

TRAINING IN LISTENING: METHODS AND MATERIALS

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Abstract

The overall goal of any language teaching programme is to develop a basic practical communication ability in hearing and speaking. English, being the medium of instruction, leaves the teacher (especially the primary school teachers) with the arduous responsibility of introducing the concept of listening to their pupils. After highlighting some of the basic concepts of listening, the primary concern of this paper is to expose teachers and teacher-trainers to some beneficial pedagogic approaches to the teaching of listening to beginners.

Introduction

English Language is the de-facto official language of government and administration in Nigeria. Its prominence within literature, media mass communication, historical and socio-political hemisphere will remain in Nigeria for unforeseeable future.

When and how should we begin training a child in listening? An approach that is formal and systematic favours an early start on the argument that the teacher has the major role to play in the instructional setting.

Listening Defined

Listening is "the process of hearing, identifying, understanding and interpreting the spoken language" (Lewis, 1958). Petrie (1961) defined it as "composite process by which oral language communicated by some source is received, critically and purposefully attended to, recognized and interpreted (or comprehended) in terms of past experiences and future experiences".

The effective listener will develop the necessary skill in order to decode message and to encode the appropriate feedback. It is clearly impossible to expect a pupil to produce a sound which does not exist in his mother tongue without first of all providing him with a model, because it is not possible to produce satisfactorily what one has not heard. The first logical step therefore, in attempting to achieve oral fluency or accuracy is to consider the learner's ability to listen. In this case, both intensive and extensive listening practice should be part of the arm our of a language teacher. The National Policy on Education states that education in Nigeria is no more a private enterprise, but a huge government venture involving current massive investment.

By implication therefore, selection of methods, medium and materials for teaching must therefore be done in consonance with the overall philosophy and objectives. Southgate (1970) refers to this selection as "the three M's".

Method: Can be defined in the restricted sense, to represent different ways of commencing listening instructions, e.g. lectures, conversations, prediction/anticipation, etc.

Medium: On the other hand influences the method.

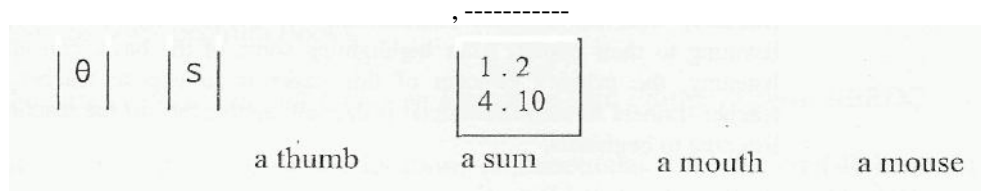
Materials: Materials are the end products of both method and medium. These are supporting apparatus like pictures, tape recorders, charts, etc.

Training the Young Listener

There are various techniques and methodologies that can be employed in order to enhance the pupils' listening proficiency depending on the maturity of the learners (here, specially the elementary pupil).

a) Discriminating Between Homophones and Like-Phonemes: The teacher of listening should pronounce sounds accurately himself so as to enable the learner produce them correctly too. For

elementary students there is a need for illustrations with the aid of picture dictionaries or cardboard drawings, e.g.



The teacher as well engages the pupils in the practice of homophones whereby he could get them to listen carefully for the sounds in a given passage and also ask them to choose the best appropriate word among the pair-words, like 'meat' and 'meet', 'fit' and 'feet', 'park' and 'pack', 'heart' and 'hat', and 'hut', 'phase' and 'face' etc. This is a good way to reinforce learning.

b) Discourse in Lexis and Grammar: The teacher may be aware that his pupils cannot understand ordinary informal speech as used by the native speaker. In this case, his aim is to create a more general familiarity with the phonological characteristics of conversation stress, rhyme, intonation and also the lexis and grammar necessary for discourse. The teacher will set the class to listen to a passage of natural English speech suitable to their level, or a direct transcript of a sportsman conversation recorded on tape which should be played to the class.

c) Story Telling: The teacher himself is the source of model in story-telling. Narrating short stories in the classroom exposes the child to a genuine natural environment of the aural stimuli.

The pupil's vocabulary is hereby reinforced by hearing unfamiliar structures and technical words, idioms, proverbs and passives. Story-telling, especially appealing to a younger age-group should be made to include considerable proportion of unknown lexis and untaught structures. At lower levels, learners cannot be expected to 'organize' mentally what they hear without considerable support like pictures in a correct sequence of story. Later on, as the learner's proficiency develops, the task will gradually become more language-based, eventually, requiring students to construct a framework of meaning for themselves, and to make inferences and interpret attitudes as well as understand explicitly stated facts (Rost, 1990).

d) Drills on Colloquial Vocabulary: In preparing children for the use of informal speech, the main part of the teacher would be to present authentic tapes of English Native speakers talking together, which is a much more effective and convincing way of enhancing accurate listening. Words like, 'don't', 'can't', 'doesn't', 'aren't', 'fagged-out', 'vamoose', 'shit' may be new to the young learner.

The teacher can also record from a variety of sources like television and radio broadcasts, advertisements, recordings from BBC World Service, etc. These recordings have to be made available to the learners to listen at their own speed and time.

At the most sophisticated level, this can be done in the language laboratory which should have a library facility equipped with tapes for extensive listening. Once the vocabulary has widened, the pupils can be trained to make predictions and guesses by anticipating the next word to come. This drill is most appropriate at the upper elementary level.

e) Exercise and Questions: The pupils may be given various activities to perform based on what they were able to listen and comprehend. These may range from the simplest yes/no answers to questions and true/false, blank-filling and picking out particular facts as well as multiple choice questions can also be employed.

Recommendations

1. We need more resources in teaching reading comprehension effectively. Materials like Video, TV or other audio equipment should be provided adequately because they do help in capturing other non-linguistic information.

2. Students should be encouraged to become active participants in listening exercise and consequently develop their own task and materials.
3. It is more appropriate to grade tasks of listening as a starting point from lower to higher order so as to make sure that global understanding of the whole concept of listening is achieved.
4. For the benefit of those children who are being exposed to English for the first time in school, an adequate basis for pre-listening activities should be established so that they may have a point of reference.
5. It is important that learners are exposed to the international nature of everyday conversation quite distinct from fixed dialogues.

Conclusion

Listening has a number of roles to play within a language course. This paper does not in any way exhaust the various possibilities to teaching listening to beginners. Rather, the stand of the paper is that for the Nigerian context, methods and materials have to be adopted to suit the requirements of children of English as a Second Language, especially when many learners do not have much opportunity to interact with native speakers, let alone travel to English speaking countries.

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