

TEACHING LISTENING SKILL WITH LIMITED RESOURCES

Yehia A. Al-Sohbani (Ibb University –Faculty of Arts)

Abstract

Listening skill is considered to be the fundamental of the four skill .The learner will not be able to communicate well unless he is trained to listen . However , it is noticed that this skill tends to get neglected in the language classroom.

This paper suggests some principles to improve the teaching of this skill integratively and effectively where resources are limited such as the lack of audio tapes and other teaching materials .

To accomplish this , it is suggested to take into account three main factors . They are input , transition notes , and output .

TEACHING LISTENING SKILL WITH LIMITED RESOURCES

Yehia A. Al-Sohbani - Ibb University –Faculty of Arts

فلاصة:

إن مهارة الاستماع تعد من أهم المهارات اللغوية فالتعلم للغة لن يستطيع أن يتواصل أو يتحدث مع الآخرين إلا إذا تدرّب على هذه المهارة . مع ذلك فإن هذه المهارة لم تحظى بالاهتمام من جانب مدرّس اللغة الإنجليزية .

تهدف هذه الورقة إلى تقديم بعض الأسس التي يمكن اتباعها في تدريس هذه المهارة (*Listening skill*) بالطريقة التكاملية بحيث يصبح الدرس فعالاً على الرغم من محدودية توافر المصادر المتاحة للتدريس مثل التسجيلات الصوتية والمواد التعليمية الأخرى . وللوصول إلى ذلك يقترح الباحث الأخذ في الاعتبار ثلاثة عوامل هي : المدخلات (*input*) ، الملاحظات (*notes*) والمخرجات (*output*) .

1. Introduction

No one can deny that listening skill is one of the most important and fundamental of the four skills in language learning because without having been taught to listen, a learner will never be able to communicate with the native speaker. The greatest problem facing the non-native speaker is decoding the message he / she is listening to.

The listening skill has never been taken into account as an essential skill in the language classroom. Reasons for this may lie in the lack of experienced teachers, lack of appropriate materials or it could be due to practical constraints.

The purpose of this paper is to suggest some principles which can be useful in teaching listening skills integratively with limited resources in a situation like Yemen.

2. Integrating Listening with other Skills

In real-life situations both receptive and productive skills mostly occur together when we speak and listen. In the words of Byrne (1976: 8):

Oral communication is a two way process between speaker and listener (or listeners) and involves the productive skill of speaking and the receptive skill of understanding.

This is what may happen in a real-life situation. But what about in the classroom? One may say that it is impossible to bring the environment of an English society to the classroom in order to expose the learners to it. Although that is true, the teacher can to some extent make his lesson more efficient in a way that it becomes quite similar to what the learners may encounter in the future especially those who will go abroad for further education. They will have to be able to use more

than one skill. As Burgess (1987:108) puts it:

should represent to some extent the real-life language. Moreover, it is recommended that the source -- input -- should be quite sophisticated - - as Widdowson (1978:161) suggests, not restricted -- so that it contains some new information (e.g. vocabulary) so the learners are required to think and learn the new items they are in need of. McEldowney (1982:4) puts it as follows:

Any development of a skill requires a learner to practise it. It would seem, therefore, that our reading and listening texts should contain a proportion of unfamiliar words and relationships which learners are led towards working out for themselves

Thinking thoroughly about what McEldowney is arguing above, one can say that it is really necessary to provide our learners with input texts which introduce within them new items, otherwise the learners may think that they are wasting their time and it could lead to demotivation. However, we should bear in mind that extreme difficulty can create the same problem. As Harmer (1983:6) puts it:

To give students very high challenge activities (high because the level of difficulty for the students is extreme) where this is not appropriate may have a negative effect on motivation. It will be the case that the low challenge activities are equally demotivating

Moreover, the teacher is recommended to use transition notes which will help him to deliver the listening texts impromptu. Thus, it will be similar to the natural spoken language, full of repetitions, fillers, pauses ... etc. The following steps can be followed when we form the input and the transition notes [phrases] of the listening lessons:

1. Present a grid on the blackboard (e.g. a table , a diagram)
2. Instruct ss. to carry out the required task.
3. Deliver the discourse (the listening text) in part or in toto as appropriate, checking as one proceeds whether the performance of the task is adequate.
4. Get the answer from the learners referring to their placing in the grid etc.

