication game. One student describes a picture, which the others in the group are not allowed to see. The students who are listening make notes (and can also ask questions if they want

more information). They then use these notes to write a description of the picture. [1,p.18]

Most interactive listening situations are in the form of discussions and games. Two important points need to be kept in mind.

First, these activities form the basis of oral work, where the emphasis is on getting the learners to use language for self-expression. It should not be forgotten, however, that listening is an important aspect of these activities. The learners have to listen in order to participate.

Secondly, although these activities are normally done in groups, in order to give the students themselves as many opportunities as possible to use language, we should also look for suitable opportunities to interact with the class as a whole, through conversation, discussion and games. This must be regarded as a significant component of the listening comprehension program.

Discussion-type activities. These provide good listening practice because they get students to listen to one another, especially if the discussion is geared toward making a decision of some kind. For such activities the student have to listen to one another in order to participate.

Predictive listening. For this activity a text is read aloud sentence-by-sentence. The students are asked to interpret the sentence and to predict what they think will follow. As the text builds up, they can revise their interpretations. Although this is a contrived activity, it encourages very careful listening both to the text itself and to the various interpretations suggested..

Interviews. The students can be asked to design questionnaires or surveys, which they use to interview one another or people outside the classroom. Interviewing of this kind involves careful listening and recording of answers. [1,p. 19]

The usage of the authentic listening material is one of the problems in the teaching listening comprehension. The important point, as always, is to meet the needs of the learners. On the short-term basis the learners need to listen to material, which allows them to feel comfortable, perhaps because it is mainly recycling known language. In addition to this, particularly taking their long-term needs into

account, the learners have to be exposed to listening material, which is beyond their productive level. Whether this is 'authentic' in the early stages is not entirely relevant provided the material gets them used to *not understanding* every word; encourages them to *guess* - and, over and above this, stimulates them to talk (or read or write, if these are following-up activities). But, of course, whenever possible, some authentic material should be used, and on an increasing scale as the course progresses. However, it must be kept in mind that the use of authentic material for listening is very different from reading, where, because the learners can work individually and at their own pace, authentic material carries fewer risks. In the typical listening situation, care has to be taken to see that learners are not discouraged by excessive difficulties. In general, authentic materials are best used where the learners themselves are likely to appreciate them and accept them in spite of difficulties [1,p. 20].

An effective way of developing the listening skill is through the provision of carefully selected practice material. Such material is in many ways similar to that used for testing listening comprehension. Although the auditory skills are closely linked to the oral skills in normal speech situations, it may sometimes be useful to separate the two skills for teaching and testing, since it is possible to develop listening ability much beyond the range of speaking and writing ability if the practice material is not dependent on spoken responses and written exercises.

An awareness of the way in which the spoken language differs from the written language is of crucial importance in the testing of the listening skills. For example, the spoken language is much more complex than the written language in certain ways, as a result of the large element of 'redundancy' that it contains [4, p.64].

What is the significance of these features for testing purposes? Firstly, the ability to distinguish between phonemes, however important, does not in itself imply an ability to understand verbal messages. Moreover, occasional confusion over selected pairs of phonemes does not matter too greatly because in real-life situations listeners are able to use contextual clues to interpret what they hear.

Secondly, impromptu speech is usually easier to understand than carefully prepared (written) material when the latter is read aloud. Written tests generally

omit many of the features of redundancy and impart information at a much higher rate than normal speech does. Consequently, it is essential to make provision for restating important points, rewriting and rephrasing them when writing material for aural tests [4,p.64-65].

In showing a considerable variety of listening activities we have explored some of the many ways to help students acquire the confidence to use their skills for self-expression in language situations. Different activities and procedures provide the development of the listening for communicative tasks and for extracting general or certain specific points in the discourse.

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