PRACTICAL GUIDELINES TO THE PLANNING OF A LISTENING LESSON BASED ON TASK-BASED LEARNING APPROACH

Radu BURDUJAN, PhD

TSU, Department of Foreign Languages and Literatures

Abstract. Listening plays a fundamental role in the language acquisition, making possible the oral interaction between the learners. A focus on listening skills development as well as the application of listening strategies will help learners to decode English input and achieve bigger success in English learning. That's why a correct designing of Listening Unit Planning Sheet is imperative. It is important for the teacher to provide different listening activities during the lessons to become actively engaged in the listening process. Nowadays authentic listening materials are considered as one of the greatest resources of teaching listening skills for EFL which should be included in EFL classes. Nevertheless, even if listeners understand all the text words, they may have significant difficulties in comprehending the whole meaning if they are not familiar with the context.

Key-words: listening skill, active listening, oral communication, listening unit planning sheet, listening activities, listening input.

Rezumat. Ascultarea joacă un rol fundamental în dobândirea limbajului, făcând posibilă interacțiunea orală dintre cursanți. Accentul pe dezvoltarea abilităților de ascultare, precum și aplicarea strategiilor de ascultare, îi va ajuta pe studenți să înțeleagă conținuturile în limba engleză și să obțină un succes mai mare în învățarea limbii engleze. De aceea, este necesară o proiectare corectă a planificării unității de ascultare. Este important ca profesorul să ofere diferite activități de ascultare în timpul lecțiilor pentru a se angaja activ în procesul de ascultare. În prezent, materialele autentice de ascultare sunt considerate unele dintre cele mai mari resurse de dezvoltare a competențelor de ascultare pentru EFL, care ar trebui să fie incluse la lecțiile de engleză. Cu toate acestea, chiar dacă ascultătorii înțeleg toate cuvintele textului, pot avea dificultăți semnificative în înțelegerea întregului sens, dacă nu sunt familiarizați cu contextul.

Cuvinte cheie: competențe de ascultare, ascultare activă, comunicare orală, fișă de planificare a unității de ascultare, activități de ascultare, conținut de ascultare.

Listening is the ability to accurately receive and understand messages in the communication process. Listening comprehension involves far more than mere decoding of the sounds. It involves an active process of deciphering and constructing meaning from both verbal and non-verbal messages (Nunan, 1998). Listening is basic to all effective oral communication. It can help you to navigate through difficult conversations. Without listening ability, messages are easily misunderstood and communication breaks.

Language learning tends to rely on listening which plays a fundamental role in the language acquisition, making possible the oral interaction between the learners (Smidt & Hegelheimer, 2004). So, listening plays an important role in communication and is the most frequently used language skill. According to Mendelsohn (1994), of the total time spent on communicating, listening takes up 40-50%; speaking, 25-30%; reading, 11-16%; and writing, about 9%.

Active listening takes time and practice. Thus, EFL teachers should pay more attention to improving listening which seems the most ignored of the four basic skills through which a language is taught. In this way, listening becomes the weakest skill of EFL students. If underestimated, students encounter different kinds of listening problems and cannot effectively participate at oral communications.

Authentic materials are resources that were produced by native speakers, so that the topics, vocabulary, syntax, etc. are aimed at a target audience of native speakers in contexts specifically for native-speaker consumption. Nowadays authentic listening materials are considered as one of the most imperative resources of teaching listening skills for EFL. Mendelsohn (1994) defines listening comprehension as "the ability to understand the spoken language of native speakers", or authentic materials produced for native-speaker consumption.

Nowadays, technology provides access to many different resources for students to listen to what is happening in the English-speaking world; in their turn teachers can find many useful resources to teach listening on the Internet. Listening has become very important skill with the Internet. A lot of information is presented through the listening resources nowadays. Internet media brings news, entertainment, and information using oral language. Many people are more and more "plugged in" to their devices. They are listening audio on their headphones almost all the time.

