

DIFFERENT WAYS OF IMPROVING LISTENING SKILL IN LEARNING FOREIGN LANGUAGES

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Abstract:

This article provides information about the ways of improving language skills which are the basis of learning foreign languages, as well as importance of four language skills. It also suggests tips for choosing effective tasks related to listening in the learning process.

Key words: producing language, text types, spoken language, speeds of speech, introductory activity, main activity, utterances, well organized, connected speech, authentic material, completing tables

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Listening is one of the four language skills: reading, writing, listening and speaking. Like reading, listening is a receptive skill, as it involves responding to language rather than producing language. Listening involves making sense of the meaningful sounds of language. We do this by making use of context, language and our knowledge of the world. Listening involves understanding spoken language. Spoken language is different from written language.

The differences between spoken and written language.

Written language	Spoken language
stays on the page; doesn't disappear	disappears as soon as it is spoken. sometimes it is spoken fast and sometimes slowly, with AR without pauses.
uses punctuation and capital letters to show sentences	indicators sentences and meaningful groups of words through stress and intonation.
Consists of letters, written words and sentences, and punctuation combined together into text.	consists of sounds, single words, sentences, utterances (complete sense units) and included sentences joined together in connected speech.
often has no visual support.	the speaker uses body language to support his / her communication; for example, gestures (moves of hands or arms to help people understand us), and facial expressions (the expressions on our faces).
is usually quite well organized: sentences are complete, follow one another in a logical sequence and are joined to	is not so well organized; e.g. it concerns interruptions, hesitations (pausing when speaking because you're not sure what to

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previous or following sentences. topics are usually separate from one another	say or how to say it), repetitions and frequent changes of topic.
usually uses quite execute vocabulary and more complex grammar	often uses rather general vocabulary and simple grammar.

As we can see, spoken language is generally less planned and less well structured than written language. There are very good reasons for this. When we speak we usually don't have time to organize our thoughts and our language before, so we just say things as we think of them. Also when we listen, we need to listen to simply structured messages. As spoken texts usually disappear as soon as they are said, they need to be simple enough for us to process and understand in the time that is available. We can see that written and spoken language have different features, because they are produced and understood in different types of circumstances. Their features respond to these circumstances. To understand spoken language we need to be able to deal with all the characteristics of spoken language listed in the table above.

Conversions in spoken language concern examples of include sentences, utterances, hesitations, judicial topical change, simple grammar and general vocabulary. We make sense of it partially through our understanding of language but also through making use of the context the language is spoken in and our knowledge of the world. In this, example, our knowledge of relationships between fathers and sons, and of children's attitudes to homework, may give us some help in understanding, but if we know the exact context of the conversation (e.g. where it took place, the father's and son's body language, their attributes to homework, their relationship), we would understand more.

Like written language, spoken language has different text types, e.g. conferences, stories, announcements, songs, instructions, lectures and promotions. Generally, they contain different ways of organizing language and information. Different grammatical patterns, a particular range of vocabulary, different interaction patterns, fewer or more participants, etc. Learning to listen invents learning to be able to understand a range of required (suitable) text types.

Listening also involves understanding different speeds of speech and different accents. Some people speak more slowly and with more pauses. Others speak fast and / or with few pauses. Features such as speed of delivery and accent are part of connected speech. Spoken language in which words join together to form a connected stream of sounds. Other features of connected speech are word and sentence stress, linking sounds and words together and the use of contracted forms. One reason why learners have problems understanding spoken language is because they are not used to dealing with features of connected speech.

But we do not listen to everything in the same way. There are several different listening subskills. The subskill we use depend on our reason for listening. We might listen for gist/global understanding, specific information, detail or to within attitude (listening to see what attitude a speaker is expressing), other ways of listening are listening intensively and extensively. Our reason for listening influences the amount and kind of information we need to listen for. So, for example, when listening to a train announcement for specific information we need to hear some times.

The activities in a listing lesson often follow this pattern:

- In the classroom, we can give learners the opportunity to listen to many sources of spoken language, for example the teacher, other learners, visitors, CDs, DVDs. This exposes learners to a range of accents, speeds of delivery, text types and listening skills.

- When we listen to a recording we can't see the speaker's body language or the context he/she is speaking in, and we can't ask the speaker to repeat or explain what they said. This makes listening to recordings more difficult than listening to live speakers. For this reason, it is a good idea to help students listen to recordings by pre-teaching key words, setting pre-listening tasks, focusing initially on gist listening to establishing context, and playing the recording a second or even a third time.

- Some listening texts in coursebooks are authentic material, i.e. they contain all the features of real spoken language. Other texts are written especially for language learners and are graded to make them simple enough for particular levels of learners. Authentic texts allow learners to develop strategies for dealing with the challenge of real language, while simplified texts (texts that have been made easier) allow them to build up their confidence.

- Understanding and showing you have understood are not the same thing. For example, maybe you can understand all a story, but you can't tell the story. This means that learners may have understood something but be impossible to explain what they have understood. Tasks such as completing tables, true/false, ticking correct answers in lists, and putting events in order allow learners to show whether they have understood or not, without needing to use much language.

- We have seen that there are many different aspects to listening, for example identifying different phonemes and other features of connected speech. A teacher can focus on these through a listening text or may sometimes prefer to do short activities just focusing on one of these aspects, e.g. a 5-minute activity moment minimum pairs, word stress, sentence stress or dictation.

- We can make a difficult text easier for learners to understand by giving them easy listening tasks, or we can make easier text more difficult by giving them harder listening tasks.

To conclude, we can see that listening involves doing many things sides understanding the grammar, vocabulary and functions of what we hear. It also involves dealing with the characteristics of spoken language; using the context and our knowledge of the world; understanding different text types; understanding different speeds of speech and accents, making sense of connected speech and using appropriate listening submissions.

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