

## Tactical lookouts of listening in Bangladesh

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### Abstract

Though several studies have been made in the last few decades concerning listening in a second language teaching and learning around the world, only few were done in a systematic approach. Since the communicative language teaching and learning approaches are still prevailing in Bangladesh, the present study tries to find out the appropriately applicable approaches and tactics for teaching and learning 'listening' in a second/foreign language in Bangladesh. The necessity of effective tactics for teaching 'listening' is getting more and more focused. There is no single method that is the best for ELT in our context. In this regard, the only elucidation of a tactical pedagogic approach can be an alternative to the existing methods for learning this fundamental skill. The article shows that teaching and learning of 'listening' in Bangladesh by using different tactics can escort the succession of ELT in Bangladesh and make the learners as effective listeners subsequently.

**Keywords:** instructions, strategies, prerequisites, existing methods, teaching 'listening'

### 1. Introduction

Listening plays a life-long role in the process of productive communication (Alam and Sinha, 2009) [2]. Hedge (2000) [8] says that to establish oneself in this sound system based society one must develop a lofty level of aptitude in listening. This article brings new insights into teacher's growth by discussing the place of conventional teaching methods and post-method pedagogic approach for listening in Bangladesh. Post-method pedagogy can be regarded as a good alternative to the deficiencies experienced by the employment of conventional methods to teaching and learning 'listening'. Can (2009) involves Stern's Three-dimensional framework and Kumaravadivelu's Macro-strategic framework drawn from "theoretical, empirical and experiential knowledge" (Kumaravadivelu, 2006, p. 185) [9]. These frameworks provide teachers with important guidelines on which to base their teaching in order to be aware of their teaching process and be able to justify it. Tactics value teachers' potentials by emphasizing their experiences as teachers. Based on their knowledge of these methods and, more importantly their experiences and the frameworks, teachers can construct their own methods and thus, act as evaluators, observers, critical thinkers, theorizers and practitioners. This, in turn, makes them valuable sources for prospective teachers and their colleagues leading to professional growth.

Listening is one of the four inevitable skills of English language. No communication is successful without the flair of apt listening. There have always been attempts to develop listening skill in the field of ELT to find elucidations for teaching listening problems. The skill has been in invariable fashion and change. This alteration is mostly due to the espousal of fresh teaching approaches and methods of listening, which emerged in order to meet our learners' needs in different periods. But the existing methods have already been proved as ineffective. So it is high time we reformed our approaches and methods and adapt with a post method for teaching and learning listening skill.

### 2. Objectives

The aim of this paper is to observe and analyze certain facets of listening in English as a foreign language context like ours and determine how the in-service teachers can follow some post-method tactics of teaching and learning of 'listening' skill. The principal objective of this paper is to find out the ways of developing listening skill in our context beyond the existing methods. The work also deals with the common intricacies and solutions for teaching 'listening' to achieve the headway of ELT in Bangladesh.

### 3. Methodology

The current study follows the 'observation method' with conceptual analysis. The primary idea was developed from the present critical condition of listening skill in Bangladesh. The study deals with the current methods and the necessity of a post method pedagogic approach to improve listening skill in Bangladesh. Finally some recommendations and innovative elucidations are depicted to the development of listening in ELT in Bangladesh.

### 4. Review of Literature

In this research, the literature review we propose consists in several research articles and books of recognized authors and linguists whose validity seems to be widely acknowledged. Accordingly the articles of B. Kumaravadivelu, Nilüfer Can, etc were collected in order to be acknowledged in the related topics. Books of Michael Rost, J. C. Richards, T. Farrell and T.S. Rodgers were also obliging for relevant information. Additionally, the different web-sites on applied linguistics, four skills and English language teaching and learning have also been supportive for the part of the study.

According to the *British Council*, there are five major types of listening. Each type of listening needs different methods and techniques for the learners to be skilled. 'Discriminative' listening is first developed at an early age – perhaps even before birth, in the womb. This is the most basic form of

listening and doesn't involve the understanding of the meaning of words or phrases. 'Comprehensive' listening involves understanding the message or messages that are communicated. 'Critical' listening is where listeners have to evaluate and critically respond to the message and after that give their opinion. 'Appreciative' listening is a type of listening where the focus is on enjoying what one listens. 'Therapeutic' listening is important in building good interpersonal relations. Here, listener's role is to be sympathetic to the sender without much verbal response.

## 5. Definition

According to *International Listening Association* (1996) [7], "Listening is the process of receiving, constructing meaning from, and responding to spoken and nonverbal messages." Listening is an extraordinary aptitude to exactly attain and construe messages in a communication process; and the means to all successful communication. 'Hearing' refers to the sounds that we hear. It is a physiological response that we receive a sound. But 'Listening' is a four steps process of hearing (receiving), interpreting (making sense), evaluating (judging) and responding (clarifying) to the speaker. 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.

## 6. Discussion and Findings

### 6.1 Listening Instructions

Listening instructions cover a wide range of teaching strategies. Rost (1991) [11] has divided the teaching instruction as a pedagogic plan that centers on any of four goals. These are improving learners' understanding of spoken language, increasing the quality of learners' intake from spoken effort, developing learners' strategies for better understanding of spoken discourse and stimulating a more lively involvement in face-to-face communication.

