Creating Listening Activities That Work

Randall Davis

Presented at Carolina TESOL Conference and the International TESOL Annual Convention March & April 2007

Presentation Handout http://www.esl-lab.com/handouts
Purpose

- Highlight factors that affect comprehensibility for ESL students
- Discuss keys to teaching listening
- Demonstrate classroom activities that teach listening and encourage more student engagement in the learning process.

Presentation Handout
http://www.esl-lab.com/handouts
General Concepts

- Listening and speaking are reciprocals skills.
- *Testing* listening is not *teaching* it.
- Just because you can't remember something doesn't mean you didn't understand it at the time you heard it.

*Presentation Handout*  
http://www.esl-lab.com/handouts
Comprehensibility Factors (1)

- Rate of speed (learner is a "limited processor")
- Vocabulary, idiomatic expressions, and grammatical structures
- Ambient noise
- Acoustic blur (word reductions due to unstressed syllables)

- Keep your **nose** clean
- Have your **nose** in a book
- Keep your **nose** to the grindstone
- Keep your **nose** out of something
- Thumb your **nose** at
- Pay through the **nose**
- Follow your **nose**
- Stick your **nose** in something
- Be on the **nose**
- Have a **nose** for something
Acoustic Blur

- Jeet yet?
- No, Joo?
Comprehensibility Factors (2)

• Lack of background schemata or knowledge

Familiarity with topic helps learner draw on that knowledge; however, it can distort perceptions, leading to misinterpretation.
Comprehensibility Factors (3)

- Lack of cultural understanding
  
  --- I saw Bigfoot last night rummaging through my garbage. Here's the fuzzy picture I took of him as he was running away.

- Paralinguistic utterances, feedback signals, and false starts

- Limited exposure to decontextualized speech (unpredictability factor)

- Amount of redundancy, number of pronoun referents
Comprehensibility Factors (4)

- No visual or multisensory support

Richness of environmental cues (images, sounds, smells, tone of voice) play key roles in deciphering the message.
Comprehensibility Factors (5)

- Test items sometimes distort and exaggerate the amount of information that even native speakers could process.

What is the man's name and... if one train is heading east at 60 miles an hour and another one westbound with only 28 lbs of pressure in the back left tire, what is the probability that blah blah blah blah blah?
Comprehensibility Factors (6)

- Inability to clarify, restate, and use circumlocution to indicate a need for a modified version of the utterance.
- I don't understand.
- Sorry. The number is 581-23 . . .
- What are you trying to say about _____?
- I didn't catch that last point about ___.
- So, what you're saying is that _____.
- In other words, ___.
- Let's see if I got that straight. You said that _______.

Give up, pretend, or ask for clarification
**Keys to Teaching Listening (1)**

- Create tasks (and use live speakers) that approximate real-life situations.
- Progress from semi-authentic speech to genuine authentic speech.
- Don't use tasks that result in cognitive overload.
- Design tasks that are success-oriented.
- Build upon learners' background knowledge.
- Allow time for collaborative listening and discussion to clarify and restate ideas.
**Keys to Teaching Listening (2)**

- Progress from finding the gist of the conversation, to main ideas, to critical-thinking skills where students construct meaning on their own.

- Hypothesizing
- Discussing Cause-Effect Relationships
- Clarifying
- Comparing - Contrasting
- Inferring
- Dispelling Illogical Reasoning
Keys to Teaching Listening (3)
Digital Voice Journals - Sanako Media Assistant

- Handles all major media types including .rm, MP3, and .wma
- Displays captions or other text
- Bookmarks files for easy review
- Controls speed of media files
- Records/saves files in various formats including MP3 and .wma

Designed specifically for language learning. Commercial stand-alone or lab product.
Giving Appropriate Feedback

Objective: To help students learn how to give and received clarification questions or feedback signals

