

### The Nature of Interactive Listening Skills

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#### ABSTRACT

*This article discusses the main characteristics of interactive listening skills and comprehension of it in teaching field. The study claims that active listening is the main part of communication and interaction. The article covers some theoretical data and ample sample for interactive listening in conversation.*

**Introduction.** Since listening comprehension occurs in interactive situations, this means not only understanding the oral message but understanding it in the context is also important. This interactive and transactional modes of listening have been adopted by quite a number of researchers such as e.g., Galvin, 1985; Rost, 1990; Richards, 1990; Vandergrift, 1992, 1997, 2002. Galvin was one of the pioneers to expand the term interactional listening. Richards (1990) wrote about the difference between interactional and transactional functions and purposes in comprehending language in a thorough manner.

**Literature review.** Listening comprehension is a cognitive, or rather an interactive process of constructing meanings that the speaker intends, through the complete involvement of the hearer. The active contribution of the listener's comprehension process comes not only through using his linguistic knowledge but also his non linguistic sources, and of course the communicative value of his involvement depends on the situation and the social relationship. (Little Wood, 2000). The listener must realize that comprehending the message word for word is not essential, Since not every clue is equally important to the message. The listener has to seek the general meaning to compensate his misunderstanding by continuing being involved in the communication (Little Wood, 2000).

Turning to the role of a teacher in this process, it should be noted that as the aim of practicing listening in the classroom is to prepare students for successful real-life communication, there are a number of factors that either add up to or deter effective listening. Since it is the teacher who organizes, presents and controls classroom listening, it is reasonable to examine their roles first.

The primary ones are the following:

- a) Organizing the whole process: choosing appropriate materials and tasks to match student level (too easy materials get students bored, while excessively complicated ones discourage them from listening and create a feeling of disappointment which may last further through the whole course) the instructor introduces students to the listening (by asking general questions or conducting war-up activities), clearly defines the purpose of listening (ex. Are they listening to note down specific details such as dates, names, locations, time... etc? Are they listening for general information?), provides easy-to understand instructions. Most importantly, teachers motivate and provide an incentive to listen, since most learners anticipate difficult content, confusing vocabulary and syntax.
- b) Providing feedback after the activity: when the listening is over it is not just enough to provide keys and mark students. It is more productive to organize a feedback session to check how successful students are, what was especially complicated, how motivated or unmotivated they felt by the end of listening.

From what is clearly stated before, taped authentic materials can be considered as a good tool for learners when dealing with extensive listening. According to Harmer (1998), foreign language teachers can enrich their classes with effective input carrying out extensive listening through a well chosen and appropriate tapes in different levels, genres and topics. Creative teachers can recommend certain tapes and ask students to talk about the ones they have enjoyed the most. For the reason of encouraging this type of listening, students can be asked to perform a list of tasks such as:

- To record their responses to what they have heard.
- To assess the level of difficulty. - To summarize the content of the used material such as a tape.
- To ask students to write their comments in a special comments' boxes to consult them and try to meet all the needs of the learners.

All these tasks aim "To give students more and more reasons to listen, if they can share their information with colleagues, they will feel they have contributed to the progress of the whole group". (Harmer, 1998, 229).

**Methodology.** What does interactive listening look like? Here is an example of a conversation in which several different active listening techniques are used.

**Lisa:** *I'm sorry to dump this on you, but I had a fight with my sister, and we haven't spoken since. I'm upset and don't know who to talk to.*

**Jodie:** *No problem! Tell me more about what happened.* (open-ended question)

**Lisa:** *Well, we were arguing about what to do for our parents' anniversary. I'm still so angry.*

**Jodie:** *Oh that's tough. You sound upset that you're not speaking because of it.* (reflecting what was heard)

**Lisa:** *Yes, she just makes me so angry. She assumed I would help her plan this elaborate party—I don't have time! It's like she couldn't see things from my perspective at all.*

**Jodie:** *Wow, that's too bad. How did that make you feel?* (another open-ended question)

**Lisa:** *Frustrated. Angry. Maybe a bit guilty that she had all these plans, and I was the one holding them back. Finally, I told her to do it without me. But that's not right, either.*

**Jodie:** *Sounds complicated. I bet you need some time to sort out how you feel about it.* (Withholding judgment)

**Lisa:** *Yes, I guess I do. Thanks for listening—I just needed to vent.*

We've all been in situations where our "listeners" were distracted or disinterested. Or maybe you want to improve your own interactive listening skills so you don't do this to others.

Here are a few ways to be a better active listener yourself, or to encourage others to do the same:

- **Encourage your own curiosity.** The more curious you are about something, the easier it becomes to want to know more. This naturally causes you to ask more questions and to seek to understand, which are two of the core foundations of active listening in communication.
- **Find a topic that interests you both.** This works particularly well when engaging in small talk as you get to know one another. If you both have passion for the topic, it becomes easier to stay fully engaged in the conversation.
- **Practice your active listening skills.** Like with any skill, being good at active listening takes some practice. Be patient with yourself as you go through the learning process. Continuing to practice these skills may just inspire the person you're conversing with to do the same. By seeing you demonstrate active listening, they might become a better listener too.
- **Understand when exiting the conversation is best.** If you're talking with another person and they are clearly uninterested in the conversation, it may be best to end that conversation respectfully. This can help keep you from feeling annoyed and unheard.

Summarizing, interactive listening is an appropriate way for learners to be provided by extra chances for the reason of constructing their linguistic bank.

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