Aural Comprehension Instruction: Principles and Practices

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In "Aural Comprehension Instruction: Principles and Practices," Morley first traces the changing patterns of second language listening instruction, outlines four generic instructional models, and discusses some of the psycho-social dimensions of listening. She then goes on to present suggestions for developing activities and materials for coursework, including detailed guidelines for developing a self-access self-study listening program.

INTRODUCTION

During the past thirty years, theory and practice in language learning and language teaching have changed in some fundamental ways. In retrospect, the four themes that dominated the Second AILA (International Association of Applied Linguistics) Conference in 1969 (Cambridge, England) seem to have been prophetic in pointing the way toward trends in second/foreign language (S/FL) education during the last quarter of the twentieth century. They heralded new views on the importance of

1. individual learners and the individuality of learning;
2. listening and reading as nonpassive and very complex receptive processes;
3. listening comprehension's being recognized as a fundamental skill;
4. real language used for real communication as a viable classroom model.

Every facet of language study has been influenced by these trends, but none more dramatically than listening comprehension. In the 1970s, the status of listening began to change from one of neglect to one of increasing importance. Instructional programs expanded their focus on pragmatic skills to include listening as well as reading, writing, and speaking. During the 1980s special attention to listening was incorporated into new instructional frameworks. Prominent among these were formats that featured functional language and communicative approaches. Throughout the 1990s, attention to listening in language instruction increased dramatically. Aural comprehension in S/FL acquisition became an important area of study.

Although aural comprehension is now well recognized as an important facet of language learning, much work remains to be done in both theory and practice. Unfortunately, as Brown (1987) observed, a significant number of published courses on listening comprehension and classroom practices in many schools in many countries continues to demonstrate that listening is still regarded as the least important skill.

The first three parts of this chapter discuss general aspects of listening and language learning. (See Peterson's chapter in this volume for additional information.) The last three sections outline principles and guidelines for developing and/or adapting listening comprehension activities and materials. Lesson suggestions are given for class, small-group, and pair work and for individualized self-study using equipment in the classroom, at home, or in a language laboratory setting.
TRACING THE HISTORY: LISTENING AND LANGUAGE LEARNING

Today the centrality of listening in language learning is well established. An appropriate aural comprehension program that targets learner listening at all levels of instruction is an essential for second language competence. Aural comprehension establishes a base for the development of oral language within the "speech chain" of listening and speaking (Denes and Pinson 1963, p. 1). It is important to note that multiple benefits accrue to the learner beyond the obvious improvements in listening skills. In particular, listening comprehension lessons are a vehicle for teaching elements of grammatical structure and allow new vocabulary items to be contextualized within a body of communicative discourse.

Making the Case: The Importance of Listening in Language Learning

It has taken many years to bring the language teaching profession around to realizing the importance of listening in second and foreign language learning. As observed by Rivers, long an advocate for listening comprehension, "Speaking does not of itself constitute communication unless what is said is comprehended by another person... Teaching the comprehension of spoken speech is therefore of primary importance if the communication aim is to be reached" (1966, pp. 196, 204). The reasons for the nearly total neglect of listening are difficult to assess, but as Morley notes, "Perhaps an assumption that listening is a reflex, a little like breathing—listening seldom receives overt teaching attention in one's native language—has masked the importance and complexity of listening with understanding in a non-native language" (1972, p. vii).

In reality, listening is used far more than any other single language skill in normal daily life. On average, we can expect to listen twice as much as we speak, four times more than we read, and five times more than we write (Rivers 1981; Weaver 1972).

Emerging Recognition of the Importance of Listening in Second/Foreign Language Study

It is easy for us to take listening for granted, often with little conscious awareness of our performance as listeners. Weaver commented on the elusiveness of our listening awareness: "After all, listening is neither so dramatic nor so noisy as talking. The talker is the center of attention for all listeners. His behavior is overt and vocal, and he hears and notices his own behavior, whereas listening activity often seems like merely being—doing nothing" (1972, pp. 12–13).

Much of the language teaching field also has taken listening for granted until relatively recent times (but see Gouin 1880; Nida 1953; Palmer 1917; Sweet 1899). Modern-day arguments for listening comprehension began to be voiced in the mid-1960s and early 1970s by Rivers (1966) and others. Newmark and Diller underscored "the need for the systematic development of listening comprehension not only as a foundation for speaking, but also as a skill in its own right..." (1964, p. 20). Belasco expressed his concerns as follows: "I was rudely jolted by the realization that it is possible to develop so-called 'speaking ability' and yet be so virtually incompetent in understanding the spoken language... [Students] were learning to audio-comprehend certain specific dialogues and drills, but could not understand [the language] out of the mouths of native speakers" (1971, pp. 4–5). Morley decried the fact that "virtually no specialized textbook materials exist in the area of intermediate and advanced listening" (1972, p. vii), and Blair (1982) observed that special attention to listening just didn't "sell" until recent times.

Four Perspectives—Four Models of Listening and Language Instruction

In the English language teaching programs of the 1940s, 1950s, and 1960s, neither the British Situational Approach to language teaching nor the American Audiolingual Approach paid much attention to listening beyond its role in
grammar and pronunciation drills and learners' imitation of dialogues. The language learning theories of those times高度重视 listening skill, i.e., the importance to listening beyond the sound discrimination associated with pronunciation learning. Listening, along with reading, was regarded as a "passive" skill and was simply taken for granted.

