



Teaching English Listening through the Use of Authentic Material in Class

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Abstract

in the domain of communicative language teaching four language skills - listening, speaking reading and writing are of equal importance. Within the language teaching context teachers must focus continuously on these communicative skills. But research on listening in general language is very limited as the Cinderella skill in language teaching practice. Being one of the key skills for communication, listening refers to the ability of the learner to introduce and expose the language appropriately and purposefully in different communicative contexts.

The main goal of the current paper is to introduce and consider some methodological issues related to the development of the learners' listening skills through the use of authentic material in class.

Within the scope of this study we tried to observe and analyse the problem of its development, accentuating the significance of authentic material produced and used for real-life communicative purposes. Correspondingly different exercises and techniques have been elaborated and introduced to specify and highlight the effectiveness of teaching English listening through the authenticity.

Key words: *listening skill, authentic material, meaningful language practice, group task, authentic texts/topics/situations, self/peer assessment.*

The purpose of the article is to consider the issues related to the development of the learners' listening skills through the use of authentic material in class.

Within the language teaching context teachers must focus continuously on four language skills. Reading and writing together with speaking are frequently accentuated and assessed. Moreover, of the four language skills, listening is the least practised. Research on listening in general language is very limited as the Cinderella skill in language teaching practice. Listening as a major component in language learning and teaching first hit the spotlight in the late 1970s with James Asher's (1977) work on Total Physical Response, in which the role of comprehension was given prominence as learners were given great quantities of language to listen to before they were encouraged to respond orally. So, the teachers consider some specific questions about listening comprehension:

- What are listeners "doing" when they listen?
- What factors affect good listening?
- What are the characteristics of "real-life" listening?
- What are the many things listeners listen for?
- What are some principles of designing listening techniques?

How can listening techniques be interactive? Rost and Wilson present five predominant active-listening techniques frequently adopted by language teachers within language teaching process. [7]

Theoretical Framework	Focus
1. Affective frame	Focus on enhancing the listener's personal motivation and involvement.
2. Top-down frame	Focus on deepening the understanding of ideas and making stronger interpretations.
3. Bottom-up frame	Focus on perceiving sounds, recognising words and syntactic structures more accurately.
4. Interactive frame	Focus on building cooperation, collaboration and interdependence during the listening process.



5. Autonomous frame

Focus on developing effective learning strategies.

In teaching listening comprehension one of the most factors which should be paid attention by teachers is the material. One way to prepare English language learners to encounter with real language is to apply real language or authentic language material in class.

Writers define authentic material in different ways. D. Nunan defines authentic material as material not specifically designed for teaching purposes [6; p. 238-41]. McGrath and Foppoli state that authentic materials are designed to communicate to native users of the language, not for language learners. According to McGrath “authentic texts were written to convey information, transmit ideas, express opinions and feelings, entertain”. Combining these definitions we can consider that authentic materials are materials not specifically designed for language teaching and learning, everything that teachers use in class is originally intended for native speakers.

Several writers promote the general use of authentic material in language classrooms and specify many advantages that authentic material brings to learners as well as teachers. They insist that authentic material is important because it allows learners to connect to the real world outside the classroom, which gets them accustomed to listen to native as well as Language 2 speakers. Furthermore, the authors state that using authentic material motivates students, so teachers and students are more stimulated by authentic material than inauthentic material. Implementing different kinds of authentic material learners are introduced to language used by real speakers rather than scripted, graded or contrived material. This in turn better prepares learners for the language they will hear and use outside the learning environment. Based on these advantages, the inclusion of authentic material particularly in upper-secondary school listening lessons increases learner motivation.

We teachers are concerned about choosing materials and deciding how to use them. Before starting listening we must consider about what kind of recorded texts make good listening – authentic or scripted? Wilson suggests the following components for considering the level of their effectiveness:

Feature	Questions to ask
1. Interest	Will this be interesting for my students?
2. Cultural accessibility	Will my students understand the context and ideas?
3. Speech act/discourse structure	Does it discuss abstract concepts or is it base on everyday transactions?
4. Density	Does the information come thick and fast or are there moments in which the listener can relax?
5. Language level	Is the majority of the vocabulary and grammar appropriate for my students?
6. Length	Will I need to cut part of the recording because it is too long? Is it long enough?
7. Quality of recording	Is the recording clear? Will background noise affect comprehension?
8. Speed of speech	Do the speakers talk too fast for my students?
9. Number of speakers	Are there many voices, potentially causing confusion?
10. Accent	Is the accent familiar? Is it comprehensible?

