



THE IMPORTANCE OF LISTENING SKILL IN LEARNING PROCESS & THE WAYS AND MEANS TO ENHANCE IT

R. NAVIN KUMAR

Research Scholar, (Author)
Dept. of English,
Arignar Anna Govt. Arts College,
Villupuram. (TN) INDIA

DR. L. RAVI SHANKAR

M.A., M.Phil., B.Ed., Ph.D,
Associate Professor, (Co-Author)
P.G & Research Department of English,
Arignar Anna Govt. Arts College,
Villupuram. (TN) INDIA

ABSTRACT

Listening is a significant skill which has to be developed for learning any language. Even though the other skills such as reading, speaking and writing are also essential to develop language proficiency, listening contributes primarily for language expertise. Since listening is the gateway for any learning. That is why, the skill of listening has taken the first position. Despite its importance, language learners consider listening as the most difficult skill to acquire and hence often overlooked both in importance and practice. Of course, the listening skill varies from person to person. We can find some passionate listeners, while others are not. The span of attention also does vary. The listening comprehension plays a major role in language teaching and has been repeatedly emphasized. Yet many teachers do not pay enough attention to its importance in their classes. In this paper, we are to review some important issues concerned with listening skill and to discuss various factors which provide a basis for developing listening skill. It starts with a definition of listening, the need for enhancing the skill, tips to be a good listener and various obstacles which mar one's attention and ways to improve Listening skill.

INTRODUCTION

Listening skill is one of the most important components of language learning. Learners have to comprehend native speakers and a lot of multimedia like DVDs and the Internet. Listening

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is an important skill that ought to be developed in second language learning (Rost, 2001; Vandergrift, 2007; Kurita, 2012). According to Rost (2001) and Kurita (2012), a major difference between more successful and less successful learners is related to their ability to use their skill of listening. A good listener can easily be a good learner.

Listening skill is very important in foreign language learning because the key to learn a language is to receive language input. According to Krashen, Terrell, Ehrman, and Herzog (1984) and Hamouda (2013) acquisition takes place when learners have sufficient comprehensible input. Rost (1994) stated that listening is significant in language learning because it provides input for learners and it plays an important role in the development of learners' language.

According to Krashen (1985) and Hamouda (2013), listening skill is an important element in obtaining understandable input. Learning cannot take place if there is no input. Hasan (2000) and Hamouda (2013) expressed that listening comprehension provides the appropriate situations for the acquisition and expansion of other language skills. Rost (2002) expressed that the development of listening is related to the attainment of proficiency in speaking. He continued that listening is the most important skill in language learning because it is the most widely used language skill in our day to day life.

According to Pourhosein Gilakjani and Ahmadi (2011), listening plays a significant role in the communication process too. Ferris (1998), Murphy (1991), Vogely (1998), and Hamouda (2013) expressed that listening is the most frequently used skill in the language classrooms. Therefore, it is obvious that listening is very important for the lives of students since it is used as a means of learning at all. According to Oxford (1990), listening develops faster than the three other language skills – speaking, reading and writing and it makes easy the development of the other language skills.

In this paper, important issue concerning enhancement of listening has been reviewed. The term listening has been defined; the importance of listening has been clearly stated, teachers' role in developing the skill of listening in students has been elaborated and various strategies, techniques and goals of listening have also been discussed.

The need for Listening

Listening is a part of any communication; it plays a major role in providing a considerable and meaningful response. Especially in learning a language, the role of listening is pivotal, as it helps the language learner to acquire pronunciation, word stress, and vocabulary and understanding of any message is based on the factors like tone of voice, pitch and accent; and



it is possible only when one listens. Without understanding input appropriately, there can be no response from the listener and hence the process of communication will come to a halt.

We shall be surprised to know that in the time spent by adult in communication, listening occupies about 45%; whereas speaking accounts for 30%, and reading and writing account for only 16 per cent and 9 per cent respectively. This data will help to us understand why more focus ought to be given on Listening. The one who shuns keeping one's ears open can never be a good learner. Great philosophers and wise men were always good listeners- speak less and listen more had been their mantra.

Yet now a day, we are saddened to witness many students and even teachers often fail to give listening, the attention it needs. Moreover, the school and college curriculum has not been designed integrating Listening skill and it needs to be given more attention at least in the years to come.

Challenges before the Listeners

There are many practical difficulties an individual comes across in understanding a lecture when given in a second language. The speaker, the situation and the listener can all be the cause of these difficulties. The speakers' unclear voice, the hue and cry made around and the listener's limited vocabulary, lack of knowledge of the topic are some of the contributing factors for poor listening.

According to Yagang (1994) [2], the problems in listening were accompanied with the four following factors: the message, the speaker, the listener and the physical setting. The problems were believed to cause by the speech rate, vocabulary and pronunciation [3]. As Flowerdew & Miller (1996) [4] assumed that the problems of the students were for the speed of delivery, new terminology and concept, difficulty in focusing and the physical environment.

The factors which are responsible for the learners to be indifferent towards listening are:

- i. Lack of interest and also effort to catch each and every word uttered by the speaker.
- ii. Poor vocabulary is the other reason for their low spirit in understanding the message.
- iii. Listeners' problem with different pronunciation, accents as they are accustomed to one particular verbalization.



