

Teaching listening as an english language

[Linguistics](#), [Language Acquisition](#)



TEACHING LISTENING AS AN ENGLISH LANGUAGE Introduction: English as a foreign language has the greatest motion in Bangladesh. Status of English as the " library language" and the increased " international inter-dependence" are the two reasons of this which led to a greater focus on face-to-face language usage crossing the margin of pen and paper exercise. As the decline of Grammar-Translation method in 1960s proved that language learning might not be limited to " reading and writing" or 'literacy', the provisional continuation of Direct Method confirmed too that 'listening and speaking' that is 'oracy' is not all that is language. Language must be taught in an integrative way where all four skills are focused. But most often, even in the modern methods of SL teaching, quite surprisingly, listening skill is ignored in a way or another! 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. Although listening had a boost up in 1960s (direct method) and in 1980s (Krashen's input hypothesis, 1981; James Asher's Total physical response, 1988 and Gillian Brown, 1988), it turned a fashion in most cases! In this article, I have tried to show how listening helps EFL learners to develop language skill. Despite the fact that it is not a research article, a small scale survey has been done at Noakhali Science and Technology University, Bangladesh in order to demonstrate that

listening practice is insisted by the learners and they find it functional in language learning. What is listening? Listening is a skill in a sense that it's a related but distinct process than hearing which involves merely perceiving sound in a passive way while listening occupies an active and immediate analysis of the streams of sounds. This correlation is like that between seeing and reading. Seeing is a very ordinary and passive state while reading is a focused process requiring reader's instrumental approach. Listening has a " volitional component". Tomatis' (2007) view is, while listening; the desire to listen, as well as the capability to listen (comprehension) must be present with the listener for the successful recognition and analysis of the sound. 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. Besides, according to Mecheal Rost (1991), listening comprises some component skills which are: •discriminating between sounds, •recognizing words, •identifying grammatical groupings of words, •identifying expressions and sets of utterances that act to create meaning, •connecting linguistic cues to non-linguistic and paralinguistic cues, •using background knowledge to predict and later to confirm meaning and recalling important words and ideas. As McDonough and Shaw (1993) and Rost (1991) explain that a listener as a processor of language has to go through three processes using three types of skills: a. Processing sound/ Perception skills: As the complete perception doesn't emerge from only the source of sound, listeners segment the stream of sound and detect word boundaries, contracted forms, vocabulary, sentence and clause boundaries, stress on longer words and effect on the

rest of the words, the significance of intonation and other language-related features, changes in pitch, tone and speed of delivery, word order pattern, grammatical word classes, key words, basic syntactic patterns, cohesive devices etc. b. Processing meaning/ Analysis skills: It's a very important stage in the sense, as researches show, that syntax is lost to memory within a very short time whereas meaning is retained for much longer. Richards (1985: 191) says that, 'memory works with propositions, not with sentences'. While listening, listeners categorize the received speech into meaningful sections, identify redundant material, keep hold of chunks of the sentences, think ahead and use language data to anticipate what a speaker may be going to say, accumulate information in the memory by organizing them and avoid too much immediate detail. c. Processing knowledge and context/ Synthesis skills: Here, 'context' refers to physical setting, the number of listener and speakers, their roles and their relationship to each other while 'linguistic knowledge' refers to their knowledge of the target language brought to the listening experience. Every context has its individual frame of reference, social attitude and topics. So, members of a particular culture have particular rules of spoken behavior and particular topic which instigate particular understanding. Listening is thought as 'interplay' between language and brain which requires the " activation of contextual information and previous knowledge" where listeners guess, organize and confirm meaning from the context. However, none of these micro-skills is either used or effective in isolation or is called listening. Successful listening refers to 'the integration of these component skills' and listening is nothing but the 'coordination of the component skills'. Nature of listening as a skill: Besides