### 6.2 Listening Strategies

"The principle of listening, someone has said is to develop a big ear, rather than a big mouth."- says Howard. G. Hendricks, an American Professor of *Dallas Theological Seminary*. The learners of listening skill apply meta-cognitive, cognitive and socio-sentimental strategies to ease conception and to formulate their learning more effectual. Meta-cognitive strategies are important because they watch over, control or direct the learning process. Cognitive strategies manipulate the material to be learnt or apply a specific technique to a listening task. Socio-affective strategies describe the techniques listeners use to collaborate with others, to verify understanding or to lower anxiety. Research shows that skilled listeners use more meta-cognitive strategies than their less-skilled counterparts (O'Malley and Chamot, 1990) [5].

According to Rost (2002) [12], the teachers should make the listeners understand some strategies for listening accurately and appropriately. The first strategy is 'predicting' which means to think about what the listeners will hear. Then the listeners must listen between the lines by 'inferring'. 'Monitoring' helps the listeners notice what they do and do not understand. 'Clarifying' is an important strategy where the efficient learners ask questions to the speakers and give feedback. Then the learners must react to what they hear and

test out on how well they have understood respectively by 'responding' and 'evaluating'.

### 6.3 Prerequisites of Effective Listening to Learn a Foreign Language

Effective listening means that communication is heard completely and effectively interpreted into meaningful messages. It is arguably one of the most important skills to have nowadays. Effective listening skill is needed to face intricate topics together in personal liaisons. Business people require this skill to solve composite predicament promptly and stay competitive. Effective listening skill is beneficial if we can comprehend and purge listening barriers that blocks profound, pleasant and enduring correlations. The prerequisites of Effective Listening are to face the speaker to show attentiveness through body language and maintain eye contact to the degree comfortably. One must minimize internal or external distractions and respond appropriately to show the indulgence. A good listener must keep an open mind focus solely what the speaker is saying. Nonverbal cues are important to detect enthusiasm, boredom, or irritation very quickly in the expression around the eyes, the set of the mouth, the slope of the shoulders.

### 6.4 Existing Methods of Teaching 'Listening' in Bangladesh

There are very few diminutive efforts in teaching 'listening' in Bangladesh; so this discussion may appear somehow superfluous. As our observation is concerned, most of the traditional EFL classes complete their language courses without practicing 'listening'. Very few ELT trained teachers, now-a-days, following what exactly the CLT approach suggests, efforts for 'listening' practice in the language classrooms. If the materials used for listening class comply with that in speaking class, it will certainly give a full-fledged input to the learners; otherwise the 'listening' remains ignored in the actual scenario.

## 7. Suggestions for Bangladeshi Learners

### 7.1 Sample Audio Practice Contents

The learners can listen to the conversation and do the exercises to practice and improve the listening skills from audio players about inviting someone to the cinema, introducing a friend, band auditions, ordering food in a café, spelling colors, interview with a swimmer, travelling abroad, weather forecast, going to the cinema, trains and travel, giving directions, eating out, human body, important people, favorite things, sports centers, my hero festivals, how to study, boy bands, theme parks, etc.

### 7.2 Diagnostic Approach for Listening

Listening tends to be the most challenging skill for many second language learners, and it is probably the most difficult to teach successfully. Its transient intangible nature makes it difficult to analyze and practice in the same way as other language skills. As a result, the criticism that listening is tested rather than taught in the classroom is often warranted. The difficulty for many teachers lies in finding an alternative to the 'practice makes perfect' comprehension approach that is generally adopted. John Field (2008) [3] wants to introduce a *diagnostic approach* to listening which allows teachers and students to attend to listening difficulties and practice

strategies to diminish them:

- Using incorrect answers to detect weaknesses, and designing activities to help;
- Avoiding listening tasks that require memorization;
- Helping students develop a wider range of listening strategies;
- Differentiating between listening skills;
- Providing top-down and bottom-up listening practice;

Field (2008) <sup>[3]</sup> concludes his book *Listening in the Language Classroom* by summarizing the arguments made and proposes a practical “multi-strand approach to L2 listening development” (p. 332). Field stresses the importance of the skill itself, reminding the reader, “Acquiring the ability to understand what L2 speakers say is not an optional extra. In contrast; listening is the principal means by which learners expand their knowledge of spoken forms of the target language” (p. 334). Viewed from this perspective, the potential rewards from acquiring good listening skills provide rationalization for expenditure of valuable classroom time on evolving them.

### 7.3 Attentive Listening

Both the ideas are true that attentiveness is a prior condition for understanding and listener often lacks attention for various reasons like losing interest, inability to keep up with, losing track of goals, less confident, etc. The teacher can help the listeners to hold their attention by personalizing the material, using the target language, 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 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 may be applied in this stage.

