

## USING TEXTS AND DESIGNING TASKS

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**Abstract:** Many language textbooks are accompanied by an audio component. Usually, the listening texts are scripted, which means that the spoken discourse was first written out and then read and recorded. Scripted language is an effective teaching tool, but it lacks certain features of authentic input. Their pronunciation is careful, intonation is exaggerated, sentences are complete, and there is no background noise to distract the listener. This is very different from authentic listening, which involves the language native speakers use in real life. I share information learned from years of designing texts that advance knowledge-building in the context of project-based science teaching and advance readers' textual dexterity. Our research is conducted in the context of project-based learning in science, and we approach our inquiry from multiple theoretical perspectives. To increase comprehensibility of difficult listening materials, teachers can do several prelistening exercises to activate content and vocabulary knowledge, assign listening to the same text multiple times with different purposes, and use a transcript before or after listening. Long segments can be presented in parts with comprehension-check activities between them.

**Keywords:** Teacher talk, student talk, authentic and non-authentic materials, listening activities: Intensive listening, Selective listening, Interactive listening, Extensive listening, Responsive listening, Autonomous listening.

There are lots of resources available to English teachers today: from textbooks to online teaching tools, they can all aid and enrich English lessons. Many ESL teachers also introduce authentic English material into their lessons to expose learners to the language as it is spoken in the real world.

**Authentic materials:** Authentic material is any material written in English that was not created for intentional use in the English classroom. Using this content for teaching English can make the teaching experience even more engaging, imaginative and motivating for students. It can also be useful to elicit genuine responses from English language learners. The great thing about using authentic material is that it is everywhere, which makes it easy to find, and simple for learners to practice English in their own time. Remember that it isn't limited to articles from newspapers and magazines. Songs, TV programs and films, radio and podcasts, leaflets, menus – anything written in English constitutes authentic material.

### **Selecting authentic material:**

The best content to select depends on the learners, their level of English and the course content the English teacher wishes to focus on. It's also a good idea to find out the learners' interests – after all, there's no point trying to get students fascinated by a text on the latest sci-fi movie if they're all fans of action films. The materials should reflect a situation that a student may face in an English-speaking environment – this will help them transition into a world where English is the norm. In this world, people use abbreviations, body language is important

and they'll use 'filler' sounds – such as 'ummm' – when they are speaking English – and learners will encounter these in authentic material.

**Using authentic materials:** Using authentic materials is one of the mainstays of an imaginative and motivating higher level course, but rarely features at levels lower than intermediate. There are several reasons for this, primarily a kind of fear that students will panic when faced with language that is largely unfamiliar, and a feeling that to prevent this the language should be edited to the students' level. In teaching language for learning purposes, the educators' main goal is to provide learners with the linguistic knowledge about the language. This knowledge includes grammatical rules, vocabulary lists and other linguistic codes. The underlying premise of this approach is that by informing learners about the language, it will help them decode a text in the target language. order to decode the text. Under these circumstances, the language educators tend to create teaching materials that are specifically designed to teach the linguistic concepts of the language.

**Non-authentic materials:**

A non-authentic text, in language teaching terms, is one that has been written especially for language students. The argument for using authentic materials is derived from the notion, that the most effective way to develop a particular skill is to rehearse that skill in class. Proponents of authentic materials point out that classroom texts and dialogues do not adequately prepare learners for copying with the language they hear and read in the real world outside the classroom. They argue that if we want learners to comprehend aural and written texts in the real world, then the learners need opportunities for engaging in these real-world texts in class.

- **Teacher talk:**

A valuable source of listening (and one rarely recognized as such) is teacher talk. As teachers discuss classroom business, answer students' questions, or tell stories, they provide students with natural opportunities for interaction and practicing listening to unscripted speech. This type of input is the easiest to control for difficulty because the teacher can effortlessly paraphrase, repeat, explain, and change the speed of delivery. Keeping the benefits of teacher talk in mind, I try to resist the urge to address my students in their native language to save time when they ask a question about the target culture. I take advantage of their interest in the topic and make my response a listening activity. After announcing a purpose (I am going to tell you about . . . After listening, you will tell me what you understood), I tell the story at natural speed and then repeat it more slowly. I consciously monitor my choice of words and use of nonverbal cues, pause to check comprehension, and ask for a summary at the end.

