

ISSN 0215-4994



BAHASTRA

Jurnal Ilmiah Bahasa dan Sastra

- Memaknai *Perempuan Bercahaya* Karya Rina Ratih Sri Sudaryani
Sugihastuti
- Using Jigsaw to Make Students Active and Get Better Understanding in Learning Writing
Umi Rokhyati
- Kajian Implikatur Wacana Humor Anekdot Sufi Dari Nasrudin: Kajian Pragmatik
A. Yumartati
- Analisis Mikrostruktural dan Makrostruktural Novel *Para Priyayi* Karya Umar Kayam (Sebuah Analisis Wacana)
Roni Sulistiyono
- Improving Students' Essay Writing Skill through Conferencing in the English Education Study Program, Faculty of Teacher Training and Education of Ahmad Dahlan University, Academic Year 2007/2008
Ani Susanti
- What Should Listening Teachers Know and Do?
Sucipto

Surat Keputusan Menteri Penerangan Republik Indonesia
Nomor 1108/SK/DITJEN PPG/STT/1987
Rekomendasi Direktur Jendral Pendidikan Tinggi
Departemen Pendidikan dan Kebudayaan
Nomor. 112/D5.5/U/1987

BAHASTRA
Jurnal Ilmiah Bahasa dan Sastra

Vol.
XXV

Nomor
2

Hlm.
1-88

Yogyakarta
Maret 2011

ISSN
0215-4994

Bahastra

Jurnal Ilmiah Bahasa dan Sastra

<i>Pelindung/Penasehat</i>	:	Rektor Universitas Ahmad Dahlan
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<i>Izin Terbit</i>	:	Surat Keputusan Menteri Penerangan Republik Indonesia Nomor 1108/SK/DITJEN PPG/STT/1987
<i>Rekomendasi</i>	:	Direktur Jendral Pendidikan Tinggi Departemen Pendidikan dan Kebudayaan Nomor. 112/D5.5/U/1987
<i>ISSN</i>	:	0215-4994
<i>Percetakan</i>	:	Gress Press Jln. Dongkelan Yogyakarta Telp. 0274-2643064

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Jurnal Bahastra diterbitkan oleh Universitas Ahmad Dahlan Yogyakarta. Pengelolaan oleh Jurusan Pendidikan Bahasa dan Sastra Indonesia FKIP Universitas Ahmad Dahlan Yogyakarta. Terbit dua kali setahun. Jurnal ini hanya memuat tulisan ilmiah, baik berupa hasil analisis, laporan penelitian, kajian dan penerapan teori, maupun pembahasan pustaka, dalam bidang bahasa dan sastra serta pengajarannya.

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DAFTAR ISI

Volume XXV Nomor 2, Februari 2011

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What Should Listening Teachers Know and Do?

Sucipto
Universitas Ahmad Dahlan

Abstract

Listening class often makes teachers and learners bored and frustrated. It happens because they do not recognize the nature of listening and do not know what should be done while listening English. In this article, the writer attempts to get the way out of the problem. Firstly, he explains the meaning of listening. Listening really means 'listening and understanding what we hear at the same time'. So, two concurrent actions are demanded to take place in this process. Listening is more a process than a product which instantly shapes the understanding and utterances of the learners. After that, the writer describes the listening process and strategies. Vandergrift (2002) mentioned two distinct processes involved in listening comprehension. Listeners use 'top-down' processes when they use prior knowledge to understand the meaning of a message. On the other hand, listeners also use 'bottom-up' processes when they use linguistic knowledge to understand the meaning of a message. The degree to which listeners use the one process or the other will depend on their knowledge of the language, familiarity with the topic or the purpose for listening. Knowing the listening process should be followed by practising listening skills. Teachers should be aware of three phases of listening strategies and train students to run the phases; pre-listening, during listening, and post-listening.

