
UNIT 1 TEACHING LISTENING -I

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1.0 OBJECTIVES

After completing the unit you will be able to:

- State the need for listening
- Explain what the listening process comprises
- State the different kinds of listening and develop activities for your classroom
- Take into account the factors that influence listening while organising the activities
- Develop listening tasks keeping in mind the different stages of a listening lesson
- Organise listening lessons in a way that ensures motivated listening

1.1 INTRODUCTION: THE NEED FOR LISTENING

The fact that listening is basic to learning and language learning is well established. Much of the information we acquire is through listening whether it is during a lecture, over the radio or television, advice from people, instructions and directions, suggestions and so on.

A growing change in communication patterns has made the skill of listening more important than ever. We now have BPO's, Customer Care Cells, recorded railway schedules or live problem-solving of mal-functioning gadgets that come to us over the telephone, when sought. This makes it imperative that we learn to listen well whether in formal or informal contexts.

Unfortunately, this is one skill that has often been neglected in the language class. If at all any listening is being done, it is done hastily as a part of the integrated skill approach. Most of the listening that students do in class is listening to instructions and explanations by the teacher, and at home to moralizing by the parent. Although focused listening to different genres of literature has made a beginning in our classrooms, the strategies to listen to a particular text are seldom provided.

1.1.1 Why has Listening been Neglected so Far?

The reasons for neglecting this vital skill are various. They maybe any or some of the following:

- Teachers felt that it was more important to present new language items to the class. They used listening only to practice those items.
- They focused on emphasizing those skills that enabled more systematic instruction and evaluation like grammar, reading and writing.
- Listening has been viewed as a passive skill.
- It is a difficult skill to teach and not possible to assess listening comprehension which takes place in some hidden recesses of the listener's mind. The outcome of listening is not tangible like writing or speaking.
- Often after a lot of listening practice there is no perceptible improvement which is frustrating for the teacher.
- Teachers believe that listening activities take up a lot of teaching- learning time and often require technical equipment.
- Some believe that this skill will be automatically picked up through exposure to the target language. It can be acquired naturally in response to the spoken word as in the case of L1.

But over the years teachers' experience with young learners has shown that:

- Listening is the foundation of literacy.
- Listening vocabulary is the first vocabulary of any child. A child acquires the vocabulary she listens to around her. Exposure to new words through reading comes much later.
- There would be no language without the aural/oral component. A large part of communication is aural and oral.
- We need skills in listening for the very business of living, study and work, even to run businesses and governments.

1.1.2 The Importance of Listening at Secondary School

The aim of teaching a language is to prepare the learner for life. Listening, being a significant part of the business of daily living, needs to be practised extensively. Learners need to be prepared to handle situations in life even beyond the classroom and after leaving school where they might need to obtain information from radio or television talks and chats, videos on various themes, announcements, telephonic information, directions, or simply, as oral information from another person.

Why is listening important?

Listening helps to develop a person's spoken competence which gets enriched with

- new grammatical structures when a speaker uses expressions that are new to the listener
- new vocabulary as listening exposes a person to the vocabulary in context
- new phonological patterns which enable the listener to learn the combinations of sounds and phonemic clusters in a particular language
- pragmatic information like deriving meaning from stress, tone, expression and body language of the speaker, which is an indicator of the speaker's meaning, intent and purpose

Thus it is important that we provide listening experiences of different kinds based on a variety of contexts so that students can handle listening (encounters) situations in the real world adequately. We need to open up a rich source of linguistic material for the L2 learners. This implies that students need to be exposed to a lot of language in the form of day to day conversation, stories, poems, plays, directions, discussions and announcements.

Listening is basic to oral skills

Developing fluency in speaking has always been an important goal for language teachers. Often, in their enthusiasm to teach speaking they have overlooked the fact that any oral communication involves a lot of listening. Even a simple conversation cannot be sustained if one of the interlocutors does not have adequate listening skills. Just as speaking, listening too has its own fluency and accuracy without which communication may break down.

- Fluency: acquiring the patterns of listening like paying attention to the key words, using non-linguistic clues to arrive at the meaning, not having to listen word for word (meaning-making skills)
- Accuracy: ability to decode pieces of connected speech, word by word, noticing word boundaries (decoding skills)

Hence teachers in the classroom need to provide practice with goals and processes in mind. Listening should be practised at every level of language learning or acquisition.