5. Ask the learners to place the items in the grid etc.
6. Repeat steps 2 to 5, if necessary, until the whole discourse has been processed.
7. Have the learners 'translate' the information to visual form, by labeling a drawing or whatever is appropriate.

(ii) Transition

By transition it is meant that we express the same piece of information through different mediums, for example verbally or non-verbally.

In real-life situations we are exposed to this kind of information usually simultaneously with language (e.g. maps, some advertisements, and so on). This actually is useful for us because we are supposed to get the information in the easiest way and maybe by more interesting means. This can be for instance, applied to the advertisements which are meant to attract our attention in order to understand their message effortlessly. However a learning situation differs. We can use both -- verbal and non-verbal -- but not exactly in the same way as we do in our daily life. That is because our aim in the classroom is not just to attract the learners' attention but to give them opportunities to learn something new. In fact, this is not gained by spoon-feeding but by undergoing certain mental process which requires the learners to think in the process of carrying out certain tasks. Therefore, one can say that verbal information should be introduced first separately from the non-verbal, otherwise the learners may just pick up the information illustrated in the non-verbal and solve the tasks given without understanding the abstract information -- verbal. McEldowney (1982:3) puts it as follows:

If meaning is immediately conveyed merely in a visual form, the words will become redundant and the learner will have no need to read or listen. For this reason, the two means of conveying information need to be separated.

On the basis of what has been mentioned, one can say that it is the teacher's job to let his learners first listen to the text and rework the information by doing the task given. The same kinds of mental operation are involved in reworking the information which has been gained or collected and then this will show whether or not communication is taking place. To illustrate this let us suppose that the following information is being taught:

Mr. George and John went to Ibb yesterday. They stayed at a small beautiful hotel. In the morning they left the hotel and walked around Ibb. They saw many beautiful views so they took some photos. In the afternoon, they visited the market which was very busy. Mr. George bought a tie and a shirt. John wanted to buy some Arabi clothes but he did not have enough money.

The teacher can draw, for example, a flow diagram showing the events which happened in sequence as follows:

- 1 --
- 2 --
- 3 --
- 4 --
- 5 --
- 6 --
- 7 --

Then he can write a verb (e.g. went) in the first box provided and say: listen and find the words that fit these boxes (pointing to 2, 3, 4, etc.). Having finished this task and the tasks related to these words (verbs), the teacher distributes a series of pictures -- showing the events mentioned in the text -- to the students saying: now look at these pictures, they are not in an order. Remember what Mr. George and

Mr. John did and put them (pictures) in order -- you can number them. (For further illustration see section 3).

In such a way we are expecting the learners to move from abstract to concrete. Moreover, by asking the learners, later on, to put the non-verbal (pictures) in order, we make sure that they -- learners -- do not become frustrated by constant verbal abstraction and, also, to provide a concrete check of achievement .

(iii) Output

This factor, actually, is not isolated from the former one for it is what we use or produce after listening. However, it does not mean it must be a copy of the input. McEldowney (1982:3) puts it as follows:

... because a student's use of his sources in real life should represent a selection and reworking of the information there, the learner's production in the language class should not represent a

Widdowson (1978:161) supports McEldowney's view, saying:

When we listen to talk or read something we are able to adjust our attention: the input is one thing, but our intake is another. We in fact impose our own filter on the data

So, the output is unsophisticated, unlike the input and it is usually varied according to the tasks done/or practised by the learners. It can be speaking, writing or any other production. Thus tasks tend to have the important role in making/or developing the output to be really successful or not. Tasks should be stated in a way that they are serving the aim we are seeking to reach at the end of every lesson. Since they -- the tasks -- will not take care of themselves, it is the teacher's responsibility to exploit the input texts (monologue or dialogue) he has in such a way that they give his students the opportunity to practise more than one skill quite freely. In the words of Geddes (1981:80):

It is... the teacher's job to provide the student with appropriate texts and to devise tasks that will guide his listening and integrate it with other skills, and to be on hand to help him if serious difficulties arise. The student should be given plenty of opportunities to practise listening and develop confidence on his

abilities through successful practice without being interrupted by the teacher.

