



STRATEGIES AND APPROACHES TO OVERCOME LISTENING BARRIERS

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ABSTRACT

Listening skill is generally judged as passive and simple task and less important than other skills of communication- speaking, reading and writing, but it is not just the ability to absorb information from someone else. It is the most fundamental and useful element in the process of communication, hence, it should be improved. The present paper intends to highlight barriers for effective listening and also suggests some of the useful approaches. Mother tongue influence, fallacies that people hold about listening etc. could be few of the obstacles for effective listening. The paper also aims to have elaborate view of helpful approaches like podcasting that is easy for present techno-smart generation, narrating or acting story, revising and repeating what is listened, listening to the tone and volume of the speaker, listening to person reading, etc. to develop effective listening.

Key words: *listening skills, barriers, approaches, podcast, fundamental, effective*

“If we are supposed to talk more than we listen, we would have two tongues and one ear.”

-Mark Twain

It is easily mistaken that listening is passive and simple task but it requires more than just the ability to absorb information from someone else. It is the most basic and powerful way to connect to another person, perhaps it is the most important thing in communication. However, it is the neglected communication skills, the learners are instructed to read, to write and to speak but only few have any formal instruction to listen skillfully. Many believe that talking is the most important element of communication but Adle R., Rosenfeld, and Proctor R. in their research show, “the time a person engaged in some sort of communication, approximately an average of 45% is spent listening compared to 30% speaking, 60% reading and 9% writing.”⁽¹⁾

Since listening plays a key role for comprehension, to acquire insight and information and to achieve success in communicating with others, initiatives should be taken to develop

language abilities. Before suggesting few of the strategies to improve listening skills, this paper intends to list down some of the barriers in listening.

1. I think MTI (Mother Tongue Influence) is the greatest hindrance while listening for the learners of English as second language. Most of the non-English speakers are not well conversant with the sounds of English language, their articulation, rhythm and inflection. Everybody has a different way of speaking- some people are less confident and more nervous or shy than others, some have regional or mother tongue accents. Many times the speaker is not aware of both volume and tone to keep his audience attentive so while listening to English speakers it needs extra attention to absorb the information and many times it is distracted.
2. Among the others hindrances of effective listening are the fallacies that people hold about listening. As the non-English speaker emphasize on developing speaking skills they blame the speaker for not speaking accurately if they fail to comprehend the message or they pretend that they did not get the point.
3. While interacting, people often do not listen carefully. They may be unfocused, thinking about other things or thinking about what they are going to say next “Most people do not listen with the intent to understand; they listen with the intent to reply”.⁽²⁾
4. Hearing and listening is treated as the same by many speakers and listeners. In reality many people who are good at hearing are not good listeners. To have good hearing means to have good perception of sounds; but good listeners don't simply hear words they focus on the meaning. In the words of John A. Kline, “The difference between hearing and listening can be stated this way: Hearing is the reception of sound, listening is the attachment of meaning to the sound. Hearing is passive, listening is active. Understanding the difference between hearing and listening is an important prerequisite for listening effectively.”⁽³⁾
5. Poor listening may be, sometimes, due to listener's weak language proficiency in general and constricted range of vocabulary in particular. Certain words which are used by speaker may not make any sense to the listener. These words need not be rare or technical words. Even though the listener does not understand a word he may not ask for clarification because he may be afraid or shy or because he does not get an opportunity.

Instead of pondering over the barriers, let's find some of the strategies or solutions to overcome the difficulties to have effective listening skill. As there can be many ways to put up a list of suggestions, few effective ones are experimented and listed below.

Podcasting:

Podcast is a portmanteau word combined from “iPod” and “broadcast”. Podcasts are basically radio programmes that can be downloaded onto an MP3 player or listened directly from computer. In other words these are the audio programmes in the web. The present generation has grown up and lived with digital technology and so are called “Techno smart generation”. Hence it is the easiest way to make them practice listening skill with the help of podcasting. The usefulness of podcasts lies in the fact that one can improve one’s listening skills while performing multi-tasks like walking, ironing, cooking, gardening, etc. while doing so, it does not understand everything. The important thing is that it provides the listener’s brain much exposure to native English speaker’s speech. This activity effectively abridges the gap between the formal English which dominates in most language classrooms and the informal English used in most real life communication events.

Narrating or Acting out a story:

This is another good and effective listening activity. It is also very useful activity to develop imagination, pretending, pantomiming and physical coordination. The actors listen and speak while observing body language and it is helpful to enhance listening skills. The students enjoy this activity very much and get great pleasure when acting it out. It is also a good moment for observing the children, their actions and reactions to the story.

Revise and repeat what is listened:

There are some of the good exercises of revision and repetition. For example, students sit face to face with a partner. One partner says any word in English and other responds repeating the same. Then one partner says another word. Each time other responds back with the same word pronounced recently. Increase the speed at which one partner responds to the other person. As soon as he starts to say a word, other responds until one partner is almost saying the word at the same time. It will be surprising result. By the end of the exercise both partners will be saying the word at the same time. The point of this activity is to become aware that we can time into someone else’s space much farther than we currently do. We have the ability to focus and pay attention in ways that we usually don’t.

Listen to the tone:

Volume and tone both add to what is being said by someone. A good speaker uses both volume and tone to his advantage to keep his audience attentive; everybody uses pitch, tone and volume of voice in certain situations. To understand the emphasis of what is being said the above things should be taken into account.

**Observe Non- Verbal Communication:**

Facial expressions, postures, gestures and eye-movements are all useful to get the message. We don't just listen with our ears but also with our eyes. So, the listener should watch and pick up the additional information being transmitted via non-verbal communication.

Apart from these, the activities, such as listening to person reading, question-answers can be fruitful to draw away the obstacles and to improve listening skills.

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