The goals could be:

- Pronunciation teaching (to identify and discriminate between sounds, utterances)
- Modelling (for contractions like *I'm/We'll*, or minimal pairs which distinguish certain sounds ('*ship sip*') and stress patterns ('*present pre'sent*').
- Pragmatic input (what certain utterances would mean in certain contexts like 'I'm afraid...' as being the beginning of a complaint or an expression of dissatisfaction or even a warning)
- Feedback: whether they missed the main ideas or misinterpreted the words of the speaker etc. ('Perhaps you missed what I said about...?'/ 'What I really meant was...')

The processes are the following:

- Decoding processes
- Meaning -making processes

Since much of the information made available to the students is through the voice of the teacher or through audio material, apart from the visual medium like books and the chalk board, the ability to understand speech in the target language becomes absolutely necessary. The teacher's role would be to provide adequate assistance in understanding the oral form of L2.

Learner concerns

Most learners of L2 when asked of their area of difficulty often cite listening as the area where they feel most insecure. The reasons may be:

- They do not have concrete evidence that they are making progress in the skill.
- Listening happens in real time, which means that it is supposed to be understood at the moment in order to make a suitable response. One cannot play it back in one's mind to decipher its meaning.

The L2 learner begins to feel inadequate at this deficiency and also begins to think that L2 speakers speak very fast. This creates a sense of insecurity amongst the L2 learners.

Listening and other language skills

Listening is inextricably linked to the development of the other language skills. Say, for example listening is directly linked to speaking. Although listening is an internal encounter yet we can get an idea of the extent of comprehension when the listener encodes his/her response in the spoken form, whether in a conversation or while answering questions in different formal and informal situations. All children need to have a human model to interact with linguistically in order to learn speech.

Though an oral response is a significant way to measure comprehension while listening, it may be borne in mind that many attentive listeners do not express their understanding in the spoken form.

Listening and reading are both decoding skills. Listening depends upon sounds and is an aural experience whereas reading depends upon the written text and is a visual experience (depending upon graphemes). In fact listening provides the foundation for reading:

- Decoding and auditory discrimination is the first step in reading where beginner readers try to sound out the words.
- Non-linguistic clues like pauses, voice variation and inflection can at later stage provide clues to meaning while reading aloud.
- A child utilises her listening vocabulary as a basis for reading and those with a limited listening vocabulary may have limited reading and writing vocabulary.

Listening can be evaluated through listening comprehension scales which range from no comprehension to a high level of inferential comprehension. The levels of comprehension are the same as for reading beginning with literal comprehension (factual recall), interpretation (making logical guesses, finding relationships, using contextual clues) and then critical comprehension wherein the listener or the reader evaluates what she hears or reads. Thus it is necessary that students be provided an opportunity to exercise all of the above skills through graded tasks. We all know that writing is nourished by the other skills of the language and that our listening vocabulary and the kind of language we listen to influence the skills of writing. It thus becomes evident from the above discussion that listening is vital to the learning of L2.

1.1.3 Need for Modeling Good Listening Behaviour

Listening has been made unpopular by adults, namely parents and teachers. Often parents, busy with their day to day chores or occupations, tend to ignore what the child is trying to say and rarely respond with more than impatient noises. They do not make eye contact but show cursory interest. This kind of behaviour is learned by the child who learns to switch off when asked to listen. On the other hand, parents demand the child's attention when they discuss matters of importance to them or simply indulge in moralizing.

Teachers too, with their injunction to listen, often make the act of listening an unpleasant experience. When the student is speaking, teachers tend to interrupt to correct and improve them. There are interruptions during a listening experience which may be caused by bells, announcements or peons coming in with notices.

Last but not the least, listening appears to be a daunting task for the students when instructions are not properly given and the students do not know what is expected of them.

It is therefore important that both teachers and parents model active listening by doing the following:

- Put aside other work and pay attention to the child.
- Make a note of significant points and ask questions to clarify or repeat to confirm if that is what the child meant
- Show that they are registering what the child is saying.
- Make eye contact and lean forward to indicate interest and attentive behaviour.
- Ask questions to clarify.
- Allow the child to complete what he/she is saying without interrupting and then ask questions.

This will model good listening behaviour and will also allow the child to learn how to listen well and how to negotiate the meaning of what they are listening to.

Check Your Progress 1

1) Why is it important to develop the skill of listening?

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2) In what way does listening contribute to an individual’s linguistic competence?

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3) What are the difficulties in teaching listening?