However, slowly and steadily, more attention has been given to listening comprehension. Today, the role of listening and the purpose of listening comprehension instruction in the ESL curriculum, can be one of four different perspectives. A generic instructional model for each perspective that reflects underlying beliefs about language learning theory and pedagogy is outlined below.

Model #1 Listening and Repeating

Learner Goals To pattern-match; to listen and imitate; to memorize.

- **Instructional material**: Features audiolingual style exercises and/or dialogue memorization; based on a hearing-and-pattern-matching model.
- **Procedure**: Asks students to (a) listen to a word, phrase, or sentence pattern; (b) repeat it (imitate it); and (c) memorize it (often, but not always, a part of the procedure).
- **Value**: Enables students to do pattern drills, to repeat dialogues, and to use memorized prefabricated patterns in conversation; enables them to imitate pronunciation patterns. Higher level cognitive processing and use of prosodic as well as language structuring are not necessarily an intentional focus.

Model #2 Listening and Answering Comprehension Questions

Learner Goals To process discrete-point information; to listen and answer comprehension questions.

- **Instructional material**: Features a student response pattern, based on a listening-and-question-answering model with occasional innovative variations on this theme.

Model #3 Task Listening

Learner Goals To process spoken discourse for functional purposes: to listen and do something with the information, that is, carry out real tasks using the information received.

- **Instructional material**: Features activities that require a student response pattern based on a listening-and-using (i.e., "Listen-and-Do") model. Students listen, then immediately do something with the information received: follow the directions given, complete a task, solve a problem, transmit the gist of the information orally or in writing, listen and take lecture notes, etc.
- **Procedure**: Asks students to (a) listen and process information and (b) use the orally transmitted language input immediately to complete a task which is mediated through language in a context in which success is judged in terms of whether the task is performed.
- **Value**: The focus is on instruction that is task-oriented, not question-oriented. The purpose is to engage learners in using the informational content presented in the spoken discourse, not just in answering questions about it. Two types of tasks are a language use tasks, designed to give students practice in listening to get meaning from the input with the express purpose of
making functional use of it immediately and (b) language analysis tasks, designed to help learners develop cognitive and metacognitive language learning strategies (i.e., to guide them toward personal intellectual involvement in their own learning). The latter features consciousness raising about language and language learning.

Model # 4 Interactive Listening

Learner Goals To develop aural/oral skills in semiformal interactive academic communication; to develop critical listening, critical thinking, and effective speaking abilities.

- Instructional material: Features the real-time/real-life give-and-take of academic communication. Provides a variety of student presentation and discussion activities, both individual and small-group panel reports, that include follow-up audience participation in question/answer sessions as an integral part of the work. Follows an interactive listening-thinking-speaking model with bidirectional (two-way) listening/speaking. Includes attention to group bonding and classroom discourse rules (e.g., taking the floor, yielding the floor, turn taking, interrupting, comprehension checks, topic shifting, agreeing, questioning, challenging, etc.). (See Morley 1992 and 1995.)

- Procedure: Asks students to participate in discussion activities that enable them to develop all three phases of the speech act: speech decoding, critical thinking, and speech encoding. These phases involve (a) continuous on-line decoding of spoken discourse, (b) simultaneous cognitive reacting/acting upon the information received (i.e., critical analysis and synthesis), and (c) instant-response encoding (i.e., producing personal propositional language responses appropriate to the situation).

- Value: The focus here is instruction that is communicative/competence-oriented as well as task-oriented. Learners have opportunities to engage in and develop the complex array of communicative skills in the four competency areas: linguistic competence, discourse competence, sociolinguistic competence, and strategic competence (Canale and Swain 1980).

SOME PSYCHOSOCIAL DIMENSIONS OF LANGUAGE AND THE LISTENING ACT

The Dynamic Process of Communicative Listening: Active, Not Passive

Listening, along with reading, has been labeled a “passive” skill. Nothing could be further from the truth. Anderson and Lynch (1988) reject a conceptualization of listening as a passive act, calling it a “listener-as-tape-recorder” explanation. They argue that such a perspective fails to account for the interpretations listeners make as they hear the spoken text according to their own purposes for listening and their own store of background knowledge.

Implications for Instruction One of the obvious implications for instruction is to bring students to an understanding that listening is not a passive skill, but an active receptive skill which needs special attention in language study. This goal can be accomplished gradually as a part of listening skill-building activities. Learners can be guided to realize that achieving skill in listening requires as much work as does becoming skilled in reading, writing, and speaking in a second language.

Listening in Three Modes: Bidirectional, Unidirectional, and Autodirectional

If we consider the roles we play in our listening interactions, we can identify three specific communicative listening modes: bidirectional, unidirectional, and autodirectional.
Bidirectional Listening Mode  The obvious mode is two-way or bidirectional communicative listening. Here the reciprocal speech chain of speaker/listener is easily observed (Denes and Pinson 1963). Two (or more) participants take turns exchanging speaker role and listener role as they engage in face-to-face or telephone verbal interaction.

Unidirectional Listening Mode  A second mode is one-way or unidirectional communicative listening. Auditory input surrounds us as we move through the day. The input comes from a variety of sources: overheard conversations, public address announcements, recorded messages (including those on telephone answering machines), the media (e.g., radio, television, films), instructional situations of all kinds, and public performances (e.g., lectures, religious services, plays, operas, musicals, concerts). As we hear speakers but are unable to interact, we often talk to ourselves in a reactive or self-dialogue manner as we analyze what we hear. We may subvocalize or even vocalize these responses.

