

# Listening Problems And Challenges For English Learners

Mamasharipova Azizakhon and Bakhridinova Odina

Student of Samarkand States Institute of Foreign Languages

**Abstract**— *Listening is a vital skill for the achievement of full mastery of the four language skills in order to enable learners to fulfil academic tasks at tertiary level. At the beginning of the article the definition and the professional explanation of listening by famous linguists is cited. Then in the main part, the author explains to the readers the common errors in teaching listening and the reasons of them.*

**Keywords**— listening problems, speaker, listener, message, skill

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Presently, learning English demands to develop four skills at the same time. Listening is the essential element to learn foreign language. Before talking about it we should understand what is listening. Here are given some definitions about listening by famous linguists.

## 2. MAIN PART

“Listening is the ability to identify and understand what others are saying. This involves understanding a speaker’s accent or pronunciation, his grammar and his vocabulary and grasping his meaning.” [1]

An able listener is capable of doing these four things simultaneously. [4]. The enabling skills are:

- \*predicting what people are going to talk about
- \*guessing all unknown words or phrases without panicking
- \*using one’s own knowledge of the subject to help one to understand
- \*identifying relevant points, rejecting irrelevant information
- \*retaining relevant points (note-taking, summarizing)
- \*recognizing discourse markers: Well; Now; Finally
- \*recognizing cohesive devices: link words, pronouns, references
- \*understanding different intonation patterns and uses of stress
- \*understanding inferred information: speakers’ attitude or intentions

During the teaching process we face a lot of problems connected with listening. In order to overcome the difficulties, we must identify what are the problems and how can we solve them. The evidence that shows why listening is difficult comes mainly from four sources: the message, the speaker, the listener, the physical setting. Now in details about them.

The message. Many learners find it more difficult to listen to a taped message than to read it since the listening passage comes into the ear in the twinkling of an eye, whereas reading material can be read as long as the reader likes. The listening material may deal with almost any area of life. It might include street gossip, proverbs, new products and situations unfamiliar to the student. The content is not well organized and the messages on the radio or recorded on the tape cannot be listened to at a lower speed. The speech may consist of liaisons, elision, colloquial words and expressions, redundant words. These things make it difficult for the listener to understand the message.

The second problem is the speaker. According to Ur “In ordinary conversation we use more words than necessary. Redundant utterances may take the form of repetitions, false starts, re-phrasings, self-corrections, elaborations, meaningless additions.” In addition to this, accent is another challenge for them. The speaker can use the American or the British or Australian accent. Also, natural dialogues are full of hesitations, pauses, different intonation.

The third problem is the listener. It is known that foreign language learners are not familiar enough with clichés and collocations in English to predict a missing word or phrase. “Lack of sociocultural, factual and contextual knowledge of the target language can present an obstacle to comprehension because language is used to express its culture” [2].

The fourth problem is the physical setting. Noise, including both background noises on the recordings and environmental noises can take the listener’s mind off the content of the listening passage. Listening material on tape or radio lacks visual and aural environmental clues. Not seeing the speaker’s body language and facial expressions make it more difficult for the listener to understand the speaker’s meaning. Unclear sounds resulting from poor-quality equipment can interfere with the listener’s comprehension. What can teachers do to help learners master the difficulties?

Not all the problems described above can be overcome. Certain features of the message and the speaker, for instance, are inevitable. But this does not mean that the teacher can do nothing about them. S/he can at least provide the learners with suitable listening materials, background and linguistic knowledge, enabling skills, pleasant classroom conditions and useful exercises to help them discover effective listening strategies. Typically, teachers do some pre listening and then have learners listen to the text and perform a variety of tasks. This approach tests learners’ listening comprehension, informing them that they are failed at certain

points, but doesn't teach how to listen. They cannot understand the reason, what went wrong with their listening and how it could be repaired.

Unfortunately, most ESL teachers have not got enough experience and cannot teach how to improve listening skills of pupils. I would like to present the result of my questionnaire about their teaching methods. The answers were different. Some teachers said that they play the recorder until the listeners can understand. Other teachers offered to explain the words and then do the listening task. After listening to their answers, I decided to find the best, right way. Field [6] calls for a diagnostic approach to listening which allows teachers and learners to attend to listening difficulties and practice strategies to diminish them.

Diagnostic approach

1. using incorrect answers to detect weaknesses, designing activities to help
  2. avoiding listening tasks that require memorization
  3. help learners develop a wider range of listening strategies
  4. providing top-down and bottom-up listening practice
- More detailed explanation of this approach is given below.

1. 1. Using incorrect answers to detect weaknesses, designing activities to help

When teacher plays the recording several times and asks to find the right answer, she misses the opportunity to determine the reason for the listening error. Teacher could identify problems by making a note of learners' lapses in comprehension as she checks their answers. She would then discuss with learners how they arrived at a certain answer, what prevented them from understanding parts of the text and what could be done to improve their listening facilities.

2. Avoiding listening tasks that require memorization

Understanding a message does not mean remembering every single detail, so learners' inability to recall information does not always signal a lack of comprehension. Instructors should try to include various types of comprehension questions that discuss the content of the text as well as invite learners to examine their listening performance. 3. Help learners develop a wider range of listening strategies

Ineffective listeners rely on a single strategy without changing or adapting it. To cope with difficult texts more effectively, learners should be exposed to a variety of strategies. Explaining, modeling, regularly practicing with learners how to set goals, plan tasks, self-monitor and evaluate helps them control their listening. Anticipating content, inferring, guessing and recognizing redundancies improve specific listening problems.

4. Providing top-down and bottom-up listening practice

The fact that listening is a complex multistep procedure that involves different types of processing implies that both top-down and bottom-up skills should be practices in the classroom. Bottom-up processing helps learners recognize lexical and pronunciation features to understand the text. To develop bottom-up processing, learners could be asked to:

- \*distinguish individual sounds, word boundaries and stressed syllables

- \*identify thought groups

- \*listen to intonation patterns in utterances

- \*identify grammatical forms and functions

- \*recognize contractions and connected speech

- \*recognize linking word

Top-down processing relies on prior knowledge and experience to build the meaning of a listening text using the information provided by sounds and words. Top-down listening skills include

- \*listening for gist, main ideas, topic and setting the text

- \*listening for specific information

- \*sequencing the information

- \*prediction

- \*guessing

- \*inferencing

### 3. CONCLUSION

It is essential that learners receive feedback immediately after the task, while they still remember the activity. At the same time, teachers do not want to embarrass weaker listeners in front of their classmates, so discussion of common errors and ways to avoid them should be impersonal and nonjudgmental. (There were some problems with instead of You made a mistake). Individual comments should be transparent, targeting specific strength and weaknesses and providing tips for improvement. A good strategy is to start with a general, positive statement (You did a great job understanding all the reasons the speaker stated), mention areas for improvement (I did not see you taking notes while listening. Did you pay attention) and finish with encouragement (You managed to understand a lot from the text) to sustain confidence and create a positive listening environment where learners are not afraid to try new strategies make guesses and discuss.

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