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4) What are the different ways parents and teachers model good listening behaviour which will encourage children to listen?

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1.2 LISTENING SKILLS AND STRATEGIES

In real life listening tends to be a more difficult skill than reading since the listening text is not permanent and there is no possibility of playing it back or referring to the text again. One can, however, negotiate meaning by asking the speaker for clarifications or asking the speaker to repeat what he or she said. But most of the time listening is done through discrimination of sounds and words, evaluation and processing of the message which involves many other non-linguistic clues. Often the emotional factor is very important and these comprise the speaker’s expression, the social setting, the speaker’s stance and the listener’s own expectations.

Thus two major processes are involved in listening. These are:

- The Decoding process — analyzing what is in the speech signal
- The Meaning-making process — the process used to build meaning by bringing in outside knowledge

An efficient listener engages with the listening text and processes the language at both the levels in order to arrive at the meaning. Needless to say that motivation to listen plays a significant role in the comprehension or *auding* (making meaning of what is said) of a listening text. There are various sub-skills that go into listening comprehension but these are not discrete and often function in relation to each other in clusters. Hence we cannot make hierarchies of the listening skills.

1.2.1 The Decoding Process

The decoding process is the process of translating the sounds (acoustic input) that the listener receives into standard forms of language (words, phrases or sentences) using clues like pronunciation and inflection. Hence a piece of speech is reshaped into larger units of language.

The listener's ears receive the phonemes of the language which are clustered into syllables and the syllables into words. The words fall into familiar clusters as in phrases and clauses or lexical clusters.

The decoding happens at the phoneme level, syllable level, word form level and chunk level. Then it happens at syntactic level and intonation level and lastly at the meaning level, followed by the response of the listener.

Some of the significant decoding processes are at:

- Phoneme level: identifying the different consonants and vowels
- Syllable level: recognising the syllable structure by paying attention to the variation in stress, weaker syllables and so on.
- Word Level: identifying word boundaries (where they begin and end in connected speech, i.e. *Whatdoyousay?* = *What+do+you+say?*), matching sequences of sounds to words, matching words that are in their standard forms and figuring out new words
- Syntactic level: isolating phrases and clauses, making predictions using the beginnings of phrases and clauses, and anticipating the syntactic patterns and checking hypothesis (whether what was anticipated is true or not)
- Intonation level: making use of sentence stress, using intonation to support syntax, recognizing chunks of language (pauses between sense groups, tone groups)

Thus a listener uses the grammatical structure of the utterance and the pattern of intonation that binds together words in order to understand what is being said.

Initially these decoding routines are conscious and require effort but as the listener becomes more efficient these routines become automatic. A competent listener does not have to make a conscious effort to match the group of words in the listening input to her own vocabulary or try to recall a group of words several seconds after they have passed. Automaticity requires minimal mental attention.

To summarize, the following are the sub-skills that are exercised in the decoding process:

Perception skills

- Recognizing individual sounds /p/, /b/, /k/, /t/
- Discriminating between sounds /pin/, /bin/
- Identifying reduced forms in connected/fast speech (elision and assimilation) 'fish and chips' 'fishnchips'
- Identifying stressed syllables – 'politics, po'litical, poli'tician
- Identifying stressed words in utterances – I 'went to the 'market.
- Recognizing intonation patterns:
 - o Falling tone – Who is he?
 - o Rising tone – Is she here?

Language Skills

- Identifying individual words and groups and building up possible meanings for them
- Identifying discourse markers which organize what is being said, for example, *then, I was saying, as a matter of fact, to start with, etc.*

Thus in the L2 classroom we need to provide the learners adequate decoding practice to reach greater automaticity where the recognition of words and chunks comes easily. In the following units you shall look at various activities that help the learner to practice the decoding process.

1.2.2 The Meaning-Making Process

In order to understand the import of an utterance a listener does not need decoding processes alone, although these seem to dominate in the early stages. To arrive at a full meaning of the speaker's message, the listener uses various non-linguistic clues and a range of contextual information that may be **independent** of the actual words used; this is referred to as pragmatics earlier in the unit.

The following come into play for arriving at the real meaning of what a speaker is saying:

- Listener's knowledge of the world
- Knowledge of the speaker
- Knowledge of what has been said so far

According to Goodith White using *knowledge of the world* includes the processes below:

- Connecting groups of words to non-linguistic features such as expressions, gestures, or objects, in order to get clues to meaning
- Using previous knowledge of the topic to guess what the speaker might be saying about it
- Using knowledge about the patterns that certain oral interactions typically have in order to predict what is being said "ordering in a restaurant, making a telephone call to the travel agent, etc."

