

LISTENING SKILLS THROUGH “INSTRUCTIONS”

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ABSTRACT

We observe several students who cannot comprehend when English is spoken at normal speed. Particularly, students from Urdu background react differently to any kind of tasks given in English language laboratory. Few students who lack communication skills feel utterly dejected and disappointed when they start learning English. A number of educationalists like Blair (1982), Krashen (1982), Elenbaas (1983), Bancroft (1984), Alexander (1985), Henry (1985), Sano (1986), Murphey (1987), Goodwin (1991), Bennett (1997) and others highlighted the importance of taking steps to enhance students' communication skills. The present paper talks on how 'instructions' can train Urdu students to respond quickly, naturally and effectively while listening to a task.

Introduction

We observe several students who cannot comprehend when English is spoken at normal speed. Students who are studying Diploma courses at Maulana Azad National Urdu University, Hyderabad, react differently to any kind of tasks given in English language laboratory. Few students from Urdu background, lack communication skills, feel utterly dejected and disappointed when they start learning English. So the teacher must come up with different language learning strategies and techniques in the laboratory. A number of educationalists like Blair (1982), Krashen (1982), Elenbaas (1983), Bancroft (1984), Alexander (1985), Henry (1985), Sano (1986), Murphey (1987), Goodwin (1991), Bennett (1997) and others highlighted the importance of taking steps to enhance students' communication skills.

In the Communication Skills Laboratory, students should follow many instructions to do the tasks. Let us look at some of the instructions given by the teacher to the students:

*TURN ON the system
Go to LISTENING SKILLS file on the Desktop
Double Click on the FILE
Then choose a module to work on
Select the video
Double Click on the selected audio
Play the video and read the text*

When we look at the above instructions, we can clearly affirm that there is a need to teach instructions first in the class before asking them to do the task. The present paper talks on

how 'instructions' can train Urdu students to respond quickly, naturally and effectively while listening to a task.

Asher (1979) theorized that 'listening and comprehension are the first steps in language learning.' Asher points that: "understanding the spoken language before developing the skills of speaking. Imperatives are the main structures to transfer or communicate information. The student is not forced to speak, but is allowed an individual readiness period and allowed to spontaneously begin to speak when the student feels comfortable and confident in understanding and producing the utterances." Regarding comprehension Asher connects himself to Winitz's (1981) Comprehension Approach. This approach talks about a) comprehension abilities precede productive skills in learning a language; b) the learning of speech should be delayed until comprehension skills are established; c) skills acquired through listening transfer to other skills; and d) teaching should emphasize learner stress-free environment etc. Morley (1991) also stated that, "all of the listening activities have a 'listen-and-do' format."

Procedure in the Laboratory

In the beginning stage of the session in the laboratory, the teacher asks the students to observe him while he gives instructions in English and then act. The students listen and watches the teacher, "*go the computer, turn on the system, check the listening skills file on the desktop, bring the cursor to the file, double click on the file, choose a the module 'unit IX', select the audio file, play the audio, answer the questions as instructed in the manual, read the transcript, check the answers.*"

In the second stage, the teacher calls one group to do the same as the teacher acted in the beginning stage. The teacher gives only instructions in this stage and asks six students in that group to do the same. The rest of the groups just listen to the instructions and observe the group who are acting to the instructions. The teacher checks the students if they are acting according to the instructions or not. In the third stage, the teacher asks all other groups also to act out to the instructions. These types of activities, using instructions in the primary stage, make the students feel comfortable and respond perfectly after some repeated actions. After finishing 20 hours of such various activities of instructions the teacher can start speaking skills in the English Laboratory. As the objectives of the course tell us, students will be able to acquire the abilities of listening with comprehension.

Activity in the classroom

The class had 30 students. They were divided into five groups i.e., six students in each group. The teacher asked each group to do the task. One of the most effective approaches for large groups of beginners, especially for Urdu speakers, was giving instructions. In the laboratory, students participate in activities in which they listened to a series of instructions in English. Students were instructed to listen to the instructions carefully. They had to answer questions on what they listen to in the laboratory manual. The test was in three sections. Students were

given time to answer in the task sheet provided in the manual. Let us now look at how instructions were given to the students in the laboratory while conducting the test.

Unit IX Section 1 News Bulletin

Students will hear a news bulletin. As they listen to the bulletin, they will answer questions 1-10.

- a. Instructions: *listen to the Breakfast news. Arrange them in an order. Circle the letters as 1,2,3,4.*
- b. Instruction: (Questions 5 – 8) *listen to the statements and state whether they are True or False.*
- c. Instructions: (Questions 9 & 10) *now listen to the rest of the news bulletin. Answer questions 9 & 10. Match phrases in column A with choices given in column B. Circle the appropriate letters.*

Section II A layout of M V P Colony, Visakhapatnam

Students will listen to a real estate business person selling a plot at a prime locality in MVP colony. She explains the facilities available at the colony to persuade the customer to buy a plot.

- d. Instructions: *listen to the speaker. Look at the map closely. Follow the sequence of the blocks that are numbered. Look at the map carefully while listening. Find answers to the questions 11 – 25.*

Section III Harnessing Solar Energy

Students will listen to an agent from the Ministry of Non-Conventional Energy Sources talking about Solar Cookers and their use in India.

- e. Instructions: *listen to the speaker who is an agent from the Ministry of Non-Conventional Energy Sources. The speaker is talking about Solar Cookers and their use in India. First look at the questions 26 – 28. Fill in the spaces while listening to the speech.*
- f. Instructions: *now listen to the speaker. Look at the questions 29 – 32. Tick the appropriate choice while listening to the speech.*
Instructions: *Now listen to the speaker. Look at the questions 33 – 40. Fill in the spaces. Write answers in not more than three words.*

Discussion

The listening comprehension ability of Urdu speakers got improved very quickly using instructions in the laboratory. They were capable of understanding the near native pronunciation and intonation too. Students did not feel nervous but they look confident, motivated and relaxed in the laboratory. Students participated in the listening activity freely and answered the tasks provided in each section:

As this test was conducted for 30 students, they were divided into five groups i.e., six students in each group. For Section I (arranging news headlines in order, identifying true or false statements, matching phrases), fifteen students in three groups had answered them correctly and remaining two groups only seven had done it right. For Section II (following the sequence of the blocks that were numbered), four students from first group, three students from second group, five students in third group, five students in fourth group and only two students in fifth group had answered following the sequence. Coming to the last section III, they should fill in the spaces, tick the appropriate choice, and fill in the spaces in not more than three words: Five students from first group, four students from second group, four students from third group, three students from fourth group and five students from fifth group had answered appropriately. So we could affirm that through instructions Urdu students could be trained to comprehend the listening tasks.

Conclusion

Listening activities through instructions are successful in the language laboratory. Giving instructions make sense to try with students who are from different age groups, particularly who have Urdu background. It is felt that 'Instruction' strategy can be used at the beginning stage; especially while teaching listening skills by giving instructions in the language laboratory classes. Therefore it is viewed as an essential technique to improve listening skills at beginning levels, but also a method that needs to be mixed with other approaches.

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