Autodirectional Listening Mode  The third communicative listening mode is autodirectional. We can think of this as self-dialogue communication in which we may not be aware of our internal roles as both speaker and listener/reactor in our own thought processes. Sometimes we re-create language internally and “listen again” as we retell and relive communicative interludes. Sometimes we simply attend to our own internal language which we produce as we think through alternatives, plan strategies, and make decisions—all by talking to ourselves and listening to ourselves.

In all of these communicative listening modes, notice that listening is not a passive experience. Each listening mode is a highly active, clearly participatory, verbal experience.

Implications for Instruction  S/FL learners need to have instruction and practice in both the bidirectional communicative listening mode and in the unidirectional mode. In addition, self-dialogue in the autodirectional communicative listening mode should not be ignored. It is an important feature of language behavior which should be discussed with students. Autodirectional “talk” is something which learners should be led to develop as a skill in its own right, as well as a tool to be used in connection with bidirectional and unidirectional listening.

Psychosocial Functions of Listening: Transactional Listening and Interactional Listening

Brown and Yule (1983a) suggest dividing language functions into two major divisions: language for transactional purposes and language for interactional purposes. They note that transactional language corresponds to Halliday’s notion of ideational, while interactional language corresponds to his term interpersonal (Halliday 1970, p. 143).

Transactional Language Function  Transactional language is message oriented and can be viewed as “business-type” talk with the focus on content and conveying factual or propositional information. Transactional language is used for giving instructions, explaining, describing, giving directions, ordering, inquiring, requesting, relating, checking on the correctness of details, and verifying understanding. The premium is on message clarity and precision. Speakers often use confirmation checks to make sure what they are saying is clear; they may even contradict the listener if he or she appears to have misunderstood.

Interactional Language Function  The most important difference between the two types of language use is that interactional language is “social-type” talk; it is person oriented more than message oriented. Its objective is the establishment and maintenance of cordial social relationships. Brown and Yule comment that a great deal of casual conversation contains phrases or echoes of phrases which appear to be intended more as contributions to a conversation than as instances of information giving. Important features of interactional language are those of identifying with the other person’s concerns, being nice to the other person, and maintaining and respecting “face.”

Implications for Instruction  Teachers need to provide practice experiences in both transactional talk and interactional talk. While the contrast
Psychological Processes: Bottom-Up and Top-Down Listening Schemata

In accounting for the complex nature of listening to understand spoken language, it is hypothesized that two different modes work together in a cooperative process. One is the externally based bottom-up mode while the other is the internally based top-down mode. (See Peterson’s chapter in this volume for more information.)

**Bottom-Up Processing** The bottom-up mode of language processing involves the listener playing close attention to every detail of the language input. *Bottom-up* refers to that part of the aural comprehension process in which the understanding of the “heard” language is worked out proceeding from sounds to words to grammatical relationships to lexical meanings. That is, the meaning of the message is arrived at, bottom to top, based on the incoming language data.

**Top-Down Processing** On the other hand, the top-down facet of listening involves the listener’s ability to bring prior information to bear on the task of understanding the “heard” language. This internal resource includes a bank of prior knowledge and global expectations about language and the world. It is used by the listener to make predictions about what the incoming message is expected to be at any point, and how the pieces fit into the whole. Chaudron and Richards (1986) note, “Top-down processing involves prediction and inferencing on the basis of hierarchies of facts, propositions, and expectations, and it enables the listener or the reader to bypass some aspects of bottom-up processing” (pp. 114-115).

**Implications for Instruction** Teachers need to provide students with practice in both kinds of language processing. Many published materials focus heavily on one or another of these processes, without necessarily labeling them as *top-down* or *bottom-up*.

Taking dual perspectives into account, Richards (1990) proposes a model of materials design for second or foreign language listening comprehension that combines language functions (interactional and transactional) and language processes (top-down and bottom-up). He observes that the extent to which one or the other process dominates is determined by (a) whether the purpose for listening is transactional or interactional, (b) what kind of background knowledge can be applied to the task, and (c) what degree of familiarity listeners have with the topic. He concludes:

Too often, listening texts require students to adopt a single approach in listening, one which demands a detailed understanding of the content of a discourse and the recognition of every word and structure that occurs in a text. Students should not be required to respond to interactional discourse as if it were being used for a transactional purpose, nor should they be expected to use a bottom-up approach to an aural text if a top-down one is more appropriate (p. 83).

**Richards’s Functions/Processes Chart** Richards combines the functions and the processes into the following very useful chart. It provides teachers with a way to construct a listening lesson which can be cross-classified according to the demands of both the listening function involved and the listening process which can be expected to be most prominently involved.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>INTERACTIONAL</th>
<th>TRANSACTIONAL</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>BOTTOM-UP</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
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<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>TOP-DOWN</strong></td>
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Aural Co
Richards gives an example for each of the four cells as follows.

In the bottom-up mode:
Cell #1: Listening closely to a joke (interactional) in order to know when to laugh.
Cell #3: Listening closely to instructions (transactional) during a first driving lesson.

In the top-down mode:
Cell #2: Listening casually to cocktail party talk (interactional).
Cell #4: Experienced air traveler listening casually to verbal air safety instructions (transactional) which have been heard many times before.