It is important for the listener to decide whether the piece of information he or she is receiving is important or not and how it relates to the previous piece of information or the context. It is also important to see how it relates to the interests of the listener.

Although practice in decoding is essential, these processes of meaning making must not be ignored even in the early stages of learning language, for these are cognitive processes and help to develop thinking amongst the learners.

In brief we can sum up the meaning-making processes as:

- Using the knowledge of the context (topic, social situation, cultural knowledge and comparing with earlier similar encounters etc.)
- Deriving meaning: storing the literal meaning of an utterance and accepting an approximate meaning and checking understanding
- Adding to the meaning by making inferences, conjecturing where things are not clearly stated and dealing with pronouns and linkers to make connections
- Selecting information and recognizing redundant information
- Integrating information by connecting ideas, carrying information obtained so far and noticing the connecting words used by the speaker.

While interacting with a speaker the listener needs to:

- Cope with the speed of talking and accent of the speaker
- Recognize the speaker's intention in saying something
- Identify the speaker's mood/attitude to arrive at the real meaning
- Recognize the speaker's cues about things such as when to take a turn at speaking and when there is a change in topic
- Predict what the speaker will say next

The teacher needs to decide whether she wishes to practice the decoding processes or meaning-making processes but these processes can be clubbed so that they feed into one another. Efficient listening also requires discourse skills which can be developed through conversation and extended talk. In conversation, the social interaction is more obvious as each short turn responds to previous turns and contributes to the development of the talk.

Similarly, students can be exposed to extended talk like the teacher's little stories or the retelling of stories, incidents from life, anecdotes or interesting quips suited to the level of the learner.

Exposure to literature and 'narrative' continues not just as a discourse form but as a mode of mental organization, eliciting personal responses, retelling and extending the story and creative use of language, after the listening experience is over.

Check Your Progress 2

- 1) Explain the decoding process in a few sentences.
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- 2) What are the different ways a listener negotiates the meaning of what is being said?
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1.3 EFFECTIVE LISTENING

During the course of daily living we listen to a variety of things in various formal and informal situations. The things we listen to range from polite exchanges and enquiries to listening to talks, news and lectures. We may have discussions on serious or non-serious issues or seek consultation and guidance from different kinds of professionals. Some of these require a response from the listener for communication to continue while some do not offer any scope for the listener to respond in real time.

Listening may be reciprocal or non-reciprocal or it may be academic or conversational. Each situation requires different skills of listening.

A brief discussion on kinds of listening follows.

1.3.1 Kinds of Listening

It is necessary to understand the different kinds of listening that occur in communication. This will help the teacher to organise activities so that various kinds of listening skills are practiced and developed.

1) *Passive or Marginal Listening*

This kind of listening happens when our attention is partially divided like when children are doing their homework with the television turned on in the background, or when students are discussing in different groups within the classroom. There is a momentary ‘tuning out’ but there is enough consciousness to return to the activity on hand. In the classroom the teacher’s voice alerts students to attention. This happens on many occasions in real life.

2) *Attentive Listening*

There are situations in life when accuracy of comprehension is necessary for the information received is vital as in directions, instructions,

announcements and introductions. Failure to understand or remember any portion of the information might lead to problems. The importance of attention skills becomes paramount in these situations. The listener has to pay close attention to what is being said and stop to ask questions, sum up what the speaker says in order to confirm if he/she has understood correctly or even ask the speaker to repeat what he or she said.

A teacher can develop activities based on directions and instructions such as when students carry out an experiment, or a process following the instructions step-by-step.

3) *Responsive Listening*

Responsive listening falls under the category of reciprocal listening for it requires a response from the listener in order to continue with the communication. Thus it is similar to attentive listening because the listener has to pay attention to the speaker's words in order to make an appropriate response. This requires a different mindset and can be practised by creating situations where the students:

- Participate in a discussion
- have a conversation

A teacher may provide a theme or a situation for the students to discuss after they have heard a story, read a passage or a news item. Students may also practise conversation in simulated conversations based on different situations of life.

