

Different types of Listening Materials

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Abstract

Listening texts can be classified according to the contents, complexity, authenticity, sphere, theme, quantity, etc. The linguistic and thematic level of listening input and its adequacy to general teaching purposes or concrete goals of each lesson are defined by a sort of criteria. The main language and content elements of the particular listening text mostly provide the style and type of working on it, though this does not exclude the general approach.

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According to A. Anderson a recent survey of the preferences for particular published listening materials among EFL teachers working in Britain, Europe, and Japan suggests that the following are among the reasons for teachers' satisfaction with particular listening materials:

- 1) good for starting discussions
- 2) can be used for self-access learning
- 3) contains a variety of tasks
- 4) entertaining and amusing
- 5) easy to use
- 6) practices guessing from context
- 7) uses authentic material
- 8) integrates different skills

The selection of listening activities (making a list of the participants or giving their description) is affected not only by the level of the material itself, but by the language level of learners as well.

Quite often it is necessary to pre-teach lexical and grammatical units owing to the linguistic difficulties, sphere and topic of the text. Sometimes it is better to explain the meaning of new language elements at while listening level. Some of the texts demand working on their stylistic peculiarities beforehand especially if learners are quite ignorant to them.

Dialogue and **monologue** are universally acknowledged to be the main types of oral comprehension. Most of the listening text should contain dialogues for general ELT course, as they are the significant part of authentic

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communication. But at high level of ELT and ESP the role of monologue (presentation, report, and lecture) is enormously increased. Thus the great consideration should be conveyed to the use of these listening texts.

Spoken texts are categorized into three broad types: **static**, **dynamic** and **abstract**. The structure of static text (such as one describing an object or giving someone instructions on how to assemble a model) is rather complicated and the comprehension of such listening input is practically unpredictable without visual support. To the contrary, it is much easier to percept and understand a dynamic text (involving shifts of scene and time, drifting the people or characters of the text in and out of the story) even when visual clues are not available. But if the details are demanded to be memorized it is useful for learners to make up a plan by putting down key words (in this case learners create visual support themselves).

As for abstract texts (focusing on someone's ideas, beliefs, theories, problems, opinions), they are pretty difficult to be responded even in native language without visual aids (picture, scheme, table, chart etc.).

Students can benefit not only from audio recordings but from the experience of listening to their teacher and each other. Both have advantages and disadvantages.

Advantages of recorded materials:

1) Recorded materials enable a non-native English teacher to provide the audience with the variety of English sounds, voices and accents. The used material is authentic by means of language and situational context.

2) Distribution of recorded materials lets the teacher or a student to work with them according to their desire in the way to stop, restart or repeat for several times (in terms of analyzing or imitating unfamiliar speech patterns).

3) They can be used automatically by a student any time.

4) While listening to the recorded materials students listen to several speakers, their discussions and conversations.

5) Video based listening practice suggests videotape advantages and additionally provides the variety of visual support (gestures, mimics) typical for real life and necessary for students to decipher speakers' message and interrelations.

6) The contents, spheres, themes and phonetic input of recorded materials is more colorful compared to "real life" listening comprehension.

7) It is easier to choose and prepare listening activities beforehand with the help of recorded materials.

Disadvantages of recorded materials.

1) There is no straight communication between the listener and the speaker. Thus, there is no way to regulate the speed, rhythm and other peculiarities of speech, to work out the compensating strategies (i. e. stating the message contents with the help of the partner) within students.

2) Audio and video materials are not always of a very good technical quality. This fact can make students rather confused and distract from productive and successful studying.

Advantages of live listening

- 1) The choice of the listening input (acceptability of the language),
- 2) The ability of determination (in case it is necessary),
- 3) Minimal technical background noise,
- 4) The ability of using visual aids (mimics and gestures),
- 5) Reaction of the speaker.

Disadvantages of live listening

1) Live listening situations cannot be exactly identical in occurrence. To the contrary from recorded materials small segments cannot be repeated or speech production cannot be stopped artificially.

2) Incomplete utterance of speakers (especially when students listen to each other). Though, it has already been mentioned that the main goal of listening comprehension practice is not only the perception of original model production but also the formation of the skills that make students understand any kind of foreign speech (including non-native international language speakers).

As for the concept of authenticity, we can speak about the authenticity of the language used in the listening materials and about the authenticity of the materials themselves. According to S. Haines this is a kind of spoken or written language used by the native speaker. And authentic are the materials taken from real life communication (newspaper articles, tourist informational leaflets, radio and TV programs, “real-life” conversations.) and not materials especially designed for teaching purposes.