[9; p. 33]

Most teachers use the material in meaningful and interactive ways in order to make learners acquire as much new knowledge of the target language as possible. So, to put another way, implementing authentic material in listening lessons equips learners with the listening skills required to participate and communicate in and for real-life purposes.

Authentic material can help students develop knowledge of language and the surrounding world so that they have the ability, desire and confidence to use English in different situations and for different purposes. Authentic material has the possibility to provide students with texts of different kinds and for different purposes. Besides, using authentic material can help the student become familiar with living conditions, attitudes, values and traditions, as well as social, political and cultural conditions in different contexts and parts



of the world where English is used. Actually, textbooks can do a good job at providing subject areas related to learners' educational lives, but no textbook can cater to every learners' social life, opinions, experiences and feelings, etc.

Of course, authentic materials are more interesting and students read them while travelling, studying abroad or using the language in other contexts outside the classroom. Authentic materials enable learners to interact with the real language and content rather than the form. Learners feel that they are learning a target language as it is used outside the classroom, in real life.

We know that classroom time is limited. So, teachers' work is just one of the learning resources for the students. Teachers should raise students' motivation to contribute active participation. On the other hand, he/she must raise the learner's cultural awareness and encourage them to learn the target culture by themselves.

Authentic materials can include:

- **Listening:** TV shows, radio, commercials, news broadcasts, documentaries, movies, phone messages, etc.
- **Visual:** photographs, art works, signs with symbols, postcards, picture books, etc.
- **Printed:** restaurant menus, newspaper articles, bulletin board advertisements, company websites, coupons, sales catalogues, travel brochures, maps, telephone books, signs, blogs, movie posters, food labels, etc.

Following steps are suggested for applying authentic material in class:

1. The teacher divides the whole class into four groups.
2. The teacher provides four topics for each group. Then they are expected to search as much information as possible on the selected topic. After this they should hold a discussion with their group members on the found information and decide how and who gives the report.
3. On the "report day" the four representatives give their reports one by one. Instead of reading the report, they are asked to retell what they have prepared. The rest of the students should regard this class as a listening practice and respond to it after the report.
4. When the reporter finishes, students can ask questions related to the report. If the reporter cannot give the answers, he/she can turn to his/her group members. The students may benefit in two ways if they carry on this plan. First, in the report section, students in fact make a listening class by themselves. Every student is getting involved in this process, so they are highly motivated and willing to listen to each other very carefully. Second, in the preparing process, students may read quite an amount of cultural information, and deal with various authentic materials. Their knowledge on culture is enriched. Day by day, when they come back in the listening classroom, they may find that the authentic listening materials are no longer so difficult, and when they go outside the classroom, they may find it easier to communicate with native speakers.

We can activate learners' listening skills in association with writing through the use of dictation exercises.

Davis and Rinvolucru state: "Decoding the sounds and recoding them in writing is a major learning task"

(1988). As for Frodesen dictation can be "an effective way to address grammatical errors in writing that may be the result of erroneous aural perception of English.

In all cases dictation texts must be selected taking into account the students' abilities. The teacher must not select material that is too different from the students' language learning norms, in terms of grammar, vocabulary, spelling, and punctuation.

Steps for dictation:

1. The teacher reads the text (it can be authentic as well) at normal speaking speed. The students must only listen.
2. The teacher then reads a second time at a slightly slower speed. The students begin transcribing. The teacher stops after each phrase or meaningful unit and also calls out punctuation, which the students must include in their transcriptions. If a student asks for a word or phrase to be repeated, the teacher repeats.
3. The teacher reads the dictation through a third time at normal speaking speed, again including punctuation. During this reading the students check their work and make last changes.
4. After finishing the dictation, the teacher allows the students a couple of minutes for final corrections. The learners make self-corrections. The teacher can instruct the learners for peer-correction and the students correct each other's dictations.

A good time to deliver a dictation is at the beginning of class. Before beginning the dictation, the teacher writes on the board any proper nouns, abbreviations (*etc.*, *e.g.*, *i.e.*, and so on), acronyms, or foreign or specialized



words within the dictation that he or she has not previously explained. The teacher also writes on the board the chosen spelling for any word that is commonly spelled in more than one way (e.g., *rock and roll/rock'n'roll*). While evaluating learners' transcriptions the teacher distinguishes comprehension errors and spelling errors. Comprehension errors include both phonological mistakes and grammatical mistakes. A phonological mistake would be the spelling of the word *physics* as *fyzics*; a grammatical mistake would be transcribing *Yesterday he worked* as *Yesterday he work*.