4) *Selective Listening*

This kind of listening happens when the listener is looking for a certain piece of information in a part of the listening text. It also happens when the teacher explains parts of a process or material from which the students choose certain parts. The teacher may ask the students to pay attention to certain parts of the listening text, or may give a few questions beforehand so that the students know what to look for in the text and become alert when they think that portion is coming.

5) *Appreciative Listening*

Appreciative listening is a pleasurable activity wherein a listener settles down to enjoy a dramatization, a story or a poem. This results in some kind of emotional reaction when the listener begins to identify with the character or share the emotions that accompany the situations in the story.

Rendering of poems, stories on CD or told by the teacher or listening to a play can be followed by asking students' response to theme, storyline, situation, character, motives and relationships.

6) *Creative Listening*

This involves the process of developing new and original solutions to problems presented through the spoken word. It is also the act of entering imaginatively into the experiences, the setting and the feelings of the characters in a story. (Being narrated, read aloud, over the radio or stage). The listener may listen to a situation and suggest solutions or after listening to a story give the story a different end.

7) *Analytical or Critical Listening*

Analytical listening makes a great demand on the listener because the listener needs to be careful, accurate and attentive in order to make inferences and value judgements regarding situation, process, places, persons or things.

The listener weighs what he/she hears against personal experience and forms an opinion. While listening critically the listener is alert to the attempts of the speaker to sway his/her opinion by the devices of propaganda or through an exaggeration as in advertisements.

1.3.2 Factors that Influence Listening

It has been noticed that often children fail to listen properly because they may not have had a pleasant association with listening. Often the teacher forces them to listen to her, to what she is saying, the rules they have to follow, often sermonising or scolding. At home, parents do not indulge in active listening and often continue to pay attention to the activity on hand while just muttering 'uh-huh' or 'hmm' to what the children are saying. Hence, these occasions do not have pleasant associations, and as with other learned behaviour, the child is unable to listen wholeheartedly. In the classroom there may be frequent disruptions caused by the bells or announcements. Sometimes the students are not clear about what needs to be done.

Hence it becomes imperative that the teacher be the model listener in the day to day classroom activities by listening to the students actively, responding to them and encouraging them to talk. The teacher can do so by making eye contact, asking questions or summarizing what the child just said in order to confirm what the child meant. Before the activity the teacher needs to provide clear instructions with a demonstration about what is to be done and how.

There are certain factors that might influence listening. They are:

1) Physical conditions of the student like:

- Hearing problems
- Fatigue, pain or illness

Or the physical conditions in the environment such as:

- Temperature and humidity causing sweating, shivering or discomfort
- Distracting noise in the environment
- Distracting mannerisms of the speaker /teacher like running hands through hair, smoothing clothes or repeating phrases, etc.

2) Psychological factors that may interfere with effective listening can be:

- Boredom
- Lack of interest in the subject
- Improper attitude towards school and teacher
- Prejudice and misconception about the topic

3) Experiential background

Attitudes of people grow out of their pleasant or unpleasant experiences. This may lead to:

- Lack of interest which may be marginal or totally absent
- Antagonistic attitudes that have grown out of unhappy experiences

4) Listening Vocabulary

It has been seen that children do not hear ideas that are beyond their understanding and words that are not in their listening vocabulary. Hence it is important for the teacher to build the students' listening vocabulary.

1.4 APPROACHES TO LISTENING

Instruction in listening can be given in many ways i.e. stand alone activities or integrated with other skills in a communicative task. Technically there are four approaches to teaching listening.

1) Direct Approach

Focused listening activities can be organised to enable students to realize the importance of listening. The teacher can also discuss what the listening process involves and enumerate the characteristics of good or poor listening. The students are aware of what they are doing and during feedback the possibilities of not having listened well can be discussed, if required. This makes the students aware of their listening behaviour and makes them more attentive.

2) Integrated process

At times a teacher may reorient a reading or writing task and integrate with teaching of listening. The students may be asked to listen to a text and later read a summary of it to find out whether the summary is accurate or not. Alternately, they listen to a situation, following which the students write a letter or a report.

3) The Incidental Approach

This is the most common occurrence in the classroom where the teacher draws the attention of the learners to various things during the teaching learning process. Since the information provided is incidental which does not require students to do a task, many do not tend to listen carefully enough to retain the information they received thus. This approach does not prove to be very effective in training students to listen.

4) The Eclectic Approach

The eclectic approach is a combination of approaches 1 and 2 where the teacher, while integrating the listening activity with other skills, focuses students' attention to what they need to listen for and how.