The alternative to authentic materials in teaching processes is the material deliberately simplified to match the definite level of learners at the definite stage of teaching. These are the texts concentrating on the language (lexical, grammatical) input that has to be acquired. The “fight” against non-authentic materials started in the 1970-s with the change to communicative approach as strictly controlled structural materials designed according to audio-lingual method were found to be inadequate.

Most modern English language teachers wish to provide their students with realistic listening materials that go next to reality in order to handle with real life listening communications. It led to the great interest to authentic materials that contain natural spoken language and mostly are recorded in the way that speakers know nothing about it. Thus, students keep in touch with natural “part of life” which is very significant and necessary for successful language acquisition.

S. Haines considers the following to be the advantages of authentic materials:

- 1) Authentic texts have a communicative purpose unrelated to the language teaching itself,
- 2) Most texts are aimed at particular target listeners, who may be expected to react to the text in some way,
- 3) Authenticity itself is attractive to learners,
- 4) Authentic texts help students to develop listening strategies,
- 5) Heard English Language is real, and not the one devised by the course book author or artistically performed by professional actors. This fact

builds up the interest in students to tackle apparently “impossible” real life situations.

6) As the speech is the perfect example of real spoken language there are many forms and ways of working on it: Paying attention to the accent, working out the pitch of the voice, activities based on commonly used and useful phrases or expressions.

Disadvantages of authentic materials:

- 1) The enormous difficulties that sometimes affect the motivation of students and lower the teaching process because of the negative influence,
- 2) The low level of matching with teaching program. (It is not easy to choose the material matching with necessary topics, vocabulary and grammar),
- 3) Most of the taught language rules are broken in them,
- 4) They have much background and technical noise,
- 5) Authentic texts are soon out of date,
- 6) Much authentic material is ambiguous (because of the ignorance of wider and further context),
- 7) They are too long to be used in classroom conditions.

These disadvantages are not characteristic to any of the materials designed for special teaching purposes, though they are less natural or interesting. As for the students confidence it is encouraged because of the acceptable language input of deliberately devised texts. We should also not underestimate the feeling of pride of the learner whose language acquisition level is rather limited and who manages to decode much more information from authentic materials than his vocabulary stock can afford. Consequently, both types of material (authentic or non-authentic) can be satisfactorily used in teaching, but as authentic ones match the final goals of education the amount of used texts should increase for authentic.

The typical characteristic features of non-authentic materials represent both advantages and disadvantages:

- Unnatural rhythm, speed and intonation;
- Artificial articulation, fluent speech;
- Structural language, complete sentences, logical information;
- Non-existence of background noise.

All these criteria apply to the easiest and better ways of foreign language acquisition. On the other hand, learners get used to listen to unnatural speech.

The choice of authentic and non-authentic texts is a rather complicated and problematic issue. Many methods specialists insist on using only one type. But this position is not acceptable not regarding a compromise. Both types of listening input can be distributed in the language teaching process because of their positive and negative aspects, though the proportion should be changed making non-authentic materials vanish from time to time and level by level. There are many interesting and high-motivated texts among authentic materials such as some radio or TV programs (spoken language of programs differs in speed, rhythm, lexical and grammatical supply), short thematic (often humoristic) stories, rhymes, general educational programs, weather forecast, sport comments, relatively

difficult are talk shows, movies, songs, etc.

T. Farrell recommends language teachers using TV soap operas for teaching listening comprehension skills and states his advice by the following:

- 1) In this new age of satellite TV, many countries around the world get variety of programs of different TV channels and companies.
- 2) TV and video materials can be used during the lesson, as well as separately (autonomously).
- 3) TV soaps (in comparison with other TV programs) have enormous visual clues.
- 4) TV soaps are usually programmed on a regular sequential basis.
- 5) Even though the language of TV soaps is not completely authentic, it is maximally approached to it. The used lexical and grammatical elements are rather simple and the speed of the speech - slow and understandable.
- 6) TV soaps provide the variety of real life situational topics.
- 7) Their entertaining and amusing effect is so profound that while listening to them the viewers are not tense and subconscious acquisition of the language is held successfully.

According to K. Galvin there are five main reasons for the listening which will generally fall under one or other of these categories:

- a) To engage in social rituals,
- b) To exchange information,
- c) To exert control,
- d) To share feelings
- e) To enjoy yourself.

P. Ur suggests the following listening situations for teaching listening comprehension purposes:

- Listening to the news (weather forecast, sports report announcements, etc.) on the radio,
- Discussing work, current problems with family or colleagues,
- Making arrangements (appointments, exchanging news),
- Chatting at a party or other social gathering,
- Hearing announcements over the loudspeaker (at a railway station or airport),
- Receiving instructions, requirements, tasks,
- Attending a lesson, seminar,
- Being interviewed, interviewing,
- Listening to recorded or broadcast songs,
- Attending a formal occasion (wedding, prize-giving, other ceremonies),
- Getting professional advice (from a doctor, etc.),
- Being tested orally in a subject study.

