

Improving Listening Skills to English as a Second Language Learners

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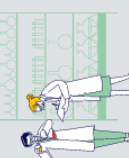
Abstract

This article indicates what problems students of a foreign language as a second language encounter most during their studies and the reasons for this. It was noted that listening, which is considered the main element of language skills, is useful for students in the process of speaking. Tips and techniques for improving listening comprehension skills for people with English as a second language were also discussed.

Keywords: language skills, ESL, cognitive strategies, listening practice, pre-listening activities, while-listening activities, post-listening activities, video tools.

Introduction

Foreign students are faced with many challenges when pursuing academic success abroad, even after passing the language test required by their targeted educational institutes. Among the other language skills (Reading, Writing and Speaking), academic listening tasks pose serious challenges to F/SL (Foreign, Second Language) learners. Even for students with high level of proficiency and being comfortable with everyday listening and conversation, listening tasks encountered in academia still seem formidable [1]. Academic listening is complex, multi-faceted process which places enormous skill demands on the listener [2]. Since researches have shown that effective academic listening comprehension skills are essential for the students to achieve academic success [3], studies focusing on this subject are actively conducted worldwide. Language learning strategies are a sequence of steps taken by a learner, deliberately, in a specific order for a specific purpose that is to learn, recall or comprehend the target language. Cognitive strategies refer to strategies that manipulate the material to be learned mentally, like 'elaboration' or physically as in 'note-taking'. They are more directly related to the performance of a particular learning task and involve direct manipulation or transformation of the learning material [4];[5] Metacognitive strategies refer to strategies concerned with planning, regulating, and managing learning. They do not process input directly but go beyond cognitive manipulation and transformation of incoming information. They involve thinking about the way information is processed and stored as well as taking appropriate steps to manage and regulate the cognitive processes. Although researchers in the field of linguistics have repeatedly proven the effectiveness of consciously adopting adaptive strategies in listening practice through various methodologies, there are several difficulties for foreign students to successfully utilize proper listening strategies in most of the cases. Firstly, it is difficult to consciously put listening strategies into operation. Indeed, there are efforts having been put into teaching the techniques to insinuate the application of listening strategies [6], and the results of which were mostly positive. However, in academic life where foreign students often are pressed by hard schedule and mostly fail to attend such classes, self-directed learning is the main approach for practicing academic listening ability. As a result, they tend to resort to their inefficient accustomed way of practicing without Improving Academic

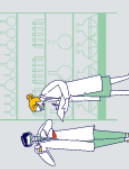


Listening Skills of Second Language 387 being aware of what strategies they are using and how these strategies affect their learning. Secondly, it is difficult to flexibly adopt adaptive listening strategies. Factors including personal traits, motivational level and cognitive style may influence the strategy choice [7]. Because of their lack of strategy knowledge and guidance of strategy application, it is difficult to come up with an adaptive combination of listening strategies which suits the learners' characteristics and their learning goals. Thirdly, it is difficult to put social strategies into practice. As for self-directed learning is the mainstream among foreign students to build up the necessary skills of the targeted language, it is considered inconvenient for them to get involved actively in communication or cooperation with like-minded people to ask help, exchange ideas and get advice. This leads to the missing of learning chances and sharing of knowledge.

Effective language instructors present students how they can adjust their listening behavior to deal with a variety of situations and listening purposes. They assist students to develop a set of listening strategies and match appropriate strategies to each listening situation. In the following main types of listening activities ought to be clarified:

- ❖ Pre-listening activities. They are called also introductory activities that is an introduction to the topic of the text and activities focusing on the language of the context. They aim to deal with all these issues which are generating interest, building self-confidence and facilitating comprehension. They serve to motivate learners to begin the activity easily and teachers give some minutes to find out key words, unknown words, useful structures that to understand and predict what kind of tasks will be asked.
- ❖ While-listening activities. In these activities learners receive a series of comprehension activities for developing listening skills and teachers' purpose to practice listening subskills. In that time a learner has a chance to confirm his or her prediction about the text. Teachers should observe how pupils feel and what they are doing in while listening activity attentively. If there are some learners that are not able to do the task and feel pressure, it is possible to turn on the audio again. Generally, this part is the most difficult stage for the teachers to control, make them do the task independently and process the information actively.
- ❖ Post-listening activities. Last stage is post-listening one which requests learners to talk about how a topic in the text relates to their own lives or give their opinions on parts of the text. These activities have a goal to utilize the knowledge gained from listening and summarize ideas. It also includes, working with mistakes which part is more difficult than other parts or just why learners made them.

Moreover, another helpful resource for teaching listening skills are video tools, including short sketches, news programs, documentary films, interview segments, and dramatic and comedic material. As with audio materials, it is important to choose the portion and length of the video materials in accordance with the skill level of students. Firstly, students watch the video without any sound and discuss it together. In this time teacher should encourage the students to identify what they think will be the content of the tool. Then, they watch the video material again, this time with sound, allowing students to take notes if helpful for their skill level. After the completion of the video, educators can have students write a summary of the video, or it is possible to take time to discuss as a group how the video compares with the students' expectations. Behavior such as gestures and facial expressions can signal emotion both productively and receptively. All of these are subject to multiple rehearsal experiences and feedback, making the learning process extremely rich in content and filled with intensively



recycled language practice. Besides, exaggeration as an inherent element in drama also plays a role in the consolidation of verbal and non-verbal language as well as the awareness of purposeful talking and listening. It is through this enhanced practice that listening skills in the acting quality can be taken to the next level where it ranks equal with speaking in its communication. Impact. For example, a response to speech can be made both verbally and non-verbally whereby, in many cases, the listening of a character without answering can produce meanings and provoke reactions. Even a sound, a pause, or a look can be laden with intended communicative effects. Our proposed activity revolves around the story of Alice in Wonderland, a classic English novel that has been adapted into movies, plays, and musicals. The plot is full of twists and turns, along with collisions of strong emotions. We suggest using the BBC Learning English (2022) version which caters to ESL learners' language learning. This material contains general transcripts with corresponding recordings, both of which will be used during the task.

In conclusion, enhancing listening skills is a crucial component of language acquisition, particularly for English as a second language (ESL) learner. The ability to comprehend spoken language not only facilitates effective communication but also contributes significantly to overall language proficiency. Employing diverse and interactive learning strategies, such as audio resources, real-life conversations, and language immersion, can greatly aid ESL learners in honing their listening skills. Furthermore, fostering a supportive learning environment that encourages regular practice and provides constructive feedback is essential. As ESL learners invest time and effort into refining their listening abilities, they not only enhance their communication skills but also gain a deeper understanding of the cultural nuances embedded in the language. Ultimately, the continuous development of listening skills empowers ESL learners to navigate diverse linguistic contexts with confidence and fluency.

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