

## TEACHING LISTENING COMPREHENSION

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This article include methods and exercises teaching foreign languages through listening skills and effectiveness of the listening.

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Virtually everything students do in the foreign language classroom involves listening comprehension to some extent, and it seems difficult to know just where to incorporate listening comprehension exercises into the curriculum. The guideline should be the specific teaching point of the activity: exercises, on the phonological code (e.g., distinguishing voiced-voiceless, pairs as eyes-ice) should be done in conjunction with the pronunciation segment of the lesson, as should practice on cognate words which students recognize in their written form but not in their spoken version. Exercises on the grammatical code, such as distinguishing between he's eaten and he's eating, should be done in conjunction with the grammar segment. We also practice recognizing varieties of speech (the formal-informal distinction) in the grammar class as it is primarily the grammatical patterns which trouble the students, but such practice can equally well be done anywhere in the curriculum [4, 13]. Many listening comprehension exercises lend themselves particularly well to work in the language laboratory. The students are set a specific task such as answering questions or solving a problem. When they complete their task, they check their own work from an answer key so that they get immediate feedback on how well they have done. As with all work, it is important that the students have some tangible record of how they are performing, and the immediate correction of these exercises gives them an evaluation and record of their performance as well as responsibility for their own progress. If a laboratory is not available, a tape or cassette recorder in a quiet corner of the classroom is excellent for group work, and , teachers who are not native speakers of English should especially try to use as many exercises as possible which have been recorded by native speakers.

There are a general set of principles for teaching listening comprehension (LC)

1. Listening comprehension lessons must have definite goals, carefully stated. These goals should fit into the overall curriculum, and both teacher and students should be clearly cognizant of what they are.

2. Listening comprehension lessons should be constructed with careful step by step planning. This implies, according to Morley, that the listening tasks progress from simple to more complex as the student gains in language proficiency; that the student know exactly what the task is and is given directions as to "what to listen for, where to listen, when to listen, and how to listen."

3. LC lesson structure should demand active overt student participation. She states that the "most overt student participation involves his written response to the LC material," and that immediate feedback on performance helps keep interest and motivation at high levels.

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4. LC lessons should provide a communicative urgency for remembering in order to develop concentration. This urgency, which along with concentration is a key factor in remembering, should come not from the teacher, but from the lesson itself. This is done by giving the students the writing assignment before they listen to the material. (It serves the same function as the "before" questions in the reading class.)

5. Listening comprehension lessons should stress conscious memory work. One of the goals of listening is to strengthen the students' immediate recall in order to increase their memory spans. In Morley's terms "listening is receiving, receiving requires thinking, and thinking requires memory; there is no way to separate listening, thinking, remembering."

6. Listening comprehension lessons should "teach," not "test." By this, Morley means that the purpose of checking the students' answers should be viewed only as feedback, as a way of letting the students find out how they did and how they are progressing. There should be no pass/fail attitude associated with the correction of the exercises [1, 140-143].

Typically the format of a listening comprehension exercise consists of a passage of oral language of various types narration, description, directions, etc.--and a set task for the students to complete as an indicator of the degree of their comprehension. Common tasks are answering questions, solving problems, taking dictation, and even drawing pictures to correspond to the information given.

The steps of a listening comprehension exercise are similar to a pronunciation lesson:

1. Selection of the teaching point
2. Focusing of students' attention
3. Listening and completion of set task
4. Feedback on performance

Step 1: Selection of the teaching point

The subsequent list of techniques for specific teaching points will suggest range of items students need to practice on. The important 'joint to be aware of is that structure and vocabulary be controlled so that exercises are not beyond the students' level of proficiency.

Step 2: Focusing of students' attention

The students must be aware of the purpose of the exercise in general and the nature of the specific task in particular before they listen to the passage. An easy way to alert them to what they are going to do is simply to say: "Today you're going to listen to an exercise which will help you understand native speakers outside the classroom," or "Today you are going to listen to an exercise which will help you to be able to follow a classroom lecture." The students should be given whatever written material is necessary for them to complete their task before they listen to the passage; they should know before they listen whether they are going to answer comprehension questions (and if so what those questions are) or to draw a picture. There should always be an example at the beginning of the exercise to help those who may not have understood the verbal directions [2, 101].

Step 3: Listening and completion of exercise

If teachers read the material to the class, they must take great care to read with normal speed and intonation. Students always ask teachers to speak or read slower, but such requests must be resisted. Slowing down tends to distort stress and intonation, but most of all it gives the students no practice in understanding normal speech, which after all is the purpose of the exercise. Rather than slowing down, teachers can play or read the exercise over again. The number of times students need to listen to an exercise depends on the length and difficulty of the exercise, on the nature of the set task, and always on the students' proficiency. If the task, can be completed during the listening, and the listening is relatively easy, once is enough. If the students must recall facts in order to answer questions after having listened, they may need to hear the passage more than once. The students themselves are the best judge of how many times they should listen to an exercise. If they have difficulty with a passage, they will want to listen more than once; if they find a passage easy, listening more than

once will be very boring, and they should be encouraged to give their opinion freely about the number of times they want to hear a specific exercise.

**Step 4: Feedback on performance**

The easiest way for students to receive feedback on their performance is to supply them with an answer key and have them correct their own answers. The teacher should regularly check on their progress so that recognition can be given to those who do well and help given to those who are having difficulty.

Techniques for listening comprehension can be classified according to the various teaching points: (1) exercises on the phonological code, (2) on the grammatical code, (3) on them essayed the sentence level, (4) on variations of language style, or (5) on the total meaning of a passage or communication situation. Each point needs to be taught in increasing complexity as the students progress in their learning, i.e., advanced students will still need work with the grammatical and phonological codes [3, 89], but the structures will be more complex, and beginning students should also be given an introduction to other than formal spoken style. Some exercises, however, such as taking notes from lectures and listening to radio programs, are not feasible with beginning students because they are not proficient enough in English. The following activities have been organized according to teaching points, and the order coincides roughly with increased proficiency.

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