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TEACHING LISTENING

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Abstract. Listening really deserves very close attention during the teaching process of a foreign language. It is one of the main reasons for offering the students a chance to listen to spoken English and hear different varieties of pronunciation and accents rather than just the voice of the teacher. It also develops the students' abilities to understand and respond to spoken language. The differences lie not only in the way the sounds are pronounced, but also in grammar (the use of "shall" in northern varieties compared with the use in Standard English, the southern BBC type variety, the grammatical coherent use of "done" and "I done it" in non-standard English). The given paper also makes a systematization of the main principles in teaching listening and gives a review for each of them. When being applied into practice, the theory may not work properly, so there are different scenario such as replaying, offering the written text, role-playing and other methods.

Keywords: *audio file, listen, method, principles, students, task, teacher.*

Rezumat. Audierea cu adevărat merită o atenție sporită în procesul de predare a unei limbi străine. Acesta este unul dintre motivele principale de a oferi studenților șansa să audieze engleza vorbită și să asculte diferite varietăți de pronunțare și accente în afară de însăși vocea profesorului. Audierea totodată dezvoltă abilitățile studenților de a înțelege și a răspunde unei limbi vorbite. Diferența însă constă nu doar în modul în care sunetele sunt pronunțate, dar, de asemenea, și în partea gramaticală (utilizarea verbului "shall" în varietățile de pronunțare din partea de nord, în comparație cu engleza literară, pronunțarea tip BBC din partea de sud, corectitudinea gramaticală a utilizării participiului trecut "done" și expresia "I done it" din engleza neoficială). Lucrarea, de asemenea, vine cu o sistematizare a principiilor care stau la baza procesului de audiere și totodată oferă un rezumat pentru fiecare dintre ele. Când este aplicată în practică, teoria poate da greș, astfel, fiind aplicate diferite scenarii, cum ar fi audierea repetată, oferirea textului, schimbul de roluri și alte metode.

Cuvinte-cheie: *audiere, fișier audio, însărcinare, metodă, profesor, principii, studenți.*

Introduction

The main method of exposing students to spoken English is through the use of recorded material which can exemplify a variety of topics such as advertisements, news, broadcasts, poetry reading, plays, speeches, telephone conversations and all manner of spoken exchanges. Teachers can imitate all these but good records are far more powerful.

One of the major reasons for teaching listening is that it helps students to acquire language subconsciously even if teachers do not draw attention to special features. Listening to appropriate audio files provides such exposure and students get vital information not only about grammar, vocabulary but also pronunciation, rhythm, pitch and stress [1 - 3].

The dilemma about the use of authentic listening material is just as strong in listening as it is in reading. If we play an audio file of a political speech to complete a task for beginners, they won't understand a word. One could argue that such a tape would at least give them a feel of the sound of the language but it is difficult to see what they would get out of it. If on the other hand we give them a realistic (though not authentic) record of a telephone conversation, they may learn more about the language and start gaining confidence as a result.

Everything depends on the level and the kind of tasks that go altogether with the audio file. There may be some authentic material which is usable by beginners such as pre-recorded announcements, telephone conversations, messages etc. More complex material may be appropriate for elementary students provided that the questions they are asked do not demand detailed understanding [4]. Advanced students may benefit from written material if it is interesting and subtle enough and the tasks to go with it are appropriate for their level.

Teaching Principles

There are some main principles behind the teaching of listening.

Principle 1: The playing device is as important as the record.

However good your record is, it will be useless if the device it is played with has a poor speaker. You need to assure that the player can be heard all around the classroom.

Principle 2: Preparation is vital.

Teachers and students have to be prepared for listening because of the special features. Teachers need to listen to the audio file all the way through before they take it into the class. Thus they will be prepared for any problems, noises, accents etc. that can come up. Altogether with that they can evaluate whether the students will be able to cope with the record and the task to go with it.

Students need to be made ready to listen. This means they will need to look at pictures, discuss the topic, or read questions first, for example, to be in a position to predict what is coming next. Teachers will do their best to get students to get students "engaged" with the topic and the task so that they really want to listen [5].

Principle 3: Once will not be enough.

There are almost no occasions when the teachers will play the audio file only once. Students will want to hear it again to pick up the things they missed the first time. You may want them to have a chance to study some of the language features on the record. The first listening is often used just to give students an idea of what the listening material sounds like so that subsequent listening is easier for students. Once students listened to an audio

file two or three times, however, they will probably not want to hear it too many times more.

Principle 4: Encourage students.

Students should be encouraged to respond to the content of a listening, not just to the language. As with reading, the most important part of listening practice is to draw out the meaning what is intended, what impression it makes on the students. Questions like “Do you agree?” are just as important as questions like “What language did he use to invite her?”

Principle 5: Different listening stages demand different tasks.

In order that there are different things we want to do with a listening text, we need to set different listening stages (Pre-listening, while-listening, post-listening) [6-7], i.e. for the first listening, the tasks need to be fairly straightforward and general. Thus, the student’s general understanding and response can be successful and the stress associated with the listening process, can be neutralized.

Principle 6: Good teachers exploit listening texts to the full.

Listening often seems to be reduced to text followed by questions to be answered, true or false activities or multiple-choice tasks. If teachers ask students to invest time and emotional energy in a listening task, and if they themselves have spent time choosing and preparing the listening, then it makes sense to use the record for as many different applications as possible. Thus, after an initial play of the audio file, the teacher can play it again for various kinds of study before using the subject matter, situation or typescript for a new activity. The listening then becomes an important event in a teaching sequence rather than just an exercise by itself [8-12].

An alternative scenario

Sometimes, despite the teacher’s best judgment and effort, or the judgment of a text book writer, listening material seems too difficult for students to understand. However, many times the teacher plays the audio file (and after the third or fourth listening both, the teacher and the students will be desperate), it just does not work. There are a number of alternatives to this scenario, which might help.

Thus, if students find an interview difficult, they can be given the questions first and encouraged to role play the interview before listening to it. This will have great predictive power. The students can be also given a straightforward task which does not demand too much detailed understanding [13]. A useful possibility is to ask them to describe the speaker, the sound of the voice will suggest sex, age, status etc. That is you may present as well dialogue as monologue. Also, instead of playing the whole tape, teachers can just play the first part and let the students predict what is coming next. The written text can be also cut into pieces and the task of the students would be putting them in the right order as they listen, they could be given the whole script beforehand or during the listening by having some words or phrases blanked out. Finally, not in the last moment students should be given the key vocabulary of the text. They can then predict what the audio file will be about and, as they know some words, they may well understand more [14 - 15].

Conclusion

After all the teacher is the one who provides listening practice in which the speaker can uninterruptedly follow the listeners’ interest, attention and as it follows, the comprehension, by adding any necessary explanations, repetitions, reformulations, and where the teacher can give the student signals both non-verbal (e.g. nodding, frowning) and

verbal (e.g. "I see", "So, do you mean?", "I'm not sure what you mean by") – so that the listener is not just a passive, more or less successful, receiver, but understanding is mutually built.

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