

PROBLEMS IN LISTENING ENGLISH

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ABSTARCT

Listening is one of the most important skills in English language learning. When students listen to English language, they face a lot of listening difficulties. Students have critical difficulties in listening comprehension because universities and schools pay more attention to writing, reading, and vocabulary. Listening is not an important part of many course books and most teachers do not pay attention to this important skill in their classes. In this paper, the researchers reviewed the terms listening, listening comprehension, listening comprehension strategies, and listening difficulties.

KEYWORDS: listening, misinterpretation, listening comprehension, strategies, difficulties.

INTRODUCTION

The review of literature indicated that when teachers are aware of students' learning difficulties they can help them develop effective listening strategies and finally solve their difficulties in listening and improve their listening comprehension abilities. Listening comprehension is one of those skills that you simply can't put your finger on. It seems to be easy enough for some. For others, it's a nightmare. Why is this so?

A number of factors contribute to the extent to which an ESL student is able to understand an audio recording in English. Some of these factors may be characteristics we can attribute to the students themselves, things like working memory, anxiety or mental blocks. Other factors deal with characteristics of the audio track, things like length and complexity. Finally, others are specifically related to the task at hand, things like time pressure and note taking. But to answer the question, let's address some specific reasons your ESL students are having such a hard time with their listening tasks.

Most students with listening comprehension issues get stuck trying to understand every single word.

They try to figure out the meaning of just one word, and before they know it, the recording is finished, and they've missed most of it. Graham (2006) said that there are some other factors that increase learners' listening comprehension problems such as restricted vocabulary, poor grammar, and misinterpretations about listening tasks. According to Seferoglu and Uzakgoren (2004), some other listening comprehension problems are related to the kind of listening materials. The researchers emphasized that listening is not of great importance and teachers do not teach listening strategies to their learners. Bloomfield et al. (2010) and Walker (2014) expressed that one of the serious problems of listening comprehension is related to the pronunciation of words that is different from the way they appear in print. Due to the fact that the spoken language varies to the form of the written language, the recognition of words that make the oral speech can create some difficulties for students. According to Vandergrift (2007) and Walker (2014), in addition to identify the words despite their unfamiliar pronunciation, students should try to decide which linguistic part belongs to which word. Prosodic features of spoken language like where the stress falls, weak forms and strong forms of words, and intonation also impact the comprehension of oral text.

Some students say that as they've mostly been exposed to American English, they don't understand the British English accent, or vice versa.

A whole other problem is when they don't understand certain foreign accents, i.e. an Italian/French/Korean person speaking English. Depending on the class, you could choose one of two paths. You could focus on the accent they need to grasp. I would recommend this, for example, if you have a group preparing to sit for

any of the Cambridge ESOL exams. Most of the audio features British English, and your students need to train their ears for this particular accent because their exam score depends on it. The next route is to give them as much variety as possible. In real life, students will encounter people from a variety of backgrounds, and they'll need a great deal of flexibility if they want to interact or do business with people from all over the world. This is one aspect of the problem above that all people speaking a foreign language have experienced at one time or another. This often happens when you hear a word you half remember and find you have completely lost the thread of what was being said by the time you remember what it means, but can also happen with words you are trying to work out that sound similar to something in your language, words you are trying to work out from the context or words you have heard many times before and are trying to guess the meaning of once and for all. In individual listening you can cut down on this problem with vocabulary pre-teach and by getting students to talk about the same topic first to bring the relevant vocabulary for that topic area nearer the front of their brain. You could also use a listening that is in shorter segments or use the pause button to give their brains a chance to catch up, but teaching them the skill of coping with the multiple demands of listening and working out what words mean is not so easy. One training method is to use a listening or two to get them to concentrate just on guessing words from context. Another is to load up the tasks even more by adding a logic puzzle or listening and writing task, so that just listening and trying to remember words seems like an easier option. Finally, spend a lot of time revising vocabulary and doing skills work where they come into contact with it and use it, and show students how to do the same in their own time, so that the amount of half remembered vocabulary is much less.

This is again one that anyone who has lived in a foreign country knows well- you are doing fine with the conversation or movie until your brain seems to reach saturation point and from then on nothing goes in until you escape to the toilet for 10 minutes. The first thing you'll need to bear in mind is to build up the length of the texts you use (or the lengths between pauses) over the course in exactly the same way as you build up the difficulty of the texts and tasks. You can make the first time they listen to a longer text a success and therefore a confidence booster by doing it in a part of the lesson and part of the day when they are most alert, by not overloading their brains with new language beforehand, and by giving them a break or easy activity before they start. You can build up their stamina by also making the speaking tasks longer and longer during the term, and they can practice the same thing outside class by watching an English movie with subtitles and taking the subtitles off for longer and longer periods each time. Being able to cope with background noise is another skill that does not easily transfer from L1 and builds up along with students' listening and general language skills. As well as making sure the tape doesn't have lots of hiss or worse (e.g. by recording tape to tape at normal speed not double speed, by using the original or by adjusting the bass and treble) and choosing a recording with no street noise etc, you also need to cut down on noise inside and outside the classroom. Plan listening for when you know it will be quiet outside, e.g. not at lunchtime or when the class next door is also doing a listening. Cut down on noise inside the classroom by doing the first task with books closed and pens down. Boost their confidence by letting them do the same listening on headphones and showing them how much easier it is. Finally, when they start to get used to it, give them an additional challenge by using a recording with background noise such as a cocktail party conversation.

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