### 7.4 Combining ‘Intensive’ and ‘Extensive’ Listening

Intensive listening requires students to understand the meaning of each discourse and, ultimately, to understand every sentence and word. Whereas, extensive listening does not require students to understand every sentence, and every word instead, students are encouraged to grasp the general meaning of the passage; the key point of listening is to understand the content. The purpose of intensive listening is to build basic listening skills, while extensive listening is to strengthen and enlarge effectiveness of intensive listening in order to improve overall listening ability. In teaching ‘listening’, the teacher can combine both intensive and extensive listening to cultivate students’ basic skills, the development of the productive listening habits of active thinking and the ability to understand the text given for listening practice.

### 7.5 Selective Listening

It involves listening to selected part of a text. 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 practices.

### 7.6 Interactive Listening

This is a very advanced stage 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, which ultimately goes beyond a mere practice session. As this phase involves both comprehension and production, it directly promotes speaking skill. Teachers have a central role in this stage by setting up specific goals so that learners can assess their own performance. Group survey, self-introductions, short speeches, chatting and discussing, exchanging news and views, interviewing and being interviewed etc. might be appropriate here.

### 8. Listening: Frequently Faced Challenges and their Amputation

The major challenges we repeatedly face in teaching and learning ‘listening’ in an EFL context like ours are distractions, prejudice, interruption, linguistic barriers and perceptual barriers. The four main types of distractions are physical, mental, auditory and visual. It may be internal or external. Prejudice is a preconceived opinion of feeling, which is irrational. The reason for a prejudice may be the speaker’s race, religion, age or appearance. If one respects the others’ knowledge and skills, irrespective of the person’s background then this barrier may be reduced. Interrupting a conversation with improper body language or inappropriate words has a negative impact in effective listening. To avoid interruption one must listen without interrupting while the other person is speaking and use appropriate body language such as raising hand or appropriate words. Linguistic barriers are found when a speaker says something unclear: using jargon or complex words, showing hesitant manner or delivering words too fast/slow/loud/quiet. These barriers can be removed by asking the speaker what s/he actually meant. The listener must wait for the speaker to pause to ask clarifying questions and take notes before asking. Perceptual barrier involves the cultural and social background differences.

### 9. Recommendation, Convolutions and Fixes

Competence of listening skill in a second language in Bangladesh is a complex process that needs to be developed consciously and subtly. It can best be developed with practice when students of our EFL context reproduce on the process of listening devoid of the intimidation of evaluation. Using listening activities to only test comprehension leads to anxiety which encumbers the progress of meta-cognitive strategies. Strategy use positively impacts self-notion, approaches, about learning and ascription beliefs about individual control. We must steer our students (Vandergrift, 2002) <sup>[13]</sup> through the process of listening not only providing them with the knowledge by which they can effectively complete a listening task but also motivating and putting them in control of their learning. The students must indicate the ways they are listening giving encouraging acknowledgements (e.g. “Yes” or “I see” or nodding or “Ah ha”). They should also give non-

verbal acknowledgements (e.g. gesture, relaxed body posture, eye contact and facial expressions) because they must remember that people can speak with their bodies without saying a solitary word; a movement can indicate a great deal about how a person is feeling. The teachers may invite more responses (e.g. 'Tell me more' or 'I'd like to hear about that' – which can imply, the teacher is keen for the students to expand on their message because it has relevance to the teacher and the rest of the group).

#### a) Role of Students

Students need to devote all their attention to the listening task. Students may keep writing to a minimum during listening. But they must remember that the primary goal is comprehension, not production. If a written response is to be given after listening, the task can be more demanding. The learners must adapt themselves with the new approaches and adopt the post-methods according to their tutors' instructions to be adept in listening skill in a proper way.

#### b) Role of Teachers

The tutors should organize activities so that they guide listeners through the text. A teacher can combine activities such as getting the main idea, topic, and setting with selective listening activities that focus on details of content and form. The teacher can use questions to focus students' attention on the elements of the text crucial to comprehension. The teacher can use predicting to encourage students to monitor their comprehension as they listen. So he can design a predicting activity before listening, and remind students to review what they are hearing to see if it makes sense in the context of their prior knowledge and what they already know of the topic or events of the passage. The chief responsibility of the teacher is to give immediate feedback whenever possible and encourage students to examine how or why their responses were incorrect.

#### 10. Conclusion

A Turkish proverb goes: "If speaking is silver then listening is gold". This statement easily summarizes the immense importance of 'listening' for communication, because the speaker may use multiple languages while talking but if the listener do not understand the message what the speaker intends to convey, the communication fails. We must admit that proper listening is an essential part of effective communication. Every good conversation starts with good listening. Effective listening skill fuels our social, emotional and professional successes. So, we should develop this skill overcoming its barriers. We also need to admit that learning a language depends undeniably on listening as we respond only after listening something. Listening offers the acoustic effort that serves as the incentives for language possession and consequently the learners can interact in oral communication. The language trainers should introduce the learners to native speaking, to make the learners conscious both verbally and cognitively. With the intention of doing so, the teachers must make the learners learn the adjustment of their listening ability to cope with multiplicity of circumstances, types of effort, and rationales of listening.

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