Further, tasks should not be just written plans in the teacher's notebook, but they should be honestly applied in the classroom. Therefore, if for example the students are listening to an interview between a bank manager and a journalist, in such a case, the teacher should give them -- students -- in advance an idea of what they are going to listen to and why [the purpose]. For instance:

Today you are going to listen to ...

T. Now listen and tell me how many people are talking.

(For further illustration see section 3.2)

Mckeating (1981:67) recommends the following:

You can introduce the topic with a short discussion; for example you could announce the title or say the first sentence and ask what they think it will be about. This arouses certain expectations and makes the students mentally prepared for the topic.

Geddes (1981:81) puts it as follows:

We should not ask a student to listen without identifying—or helping him to identify—a purpose that relates to the communicative value of the text. As in reading practice, we can help the student by giving him instructions or setting a task. The task should be as realistic as possible so as to help the student relate what to do in real life in the foreign language.

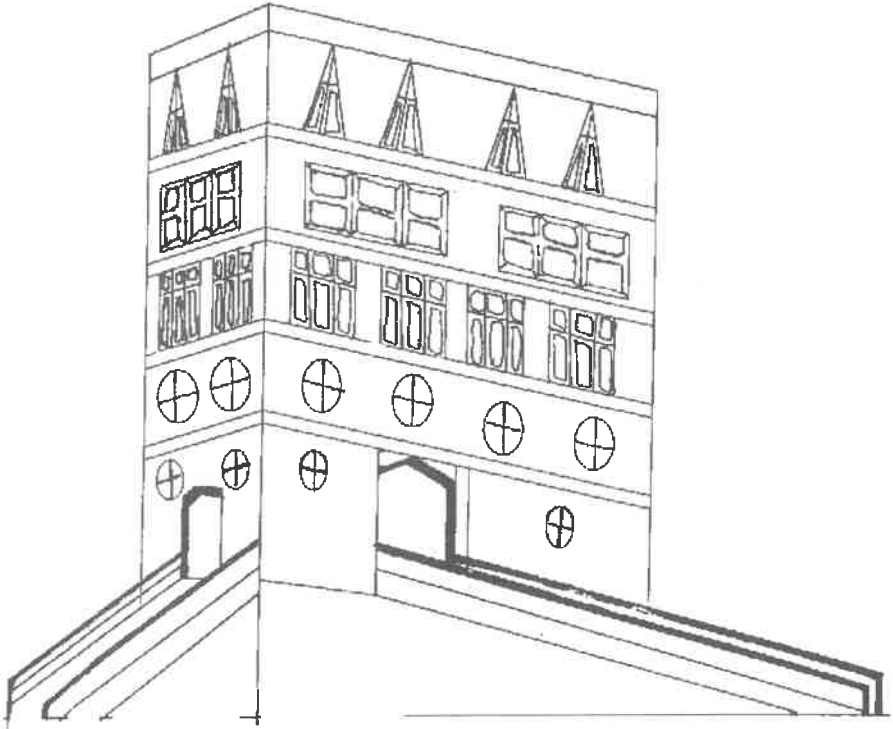
If the teacher does not take what has been mentioned above into account, the students may switch off during listening or they may try to listen to every detail and as a result of that, they might get confused and frustrated.

3. Sample Lesson Plans

These samples are meant to illustrate practically how the teacher can exploit the source (input) to integrate listening with other skills.

3.1 Sample One

THE SOURCE (text)