Other examples of transactional uses are instructions, descriptions, lectures, and news broadcasts. Other examples of interactional uses are greetings, small talk, jokes, and compliments. Richards notes that in many situations both interactional and transactional purposes are involved and suggests that effective classroom participation requires both.

1. Interactional—to interact with the teacher and other students while accomplishing class tasks (i.e., “classroom” talk).
2. Transactional—to assimilate new information, construct new concepts, and acquire new skills.

Linguistic and Nonlinguistic Cues to Affect
As the old saying goes, it’s not what you say, it’s how you say it! But how can ESL and EFL listeners learn to recognize and interpret aspects of the how as well as the what in two-way and one-way oral communication? How can they become skilled at processing both nonlinguistic and linguistic affective information?

In bidirectional interactive communication, messages are conveyed in at least three ways: linguistic (i.e., the words and their meanings), paralinguistic (i.e., vocal meaning) and extralinguistic (i.e. the meaning transmitted through various aspects of body language). In unidirectional communication, the visual cues of extralinguistic information may be missing, and the listener must then rely on only the linguistic and paralinguistic information.

Linguistic Messages (the Words) Meanings begin in people. But sometimes meanings don’t come across clearly, and we hear speakers protest, “But that’s not what I meant.” In an attempt to convey an intended meaning, speakers choose words and arrange them into sentences or partial sentences, groups of sentences, and larger pieces of monologue or dialogue discourse.

Both the words chosen, and their intrasentential and intersentential arrangements, map affect (i.e., feelings) onto the linguistic information. As speakers do this, they may or may not be conscious of either the nature or the strength of the affective coloring; on the other hand, they may use it deliberately, with careful design.

Examples:
- That was an (interesting/excellent/good/fair/so-so/terrible) movie.
- I like him a lot but . . .
- Even though she’s my best friend, I must tell you that . . .

Clearly, affective interpretation must be a part of listening comprehension activities. This means that instructional experiences must be contextualized and must reflect real-world situations and feelings.
Paralinguistic Messages (Vocally Transmitted Meaning) The very way the voice is used in speaking transmits meaning. That is, the way words, sentences, and groups of sentences in spoken language are programmed vocally enables them to carry information about how they are to be interpreted. Although the speaker may not be aware of it, the speaker’s attitude toward what he or she is saying is transmitted by vocal features. In the important realm of intonation, the work by Brazil, Coulthard, and Johns (1980) and Brown, Currie, and Kenworthy (1980) has explored a variety of aspects of intonational meaning in oral discourse. The vocal elements that map affective information onto the linguistic message are those beyond the neutral patterns of basic stress, rhythm, and intonation. Nuances of meaning can be transmitted by subtle changes in tone quality, rate, rhythm, stress, and many other features.

Extralinguistic Messages (Meaning Transmitted through Body Language) Speakers also convey meaning through body language. That is, simultaneous physical messages are being transmitted with the words and vocal information and must be interpreted by the listener. Once again, the speaker may or may not be fully aware of this aspect of his or her communication. Elements involved include body postures, body movements, body and hand gestures, facial expressions, facial gestures, eye contact, and use of space by the communicators. It is important to help students learn the meanings of specific features of body language in the second language; they also need to recognize that body language differs greatly between languages and between cultures.

Intellectual, Emotional, and Moral Attitudes

As noted above, an important part of communication is the expression and comprehension of attitudes. Van Ek (1976) lists six basic language functions, including three which are attitudinal: intellectual, emotional, and moral attitudes.

Intellectual Attitudes These include expression and comprehension of agreement/disagreement; confirming/denying; accepting/declining; forgetting/remembering; possibility/impossibility; capability/incapability; uncertainty; obligation, permission; and more (pp. 45–47).

Emotional Attitudes Included in this area are expressing pleasure/displeasure; interest/lack of interest; surprise; hope; fear; worry; satisfaction/dissatisfaction; disappointment; preference; gratitude; sympathy; intention; wants and desires; and more (pp. 47–48).

Moral Attitudes Moral attitudes are expressed in the language of apologizing; expressing approval/disapproval; appreciation; indifference; regret; and more (p. 48). (For additional information see Munby 1978; Wilkins 1976).

DEVELOPING LISTENING COMPREHENSION ACTIVITIES AND MATERIALS

This second section focuses on instructional considerations, while keeping in mind the following three important points about listening as a language act.

1. Information Processing Listening comprehension is an act of information processing in which the listener is involved in bidirectional communication, or unidirectional communication, and/or autodirectional communication.

2. Linguistic Functions Broadly speaking, real-world spoken communication can be viewed as serving two linguistic functions: interactional and transactional.

3. Dimensions of Cognitive Processing The cognitive processing of spoken language appears to involve simultaneous activation of both top-down and bottom-up engagement in order for listeners to construct what they believe to be the intended meaning of the spoken message.

With these features of listening as a language act in mind, we begin with a discussion of three important principles of materials development. Next, we outline six kinds of communicative outcomes, with lesson suggestions for each. In the final section we present some suggestions.
for creating a self-access, self-study listening center. Central to the underlying belief system reflected in this chapter is a communicative language teaching perspective which values meaningful tasks and communicative activities. (See Savignon’s chapter in this volume.)