Picture dictation

The teacher describes a simple picture and the students draw it. The next step is to get the students working in pairs doing the same thing with other pictures. A nice touch is to use famous works of art that the students may recognize. Paintings with clear lines and not too much detail work best: da Vinci's *Mona Lisa*, Van Gogh's *chair*, etc. A final stage is to display the students' drawings next to the pictures of the originals on the walls. The students wander around as if in an art gallery and make comments either orally or in writing [10; p. 92].

The main benefits of using authentic English is clear. By using authentic materials students encounter words and language structures that they have never seen in formal language materials. Instead, teachers prefer authentic material because it allows to introduce diverse topics which students and teachers find more interesting than inauthentic material and because authentic material connects better to the world outside of school. In other words, implementing authentic material allows learners to take part in and become accustomed to the natural language, as it is used by native and foreign speakers of English.

Authentic materials stimulate interaction in class. Through interactive listening learners appear in small groups. They receive new information, identify them continuously, they work out the problems of understanding each other and formulate responses. For this account group surveys, self-introductions, short speeches, chatting and discussing, exchanging news and views, interviewing and being interviewed etc. might be appropriate and effective.

"False Facts" dictation

This activity involves making deliberate factual mistakes in the dictated passage. The mistakes could refer to general knowledge or to something the class has studied recently. Some teachers use this activity to review texts, dictating a summary with, say five factual mistakes. The students either make the corrections silently, before checking in groups, or noisily, shouting out every time they hear something erroneous. Here is an example of a "False Facts" dictation done after watching the film *Green Card*.

In Green Card the main character is a piano player from France. At the beginning of the film he gets divorced because he needs a green card to stay in the USA. The woman marries him because she wants to rent a flat which is only available to single women [9; p. 92].

So, dictation is an effective language learning device. We agree with Finocchiaro's (1969) statement: "Dictation ensures attentive listening; it trains pupils to distinguish sounds, it enables pupils to learn to transfer oral sounds to written symbols, it helps to develop aural comprehension and it assists in self-evaluation."

Authentic material is beneficial not only for the development of the learners' listening skills but also their overall communicative competence, it boosts their confidence and experience with the support of "real" language and constructive feedback.

Listen and Describe

In this activity the teacher tells a story but stops regularly and asks the students to write or give a description. For example, the teacher begins, 'I was walking close to my home when I met a girl. What did she look like?' The students then write a one line description, e.g. 'She had green hair and big hands'.

This activity works well as a way for students to generate language. At the end the teacher should tell the whole story with no interruptions, as this provides an extended and more enjoyable listening experience.

Below is the list of common differences between authentic and scripted speech:

Authentic	Scripted
Overlaps and interruptions between speakers	Little overlap between speakers
Normal rate of speech delivery	Slower may be monotonous delivery
Relatively unstructured language	Structured language, more like written English
Incomplete sentences, with false starts, hesitation, etc	Complete sentences
Background noise and voices	No background noise
Natural stops and starts that reflects the speaker's train of thought and the listener's ongoing response	Artificial stops and starts that reflect an idealized version of communication (in which misunderstandings, false starts, etc. never occur)



Loosely packed information, padded out with fillers

Densely packed information

[9; p. 30]

So, in order to develop the skills and strategies necessary to cope with natural speech, learners need to be introduced to an authentic or authentic-sounding texts on a planned basis. Their confidence can be built up by a judicious choice of texts and activities [8; p. 27].

While selecting texts for listening lessons – either authentic or inauthentic, teachers must take into consideration some definite factors we have already mentioned above. As for activities, they must be subdivided into three main stages: pre-listening, while-listening and post-listening. Both teachers and learners must identify the particular role and purpose of each stage activity(ies), for example,

- **Pre-listening stage activities:** They prepare the learners towards the text to listen.
- **While - listening stage activities:** They activate the learners' listening skills.
- **Post - listening stage activities:** Teacher checks the learners understanding of the text and their language knowledge.

Actually we appreciate any kind of listening material (authentic, scripted or semi-scripted), if they foster learners' motivation and engagement in class. The important question is – how well these materials are relevant to the students' language-communicative skills, their background knowledge and culturality.

Conclusion: One way to define authenticity may be to say that if the text exists for communicative purposes other than teaching language, then it is authentic. As the authentic material is produced by/for native speakers and is used for real-life purposes teachers of secondary school should strongly consider the importance of implementing them in listening lessons. The use of authentic materials in the language classroom must be strongly encouraged as they have a positive impact on the development of students' linguistic skills and their life competences as well.

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