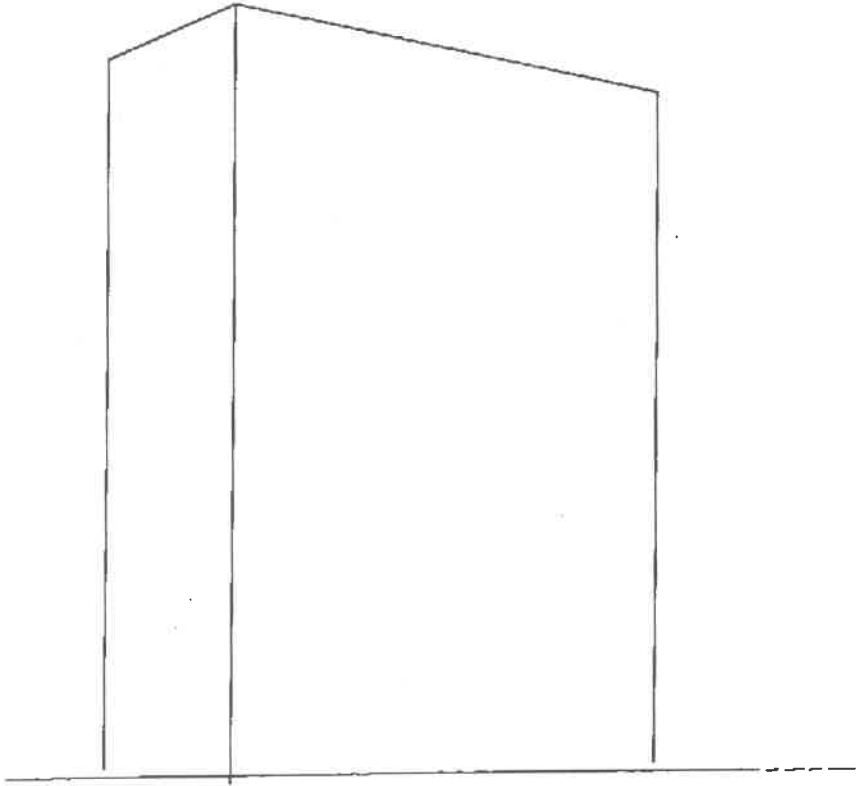


TEACHER'S NOTES

The Palace

Name	Dar Al-Mulk.
Location	in Sana'a
Doors	Two
Floors	five

	Ground Floor	First Floor	Second Floor	Fourth Floor	Fourth Floor
Colour	Blue	yellow	White	yellow	White
Rooms	one	three	Four	three	Five
Windows	4	6	5	3	6
Window's shape	round	round	Square	rectangular	triangular

STUDENTS' WORKSHEET

*This can be drawn on the blackboard .

- 1- Say , Today I am going to tell you about a famous palace.
- 2- T. draws this table on the blackboard :

Table 1

The Palace	
Name	Dar Al-Mulk
Location	In Sana'a
Main Doors	Two
Floors	Five

- 3 - Say : Listen and tell me the name and the location of this palace (using gestures) .

T. speaks the text from the notes .

T. gets the answer and writes it in the table illustrated above in Table 1.

- 4 – Say , Tell me how many floors .
T. gets the answer and writes it .

- 5 – Say Now , look at this table – Table 1 – and listen to me.

This palace is Dar Al-Mulk.

Say , It is in Sana'a

It has two main doors

It has five floors .

- 6 – Say , Ali , tell me something about this palace .

Ali : This palace is Dar Al-Mulk .

Say , Good . Now you Saleh .

Saleh : It is in Sana'a

“ T. Can let students practise reading the information given in Table 1 – step 7 . “

7 - T. gives students the worksheet (visual) .

Say , Now use this picture and draw the doors and the floors .

T. walks , checking the progress of the task .

8 - T. draws a blank table – Table 2 – on the blackboard :

Table 2

		Ground Floor	First Floor	Second Floor	Third Floor	Fourth Floor
1	Colour	blue	yellow	white	yellow	white
2	Rooms	one	three	four	three	five
3	Windows	4	6	5	3	6
4	Windows' shape	round	round	square	rectan-gular	trian-gular

9 - Say , now look at this table – Table 2. Listen and tell me the colours (using gestures)

T. speaks the texts

T. gets the answers and writes in the table opposite (1) .

10 – Say , Listen and tell me how many rooms .

T. speaks the text.

T. gets the answer and writes it in the table next to (2).

11 - Say , Listen and tell me how many windows .

T. speaks the text.

T. gets the answer and writes it in Table 2 next to (3).

12 - Say , Listen and tell me the shapes of the windows .

T. speaks the text

T. gets the answer and writes it in Table 2 .

13 - Say , Now , look at this table (using gestures) and listen to me.

T. speaks The ground floor is blue

It has one room

It has four windows

The windows are round .

14 - Say , Mohammad , tell me something about the ground floor .