Listening situations for which we should prepare listeners include:

- a) Listening to live conversations in which one takes no part. This is usually referred to as "eavesdropping". A person may find him \ herself listening to a conversation because something in what is being said attracts his \ her attention and makes him \ her want to hear more. The listener may not be especially interested in the overall topic and may have no particular purpose for listening. The listener, who is probably unaware of the context and perhaps unfamiliar with the speakers,

manages to sort out the message without being able to seek for clarification or repetition of any of the points.

b) Listening to announcements (at airports, railway stations, etc.) when the listener is interested almost exclusively in extracting and confirming the relevant information. The listener might just keep the newly acquired information in mind, by repeating or jotting it down in order not to forget it.

c) Listening to the news, the weather forecast, etc. where the objective is again to extract clearly stated information, but the motivation and purpose for listening may be different. In the case of the news, the listener who wants to know all the main items of news for that particular day will listen equally attentively to the whole bulletin, while the person who is only interested in one or two of the topics covered will pay little or no attention to the items, in the latter case, the listener needs to be able to distinguish between the points safe to ignore what is being said. This skill of knowing when to listen also applies when a listener turns on the weather forecast but is only interested in the information about a particular region or a specific time of the day. If he \ she knows the order in which the weather forecast details are normally presented on the radio, then it is easier for the listener to recognize the signals and to judge when to pay attention.

d) Watching the news, the weather forecast, etc. on television, when the visual support is a help to the viewer-listener, who either sees the speaker and so gets help in understanding what is being said from such things as the facial expression, the direction of the eyes and the movement of the hands, or sees scenes and probably written adds which relate to the topic being spoken about and so gets help in contextualizing the utterances.

e) Listening to the radio for entertainment, where the listener often has very limited knowledge of what is going to be said or who is going to make the utterances. This is probably one of the most difficult listening situations as the language student who can appreciate and enjoy such listening input should have reached a high level of listening skill.

f) Watching television for entertainment, this is, of course, much easier than simply listening to the radio. The paralinguistic signals given by the speaker (the nods, the hand movements, the smiles, the frowns) all assist the viewer, as do the pictures seen on the screen. In fact, it is quite possible to follow what is happening on some TV programs. However, some amusing, or disastrous, misinterpretations can also occur.

g) Watching a live performance of a play (perhaps in school hall) where the objective is nearly always entertainment. The person watching the play is likely to be interested in the story and the characters and the interactions between them and will remain an outsider. But he \ she is greatly helped if the actors deliver their lines clearly and the production are such that especially significant utterances are given prominence.

h) Watching a film in a cinema, where the viewer is again an outsider, but can see facial expressions and gestures more clearly than in the theatre. The second advantage is in better volume quality.

i) Listening to records (of songs, etc.), where the sound of the music interfere with the sounds of the words, but where the rhythm and the rhyme of the

lyrics sometimes help the listener to predict what will come next. Most people listen to songs for pleasure.

j) Following a lesson (in a school or college where English is a second language), where the listener may need to grasp concepts, and to distinguish between main and subsidiary ideas. During lessons, listeners may be required to answer questions, to write notes, to carry out practical tasks, to discuss the issues, and so on. Listening in the classroom is often integrated with other activities.

k) Listening a lecture (a report of a foreign guest or a lecture in a college where English is the main instruction) where the objective is to try to understand the content of the lecture, although on many occasions retention of that content is also required and so listeners take notes to which they can refer later. To take good notes, listeners need to be able to recognize the signals used by the speaker to indicate that he/she is making a particularly important point, moving on to another point, making a contrast, or expressing cause and effect.

l) Listening on the telephone (to take a message, or simply to hold a conversation), where the listener is unable to see the speaker and may, in addition, have problems in distinguishing the spoken sounds because of interference and distortion.

m) Following instructions (given, for example, by a sports coach or dance instructor), where visual support makes the activity much easier but the requirement for immediate action intensifies the listener's attention. Sometimes it is useful to ask listeners follow instructions by little segments.

n) Listening to someone (a political leader, for example) giving a public address, where the listener is usually interested in the personal views and attitude of the speaker to the actual spoken topic. The points the speaker makes are listened to, but in this situation the way in which they are presented and the tone of the delivery are also important within the words.

To conclude the article we have to mention that the variety of listening input should be reflected in the process of teaching listening comprehension, and that the use of visual aids in most of the texts of different nature and complexity level is completely effective, if not necessary.

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