

Real – life and Classroom Listening Situations.

Tatiana Portăresco, lector

Rezumat

Importanța predării audierii nu evocă nici un dubiu că este una dintre cele mai dificile abilități. Abordările pentru învățarea studenților să audieze mai eficient au variat de-a lungul anilor, în funcție de teoriile predominante asupra procesului de ascultare. Scopul articolului este de a arăta legătura dintre relația situațiilor întâlnite în viața reală și în clasă, în timpul audierii.

There is no everyday distinction between hearing something and listening to it. Hearing is simply the recognition of sounds, as when we say : “I’m sorry, I didn’t hear exactly what you said”. Listening implies some conscious attention to the message of what is said , as when we say: “ Are you listening to me?”

This distinction will be useful when we look at the different abilities used by a learner trying to make sense of a piece of spoken English. We shall see how many learners worry greatly about their ability to hear all the words, which for them is a vital part of the process of understanding the message of what they are listening to [1, p.211].

Alice Duer Miller said that “Listening is not merely not talking ... it means taking a vigorous human interest in what is being told us. You can listen like a blank wall or like a splendid auditorium where every sound comes back fuller and richer. ”

The quotation above suggests that listening can be done in a narrow and limited way, or it can be done in a way that enriches communication.

Rarely if ever do we listen to something without some idea of what we are going to hear : only, perhaps , when we turn on the radio or television at random, or enter a room where a conversation is already in progress. usually we have some preconceived idea of the content , formality level and so on of the discourse we are about to hear. Our expectations may often be linked to our purpose in listening: if we want to know the answer to a question , then we will ask, and expect to hear a relevant response. In discourse that is not based on the listener’s active spoken participation, his expectations may be less strictly defined, but they are there nevertheless and again are connected with his purpose. If we listen to the news, it is from a desire to know what is happening in the world, and we shall expect to hear about certain subjects of current interest in a certain kind of language. If we are listening to a lecture, we usually know roughly what the subject is going to be, and either need to learn about it or are interested in it for its own sake. If none of these conditions is true then we shall probably not listen at all, let alone understand. It is fair to say that we are nearly always in the physical presence of, or be able to see the person(s) we are listening to. Usually the visibility of the speaker coincides with the necessity for listener – response, but not always. There are cases where we can see the person we are listening to, but are not expected to react to him personally (as when we watch a television programme). If the speaker is usually present in real-life listening situations, towards which we wish to train our students in the classroom, then perhaps we should think again about how much we ought to use recordings as the basis of our exercise.

Apart from the speaker himself – his facial expressions, postures, eye direction, gesture, tone of voice – a real – life listening situation is normally rich in environmental clues as to the content and implications – of what is said. Often noises or smells or other sense-stimuli can contribute valuable background information, but we think it is true to say that most environmental clues are visual. These may be deliberately introduced, as when a teacher or lecturer clarifies her exposition with diagrams or pictures, or a television documentary uses film

extracts or stills to illustrate its commentary. Similar clues appear quite naturally in less formal situations, as when someone gives us directions according to a map. Occasionally the general surroundings contribute information: if we are in a railway station, for example, and hear an announcement over the loudspeaker, we expect it to announce the arrival or departure of a train. In classroom terms, environmental clues are normally represented by visual materials (illustrations, diagrams, maps and so on) which are thus essential to the effective presentation of most listening exercises.

Having tried from several levels of linguistic operation simultaneously and in an interrelated way, it may seem strange to raise the question of how they should be taught. Most realistic tasks require students to use several skills together. As a young teacher it took me some time to realize that my students did not perceive certain English sounds with any accuracy because these did not exist (at all, or as separate phonemes) in their own language.

Steven McDonough in *Applied Linguistic in Language Education* reports on experiments which aim to find out exactly what it is that a listener remembers of something he has heard. It seems that, rather than remember every word, the listener summarizes the sense of what he hears as he goes along. That is, he remembers the information itself but forgets or purges the exact words he hears. This lessens the overall load on the memory [2, p.154].

Non – native speakers of a language take rather longer to go through this summarizing process than native speakers, even when their level of comprehension is good.

They can cope with an unnaturally slowed down version of the same text without the pauses between the sense – groups. When a listener has not understood the meaning of a group of words the natural strategy is to hold the sounds or the words verbatim in his short – term memory (the type of memory you use when you need to remember something for a limited time only - a new telephone number while you are dialing it, for example). This allows the listener to return to the mysterious part and reinterpret it when perhaps, further listening has made matters clearer. Most people will be familiar with this experience in their native language.

Learners will find themselves in this position much more often than native speakers, either because they are not quite sure of a particular section of what they have heard, or because they cannot make any sense of it at all. If there is too much to go into the short term memory it will be put under a lot of strain and the listener will start to feel lost and may panic. Panic, of course, only makes matters worse. Apart from the possibility of pausing, taped materials can provide a lot of support for students who are nervous about this aspect of listening sections which have not been understood, can be repeated at will, or the whole passage played as often as the students like. This facility is, of course, artificial, since, in real life such things are not possible.

However, we are talking about ways of helping students learn, not about testing their current abilities.

Visual Aids

Visual aids as photographs, drawings, posters, and videos provide an opportunity for students to explore known images as well as develop new mental images to discuss in the context of previewing text and setting the purpose for learning.

Realia

Realia is using real objects and materials to explicitly demonstrate a concept that are abstract. Students can relate the instruction to real life experiences and prior knowledge.

Manipulative Materials

Hands-on activities and materials build background and context. Manipulatives may include gestures, body language, and supportive speech patterns.

Repetition and Oral Routines

Repetition helps build vocabulary as students are provided ample time to hear correct pronunciation and time to practice words.

Small- Group Discussion

Discussing learned concepts provides time for students to have adequate practice speaking the language in a controlled, safe environment.

Role Playing

Role playing is a simulation technique that enables the student to practice language and behavioral skill in a safe-environment that is motivating and relevant to the age of the learner.

Having the chance to battle with something which at first seemed impossibly difficult and to arrive at some success in understanding it, not only giving the students the possibility of learning for themselves more about how English sounds and about the linguistic forms it contains, it also increases confidence and lessens the tendency to panic even in real life situations [3, p.95].

Bibliography

1. Close, R., A., English as a Foreign Language, London, 1986.
2. McDonough, St., Applied Linguistic in Language Education, Arnold, London, 2000.
3. Wright, A., Collins English Nursery Rhymes for Learners, Oxford, 1986 .