Key words: listening, listening process, listening strategies

Introduction

Listening is the most common communication activity in daily life. According to Morley (1991, p.82), "We can expect to listen twice

as much as we speak, four times more than we read, and five times more than we write." Listening is very important in language learning. Rost (1994, p. 141-142), points out, "listening is vital in the language classroom because it provides input for the learner. Without understanding input at the right level, any learning simply cannot begin. Listening is thus fundamental to speaking."

However, even in the modern methods of SL (Second Language) teaching, quite surprisingly, listening skill is ignored. David Nunan (1997) commented that listening is the "Cinderella Skill" which is overlooked by its elder sister "speaking" in SL learning. As 'to expertise the productive skills like speaking and writing' has become the standard of the knowledge of second language, listening and reading have been turned to be the secondary ones. Besides, in our schools, colleges and even in the higher levels, instructors direct how to read and write, not how to speak or listen. It is believed that these would be mastered by the learners automatically.

In language course teaching listening skills is one of the most difficult tasks for any ESL/EFL teacher. This is because successful listening skills are acquired over time and with lots of practice. Listening is often frustrating for both of teachers and students. It is because there are no rules as in grammar teaching.

In a series of experiments Anderson and Lynch (1988) in Nunan (1991;24) found that the difficulty of listening tasks was particularly influenced by the following: (1) The organization of information (texts in which the order in which the information was presented matched its chronological sequence in real life were easier than texts in which the information was presented out of sequence), (2) the familiarity of the topic, (3) the explicitness and sufficiency of the information, (4) the type of referring expressions used (for example, use of pronouns rather than complete noun phrase referents made texts more difficult), (5) whether the text described 'static' relationships (for example, geometric figures or dynamic relationship (for example, a road accident).

Moreover, the difficulties in listening getting more and more because of the teachers' paradigm. Miller (2000:25) in Qing (2001) said that many teachers believe in the concept: "practice makes it

perfect". They require students do various kinds of exercises in each class. Students are in a passive situation and often feel tired and bored, and too often, teachers only use listening activities to "test listening skills, rather than developing good listening skills", which leads to anxiety and apprehension.

Many teachers' listening teaching approach is teacher-centred. Harden and Crosby (2000:335) describe teacher-centred learning strategies as the focus on the teacher transmitting knowledge, from the teacher or the expert to the learner or the novice. Teachers often think "the more practice they give to the class the better". They have been dominating the classroom, so that the learners are very passive. Unconsciously, they have made the listening class students become dependent learners. They do not know how to listen and how to improve their listening comprehension. In this article, the writer describes what the teachers should know and do for their listening classes.

What Is Listening?

Listening teachers should know what listening is. Listening is a skill that it is a related but distinct process than hearing which involves just perceiving sound in a passive way while listening occupies an active process. This correlation is like between seeing and reading. Seeing is a very ordinary and passive state while reading is a focused process requiring reader's instrumental approach.

What 'listening' really means is 'listening and understanding what we hear at the same time'. So, two concurrent actions are demanded to take place in this process. (Saha and Talukdar, 2008)

Furthermore, there is a traditional labeling for reading and listening as "passive" skills. But linguists believe that a listener is involved in guessing, anticipating, checking, interpreting, interacting and organizing by associating and accommodating their prior knowledge of meaning and form.

Even as a receptive skill, listening differs greatly with reading as reading materials are printed and permanent enough where the learners are required to interact with the next sentence using the knowledge of

the previous one while listening involves continuous material presentation where they have to respond to the immediate expression. From the view point of "product" or "process", listening is more a process than a product which instantly shapes the understanding and utterances of the learners.

Listening process

Richards (1990) in Moran (2005) provides a clear description of how listening comprehension is achieved by native or non-native listeners. He refers to this listening process as bottom-up and top-down processing. Bottom-up processing refers to the decoding process, the direct decoding of language into meaningful units, from sound waves through the air, in through our ears and into our brain where meaning is decoded. To decode sounds students need to know the code. The code consists of how the sounds work and how they string together and how the code can change in different ways when it is strung together.

