

The Teaching of Listening Comprehension for EFL University Students

*Arunee Wiriyachitra
Prince of Songkla University, Haad Yai*

The aim of an EFL teacher is to prepare the students to cope with English outside an English classroom. Since one area of particular difficulty for most EFL students is listening comprehension, aural comprehension has been receiving increasing attention as one of the language learning skills.

Like all other language skills, the listening skill is something which can be taught in a systematic and sequential way. Unfortunately, there seems to be a lack of a complete commercial listening comprehension program for EFL learners. Therefore, in this article, I will outline a systematic course specially designed to improve the listening skill of the EFL university learners through controlled exposure to the features of normally spoken English.

General Aim of the Program.

The listening comprehension program with which I work is designed as an elective 2-credit course for the students at Prince of Songkla University, Haad Yai, Thailand. The students are from all faculties in the university. These students are required to complete compulsory English courses which take from 2-4 semesters depending on the requirements of each faculty. The compulsory courses mainly focus on reading and writing. Therefore, this course is intended for those who have mastered the foundations of English but require further practice in order to acquire fluency in listening to the English language both in areas of General English and in English for Specific Purposes, so that they will be comfortable with the language when listening to lectures or English spoken by native speakers.

Specific Aim of the Program.

1. To familiarize students with the sound, stress and intonation system of spoken English by a presentation of the phonetic system of English accompanied by corrective and fluency drills.
2. To practice listening for structural details by writing from dictation.
3. To practice spanning and memory recall by writing from dictation and listening to dialogues and lectures.

4. To practice comprehension by listening to authentic English dialogues delivered at normal speed.
5. To practice listening with understanding by listening to short passages and lectures.
6. To recognize, interpret or discount characteristic performance variables of native speakers including :
 - hesitation
 - repetition
 - false starts
 - digression
 - fillers and formulaic phrases
 - weak forms
 - incomplete sentences
 by listening to lectures and dialogues.
7. To practice listening for important information by being able to :
 - identify the topic
 - identify the main idea
 - listen for key words and phrases
 - select out relevant details.
 through listening to lectures.
8. To be aware of and adjust rapidly to the phonological diversity of spoken English among native speakers as affected by sex, age and nationality by listening to different English speakers throughout the program.

Period of the Program : 14 weeks

Time Schedule per Week :

- one hour of group meeting to test what has been learned in the previous week, to lecture on the topic for this week, to explain the procedures in listening and to practice listening together.
- one hour for tutoring the students with listening problems.
- as many hours as possible for individualized listening.

Teaching Materials per Week :

- Lecture notes
- Tape answer sheet
- Tape answer key for immediate feedback of performance
- 1 hr. recorded cassette tape

No. of Teachers : one American responsible for the second, third and fourth week lectures.

: one Thai teacher responsible for the whole program.

No. of students : 28 students

Instructional Method :

Week 1 – Pretest using one copy of TOEFL Listening Comprehension Tape, Part A, B, C

Week 2 – Pronunciation

During the lecture hour, the students will be told how the English vowels and some of the consonants which the Thai have difficulty with are pronounced. The lecture is focused on the aural receptivity or the recognition of sounds as well as the actual production of sounds. A pronunciation chart is used. The practiced sounds include :

/t/, /i/, /e/, /æ/, /ʌ/, /a/, /o/, /ɔ/, /u/, /ʊ/, /ɜ/, /ei/, /ia/, /s/, /z/, /ch/, /sh/, /f/, /v/, /t/, /d/, /b/, and /p/.

Different types of exercises on these sounds are produced by Mrs. Kathy Chareonsup.

Week 3 – Stress and Rhythm

During lecture hour, the students will be provided with systematic training in English stress patterns. Some important rules are given. However, the students are warned of the exceptions. These rules include : where the stress falls in polysyllabic words, in words with different endings, in compound expressions, in noun-verb words and in sentences. The students are told how unstressed vowels are pronounced and how to perform the timing of syllables which gives the language its characteristic rhythm, also focusing on the difference in meaning or implications if stress is placed on different words in the same sentence.

Different kinds of exercises on stress and rhythm are recorded.

Week 4 – Intonation

During lecture hour, the students will be told of the patterns used in final and non-final intonation : when and why they are used. The important theme in the intonation lecture is to make clear to the students the tune of the English language which can indicate the speaker's state of mind as he speaks and the mental attitude which accompanies his words.

Varieties of intonation exercises are also recorded on tape.

Week 5 – Transferring of Listening to Writing

During the lecture hour, the purpose of the week's listening is given ; that is, it is focused on transferring the spoken words to written text, on stressing memory, on lengthening memory

span and strengthening immediate recall. It is also to review the basic skill of discriminative listening, of attending to grammatical relationships within the flow of natural spoken English with its patterns of contraction, word reduction, elision, assimilation, blending, phrasing, stress, rhythm and intonation. Through this practice, the students will also improve their ability to extract meaning from spoken English sentences.

Lessons from Listening Dictation by Joan Moreley are recorded. These lessons are 1-B, 2-C, 3-C, 4-B, 5-D, 6-C and 6-D.