the division of the skills as 'receptive' and 'productive', another subdivision focuses on 'one-way reception' and 'interactive reception' in this age of active learning. Reading and writing are one-way skills where learners don't get direct feedback. But in speaking and listening, learners may have their understanding and reproduction checked instantly. Thus active and self-learning takes place. Moreover, 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. Rost (1990) thinks, listeners " co-author" the discourse and they construct it by their responses. 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. Why listening? No doubt, listening is the most common communicative 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." So, listening, as a skill, is assuming more and more weight in SL or FL classrooms than ever before. 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." Limited listening input fails to promote face-to-face communication by shaping their social development, confidence and self-image. Adequate listening practice could give the learners essential contact with handy input that might trigger their utterances. Teacher talk or peer-interaction might be the options for this. But according to Rod Ellis (1990), it's not only the exposure to L2 that is enough, and learners need L2 data suited to the accurate stage of their development. If the learners don't have "optimal" exposure in the target language, they can't transmit the "comprehensible input" into "intake" through "production strategies" where learners attempt to use L2 knowledge. Krashen's (1981) view is that "acquisition" takes place as a result of the learner having understood input that is a little beyond the current level of his competence that is 'the i+1 level'. We must take into account that the level of listening input must be higher than the level of language production of the target learners. So, language teaching pedagogy must incorporate academic and designed listening practice. Obviously listening influences other skills. A theory of Tomatis shows that "the quality of an individual's listening ability will affect the quality of both their spoken and written language development". He also views that if the sounds of the target language are presented to the learners before presenting them in written form, the ease with which they integrate those sound will be reflected in their understanding and production of the language. However, a pre-exposure or a following-exposure to listening input is a must on the part of a learner. It is widely known that individual's ability to process and analyze the sounds influence their ability to translate the sounds of language into their written form. We know, reading is not only a

visual process rather involves the rapid analysis of letters and words that represents sounds and it is sound which gives the words meaning. A learner can decode the graphic images or recognize their meaning efficiently if their auditory processing skills are well developed. In a similar way, sounds are translated into graphic form in writing and if the sounds are poorly integrated their graphic representation will be hampered and problems like spelling mistakes may arise. So, we see the foundation on which reading and writing skills are built is spoken language again listening is the fundamental to spoken language as without listening anything we can't reproduce or reply. In a learner-centered approach, it is deduced that listening provides the learners with the following features of the target language: •How the language is organized •How native speakers use the language •How to communicate in the language

Strategies for Listening: Two types of strategies for listening have been in practice. They are defined so according to the ways of processing the text while listening: a. In Bottom up processing, like reading, learners utilize their linguistic knowledge to identify linguistic elements in an order from the smallest linguistic unit like phonemes (bottom) to the largest one like complete texts (top). They link the smaller units of the language together to form the larger parts and it's a linear process where meaning is derived automatically at the last stage. It is absolutely "text based" process where learners rely on the sounds, words and grammar in the message in order to create meaning. b. Top- down interpretation, on the other hand, requires learners to go to the listening with their prior knowledge of topic, context, and type of text as well as knowledge of language to reconstruct the meaning using the sounds as clues. " This

back ground knowledge activates a set of expectations that help the listener to interpret what is heard and anticipate what will come next." It is assumed that bottom up process is applied while practicing minimal pairs, taking pronunciation tests, listening for specific details, recognizing cognates and word-order pattern but top-down interpretation is used in the activities like listening for the main idea, predicting, drawing inferences, and summarizing where learners relate what they know and what they hear through listening comprehension. According to the types of situation where the understanding takes place, listening is divided into: a. Reciprocal or interactive Listening where the listener is required to take part in the interaction and alternately listens and speaks. Interactive listening situations include face-to-face conversations and telephone calls in which listener has a chance to ask for clarification, repetition, or slower speech from conversation partner. b. Non-reciprocal or non-interactive Listening where the listener is engaged in listening passively to a monologue or speech or even conversation. Some non-interactive listening situations are listening to the radio, CDs, TV, films, lectures etc. and here listener usually doesn't have the opportunity to ask for clarification, slower speech or repetition. We believe, this type of listening is not totally non- interactive too. The interaction takes place here is the 'cognitive' one where students respond through understanding and creating the meaning. On the other hand, this might be turn to semi- reciprocal if the instructor makes them responding while checking their understanding through question-answer or discussion and clarification in the class or lab.