In this unit we shall be discussing the first two approaches to teaching listening.

1.4.1 Micro and Macro Skills in Listening

There is a list of sub skills of listening prepared by Goodith White, 1998. They have been divided into perception skills, language skills, use of language of the world, dealing with information and interacting with the speaker. Amongst these, the first two can be termed as Micro skills and the remaining three Macro skills, which enable a person to understand a listening text in the right perspective.

Listening incorporates the following sub-skills (Goodith White, 1998)

- 1) Perception Skills
 - identifying individual sounds
 - discriminating between sounds to be able to get to the meaning
 - identifying reduced forms of speech by noticing the weak forms of words in a flow of speech
 - recognizing the elision of words and making appropriate guesses
 - identifying stressed syllables and words in an utterance
 - recognizing intonation patterns and their contribution to meaning
- 2) Language Skills
 - Identifying words and phrases and constructing meanings from them
 - Identifying discourse markers which organize the ideas in a text i.e. then, as a matter of fact, to reiterate, to conclude, however, etc.
- 3) Using language of the world
 - Connecting groups of words to non-linguistic features such as expressions, gestures or objects in order to get clues to meaning
 - Using knowledge of the topic to guess what the speaker might be saying about it
 - Using knowledge patterns of social intercourse in order to predict the meaning i.e. formulaic language as in ordering in a restaurant or making a telephone call.
- 4) Dealing with information
 - Understanding the gist or the essence of an utterance (overall idea of what you heard)
 - Understanding the main points and how they are related to each other
 - Understanding details i.e. train time, flight details
 - Inferring the information which is not explicitly stated or has been missed (ellipsis)
- 5) Interacting with a speaker
 - Coping with variations among speakers i.e. speed of delivery or accent
 - Recognizing speaker's intention
 - Identifying mood/ attitude of the speaker
 - Recognizing spoken cues about things such as when to take a turn at speaking or change a topic
 - Predicting what the speaker will say next

A combination of the sub- skills are used simultaneously when a listener processes spoken language. The sub skills required for comprehension depend upon the kind of text one is listening to and the purpose or reason for listening. In addition, listeners will use strategies for coping with what they may have missed or understood.

1.4.2 Processes in Listening Comprehension

Comprehension of a heard discourse involves two kinds of processes very much like reading. One process involves looking at the component parts of the incoming message itself and decoding sounds, words, clauses and the syntax in sentences. This process is called Bottom Up, for it looks at the parts of the message itself.

When we use the **Bottom-Up Process** we use the micro-skills and:

- Scan the input for familiar lexical items
- Segment the stream of speech into its constituent parts
- Use phonological cues (sounds, stress and intonation) to identify the information focus in an utterance
- Use grammatical cues to organize the input into constituents (sense groups)

When we use **Top-Down Processes** we use the macro-skills and:

- Use background knowledge to comprehend the message
- Identify an interaction as belonging to a particular event i.e. storytelling, joking, praying, complaining, arguing etc.
- Assign places, persons or things to categories
- Infer cause and effect relationships
- Anticipate outcomes
- Infer the topic of discourse
- Infer the sequence between events
- Infer the missing details

In addition to these Richards mentions the 'functional dimension' based on purpose and context. Brown and Yule (1983) too, distinguish between interactional and transactional functions of utterances.

In brief we can say that successful listening involves:

- Segmenting the stream of speech into meaningful units (words and phrases)
- Recognizing word classes (grammatical units)
- Relating the incoming message to one's own background knowledge
- Identifying the rhetorical and functional intent of an utterance or parts of an aural text
- Interpreting rhythm, stress and intonation to identify information focus and emotional and attitudinal tone
- Extracting the gist from an aural text
- Using our background knowledge and knowledge of the world to get the drift of the utterance.
- Predicting what the speaker might say next.

Check your progress 3

1) What are the different kinds of listening you would like to practise in your classroom?

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2) Mention the different factors that influence listening?

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3) Which approach to teaching listening would you like to use in your classroom?

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4) In what ways does a listener try to comprehend the meaning of a listening text?

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1.5 LET US SUM UP

Though the most basic and essential skill in language learning, listening has been neglected due to various reasons in the classroom, the most important being the teacher’s belief that it need not be taught formally. The time consumed in conducting listening tasks and the difficulty in assessing the extent of the learner’s progress has been an inhibiting factor. The teacher today, is aware of the need for listening and makes a conscious effort to practise the skill in the classroom.