Mohammad : The ground floor is blue

T. Good . Now , you Ahmed .

Ahmed : It has one room

T. Good . Fatima ?

Fatima : It has four windows .

“ The teacher can continue this step – 14 – with the other floors if he feels that his students need more practice. ”

15 - Say , Now use the worksheet – visual – I gave you and complete it .

(If necessary the teacher can say : draw the windows and colour the floors .)

T. walks round checking the progress of the task .

16 - Say , Use this table – Table 2 – and the worksheet you are already working on and write about the palace.

17 - Say , write about a hotel or a palace you know .

NB. This step – 17 – can be given as a homework .

3.2 Sample Two

The Text

Ali and the Coconuts

One Sunday , Ali was on his way home from school . He felt very hot and thirsty . He looked around and saw a coconut tree . It had a lot of coconuts on it . He decided to drink some coconut milk to make him cool . So he climbed up the tree to get a coconut . All of a sudden some bees flew out of the tree and Ali climbed very quickly down again . When he got to the bottom of the tree he began to run but the bees chased him and gave him lots of stings . He got home with a very swollen face so his mother took him to the clinic.

Transition Notes :

Ali	left	the school
He	felt	hot and thirsty
"	Looked around	-
"	saw	a coconut tree
"	climbed up	the tree
Some bees	flew	out of the tree
Ali	came down	Quickly
He	ran a way	-
the bees	chased	him
They	gave	him some stings
He	got	home with a swollen face
His mother	took	him to the clinic

- 1 - Say , Today you're going to listen to a text. listen and tell me who is it about
- 2 - Say the text from the notes .
- 3 - get the answers from the students . Say , Right it's about Ali .
- 4 - T. Writes these words in a list on the blackboard :

- (12) took
- (7) came down
- (5) climbed up
- (3) looked around
- (11) got
- () gave
- () flew
- () left
- () saw
- () felt
- () chased
- () ran away

- 5 - Say . Listen to the text again and number those words as you hear them (using gesture)
- 6 - Say the text from the notes .
(As the student give the answers , the teacher writes the words in the correct order on the blackboard .)
- 7 - Say , Who left ? students say , Ali . T. writes Ali on the blackboard .
(Go through all the steps .)
- 8 - Write the school after “ left “ and say listen and complete the other sentences .
- 9 - Say the text from the notes .

STUDENT'S WORKSHEET

- 10 - Get the answers from the individuals and write them on the blackboard.(If necessary ,to get all of them , say it once more).
- 11 - Have some students tell the story .
- 12 - Rub off the subjects of the sentences .
- 13 - Ask some individuals to tell the story .
- 14 - Rub off the objects of the sentences .
- 15 - Get some students to tell the story looking at the verbs .
- 16 - Now rub off the verbs , too . Get one student to tell the first two sentences . Go through it with some other students .
- 17 - Give them the worksheet (the visual) .
- 18 - Say , Look at the pictures . They are not in order . Remember the story and number the pictures .
- 19 - Get the answer and tell it once more .
- 20 - Say , Now write a suitable verb under each picture .
- 21 - T. walks around checking the answers .
- 22 - Having written the verbs ; say Now work in pairs . Look at the pictures and tell the story to your partner .
- 23 - T. walks around checking the progress of the task and helping if necessary.
- 24 - T. can ask the students to write the story as homework .

References

- 1 – Burgess , J. (1987) “ Preparing Overseas Students for the Oral Content of Further Education Courses “ ,Unpublished M.Phil. Thesis , University of Manchester .
- 2 – Byrne , D . (1976) “ Listening Comprehension “ in Teaching Oral English , Longman .
- 3 – Geddes , M.(1981) “ Listening “ in Johnson and Morrow Communication in the Classroom , Longnan .
- 4 – Harmer , J .(1983) The Practice of English Language , Longman .
- 5 – McEldowney , P.L.(1982) English in Context : Teacher’s book . Nelson.
- 6 – Mckeating , D. (1981) “ Comprehension and Listening “ in Abbott and Wingard (Eds.) Teaching English as an International Language , Collins .
- 7 – O’Connor , J . (1980) Better English Pronunciation , CUP.
- 8–Widdowson ,H. (1978) : Teaching Language as Communication , CUP.