2. Transferability/Applicability
Whatever is relevant is also likely to have potential for transferability. Insofar as possible, at either the content level or the outcome level, or both, listening lessons need to have transferability/applicability value, internally (i.e., can be used in other classes), externally (i.e., can be used in out-of-school situations), or both. In order to foster transfer of training, the best listening lessons present in-class activities that mirror real life. For example, the use of radio or television news broadcasts in adult classes can provide not only a real experience in listening comprehension, but such lessons also contain content that can be applicable outside of class as a source of conversation topics.

3. Task Orientation
In formal language classes for teenage and adult students and in language activity lessons for children, it is productive to combine two different kinds of focus: (1) language use tasks and (2) language analysis activities.

Notions of task have developed out of communicative teaching and materials production. Johnson defines task-oriented teaching as teaching which provides “actual meaning” by focusing on tasks to be mediated through language, and in which success is judged in terms of whether the tasks are performed (Brumfit and Johnson 1979, p. 200). Maley and Moulding focus on instruction which is task-oriented not question-oriented, providing learners with tasks which use the information in the aural text, rather than asking learners to “prove” their understanding of the text by answering questions (1979, p. 102). Candlin and Murphy note, “The central process we are concerned with is language learning, and tasks present this in the form of a problem-solving negotiation between knowledge that the learner holds and new knowledge. This activity is conducted through language in use, which may, itself, be seen as a negotiation of meaning” (1987, p. 1).

3a. Language Use Tasks
The purpose here is to give students practice in listening for information and then immediately doing something
with it. This kind of lesson features **specific** Listenn-and-Do communicative outcomes such as these:

- Listening and performing actions (e.g., command games and songs such as "Do the Hokey Pokey," "May I?" "Simon Says").
- Listening and performing operations (e.g., listening and constructing a figure, drawing a map).
- Listening and solving problems (e.g., riddles, intellectual or logic puzzles, real-life numerical, spatial, or chronological problems).
- Listening and transcribing (e.g., taking telephone messages, writing notes).
- Listening and summarizing information (e.g., outlining, giving the gist of a message either verbally or in writing).
- Interactive listening and negotiating of meaning through questioning/answering routines (e.g., questions for repetition of information, questions for verification, questions for clarification, questions for elaboration).

These listening and language use tasks help students to build the following two things:

(i) **A Base of Content Experiences** This will help them to develop expectancies, increase their vocabulary, and build a repertoire of familiar top-down networks of background knowledge in the second language. This, in turn, increases predictive power for future communicative situations, including *schemata* (i.e., the larger-order mental frameworks of knowledge) and *scripts* (i.e., the situation-specific mental frameworks that allow us to predict actors, events, action sequences, and alternative outcomes). These include formulaic speech routines and assumed elements in the physical setting.

(ii) **A Base of Operational Experiences** This will help learners to acquire a repertoire of familiar information-handling operations in the second language that are applicable to future communicative encounters in that language.

**3b. Language Analysis Tasks** The purpose here is to give students opportunities to analyze selected aspects of both language structure (i.e., form) and language use (i.e., function) and to develop some personal strategies to facilitate learning. (See Peterson's chapter in this volume.) The goal is consciousness raising about language, which can be accomplished through which Wenden and Rubin (1987) term awareness-raising tasks. Some language analysis tasks can be designed to help students become knowledgeable about how language works. Activities can focus on one or two points at a time and can include attention to a variety of features of grammar, pronunciation, vocabulary, and discourse as well as sociolinguistic and strategic features (Canale and Swain 1980). Specific activities can include:

- Analysis of some features of "fast speech"; tasks can help students learn to deal with the rapid patterns of contextualized speech.
- Analysis of phrasing and pause points; attention to the ways the grouping of words into functional units (one that "follow" grammar) can be used to facilitate listening; "chunking" the input into units for interpretation.
- Analysis of both monologues and dialogue exchanges, with attention to discourse organizational structures.
- Describing and analyzing sociolinguistic dimensions, including participants and their roles and relationships, settings, purpose of the communicative episodes, and expected outcomes.
- Describing and analyzing communicative strategies used by speakers to deal with miscommunication, communication breakdowns, distractions, etc.

Recordings of real-life conversations, talks, and discussions can be used to introduce listening analysis tasks. (See Morley 1984 and 1985.) Lynch (1983), Ur (1984), Davis and Rinvuluci (1988), and Mendelsohn (1995) all give a variety of language analysis tasks.

**Communicative Outcomes:**

**An Organizing Framework**

It is clear by now that a Listen-and-Do format—that is, information gathering and information using—is recommended for listening instructional...
activities in the ESL or EFL curriculum. Listening comprehension in today's language curriculum must go far beyond a 20-minute tape a day or a paragraph or two read aloud followed by a series of "test" questions about the factual content.

Listen-and-Do in the listening comprehension context implies an outcome "objective." The purpose of oral communication in the real world is to achieve a genuine outcome; it may be very simple (e.g., enjoying sociable conversation) or it may be very complex (e.g., understanding intricate instructions), but an outcome is achieved. This same attention to outcome must be a part of any listening comprehension activity planned for use in the second language learning context.

Minimum requirements for two-way oral communication are two active participants and an outcome. Participants alternate roles of speaker-sender and listener-receiver. One-way communication requires one active participant (a listener-receiver), one long-distance participant (a speaker-sender), either "live" or recorded, and an outcome.

What is an outcome? According to Sinclair (1984), an outcome is a realistic task that people can envision themselves doing and accomplishing something. An outcome is an essential component in both two-way and one-way communication listening comprehension activities.