Vandergrift (2002) mentioned two distinct processes involved in listening comprehension. Listeners use 'top-down' processes when they use prior knowledge to understand the meaning of a message. Prior knowledge can be knowledge of the topic, the listening context, the text-type, the culture or other information stored in long-term memory as schemata (typical sequences or common situations around which world knowledge is organized). Listeners use content words and contextual clues to form hypotheses in an exploratory fashion.

On the other hand, listeners also use 'bottom-up' processes when they use linguistic knowledge to understand the meaning of a message. They build meaning from lower level sounds to words to grammatical relationships to lexical meanings in order to arrive at the final message. Listening comprehension is not either top-down or bottom-up processing, but an interactive, interpretive process where listeners use both prior knowledge and linguistic knowledge in understanding messages. The degree to which listeners use the one process or the other will depend on their knowledge of the language, familiarity with the topic or the purpose for listening. For example, listening for gist involves primarily top-down processing, whereas listening for specific

information, as in a weather broadcast, involves primarily bottom-up processing to comprehend all the desired details.

Listening Strategies

Schwartz (1998) stated that listening strategies are techniques or activities that contribute directly to the comprehension and recall of listening input. Listening strategies can be classified by how the listener processes the input. There are two strategies.

The first is top-down. *Top-down strategies* are listener based; the listener taps into background knowledge of the topic, the situation or context, the type of text, and the language. This background knowledge activates a set of expectations that help the listener to interpret what is heard and anticipate what will come next. Top-down strategies include: listening for the main idea, predicting, drawing inferences, summarizing

The second is bottom-up *Bottom-up strategies* are text based; the listener relies on the language in the message, that is, the combination of sounds, words, and grammar that creates meaning. Bottom-up strategies include: listening for specific details, recognizing cognates, recognizing word-order patterns

Students may become anxious because they have not done well in listening process and may fear that they will be negatively evaluated by their teachers and peers. They work on improving their listening but many of them do not really know where to start other than to practise harder on their own. They are unable to take control of their learning and do not know how to direct their extensive listening activities to achieve their learning goals. When they encounter problems, they also do not know how best to cope with them other than to 'listen harder'. (Goh, C, 2008)

It is important for the teacher to provide numerous opportunities for students to practise listening skills and to become actively engaged in the listening process. The three phases of the listening process are: pre-listening, during listening, and after listening.

Firstly, the process of before/ pre listening. Here the students are trained to plan for the successful completion of a listening task. Pre-listening activities help students make decisions about what to listen for and, subsequently, to focus attention on meaning while listening. When students are *developing* the plan of action, the teacher should guide them to ask themselves: (1)What in my prior knowledge will help me with this particular task? (2)In what direction do I want my thinking to take me? (3)What should I do first? (4)Why am I listening to this selection? (5)How much time do I have to complete the task?

The most important thing in the pre-listening stage is to teach students to “plan for the successful completion of a listening task. (Vandergrift1999: 172) Pre-listening is a kind of warm-up preparing for students to “tune in” to the purpose of the listening passage. First, students need to establish a framework for listening so that learners do not approach the listening practice with no points of reference. This perspective is clearly in line with the use of prior knowledge or schema and establishing of a favorable context. Second, a purposeful listening should be established so that students will know what they will hear and what they are expected to do clearly. Pre-listening activities may take the form of discussion, questions, brainstorming, predicting, and pre-teaching vocabulary, etc. Such activities are aimed to generate language, activate the learner script and set a purpose for listening.

In pre-listening phase, teachers need to recognize that all students bring different backgrounds to the listening experience. Beliefs, attitudes, and biases of the listeners will affect the understanding of the message. In addition to being aware of these factors, teachers should show students how their backgrounds affect the messages they receive.