- **Student talk:**

Another natural source of aural input is student talk that emerges in the individual and group production during class work. Although some students and teachers object to cooperative activities because of the exposure to "poor" language and other speakers' mistakes, use of the native language, and perceived loss of control over the class, the advantages of collaborative work outweigh these concerns. Group activities provide an interactive and safe environment to practice aural and oral skills, maximize listening and speaking time, and enable even the quietest students to participate. Also, many learners find it easier to understand their fellow NNEs. When teachers notice groups of students slipping into their native language, they may remind them that every minute of the class time should be spent practicing the target

language and that learning from each other is very effective because members of the group each have different strengths. To keep students on task, teachers should include relevant information-exchange communicative tasks with a clearly defined role for each participant and set a time limit for each activity. They should rotate group members to keep activities interesting and walk around the room while correcting oral mistakes, answering questions, and providing individualized feedback on listening and speaking. When students present individually, the rest of the class should be told to listen and ask questions, summarize, or report back.

### **Listening activities:**

Listening activities come in different forms and formats. They can focus on the main idea of the text or some specific information, require top-down or bottom-up processing skills, and ask for a verbal or a nonverbal response from listeners. The following classification of listening exercises is based on Rost's (2011) framework of different types of listening.

### **Intensive Listening:**

Intensive listening means paying close attention to the language of the listening text to single out words or phrases, grammatical structures, specific sounds, or intonation patterns. This accuracy-focused listening makes students consciously notice linguistic forms, which facilitates language acquisition. Some examples of intensive listening activities are

- >transcription
- >different types of dictations cloze (inserting words into blank spaces in a passage)
- >dictogloss (listening to and then reconstructing a text)
- >sentence completion
- >error correction (comparing a spoken and a written text)

### **Selective Listening:**

Selective listening involves concentrating on specific details with a deliberate purpose in mind. It is usually done to extract information in response to a particular task, such as Listen and say when the train leaves or Write down the telephone number. To engage in selective listening, students could practice

- >following directions and instructions
- >taking notes
- >answering specific questions about amounts, dates, time, facts, and so forth
- >predicting what will be said next after the recording has been stopped
- >listing the sequence of steps, events, or topics mentioned in the text

### **Interactive Listening:**

Interactive listening requires the listener to participate in the conversation by alternating between listening and speaking. This back-and forth interaction involves not only listening but also producing the language: negotiating the meaning, confirming understanding, taking turns, and delivering an appropriate response. It is the ultimate form of aural and oral practice that integrates linguistic forms, meaning, and social conventions of listening. Common interactive listening exercises include

- >interviews
- >discussions
- >partial dialogues, in which students listen to a speaker and respond
- >information-gap activities, in which students exchange information to fulfill the task

>jigsaw listening, in which groups of students listen to different parts of the message and then reconstruct the whole together

**Extensive Listening:**

Extensive listening focuses on general comprehension of the text. It means getting the overall meaning and enjoying the content rather than seeking answers to specific questions. It exposes students to different voices and styles, improves automaticity in processing spoken language, and builds confidence in dealing with the spoken input. The following activities are based on extensive listening:

- >summarizing
- >rating content as more or less interesting
- >using visual organizers (e.g., K-W-L [know, want, learn] and who/where/what/when charts)
- >filling out listening logs, in which students record their listening goals and strategies for each text
- >practicing flood listening, in which students listen to several recordings on self-selected topics

**Responsive Listening:** Responsive listening makes the listener relate to the content of the text by expressing an opinion, a feeling, or a point of view. Rather than appealing to facts, it elicits personal attitudes and emotions. This type of response may be colored by one's sociocultural background because the same content could cause different reactions from different cultures. Examples of responsive activities are

- >problem-solving tasks
- >sharing and responding to personal experiences
- >evaluative tasks, or making judgments about the truth, probability, and so forth
- >paused listening, or responding to short parts of the text by making connections to personal experiences, world events, and so forth
- >interpretative listening, or making inferences and deductions

**Autonomous Listening:** Autonomous listening describes any independent listening that is done outside the classroom. It promotes learner motivation and self-reliance because the choice of materials, comprehension monitoring, and task completion are determined by the listener. To help students cope with listening on their own, teachers can provide training in strategies and self-assessment techniques. Autonomous listening includes all the types of listening described in this "Listening Activities" section.

**Conclusion:** To sum up, text-based instruction can be a useful approach for teaching a foreign language to future pedagogues. However, it is important to consider the advantages and disadvantages of this approach and to balance it with other methods that emphasize interactive, communicative, and cultural aspects of language learning. By combining various methods, teachers can provide a more comprehensive and effective language learning experience for their students. Listening comprehension exercises are considered to be most effective when they are supplemented by prelistening and postlistening activities. Each of these stages has a specific purpose that contributes to building listening skills.

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