Methodology: Methods applied for the survey included questionnaire and group interviews taken with 40 students who attend listening classes in the

language lab regularly and it has been observed by the author that they do better in speaking and reading than others. The subjects are the students of 1st year 1st term from the department of Pharmacy and CSTE, ACCT, and FIMS. Although they are really not beginners and have learnt English at their secondary and higher secondary level, they have no exposure to authentic English speaking and listening. Here they have been practicing listening in a language lab using headphone using audio and video for three months. The purpose of the survey was convincingly explained to them and they took 30 minutes to think on the questions and to answer them. Findings: 30 students claim that listening practice has raised their confidence by throwing away their fear, hesitations, inertia and shyness that they had before to speak in English.

- All of the 40 students have told that watching video clippings and movie while listening enables to identify the right responses, styles, expressions, behaviors, attitudes and emotions in particular situations through concentrating on gesture, body language, non- linguistic cues, planning utterances, adjacency pairs, turn-taking, repairing utterances by asking for repetition, pre-closing and closing.
- 5 students have said that it has quickened their planning to respond as they listen to faster speaking than their own.
- 35 students opine that exposure to naturally spoken input by native speakers gives them practical experience of using language in target situations.
- 20 students who are highly motivated have found a change in their speaking style.
- 36 students think that listening to dialogues and conversation enriches their vocabulary and teaches how to use them appropriately.
- 10 students have found that intensive listening practice helps to remember the syntactic structures, spelling, accent and intonation.

•19 students mention about learning of the cultures, feelings, reactions, trend and customs of the English speaking people that helps them feel motivated (integrative) to speak English. •All of the 40 students opine that watching movie or video clippings draws more attention during the class and add to their learning. •All of the 40 students believe that interaction with teachers for assessment or other purposes while listening help them greatly to remove confusion and use their newly gained knowledge immediately and make it regular in use. Teaching listening: Unfortunately, as I find a very diminutive effort in teaching listening in our country, this discussion may appear too much redundant to read to the language teachers! What we find in a traditional EFL classroom? Most of the classes complete their Language course without practice listening even for a day! Very few ELT trained teachers, now-a-days, in line with the flow of CLT; efforts for listening practice consisted of teacher reading aloud a written text slowly, once or more so that it is understood and than asking some comprehension questions. It seems the objective here is 'to present the written language in an alternative way' where characteristics of naturally spoken language is totally absent and listening practice is farther beyond. If the materials used for listening class comply with that in speaking class, it will, certainly, give a fully fledged input to the learners. Teaching listening requires a bit more on the part of the teacher than that of the learners. One of the main principle of teaching listening, as I believe, should be " Language material intended to used for training listening comprehension should never be presented visually first." Good listening lessons go beyond the main listening task itself with related activities before and after the listening. The format may be like the

following: a. Pre-listening Stage: Some activities before listening may serve as preparation or warm-up for listening in several ways. These function as 'reference' and 'framework' by giving prior knowledge of listening activities. Some recommended pre-listening activities include: a. Introducing the topic and assessing their background knowledge of the topic or content of the material through commenting on a picture or photograph. b. Activating their existing knowledge through discussion. Reading through comprehension questions in advance, working out own opinion on a topic, predicting content from the title etc. can be done. c. Clarifying any necessary contextual information and vocabulary to comprehend the text. In this regard showing pictures maps or graphs and may be helpful. d. Informing them of the type of text, their role, purposes of the listening etc. A short reading passage on a similar topic may help them. b. While-Listening Stage: activities in this stage must follow the learners' specific needs, instructional goal, listening purposes and learners' proficiency level. While listening activities directly relate to the text and listeners are asked to do these during or immediately after listening. . Some specific cares are required in designing while-listening activities. These are: a. If the students are asked to give written information after listening, they should have chance to listen the text more than once which makes it easier for them to keep concentration while listening with specific purposes. b. Writing activities should be to a minimum. As comprehension is the prime target, writing would make the listening more demanding. are samples of this. c. Global activities like getting the main idea, topic, setting, summary that focus on the content and forms of the text should be given more so that listeners are guided through