Six broad categories of outcome are discussed below. Each, of course, can be subdivided into more narrowly focused specific outcomes, which can be modified to suit a given student group. Lesson outcomes can be graded toward gradual expansion of difficulty, complexity, and increasing performance expectations for students.

A lesson may contain more than one outcome, although too many outcomes for a given activity may be overwhelming. Any outcome can be used at any age, as long as it is a part of a task that is appropriate to the age, interests, and language proficiency level of the learners.

There is overlap between some outcome categories, and no attempt is made here to make them mutually exclusive. They are presented as an organizing framework for consideration by teachers in developing class or listening library materials.

**Outcome 1. Listening and Performing Actions and Operations**

This category includes responses to things such as directions, instructions, and descriptions in a variety of contexts. Examples include listening and

- Drawing a picture, figure, or design.
- Locating routes of specific points on a map.
- Selecting a picture of a person, place, or thing from description.
- Identifying a person, place, or thing from description.
- Performing hand or body movements as in songs and games such as "Simon Says" or "Do the Hokey Pokey."
- Operating a piece of equipment such as a camera, a recorder, a microwave oven, or a pencil sharpener.
- Carrying out steps in a process such as a math problem, a science experiment, or a cooking sequence.

**Outcome 2. Listening and Transferring Information**

Two kinds of information transfer are featured: spoken-to-written (i.e., hearing information and writing it) and spoken-to-spoken (i.e., hearing information and transmitting it in speech).

**Spoken-to-written** The following are some activities for spoken-to-written practice.

- Listening and taking a message (in person or by telephone) by transcribing the entire message word for word if it is very short or by writing down a list of the important items if it is long; the purpose is to give another person a clear sense of the message.
- Listening and filling in blanks in a gapped story game in order to complete the story.
- Listening and completing a form or chart in order to use the information for a later purpose, such as making a decision or solving a problem.
- Listening and summarizing the gist of a short story, report, or talk in order to report it to a third person.
Listening to a "how to" talk and writing an outline of the steps in the sequence (e.g., how to cook something, how to use a piece of equipment, how to play a game) in order to carry out the action.

Listening to a talk or lecture and taking notes in order to use the information later for some a purpose.

A popular activity called **jigsaw listening** is suggested by Geddes and Sturridge (1979). In one form of jigsaw listening, small groups of students listen to different parts of a set of information and write down the important points of their portions. Then they share their information with other groups so that a story or a sequence of actions can be completed, a problem solved, or a decision made.

**Spoken-to-spoken** Jigsaw listening also can be used with a spoken-to-spoken transfer of information. Other activities in this mode are the following:

- Listening to directions, then passing them along to a third person who must use the information to carry out a task.
- Listening to part of a story and repeating it to others.

(For examples see Davis and Rinvolucri 1988, pp. 29-30 and Morley 1984, pp. 68-69.)

**Outcome 3. Listening and Solving Problems**

Many kinds of activities for either groups or individuals can be developed in this category. One is games and puzzles:

- Word games in which the answers must be derived from verbal clues.
- Number games and "story" arithmetic problems.
- Asking questions in order to identify something, as in "Twenty Questions" or "Animal, Vegetable, or Mineral."
- Classroom versions of "Password," "Jeopardy," or "Twenty Questions" in which careful listening is critical to the successful completion of the game.

- Minute mysteries in which students, listening to the teacher or a tape, read a very short mystery story; this can be followed by small group work in which students formulate solutions.
- A jigsaw mystery in which each group listens to a tape which provides one of the clues. Groups then share information with everyone in order to solve the mystery.

More demanding varieties of problem solving are found in riddles, logic puzzles, and other intellectual problem-solving activities.

Real-world problems can include:

- Comparison shopping tasks using recorded conversations for practice (e.g., asking for prices from several rental car agencies, florist shops, or barber shops, then choosing the best bargain), followed by similar field trips.
- Short descriptions of court cases, with listeners asked to make a decision and defend it.

Field trips can be assigned in which pairs of students go out to do comparison shopping for products or services, then report back to the entire class.

**Outcome 4. Listening, Evaluating, and Manipulating Information**

These outcomes are intellectually challenging ones in which the listener evaluates and/or manipulates the information received in some manner. Lesson activities for individuals, pairs, or small groups can take many directions, including the following:

- Writing information received and reviewing it in order to answer questions or solve a problem.
- Evaluating information and reviewing it in order to make a decision or develop a plan of action.
- Evaluating arguments in order to take a position.
- Evaluating cause-and-effect information.
- Making predictions from information received.
Summarizing or giving the gist of information received.

- Evaluating and combining or condensing information.
- Evaluating and elaborating or extending information.
- Organizing unordered information into a pattern of orderly relationships: chronological sequencing, spatial relationships, cause-and-effect, or problem-solution.

Field trips are challenging and useful for intermediate and advanced learners. Students can be assigned fact-finding, information-gathering tasks for panel presentations or use in a project. At more advanced levels, preparing for and carrying out a debate or discussion assignment on current local, national, or international issues can use both aural and written information and involves the student in evaluating and manipulating information.

Outcome 5. Interactive Listening-and-Speaking: Negotiating Meaning through Questioning/Answering Routines

Here the focus of the outcome is on both the product of transmitting information and the process of negotiating meaning in interactive reciprocal listener/speaker exchanges. Initially, in small groups, (i.e., four to ten students), one student can give a brief presentation such as a short set of locally relevant announcements, a five-minute “how-to” talk, a personal story or anecdote, or an explanatory talk using visual aids. (See Morley 1992.)