Before listening, students need assistance to activate what they already know about the ideas they are going to hear. Simply being told the topic is not enough. Pre-listening activities are required to establish what is already known about the topic, to build necessary background, and to set purpose(s) for listening.

Secondly, the students are driven to do a process during listening to monitor comprehension during a listening task. During the listening activity itself, students monitor their comprehension and make decisions

about strategy use. When students are *maintaining/monitoring* the plan of action, they should ask themselves: (1) How am I doing? (2) Am I on the right track? (3) How should I proceed? (4) What information is important to remember? (5) Should I move in a different direction? (6) What do I need to do if I do not understand?

During the listening activity itself, students monitor their comprehension and make decisions about strategy use. Students need to evaluate continually what they are comprehending and check: firstly, consistency with their predictions, and secondly, internal consistency; i.e., the ongoing interpretation of the oral text or interaction.

Teacher intervention during this phase is virtually impossible because of the ephemeral nature of listening. Periodic practice in decision-making skills and strategy use can sharpen inferencing skills and help students to monitor more effectively.

Thirdly, after listening a teacher should guide students to evaluate the approach and outcomes of a listening task. Students need to evaluate the plan in pre-listening and action in whilst listening. When students are *evaluating*, they should ask themselves: (1) How well did I do? (2) Did my particular course of thinking produce more or less than I had expected? (3) What could I have done differently? (4) How might I apply this line of thinking to other problems? (5) Do I need to go back through the task to fill in any "blanks" in my understanding?

Post-listening activities is a part that is often neglected by many teacher. Activities include interactive group work, pair work, role plays, discussions, and other communicative tasks within the classroom to develop oral proficiency in response to the listening practice. Instead of spending time examining the grammar of the listening text, post-listening can be taken as a means of developing communication abilities and skills in the real world. The best units are those that include application tasks motivating students outside the classroom into the real-life communication situation, such as surveying, interview activities or just small talks, for the understanding of words, stories or events deepens the more students relate them to their prior knowledge and personal experiences, the more students express their developing understanding through creative actions, and the more can they achieve

better listening. In the post-listening period, the teacher and students need to evaluate their output. Zhang Qing (2001).

Students need to evaluate the results of decisions made during a listening task. The teacher can encourage self-evaluation and reflection by asking students to assess the effectiveness of strategies used. Group or class discussions on the approach taken by different students can also stimulate reflection and valuable evaluation. Students are encouraged to share individual routes leading to success; e.g. how someone guessed (inference) the meaning of a certain word or how someone modified a particular strategy. Vandergrift in <http://www.llas.ac.uk/resources/gpg/67>.

Conclusion

Listening class can run effectively and being not boring or frustrating anymore if the teachers and also students recognize the nature of listening and know what should be done when listening English. Naturally, listening really means 'listening and understanding what we hear at the same time'. So, two concurrent actions are demanded to take place in this process. Listening is more a process than a product which instantly shapes the understanding and utterances of the learners. There are two distinct processes involved in listening comprehension. Listeners use 'top-down' processes when they use prior knowledge to understand the meaning of a message. On the other hand, listeners also use 'bottom-up' processes when they use linguistic knowledge to understand the meaning of a message. Knowing the listening process should be followed by practising listening skills. Teachers should be aware of three phases of the listening process and train students to run those phases. It is important for the teacher to provide numerous opportunities for students to practise listening skills and to become actively engaged in the listening process. The three phases of the listening process are: pre-listening, during listening, and after listening.

Firstly, the process of before/ pre listening. Here the students plan for the successful completion of a listening task. Pre-listening activities help students make decisions about what to listen for and,

subsequently, to focus attention on meaning while listening. *Secondly*, the students do a process during listening to monitor comprehension during a listening task. During the listening activity itself, students monitor their comprehension and make decisions about strategy use. *Thirdly*, after listening students evaluate the approach and outcomes of a listening task. Students need to evaluate the plan in pre-listening and action in whilst listening.

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