
AN ANALYSIS ON LISTENING SKILLS AND TASKS TO DEVELOP LISTENING SKILLS

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Abstract: The natural process available for mother tongue acquisition is not available for a person who wants to learn a second language. The constant exposure to the language and the immediate need for communication in the same are absent. The sound basis of the mother tongue may interfere with the second language learning. The second language learner must get an opportunity to hear the language. It may not be possible for an Indian, learning English, to hear English as it is spoken by the native speakers in a natural manner. But modern gadgets like film, radio, Television, tape-recorder, computer, etc., provide him plenty of opportunities to hear natural English.

Is hearing alone enough to learn a language? No, the learners must listen. The learners must be trained to listen to the language, not for its meaning, but for its sounds. Listening is different from hearing. Hearing is casual and general, whereas listening is focused and conscious. It is selective listening that will enable a learner to learn the essentials in a language. In this article the researcher analyzed its process, micro skills of listening and task types.

Keywords: Hearing, Attention, Extensive, Repetition, Comprehension, Conversation.

Introduction: The natural process available for mother tongue acquisition is not available for a person who wants to learn a second language. The constant exposure to the language and the immediate need for communication in the same are absent. The sound basis of the mother tongue may interfere with the second language learning. The second language learner must get an opportunity to hear the language. It may not be possible for an Indian, learning English, to hear English as it is spoken by the native speakers in a natural manner. But modern gadgets like film, radio, Television, tape-recorder, computer, etc., provide him plenty of opportunities to hear natural English.

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Listening is

1. Ability to predict what people are going to talk about.
2. Ability to understand the spoken language properly.
3. Ability to understand the speaker's attitude, intention and interest.
4. Ability to differentiate the changes in sound, word, meaning and production of sentences.

5. Ability to understand the intonation, rhythm and stress in the speech.

Listening is of two types:

Casual Listening or Listening without Attention: Without any intention or purpose or interest, we listen to so many sounds/noises/voices/conversations in our day-to-day life. This is called casual listening. We may listen to them but we forget them very easily because we listen to those things without any purpose. So, all of them come under this type of listening, i.e., casual listening.

Example: sounds in a kitchen, on a road, etc.

Attentive Listening or Focused/Purposeful

Listening: With an intention or a purpose, we concentrate and listen to so many things. This is called focused listening. Our main idea or focus is on listening to the item and grasping the idea of it. So, in this type of listening, we can remember the things in a better manner. For this purpose, in our classroom situations and learning conditions, we have to encourage this type of listening. Examples : classroom lecture, meetings, etc.

Sub-skills of Listening: The other two types of listening are extensive and intensive.

Intensive Listening Involves listening to the radio and television programmes, conversations, discussions, lectures, speeches, debates, seminars, etc. Listening is purposive like listening to the teacher's instructions in the class room. With the

help of intensive listening, one gets to learn vocabulary, word order and standard pronunciation.

Extensive Listening involves enjoyment, not purposeful, but general. The activity of listening reflects on the following skill, speaking. One should listen carefully, so that one would be able to learn to speak and also understand what is being spoken.

Rhymes and Stories for Listening and

Comprehension: Rhymes and stories are meant for listening and comprehension. But in lower classes, i.e., for the starters of English, the rhymes and stories are meant only for listening purpose so as to make them exposed to new vocabulary.

For this reason, the rhymes and stories prescribed under listening skill are meant only for the listening purpose, in turn there will not be much stress on comprehension.

The poems and stories prescribed in the higher classes are meant both for listening and comprehension. Due to the exposure to the new vocabulary in the lower classes, they can comprehend the poems and stories and in turn get the central idea of the poem or gist of the story or the main idea of the passage.

Testing Conversational Skills: Language testing theories are based on the theories on language itself and language teaching. However, in spite of any number of new insights into what language is, it is recognized primarily as an instrument of communication. Whatever the micro component or element that is emphasized in teaching the basic skills of language remain the same. Therefore the testing of language also basically involves looking in a pupil the ability to perform the skills of language.

There are different kinds of tests developed for each of these skill areas the different skills are treated as separate universes, yet they never occur separately. They are integrated in the total skills of speaking, listening, reading and writing. Besides this one basic claim language tests require several other criteria to be valid. For convenience sake and otherwise many times one criteria is overlooked to give place to another. But the criteria of authenticity is something which cannot be compromised for something else. This criteria stands relevant in testing all the skills and more so in the case of conversational skills i.e. speaking and listening. Because language in its most common, pervasive, representative and apparently central manifestation involves oral-aural communication (Lado, Robert, 1961).