Either during or immediately after the presentation, each listener is required to ask at least one question in a questioning/answering routine. At first listeners can be given a card listing a question type and assigned the responsibility for asking that kind of question. The listener-questioner must continue with follow-up questions as necessary until both participants are satisfied that clear meaning has been negotiated. This means that the speaker is also a listener and must keep questioning the listener-questioner to make sure of the nature and intent of the his or her questions. Videotape or audio recordings of these class sessions with subsequent viewing and discussion of selected segments quickly demonstrates the importance of negotiation of meaning and how much time and energy must sometimes be expended in order to arrive at a consensus on meaning.

A wide variety of question types can be used in this kind of activity, but for each lesson it is useful to have only a limited number of question types used. Some examples are the following:

- **Repetition**—questions asking only for verbatim repetition of information (“Could you repeat the part about xx?”).
- **Paraphrase**—questions asking only for restatement in different words, often words that are simpler and easier to understand (“Could you say that again?” “I don’t understand what you mean by xx.”).
- **Verification**—questions seeking confirmation that the information was understood correctly by the listener (“Did I understand you to say that xx?” “In other words, you mean xx.” “Do you mean xx?”).
- **Clarification**—questions seeking more details or an explanation of an item (“Could you tell me what you mean by xx?” “Could you explain xx?” “Could you give us an example of xx?”).
- **Elaboration**—questions that ask for additional information on a point introduced in the presentation (“Could you tell us more about xx?”).
- **Extension**—questions that ask for information on a new point, one that was not introduced in the presentation (“What about xx?” “How is this related to xx?”).
- **Challenge**—questions that challenge points given or conclusions drawn (“What did you base xx on?” “How did you reach the conclusion of xx?” “How did you xx?” “Why did you xx?”).
Outcome 6. Listening for Enjoyment, Pleasure, and Sociability

Tasks with this outcome can include listening to songs, stories, plays, poems, jokes, anecdotes, or, as suggested by Ur, “general interesting chat improvised by the teacher” (1984, p. 29). Some of the activities in this category come under the heading of interactional listening, different from the previous outcome categories, which by and large are focused on transactional outcomes.

For these tasks, Ur notes that setting any outcome other than enjoying, for instance, may become superfluous or even harmful to the completion of the outcome of just enjoying.

Ur makes an especially good case for informal “teacher-chat” as an excellent source of listening material and observes that it serves as a relaxing break from more intensive work. She suggests “teacher-talk” on personal topics (e.g., your favorite hobby, plans for the future, your opinions on topical or local issues) (pp. 62–63). She notes that this, in turn, may lead naturally to “student-talk” on similar subjects for loosely structured and comfortable communicative classroom interludes, ones that afford student “practice” opportunities in both listening and speaking.

SELF-ACCESS/SELF-STUDY LISTENING AND LANGUAGE LEARNING

The purpose of a self-access/self-study resource is to provide an inviting listening center within a conventional language laboratory or a broader language resource center. This self-study facility needs to offer a wide choice of appealing audio and video materials on a variety of topics and at a range of proficiency levels. Books to accompany tapes are useful, of course. However, in addition to (or in place of) commercial books, a library of listening materials might also include carefully designed worksheet materials that present listening tasks for self-study, pair-study, or small-group study, both on the school premises and for checkout and home use.

Materials for free-listening time (like free-reading time) can be provided and students can be given a chance to self-select from a listening library that includes stories and poems, talks and lectures, plays and literary classics, participatory games, puzzles, riddles, and read-along or sing-along stories, songs, and games. Commercial audio- and videotapes can easily be adapted for listening library use. More innovatively, a collection of local audio or video recordings of conversations, songs, music events, lectures, or panel discussions can be compiled. Home videos can be an appealing addition to a listening library. Such locally produced auditory materials have a special relevance and applicability potential that commercial materials lack.

Setting Up a Self-Access/Self-Study Listening Resource Center

A self-access/self-study listening resource center can be started with a modest listening library of audio and video recorded material and the teacher-time needed to put materials into self-study packets or modules.

Ideally, listening materials can be made available to students in a special language learning center or multipurpose study room that also features reading and writing materials and has a teacher or monitor present at all times to guide students in the selection and use of materials and equipment.

Alternatively, self-access self-study materials can be used in a more conventional language laboratory setting. Whatever the setting, the most important point is that the individual learner has complete personal control over the materials. It is essential that students be able to control the source of input so that they can pace it—stop it, start it, replay it—at will. Such control allows students to regulate their own schedules of study, rather than having a rate and volume of auditory input imposed on them. This helps reduce the anxiety and pressure that many students, particularly beginners, seem to experience when listening in the second or foreign language. Some materials might be made available for checkout and home study. However, a study facility often has fewer distractions than a home or dormitory environment, and its atmosphere is usually more conducive to the self-discipline necessary for concentrated listening in the second or foreign language.

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The procedures for using self-access self-study materials might be organized in the following way:

1. Students check out a listening packet or module that contains the audio- or videotape, prelistening introductory material, worksheets (and perhaps some visuals), answer key (and perhaps a script), instructions, and postlistening tasks.
2. Students play the tape on their own schedule of starting, stopping, and replaying.
3. Students check their work themselves for verification of comprehension.
4. Students consult the teacher or monitor when necessary.