- Oh, really?
- Uh-Huh.
- No kidding.
- What's that?
- Why do you feel that way?
- I feel the same way.
- I couldn't agree more.
- What do you mean by *generous*: time, money . . . what exactly?
- I don't follow you.
- In other words?
Pre-listening activity to stimulate background knowledge

Idiomatic expressions to improve comprehension and fluency

Post-Listening exercises to improve problem-solving skills.
Sample Lesson: Dating & Marriage

- Vocabulary Exercise – Descriptive Adjectives
- Grammar Focus – Adjective clauses and modals of advice, past obligation, and speculation
- Asking Questions – Giving feedback
- Pre-Listening Task – Relying on students’ background knowledge
- Listening Task – Checking main ideas and making conclusions based on scripted conversations
- Post-Listening – Making predictions and dispelling fallacies
Grammar Focus

- Objective: To help students learn to form adjective clauses and explain their reasons.
- I'm looking for a partner who/that is ___ because __________.
- I like people who/that are ____ due to the fact that ________.
- I enjoy dating people who/that ____________.
- I prefer going out with people whose ____.
**Vocabulary Building**

- **Objective:** To help students increase their productive use of descriptive adjectives.

- **Examples:** honest, sociable, intelligent, wealthy, attractive

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Positive</th>
<th>Neutral</th>
<th>Negative</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>easygoing</td>
<td>tolerant</td>
<td>arrogant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>reliable</td>
<td>frank</td>
<td>egotistical</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>hardworking</td>
<td>sensible</td>
<td>judgmental</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>motivated</td>
<td>supportive</td>
<td>cynical</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>reliant</td>
<td>generous</td>
<td>closed-minded</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>optimistic</td>
<td>organized</td>
<td>intolerant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>pragmatic</td>
<td>romantic</td>
<td>pessimistic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>resourceful</td>
<td>sociable</td>
<td>impatient</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>sensitive</td>
<td>sympathetic</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>patient</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>dogmatic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>greedy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>selfish</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>sly</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>gullible</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Pre-Listening Task

◆ You hear a car honking in the driveway. Who might it be?

- math tutor
- date

[Watch Video] - Who is it?
Modals of Speculation

- **Objective:** To teach modals of speculation and apply them in a conversation
  - Must / has to / could / may / might
    - *It must be her date.*
    - *A guy might be there to pick her up.*
    - *The car could be at the wrong house.*
  - Couldn't / can't / might not
    - *It couldn't be her mother.*
    - *It can't be good.*
Modals of Necessity / Advice

Objective: To teach modals of necessity / advice, the appropriateness of each according to context, and apply them in a conversation

- Have to / need to
  - You have to step in and say something.
  - You need to accept the situation.

- Must / had better / should / ought to / could / might
  - You'd better follow her in your car.
  - You could invite the guy in and get to know him.
Possible Questions
Discrete Point

- Where are you going?
- How old is that guy?
- What's his name?
- Where did you meet him?
- What time will you be home?
- Does he have an earring in his nose?
- Can I follow you in my car?
- Do you need a chaperon?
- You're not going to marry that guy, are you?
- Would you rather stay home and play Scrabble?
Possible Questions
Critical-Thinking

- What do you like most about the guy and why? --- reasons
- If I don't let her go out with the guy, what will she do? --- cause and effect / condition
- What happened to your last boyfriend, Ronald? How is date, Dirk, different from the last guy? --- compare and contrast
- If you could plan the ideal date, where would you go and what would you do? --- hypothesize
Objective: To teach modals of advice, past obligation, and speculation and apply them in a conversation.

- You should spend more time with the family.
- You'd better think over your decision, or you might regret it.
- My sister shouldn't have gone to that party.
- She could have saved more for college.
- My parents must have known about my grades, but they didn't say anything.
- The dog could/might have eaten the cookies.
Summary

- Create engaging activities that teach listening, not just test it.
- Provide rich content that is within the linguistic reach of your students.
- Encourage the use of critical-thinking and problem-solving skills that are needed in and out of the language classroom.

Presentation Handout
http://www.esl-lab.com/handouts