Internet-based technology and more specifically digital tools promote foreign language learning. However, technology-based materials are not effective as long as they are not flexible, authentic, and interesting. They will not be of much use to students and teachers alike, unless effective pedagogical strategies are used along with technology or multimedia (Jones, 2008).

There are surely some difficulties in teaching listening. Underwood (1989) lists seven causes of issues, EFL students may encounter while improving their listening comprehension.

First, listeners cannot control the speed of speech. Thus, many EFL students consider that "the greatest difficulty with listening comprehension is that the listener cannot control how quickly a speaker speaks" (Underwood, 1989, p. 16).

Second serious problem is that, listeners cannot always have words repeated. It depends on teacher and not on students how many times to replay a recording or a section of recording.

Third, the speaker may choose some words the listener does not know. When in a situation where listeners encounter an unknown word they often have to stop and think about its meaning and as a consequence may not catch the next part of the speech.

Fourth, in informal or spontaneous conversations listeners may fail to recognize the transitions of the speaker from the one idea to another. In formal situations, connective adverbs like "secondly," or "then" are used. If in the latter example, these transitions are

evident to listeners, in the previous they are vaguer as the speaker uses pauses, gestures, voice loudness, a clear change of pitch, or different intonation patterns.

Fifth, even if listeners understand all the text words, they may have significant difficulties in comprehending the whole meaning if they are not familiar with the context. Nonverbal clues such as facial expressions, body movement, gestures, or tone of voice may differ in different cultures and be easily misinterpreted.

Sixth, the topic of the listening passage should be interesting; otherwise listeners concentrate in a foreign language with difficulty. While listening, even the shortest break in attention can seriously disturb comprehension.

Seventh, many teachers want students to understand every word they hear. As a result, they become nervous and therefore discouraged if they fail to understand a specific word or phrase. Students shouldn't be concerned of not understanding some words (Underwood, 1989).

Listening lessons must have fixed goals.

1. Listening lessons should include listening tasks to progress from simple to more complex as the learner advances in language proficiency; also the student should know exactly his/her listening task after the directions are given ― "what to listen for, where to listen, when to listen, and how to listen".

2. Listening lesson structure should demand active student participation which involves the immediate feedback on performance and helps to keep interest and motivation at high levels.

3. To develop concentration, a listening lesson should provide a communicative urgency for remembering. This urgency, along with concentration, should not come from the teacher, but from the lesson activities.

4. Listening lessons should be focused on conscious memory work. "Listening is receiving, receiving requires thinking, and thinking requires memory; there is no way to separate listening, thinking, remembering".

5. Listening lessons should ―teach, not ―test. This means that the students 'assessment should play the role of the feedback which let the teacher to find out what the students did and how they are progressing. (Paulston & Bruder, 1976).

Listening Unit Planning Sheet
Teacher's name: Radu Burdujan
Learning Goal for the Listening Unit: to help students understand the use of the common English phrases and their meanings in real-life situations related to student life on campus.
Unit Length: Two lessons – 90 minutes
Teaching Context:
- Age group: from 15 – 18 (High School).
- Students' educational level: EFL University students.

- Students' English Proficiency level: B1+

Overall focus of the listening unit:
- Recognize and learn adjectives describing people.
- Talk about activities of daily routine
- Develop linguistic competence.
- Use new words and phrases in both spoken and written language.

Focus of each listening activity listed in the table below:

#1: Pre listening activity - Activate Students' schemata, Understand the topic and main idea.

#2: While-listening activity - Listen for new words (focus on adjectives) and phrases.

#3: Post listening activity - Practice pronunciation and intonation, work on phonology.

Lesson scenario

#1: **Pre - listening activity**: The teacher begins the lesson with asking students if they live on campus or not.

The students who live on campus / in the hostel and share the room with a peer/peers, tell the three qualities they look for in a college roommate. Then answer the question why these qualities are important to them.