Self-access listening materials can be organized into self-study packets or modules of manageable lengths. They can be cross-referenced in a variety of ways to meet the needs of individual students or groups of students (i.e., content or topical groups, notional categories, functional categories, situational or activity categories, level-of-difficulty groupings, specific listening-task groupings, English for Specific Purposes groupings).

Modules that feature up-to-date, locally relevant, authentic aural texts are especially effective and are recommended wherever possible. In addition, segments from selected commercial listening materials can be adapted to fit into this format.

2. A focus on purposeful listening (a) in order to process information and immediately do something with the information, by performing a task of some nature, and (b) in order to analyze particular features of the message (i.e., linguistic features, sociolinguistic features, discourse features, strategic features), and (c) in order to build a base of content experiences and outcomes experiences.

3. A focus on a variety of practice materials that includes a mix of authentic, semi-authentic, and simulated language activities.

4. A focus on internal communicative interaction, as the listener receives language input (aurally and visually), restructures it, and makes a response that is either a reformulation of some of the information or an analysis of some of its features.

5. A focus on providing learners with verification of comprehension (i.e., immediate or only slightly delayed feedback) with self-check answer keys or scripts as needed.

6. A focus on encouraging guessing and following “hunches” when in doubt.

7. A focus on selective listening, ignoring irrelevant material, and learning to tolerate less than total understanding.

8. A focus on self-involvement with an emphasis on self-study and taking responsibility for one’s own work and pride in one’s accomplishments.

9. A focus on providing learners with less threatening listening/learning experiences; a self-study listening mode where students have the freedom to regulate their own work and can stop the tape, rewind, and replay as they wish.

10. A focus on integrating auditory and visual language by combining listening, reading, and writing, and observing relationships between spoken forms and written forms.

11. A focus on gradually increasing expectations for levels of comprehension (i.e., encouraging students to challenge themselves and to move themselves along toward increasingly demanding expectations).

12. A focus on the fun of listening!

Guidelines for Developing Self-Access/Self-Study Listening Materials

In addition to relevance, transferability, task orientation, and the communicative outcomes framework, the following guidelines are suggested as a reference in preparing self-access self-study listening practice materials:

1. A focus on listening as an active process with instant or only slightly delayed manipulation of the information received.
FINAL COMMENTS

Since the 1960s, the importance of listening comprehension in language learning and language teaching has moved from a status of incidental and peripheral importance to a status of significant and central importance. Whereas only a few instructional materials were available in the 1970s, today there are many texts and tape programs to choose from and, in general, materials are becoming more carefully principled, with serious attention to theoretical considerations. Each year more diverse materials are developed, and many now focus on the narrowly specified listening needs of particular groups of learners, including English for Specific Purposes.

Finally, it is important to emphasize that the S/FL listening curriculum cannot focus only on buying the right books and tapes. Skill building in listening comprehension is not something that can be accomplished in a half-hour lesson three times a week, nor can attention to listening be limited to language laboratory tapes. Listening, the language skill used most in life, needs to be a central focus—all day, every day—limited only by the availability of the target language in the school, the community, and the media. Listening instruction needs to include both two-way interactive listening activities and tasks and one-way reactive Listen-and-Do activities and tasks. Materials developers should pay careful attention to principles of design, communicative outcomes, language functions, language processes, and affective considerations.

SUGGESTED ACTIVITIES

1. Ask permission to observe two or three ESL or foreign language classes. Observe the nature of the interactions in the class. Note the amount of time in which students are engaged in listening and the amount of time they are engaged in speaking, reading, or writing.
2. Write a lesson plan that focuses on two or three ways to include specific listening opportunities in a class where the central focus is on another aspect of language learning.
3. Working in pairs, use the Richards matrix (Richards 1990) and come up with two or three examples for each of the four cells.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Characterize each of the three communicative listening modes: bidirectional, unidirectional, and autodirectional. From your own personal experience, give examples of each of these three kinds of communicative listening.
2. Discuss why listening has been called “the neglected skill” of language teaching.
3. For three days, keep a record of how much time you spend each day in each of the four skill areas: listening, speaking, reading, and writing. In small groups, make a composite of the times recorded for each of the four language skills.
4. Review the three principles of materials development discussed in this chapter. Give examples of ways they can be implemented in listening lessons.
5. Discuss the differences between interactional language use and transactional language use. Give examples from your personal experience and compare them with those given by others in your class.

FURTHER READING

This book stands back from the surface detail of comprehension materials and provides an overall perspective on listening as a communicative activity and as a language learning activity. It includes a research design focus.
Using an approach based on the analysis of conversational English, this book examines the nature of spoken language and presents principles and techniques for teaching spoken production and listening comprehension.
A very useful compendium of activities for planning language lessons with a listening focus.

An excellent collection of diverse topics in teaching second language listening. Contains many practical examples and suggestions for lesson development.

This is an easy-to-read article for the beginning TESL/TEFL student. It presents current perspectives in the area of ESL/EFL aural comprehension instruction.

Analyzes real-life listening characteristics and the problems encountered by language learners. Presents a wide range of exercise types, ranging from elementary to advanced, and appropriate for both adults and children.

Special periodical issues devoted to listening comprehension:

*Applied Linguistics* 7 (2), Summer 1986.
*Foreign Language Annals* 17 (4), September 1984.
*TESOL Newsletter* 19 (6), December 1985.