Listening is one of the basic skills in language acquisition and learning. Thus a teacher of English needs to be familiar with the sub skills, processes and kinds of listening. The teacher also should be apprised of the different approaches to teaching listening so that she may develop focused tasks for listening.

1.6 ANSWERS

Check your progress 1

- 1) Listening is the foundation of literacy and aids the acquisition of the child's language. Listening vocabulary is the first vocabulary of any child. A child acquires the vocabulary she listens around her. Listening is basic to language learning as a large part of communication is oral / aural. In daily life too we need the skills of listening for living, study, travel and work.
- 2) Listening helps a person to acquire a language. It also helps to develop a person's spoken competence which gets enriched with new grammatical structures when a speaker uses expressions that are new to the listener.

Listening exposes a person to the contextual vocabulary of the situation and helps the listener to acquire new vocabulary, new sound patterns and enables the person to derive meaning using other indicators like stress, tone, expression and body language of the speaker.

- 3) Students feel insecure doing listening activities as they often find it to be difficult. They are not sure whether they are making progress as there is no concrete evidence to prove that.

Much of listening happens in real time and one has to catch the meaning of what is said immediately and give an appropriate response.

As far as the teacher is concerned, it is a difficult skill to teach. Being an internal encounter, it is not possible to assess listening comprehension. The outcome of listening is not tangible like writing or speaking. Often after a lot of listening practice there is no perceptible improvement which is frustrating for the teacher and the learner. If properly conducted, listening activities take up a lot of time and teacher feel that they could do something else in its place.

- 4) They can listen actively by putting aside whatever they were doing, make eye contact and show that they are listening by nodding or asking questions. They may summarise what the child has said to show that they are listening and to confirm whether they have understood well. They should not interrupt the child when he or she is speaking.

Check your progress 2

- 1) The decoding process involves the translating of sounds (acoustic input) or segmenting the flow of sounds that the listener receives into standard forms of language (words, phrases or sentences). The listener uses clues like pronunciation and intonation. This kind of decoding happens at the level of phoneme, syllable, word and chunk level. Intonation and stress also help the listener to identify the chunks of language. Paying attention to the grammar and intonation the listener can predict what the speaker will say next. Decoding involves identifying sounds, discriminating between sound,

noticing reduced forms, stressed syllables and the intonation pattern of the speaker's utterance.

- 2) In addition to the decoding process a listener uses other clues to understand the import of what is being said. For this the learner uses his/her knowledge of the world, the speaker, the topic and what has been said so far. He or she also uses non-linguistic features like expressions, gestures, objects present in the situation to understand the real meaning behind the utterance. The listener also sifts the important information from the unimportant ones and use logical thinking to arrive at his or her conclusions.

Check your progress 3

- 1)
 - Attentive listening to help the students understand the information and details accurately as in directions and instructions.
 - Responsive listening to develop their skills in oral interaction with others.
 - Selective listening to help them to focus on one portion of the listening text while assessing their own work or confirming what they understood is correct.
 - Appreciative listening to develop their creativity and their aesthetic sense.
 - Creative listening by presenting problems to which they would find solutions and learn problem-solving.
 - Lastly critical listening to teach them not to take anything they hear at its face value.

- 2) Apart from the knowledge of the language and linguistic competency there are other factors that influence listening.

The factors may be the physical condition of the listener which affects listening. Physical conditions of the classroom which may come in the way of effective listening, like the temperature of the room or external noise or mannerisms of the teacher.

Sometimes the students' mental frame, mood, attitude or lack of interest may come in the way of listening well. If the topic is unfamiliar, the student may take time to understand. And last, but not the least, if the language of the listening text is difficult and is not aligned to the students' listening vocabulary, understanding may be affected.

- 3) Sometimes the direct approach to help students focus on one idea and to understand their own listening behaviour. I would also like to integrate listening with other skills in the activities to encourage participation, collaboration and association. Largely, I would use the eclectic approach to make the students conscious and active listeners.
- 4) A listener uses both the bottom-up and top-down process to listening. The bottom up process involves decoding and using perception skills using sound, word order, pause, stress and intonation as a guide. The top-down process involves other non-linguistic clues like an understanding of the context and the speaker, knowledge of the topic and using body language to infer the purpose of the speaker's speech. The listener also uses logical thinking and prediction skills to guess what the speaker will say next or why the speaker is saying something.