The students who don't live on the campus list the three qualities they would look for in a college roommate. And also answer the question why the chosen qualities are important to them.

This is a <u>Top down</u> activity.

Teacher writes all the adjectives mentioned by students in their answers on the board.

Teacher writes idioms from the recording on the board, providing the context:

"be at home with" = feel comfortable with something

"My English roommate is at home with the culture here in our country."

"squeaky clean" = someone is very good and honest and never gets into trouble

"My roommate is squeaky clean. She never does anything dishonest, and she always stays out of trouble."

Main objective of the pre-listening activity:

The pre-listening activates student's schemata.

To trigger Students' background knowledge, for this stage of the lesson, the teacher should encourage them to speak about their lives. So, for this lesson, Teacher asks students to take a picture with their roommate/roommates and post it on the social network (Instagram, Facebook, etc.). Students show pictures to the class and answer the questions of pre-listening activity.

#2: **While - listening activity**:

Students listen to the recording. The recording "College Roommates" can be found on YouTube (YouTube video).

Students fill in the worksheet with a "multiple choice" quiz so the Teacher understands if they understood the information provided in the recording.

This is a <u>Bottom-up</u> activity.

The students will have to use new words / phrases from the worksheet quiz in personalized contexts (related to their lives), so the teacher be sure they understood their meanings.

Main objectives of the while-listening activity:

This while-listening activity is focused mainly on the identification of the words / phrases related to the daily routine of roommates.

Focused on identifying and using words / phrases that make up common expressions in the English language.

For this stage of the lesson, students will work on their worksheets with a "multiple choice" quiz. The teacher might need to play the recording more times so that students can solve the quiz correctly. The teacher monitors students to provide guidance and help and even explain some words / phrases they don't understand which were not mentioned at the lesson.

After students have solved the quiz and the listening is completed, the teacher should revise new words / expressions / idioms, write them on the board for students' better understanding and checking.

#3: **Post-listening**:

Students think of some positive reasons for having roommates from other countries and list them. The teacher asks students if that would be a challenge for them. If so, students explain their ideas.

Students write short paragraphs in their notebooks.

Students practice the new words, the new expressions, pronunciation and intonation.

For this stage of the lesson, students answer the questions orally, and then all their ideas are written in a short paragraph, using as many new words as possible.

Students may look in their worksheets / previous course notes to check up how many words / expressions they use in their written paragraphs.

Both learners and the teachers need some suitable techniques which may enhance the current digital curriculum with listening skill practice. It is important to choose and apply the tasks at the appropriate level with the appropriate students. Therefore, EFL classes need more practice than theory.

A focus on listening skills development as well as the application of listening strategies will help learners to decode English input and achieve bigger success in English learning. Levels of listening comprehension affect the ability for improvement of other language skills such as speaking, reading, writing and translating. The teacher has also an important role in planning curriculum because the wrong type of listening exercise (and not

only listening exercise) may discourage the learners. It is important for the teacher to provide different listening activities during the lessons to become actively engaged in the listening process.

References

1. Grgurovic M. & Hegelheimer V. Help options and multimedia listening: students' use of subtitles and the transcript. Language Learning & Technology, 2007. no. 11 (1), p. 45-66.
2. Jones L. C. Listening comprehension technology: Building the bridge from analog to digital. CALICO Journal, 2008. no. 25 (3), p. 400-419.
3. Mendelsohn D. J. Learning to listen: A strategy-based approach for the second language learner. San Diego: Dominie Press, 1994.
4. Nunan D. Approaches to Teaching Listening in the Language Classroom. Paper presented at the Korea TESOL Conference, Seoul, 1998.
5. Paulston C. B., Bruder M. N., Teaching English as a second language: Techniques and procedures. Cambridge, MA: Winthrop, 1976.
6. Source: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ebZPyuKLqFM&feature=emb_title