the text. Listening for the gist is such an activity. d. More questions should be set up in order to focus student's attention on the crucial elements that might help to comprehend the text. Following the rout on a map or searching for specific clues to meaning, or identify description of the given pictures might be appropriate here. e. Attaching predicting activities before listening so that students can monitor their comprehension as they listen. Listening with visuals may serve here. f. Giving immediate feedback to make the students examine their responses and how it was. Checking off items in a list, distinguishing between formal and informal registers conducted by teacher are examples here. Listening activities here become varied according to their purposes and objectives. Four major distinctions include Attentive listening, Extensive listening, Intensive listening, Selective listening and Interactive listening. Attentive listening: Both of the ideas are true that attentiveness is a prior condition for understanding and listener often lapse attention for various reasons. Losing interest, inability to keep up with, losing track of goals, less confident are some of them. Teacher can help the listeners to hold their attention by personalizing the martial, using the target language while talking to them to keep flow, and lessening their stress and motivating by asking oral responses repeatedly. Activities in this stage would be interesting and easy including face to face interaction, using visual and tangible topics, clear description of the listening procedure, minimum use of written language, and immediate and ongoing responses etc so that learners can easily keep pace with the text and activity. Listening to short chunks, music image, personal stories, teacher- talk, small question- answer, and interview etc may be applied in this stage. Extensive listening: This type of

listening has also a greater ease than other types as it is concerned to promote overall comprehension of a text and never requires learners to follow every word and understand them. Learners need to comprehend the text as a whole which is called global understanding. Activities in this section must be chosen in terms with the proficiency level of the listeners. At the lower level they may have problems to organize the information, so some non-verbal forms in responding might be given such as putting pictures in a right sequence, following directions on a map, checking of items in a photograph, completing a grid, chart or timetable etc. At the developed stage, some language based tasks requiring constructing meaning, inferring decisions, interpreting text and understanding gist are usually recommended. Completing cloze exercises or giving one or two word answers, multiple choices, predicting the next utterances, forming connected sets of notes, inferring opinions, or interpreting parts of the text are some samples. Intensive listening: 'Hearing clearly' is also a prime aspect of listening as it includes accurate perception without which the second phase of processing meaning becomes very difficult. Listening intensively is quite important to understand the language form of the text as we have to understand both the lexical and grammatical units that lead to form meaning. So, intensive listening requires attention to specific items of language, sound or factual detail such as words, phrase, grammatical units, pragmatic units, sound changes (vowel reduction and consonant assimilation), stress, intonation and pauses etc. Feedback on accuracy and repetition on the teacher's part promote success here. Paraphrasing, remembering specific words and sequences, filling gaps with missing words,

identifying numbers and letters, picking out particular facts, discriminating the pronunciation of same phoneme in different positions, replacing words, finding stress and boundaries are some good intensive listening practice.

Selective listening: It involves listening to selected part of a text, as it's name suggests, to predict information and select 'cues' surrounding information. Thus, the listeners may have an assessment of their development in listening to authentic language. Here the focus is on the main parts of the discourse and by noticing these parts listener construct their understanding of the meaning of whole of the text through inferring. As the expectation on understanding is focused and has a purpose, in these activities, listeners have the chance of second listening to check understanding and have feedback repeatedly. Listening to sound sequences, documentary, story maps, incomplete monologues, conversation cues and topic listening are examples of selective listening.