In this paper, therefore, the necessity to restore to the testing of these skills, the essential feature of authenticity is considered. In this light a review of the task types for listening and speaking skills is presented.

Listening Skill – Its process, Micro skills of Listening and Task Types:

Not to let a word get in the way of its sentence nor to let a sentence get in the way of its intention, But to send your mind out to meet the intention as a guest; That is understanding. (Chinese proverb, 4th century B.C.)

In a conversation, the emphasis is always on listening rather than speaking, i.e., on the language user as the recipient rather than the producer of messages. (Johnson & Morrow 1981). This suggests that listening is an important skill and has a complex process involved in it. Clark and Clark put forth the following points to explain the process involved in listening comprehension:

- The listener takes in raw speech and holds an image of it in short-term memory.
- An attempt is made to organize what was heard in constituent, identifying their content and function.
- As constituents are identified, they are used to construct propositions, grouping the propositions together to form a coherent message.

Once the listener has identified and reconstructed the propositional meanings, these are held in Long-term memory, and the form in which the message was originally received is deleted (Clark and Clark, 1977)

The analysis of these listening processes suggests that there could be a number of Micro-skills required for conversational listening. For example, ability to retain chunks of language of different lengths for short periods; ability to recognize the functions of stress and intonation to signal the information structure of utterances; and the ability to recognize markers of coherence in discourse, and to detect such relations as main idea, supporting idea, given information, new information, generalization, exemplification; are some of the micro skills in increasing level of complexity of listening comprehension.

This complexity of the listening skill poses a great challenge for selecting both the input and the task

types for teaching and testing the listening skill in pupils.

Depending upon the task type and the micro-skill to be tested, the necessity for an informal or formal way of testing can also be decided upon. Tasks vary according to whether they require global comprehension or partial comprehension. Besides such variation they also vary according to whether they require a mechanical, meaningful, or communicative response (Paulston, 1971, as quoted by Jack C. Richards, 1985). Depending upon whether the task is mechanical or communicative; whether a pupil has to only discriminate – in order to distinguish between two sounds or he has to understand, interpret, adapt and even add to what he listens – the necessity to maintain the degree of informal and tension free atmosphere for the tasks increases.

The following are some of the task types of the listening skill:

Matching or distinguishing: This task requires choosing a response in written or pictorial form that corresponds with what was heard.

Example: Placing pictures in a sequence that matches a story or set of events; choosing a picture to match situation, such as listening to a radio advertisement and finding the product from a set of pictures.

This skill is more or less mechanical and can be carried out even in a formal atmosphere. But an informal atmosphere can be preferred.

Transferring : Exercises of this type involve receiving information in one form and transferring the information or part of it into another form. Example, listening to a discussion about a house and then sketching the house.

This skill also can be assessed and carried out in a formal way of testing.

Transcribing: Listening, and then writing down what was heard. Dictation is the most common example of this activity.

This activity also can be carried out and assessed even in a very formal way.

Scanning: Exercises in which listeners must extract selected items by scanning the input in order to find a specific piece of information. Example Listening to a news broadcast and identifying the name of the winning party in an election.

Such tasks can be carried out and assessed both formally and also informally.

Extending: Exercises that involve going beyond what is provided, such as reconstructing a dialogue when alternate lines are missing or providing conclusion to a story.

This task demands for a less formal atmosphere. It is better performed when a student feels tension free and informal.

Condensing: Reducing what is heard to an outline of main points, such as is required in taking notes.

This task or skill requires an informal atmosphere which enables the learner to coolly discriminate and select details from what he listens.

Answering: Answering questions from the input : Different kinds of questions will focus on different levels of **listening Example :** questions that require recall of details, those that require inferences and deductions, those that require evaluation or reactions.

An informal way of testing this skill is desirable as this creates scope for better performance on such tasks.

Predicting: Guessing or predicting outcomes, causes, relationships and so forth, based on information presented in a conversation or narrative. Here also the informal mode of testing is best suited for this task.

Conclusion: Ability to listen effectively has emerged the most skill for good communicators. Most people are pleased when they are listened to rather than when they are talked to. Most of us are poor listeners as listening skills are not taught in high schools. Every one should listen more, have better retention and memory. Hearing perceives only the sounds and not their meaning. Whereas listening leads to better understanding. The process of listening entails sensing, interpreting, evaluating, remembering and responding based on purpose, interaction and feedback, listening is classified into different types.

Barriers to good listening can originate from environmental, physiological, linguistic and socio-cultural factors. Students should become familiar with the above discussed tasks. So that they can make conscious efforts to assimilate leader-like traits.

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