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LISTENING SKILL – A THOROUGHFARE TO EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATION AND COMPREHENSION

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ABSTRACT

This study is about listening skill with which learning process starts. Though it is not a Productive skill, the listener's participation is indispensable for proper decoding. This process starts with sound recognition and leads to interpretation of utterances. This piece of writing projects listening, the normal activity as a skill and its traits. Various types of listening and its impact on communication and comprehension are brought out.

Keywords: LSRW skill – active and passive skills – listening and hearing – Recognition skill.

INTRODUCTION

Listening skill is the most predominant one among the four learning skills LSRW. Writing skill has been considered the higher level of language learning but recent studies realise that listening is the undercurrent that tucks in all the remaining three skills into its fold. Since it is the Recognition skill, its competence couldn't be put in a hierarchy. The decoder's willingness, focused attention and concentration are the basic requisite. "Listening is widely acknowledged as neglected skill due to the insufficient pedagogical development" (Mendelson, 1998; Takahashi, 1999). Proper listening gives immense chances of observing the articulation of words with stress and intonation of the speaker that leads to the full-fledged conceptualisation and of course, develops inter-personal relationship. According to (Janusik, 2002) "Historically more time has been spent on teaching speaking than listening, even though listening is communication activity in which we spend most of our time".

LISTENING, A HIGHER MODE OF HEARING

Language learning is mainly for communicative purpose, hence acquiring and accumulating aural, the recognition skill and oral, the reproductive skill is essential. (Janusik, 2002), points out "listening as the process of receiving, constructing meaning from and responding to spoken and non-verbal messages". A child learns to produce sounds by hearing and imitating the same effortlessly. In the long run the hearing ability is groomed into listening. This skill is developed at school in various levels. (Gohen, 2009, P.45), says "Learners have to decode the message, understand and interpret in the course of listening". Both listening skill and understanding ability are interdependent. Often listening is misconceived as hearing.

Listening is the absorption of speaker's ideas using hearing ability, which encompasses the five processes as author Joseph DeVito (DeVito 2000) states: Receiving, Understanding, Remembering, Responding and Evaluation.

ACTIVE AND PASSIVE LISTENING SKILL – THE STRATEGIES

The listening skill is bifurcated into two- One is Active and the other is Passive. Between the two, Active Listening gains momentum as the perception rate is higher. The main reason is both the speaker and the listener are in the similar environment. The eye contact and the proximity undoubtedly improve the level of understanding. Active listening is much preferable as the student and the teacher have one to one contact, which is the speciality of classroom situation. The teacher could get the feedback instantaneously and adopt different modes of approaching the students, either by reinforcing the matter or by elucidating the point using any other teaching method. Upon this, the student at the receiving end would easily recognize the feelings and emotions that quickens his thought process. Focused attention is attained through facial expressions. Passive listening is successful only when the speaker is more efficient in conveying the message with proper pronunciation, stress and pause. The encoder or the speaker has little idea about the listeners' attitude and mood. Changing or altering the approach, repeating ideas as per the demand becomes impossible. Conceiving ideas by passive listening is not that successful unless the listener takes severe effort. "Oral communication is a two-way process between speaker and listener and involves the productive skill of speaking and receptive skill of understanding", (byrne,1986, P.8).

TOP-DOWN AND BOTTOM-UP - TWIN APPROACHES

Top-down and bottom-up approaches are the two modes that have been framed to boost the listening skill. As Jack C.Richards says, "Traditional classroom listening activities focus primarily on bottom-up processing with exercises such as dictation, close listening, the use of multiple choice after a text and similar activities that required close and detailed processing of the input". When Top-down skill backs up language, Bottom-up process strengthens the understanding of the content, by giving information about the topic and the subject matter before the start of the listening activity.

LISTENING SKILL AND ITS CONSTRAINTS

Though listening skill is not Productive, it demands the involvement of the listener. "A solid foundation in the receptive skill serve as the basis for building productive skill", (Chastain, 1971, P.160). The calibre of encoding and decoding and the speed of traversal must be on same alignment for successful transmission of ideas. The encoder's fullest participation is equally important. Listening is the weakest skill in English learning due to the examination education system (EES); it is called 'Dumb English' by some English educators in china such as Wang (2009) a young researcher in China. Predominantly, it is the Recognition skill and hence it depends on the individual's talent in grasping or conceiving the ideas. Decoding ideas depends on the efficiency coupled with mental preparedness of the listener. External factors like incompatible atmosphere, disagreeable surroundings and unpleasant noise may deteriorate the ultimate result.

CONCLUSION

Betterment of listening is determined by three different levels- Readiness before listening; Observation during listening; Understanding after listening. Readiness with the topic, intensified observation during listening, would gear up the understanding level to

considerable heights. Readiness could be instigated using 2 strategies- story and picture as ‘warming up exercises’- The Zhang (2000) Using reading techniques like highlighting keywords draws the listener’s attention and attraction resulting in the maximum level of understanding. It being Recognition skill there is no parameter to measure its intensity. Hence the skill’s importance is not perceived. The profound understanding of this skill is the basic requirement of proper learning process. However, listening is purely subjective and it can’t be put in any sort of stratum. Once the students learn to be good listeners their concentration power would ramp up, there by classroom ethics would be observed relentlessly.

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