Week 6 – Sentence Comprehension

During lecture hour, students are informed that this week's listening is the continuation of the practice of the previous week. However, it only requires comprehension of rather long sentences.

Lessons 7A-D, 8A-D from "Listening Dictation" by Joan Moreley are recorded.

Week 7 – Comprehension of Short Passages.

The students are informed that the purpose of this week's listening is for students to have the opportunity to thoroughly analyze a spontaneous oral passage from the point of view of intonation and pronunciation as well as grammar. The students will hear how various discrete elements are connected and how continuous thoughts are expressed.

Units 1-4 from "CIEL Listening Comprehension" by Colin Mortimer are recorded.

Week 8 – Comprehension of Dialogues

The students are informed that the purpose of the tape is to acquaint them with the everyday speech on varieties of topics so that they will increase their ability to understand conversational English. Apart from that, the students will be trained to think of the implications from the tones and expressions used.

Samples 1-30 from "On Speaking Terms" by Jimmy G. Harris and Ron Hube are recorded. Questions are re-written.

Week 9 – Recognizing Topics and Main Ideas

A lecture is given on what should be done before taking notes and while taking notes. Semantic markers which are often used to mark the main idea are introduced. Digression is also explained and digression markers are shown. This will assist the students in selecting the main idea.

The main focus of this week's listening is to find the main idea. However, students have to complete blanks in a transcript with words or phrases heard from the corresponding tape. The tape is composed of unrehearsed lectures in real lecture situations which include coughs and various noises so that the students will be accustomed to the normal interference and distractions. The spaces to be filled are content words or logic carriers. Here, the intent is to concentrate on certain words and phrases in a lecture-like passage in order to write them down during the lecture.

Units 7 and 9 of "English in Use" by the Horwood Language Centre, University of Melbourne are recorded but cloze exercises are adapted.

Week 10 – Selecting Supporting Points

A lecture is given on the nature of relevant and irrelevant details. The organizational patterns of speech and lectures are also introduced to assist the students to easily follow the lecture. Semantic markers which mark the type of details are also introduced.

Fifteen lecturettes are recorded. The exercises ask for the students to supply the main ideas and main supporting points of these lectures.

Week 11 – Recording Short Notes

A lecture is given on how to record short notes : techniques in recording the key points in the sentence, in reducing long sentences and in reducing language are explained.

Various exercises practicing the above points and five lecturettes are recorded for students to take notes of the main ideas and supporting points in short form.

Week 12 – Outlining

A lecture is given on the widely-used outline format.

Five lectures of various topics are recorded. The students have to do note-taking fill-in exercise. It is assumed that the student will need some assistance in learning how to organize notes so the outline forms with some notes are given for each lecture. The blank space must be filled in from the tape.

Week 13 – Lecture Form

A lecture is given on the characteristic of the lecture form : introduction, main body and summary. What and how many notes to take from each section is described. The cue expres-

sions used are illustrated to assist students in identifying these sections.

Five life-like lectures from "CIEL-Experiment" by Colin Mortimer and Adelbert Smith are recorded. Students are required to take notes of each section of the lecture in an outline and shortening form. Comprehension questions follow, which must be answered with reference to the notes.

Week 14 – Note-Taking Review

This is the final step along the way towards making the students more independent and self-organized in listening. It is to review all the note-taking techniques learned.

Live lecture and recorded lectures about half an hour long each are given, students are free to take notes in their individual style.

Evaluation Method

- 45 min. pre and post test. The test is the copy of one of the TOEFL Test-Listening Comprehension Part A-B-C
- 10 min. test at the beginning of the group meeting hour. The content of the test is taken from some parts of the listening task done privately on the previous week. The reason for this is to motivate students to listen to the assigned tape as many times as possible. There will be 12 tests issued; 5 marks are given for each test.
- 1 hr. final examination. The test includes every skill practiced in class but with different items, 40 marks are kept.

Result

Judging from the pre and post test, the students' ability in listening nearly doubled. The total score is 50 marks from 50 questions on tape. The pre-test score ranged from 6-19, with an average of 11 marks. The post-test ranged from 11-32, with an average of 21.

After the post-test, the students informed me that the problem they had was not just because of the difficulty and the speed of speech but also because of the very limited time lapse in reading the multiple choice questions.

Therefore, research was done to find out whether this argument was sound or not. Another TOEFL test was administered, the difficulty of the test was parallel to the previous one but the speed of the talk especially on Part C (Lecture) was faster. However, this TOEFL test was re-recorded so that there would be a longer period of time allowed to read the choices. The result was interesting. The test score varied from 15-39 marks, with an average mark of 28.

Conclusion

Here, we have tried to show how listening comprehension can be sequenced and how the study skills can be developed. Considering that this is a 2-credit course, only 14 weeks of teaching and learning in an environment in which English is used only in an English class, we are pleased with the results. It is hoped that this may encourage those EFL teachers whose students have a poor command of listening comprehension to develop better programs for their students.

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