Interactive listening: This is a very advanced stag of listening practice as it implies social interaction in small groups which is a 'true test' of listening. In interactive listening, learners, either in pairs or in groups, receive new information, identify them continuously. Besides, they have to work out the problems of understanding each other and formulate responses immediately as we are required to do in real life. So, in spite of calling 'practice', this goes beyond of it. As this phase involves both comprehension and production, it directly promotes speaking skill. Teachers have a central role in this stage. They have to set up specific goals so that learners can asses their own performance, observe learners' language in order to provide immediate feedback on their interaction strategies. Group survey, self introductions, short speeches, chatting and discussing,

exchanging news and views, interviewing and being interviewed etc. might be appropriate here. c. After-listening Stage: post listening activities can be used to check comprehension, evaluate listening skill, use of listening strategies and use the knowledge gained to other contexts. So, these are called listening exercises at all and defined as 'follow-up works.' The features of these activities are: a. Related to pre-listening activities, such as predicting. b. May create a real life situation where students might be asked to use knowledge gained through listening. c. May extend the topic and help the students remember new vocabulary. Using notes made while listening in order to write a summary, reading a related text, doing a role play, writing on the same theme, studying new grammatical structures, practicing pronunciation, discussion group, craft project etc. are some post-listening activities. Variables affecting and effecting successful listening: Noise: Distractions and noise during the listening segment should be reduced and sound-proof language lab is perfect for this purpose. Equipment: If the cassette player or CD player being used does not produce acceptable sound quality, it may harm developing skill or motivation. Repetition: playing the text 2-3 times might be required in respect of the types of texts. In case of no chance of repetition, learners may become anxious about catching it all the first time and that will impede their actual performance. Content: It is a strong variable to be able to make difference in developing skill. The material should be interesting and appropriate for the class level in topic, speed and vocabulary. Some guidelines for judging the relative ease or difficulty of a listening text for a particular purpose or particular group of students might be: a. The selected material must be relevant to student's

real life; language of the text should be authentic and would vary in terms of learners' interest and age group. b. The storyline, narrative, or instruction should confirm common expectation in organization. It may contain main idea, details, and examples. An informative title might also be helpful. c. Learners have to be familiar with the topic. They might feel major comprehension difficulties because of misapplication of background knowledge due to cultural differences. d. At the beginner level of proficiency, the language of listening text should discard redundancy while in the higher proficiency level students may benefit from redundant language. e. If the text involves more than one individual, the differences between them should be marked conspicuously which can make the comprehension easy. f. Most texts should have visual supports like clippings, maps, diagrams, pictures or images in video that contextualize the listening input and provide clues to meaning in order to aid their interpretation. Recording own tape: Any way, recording must be of an English speaker. Copying recording two to three times is preferred in order to avoid rewind which may discrete attention of the listeners. Using video: Using video clippings with sound off and then asking students what dialogue is taking place is a good practice. Next, the teacher may play sound and check their understanding and interpret them about the discrepancy between their predictions and reality. It may also be done with the video first and giving only sound to guess what the context is can obviously effect comprehending. Homework: In teaching listening, homework is a must. A listening task between two classes prevent them forgetting. Encouraging public listening and having notes on them is a free pave to walk in teaching listening which leads to

success. Providing tape recording with questions, dictation, or a worksheet to complete may bring the expected results. Using internet: If learners have opportunity to use a computer with internet access and headphones or speakers, teacher may direct them toward some listening practice sites and home works can also be assigned from these accesses

Limitations of the essay: This essay doesn't focus on every aspect of teaching or developing listening skill; rather it focuses mainly on the necessity and functions of listening input in learning a foreign or second language. The survey also reflects on the service of listening to the EFL learners who are instrumentally motivated. The context of the essay is this country though it reflects that of some other countries where the features don't vary much.

Conclusion: Definitely we have to admit that language learning depends on listening as we respond only after listening something. Listening provides the aural input that serves as the stimuli for language acquisition and make the learners interact in spoken communication. So, effective and ideal language instructors should help the learners to be introduced with native speaking, to be respondent to that both cognitively and orally. In order to do so, first, they should show the students how they can adjust their listening behavior to deal with variety of situations, types of input, and listening purposes.

Questionnaire Name: Role: Department: Q1: Does practice listening in the language lab help you to develop English skill? Q2: How does it promote your learning? Q3: Do watching movies or using video clippings add to your understanding? Q4: How does interaction with teacher or interference of teacher while listening help you? Reference: Byrnes H. (1984). The role of listening comprehension: A theoretical base. Foreign Language Annals, 17:

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