Receptive Language Skills Learning and Teaching: Listening and Reading


1. LISTENING

1.1 Definition

Like reading, listening is a receptive skill, as it involves responding to language rather than producing it. Listening involves making sense of the meaningful sounds of language. Learners do this by using context and their knowledge of language and the world. In fact, we do not listen to everything in the same way. How we listen depends on our reason for listening. We might listen for gist, specific information, detail, attitude or do extensive listening. We can observe that listening involves doing many things: dealing with the characteristics of spoken language; using the context and our knowledge of the world; understanding different text types; understanding different speeds of speech and accents; using different listening subskills.

1.2 Teaching procedure

In the classroom, learners can listen to many sources of spoken language (the teacher, other learners, visitors, videos (DVD, Internet, etc.). When we listen to the radio, a recording or a podcast we can't see speakers' body language or the context he/she is speaking in. And we can't ask the speaker to repeat or to explain. These factors make listening to recordings more difficult than listening to live speakers. I usually develop learner's listening skills by focusing regularly on particular aspects of listening like problem sounds, features of connected speech, subskills.

1.2.3 Listening Lessons Scheme

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Warm up</th>
<th>• An optional section to help focus students on the topic and prepare them.</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Main Activity</td>
<td>• Students listen to the recording and fulfil a variety of realistic and authentic tasks</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Follow up</td>
<td>• An opportunity for students to personalise the topic and develop the scope of the lesson</td>
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It can be demotivating for students to listen to a recording in class which they simply can't understand. Many feel frustrated when they don't understand what they hear. These Listening lessons aims to help student succeed. The activities are designed to present students with a challenge they can win. Learners may listen
several times to the recording, often listening for different information each time. I help my students by encouraging them to pool their knowledge about the topic before they listen. This helps to focus their mind and prepares them for the recording. A list of key words and language patterns are provided, so I pre-teach these items students need not be confused by unfamiliar words. Language is presented in familiar and authentic contexts. By relating these contexts to their own real-world experience, learners can see the value of the listening activity and become more motivated. Listening is an active process and students need to think and interpret what they hear as they listen. The activities in this syllabus encourage students to react to what they hear as naturally as possible. Learners are encouraged to think around the recording, too, by listening between the lines for emotions and opinions, or picking up on aural clues in the background. Listening sessions highlight the main listening strategies employed in each activity. However, it is of course natural for learners to employ a combination of several different skills in the course of a single listening. Therefore, those skills highlighted simply refer to the main skills focused on by each activity type like:

1. Listening for specific information: learners identify certain key information at word level.
2. Listening for details: students listen for phrases and longer strings of information at sentence level.
3. Listening for the main idea: they listen to the complete recording in order to understand core ideas.
4. Listening for opinions: they listen to understand the views expressed by a particular speaker.
5. Inferring meaning: they 'listen between lines' to understand what the speaker is really saying.
6. Recognising context: learners listen around the recording to identify where it takes place, who the people are, etc.
7. Predicting: students anticipate what they will hear before the recording is played.
8. Identifying emotion: they listen to identify the mood of a particular speaker.

2. READING

2.1 Definition

Like listening, reading is a receptive skill and this fact involves responding to text, rather than producing it, reading involves making sense of text. To do this we need to understand the language of the text at word level, sentence level and whole-text level. Learners also need to connect the message of the text to their knowledge of the world.

The main difficulty remains on using students' knowledge of the world to see the connection between two sentences (coherence), the grammatical links between the sentences (cohesion) also helps us to see the connection between them. When we read we do not necessarily read everything in a text. What we read
depends on why and how we are reading. For example, we may read a travel website to find a single piece of information about prices. But we may read a novel in great detail because we like the story and the characters and want to know as much as we can about them. Our reasons for reading influence how we read, which reading subskill we use:

- Reading for specific information or scanning: reading a text just to find a specific piece or pieces of information
- Reading for gist or skimming: reading quickly through a text to get a general idea of what is about
- Reading for detail: getting the meaning out of every word.
- Extensive reading: it involves reading long pieces of text. This part is fully explained in the Readers’ part.

2.2 Teaching procedure

If learners know how to read in their own language, they can transfer their reading skills to reading English. Sometimes, they find this difficult so giving learners lots of opportunities for extensive reading, in or out of class, helps them to develop their fluency in reading.

The texts chosen are devoted to interest learners in order to motivate them through current topic or news that they can easily know about with realia. In this level of English, learners read articles, brochures, etc. that are what a first language speaker would read, in other words: authentic material

2.3 Reading Lessons Scheme

The lesson is divided into three stages:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Warm up</th>
<th>Introduction of the topic of the lesson.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Main Activity</td>
<td>Revision/introduction of essential vocabulary items</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Students read the text(s) and carry out related tasks</td>
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<tr>
<td>Follow up</td>
<td>Students make own personalised response to the text(s)</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Students research further reading material about the topic</td>
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The teacher has two roles in the reading classroom. Particularly at the beginning of the lesson, the teacher is the centre of the action: initiating discussion, handing out materials, giving instructions, checking feedback. But while the reading is actually going on, the teacher’s role is that of monitor, supporter and advisor. It is the students themselves who must do the reading.

But this does not mean that the reading classroom should be a silent place. In the real world, we often discuss things we have just read. Similarly, we ask for clarification if there is something we have not understood. To reflect the real world, and to encourage the on-going process of learning, I allow and encourage students to work together in pairs while they are reading the same text.
Our classroom is a well-equipped one providing each student with easy access to an English/English dictionary. At the same time, students will be encouraged to turn to the dictionary to look up an unknown word only as a last resort or to check their prediction – they have the context of the word to help with its meaning, they have their classmates to offer support and advice, they have the teacher to point them in the right direction.

Bibliografía

- Lightbown, P. 2006. How Languages are Learned, Oxford: OUP
- Spratt, M; Pulverness, A. & Williams, M. 2011. The TKT (Teaching Knowledge Test) Course. Cambridge: CUP