- iv. The span of attention plays a major role so far as Listening is concerned. All do not have the same listening power.
- v. The environment too distracts one's attention. Sound made around or even an uncomfortable sitting posture may also tend to distract one from active listening.

Differences between Hearing and Listening

Hearing and Listening are the two different human acts. **Hearing** is simply the physical act of sound waves entering into our ears and being transported to our brain. This is a **passive process** that requires no attention. No meaning is attached to the sound made. If your ears are open and you are in a place where sound is being transmitted, you will hear it. On the contrary, Listening is an **active process**. It requires more effort. Listeners take sounds and attach meanings to them. When they comprehend what a speaker has said, they do interpret and respond to the message. This is called **Active Listening**.

What to listen to?

If we have Internet and a device like computer, tablet, or smart phone, we can access to ample of English listening material. Here are some suggestions for finding appropriate materials.

Podcasts: They offer regularly updated episodes of listening bites. These shows may be short or long, formal or informal. They are often organized around a certain topic. Users don't need to pay anything. We can find many that are specifically made for language learners. We can often listen to podcasts online.

Online listening labs and sites: Many websites like English Club offer free listening activities. Some are organized by topic or level. We can also search English Club's links to find sites that offer free audio. Or we can use the search terms "free audio practice" or "free English listening".

News: Many English news sites offer audio or video clips to go with news stories. If the English is too difficult to understand, find a site that offers news in easy English, such as English Club's monthly news or other sites that specialize in news reports for English learners.

Music: Listening to music lyrics is a great way to practise our active listening. Sometimes, we will have to repeat one line over and over until we can understand the meaning. Many



lyrics are available online so we can read along as we listen. We can also go for music videos that have subtitles.

Videos/Film/TV: We should first choose any topic of our taste and start watching videos with regards to that topic. The aspirants can watch English cartoons, videos, documentaries or movies. Some videos offer captions. It will be helpful for good listening.

Conversations: Whenever we have a chance of watching people speaking distinctly, we should keenly listen to their conversations. This will help to enhance your listening skill.

Lectures: Many online schools offer free lectures on a variety of topics. We can also listen to TED Talks.

Strategy to become a Good Listener

1. Be attentive when you listen
2. Don't let anything to distract you.
3. Look at the speaker's eye.
4. Try to pinpoint what the speaker says.
5. Should be no place for daydream.
6. Don't try to think how to respond before the speaker ends his/her speech.
7. Keenly observe the body language of the speaker.
8. Learn how to paraphrase what you have heard.
9. Should not simply pretend to understand.
10. Take notes if it is not distracting the speaker.

Barriers to Effective Listening

Good listening is arguably one of the most important skills that one should possess in this complex world. It is obvious that human life can be bettered only by good listening. Much can be gained by improving one's listening skills. To be successful in any field of life, one has to be a good listener. But there are some factors which distract one from listening. These factors are called as the barriers to Listening. The following are the common barriers to good listening.

Environmental Factors

Environmental factors which include poor lighting, either high or low room temperature or even the furniture that one uses would affect the listening process. When the room where the process of listening takes place is too murky, it may take the listener to the state of drowsy.

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Similarly any room that is too warm or too cool would cause discomfort to the listener and thereby affect listening. Likewise, Comfortable seating arrangements would facilitate good listening, whereas uncomfortable seating arrangement would hamper it.

Physiological Barriers

a) State of Health

The body condition of the individual affects the skill of listening. For example ailments such as fever, headache or any other health problem would not let the listener to listen attentively.

b) Disability

Hearing is the first step of the listening process. Impaired hearing will lead to poor listening. Similarly, speech disorders of the speaker may make speech incoherent to the listener. When a speaker speaks too fast, it would be hard for the listener to understand.

Psychological Barriers

Psychological barriers relate to attitudinal and behavioural aspects. These include the following:

a) Underestimating the Speaker's Ability

Sometimes the listener may think that the speaker does not possess the depth of knowledge on any matter. In that case, he may shut his ears wantonly and pay no attention to what the speaker says. This acts as a barrier to the listening process.

b) Personal Anxiety of the Listener:

Sometimes people would be preoccupied with any personal concerns and anxieties. This would make it difficult for the listener to comprehend what is being said by the speaker and thus acts as a barrier to effective listening.

c) Attitude of the Listener:

The attitude of the listener may also act as a barrier to effective listening. The listener may think himself that what the speaker says is already known to him. As such, he would be indifferent to what is being said by the speaker and might miss to catch the points. This attitude on the part of the listener does act as a barrier to listening.



d) Listeners' Impatience

The listener may not have enough patience to wait till the speaker fully conveys what he intends to say. The listener might be impatient or may interrupt for the want of adding his own points to the discussion. As a result, his curiosity to speak in the middle of the conversation affects the process of listening, and thus acts as a barrier.

CONCLUSION

To conclude, it can be noted that without developing listening skills, there will be no chance for any learning. Today, with all the technological advancements in the field of education, more focus has to be given on listening. The recent Pandemic COVID 19 has warranted many schools and college teachers to take classes online. Unless a student is capable of understanding what is said by his/her teacher, the efforts taken by the teachers shall go futile. Hence the school curriculum should inculcate the proper evaluation of students' listening skill through proper tests. To acquire high level listening skills, there should be more exposure to the learners with variety of tests for listening.

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