

INTELLIGENT LISTENING

A practical approach to teaching multi-tasked listening exercises

This report explains a basic method for teaching listening sections and exercises involving two tasks to ESOL students. It involves both the teacher and the students and requires the teacher to have enough background information about the topic discussed in the exercise. While this method is intended for teachers of the “Interchange” series, it can essentially be applied to single-tasked exercises or exercises in other similar course books with minor alterations.

Ebrahim Tahasoni

ACECR South Khorasan

22.2.2007



INTELLIGENT LISTENING

A practical approach to teaching multi-tasked listening exercises

I have been teaching the Interchange series for more than three years and due to lack of any prior ELT methodology education, I have been forced to utilise a survival teaching method, I have been compelled to alter my methods every now and then based on my personal experience with my students and other teachers. Therefore, the method I here present is the result of constant improvement in my original approaches to teaching listening sections to adult learners of the English language.

My method, if I shall call it so, involves a teaching cycle composed of five interconnected phases, namely Background Buildup, Pre-Discussion, Generalised Listening Drill, Elaborate Listening Drill, and Post-Discussion. The basis of this approach is the idea that listening and speaking skills possess an interwoven structure and thus, have many common pre-requisites to master each.

PHASE ONE: BACKGROUND BUILDUP

This phase starts preferably with the teacher at the centre of the classroom with full attention of the students. The teacher starts with a brief function-oriented introduction to the task. For instance, if the task involves students listening to radio advertisements, the teacher would start with a quick introduction to or critique of advertising methods and end with a description of radio ads, giving one or two famous examples. Or if the task is about personality traits, the teacher may give a historical background of how such traits as envy or ambitiousness have affected the course of human history through times, or alternatively he/she may go through the different perceptions of negativity or positivity of traits among different cultures.

The teacher must consciously use the vocabulary and functional grammar needed to understand the listening exercise in a comprehensible way so that the class would not miss such words or structures while listening to the tape.



This stage usually takes between 3 to 5 minutes.

PHASE TWO: PRE-DISCUSSION

This phase is generally the naturally-expected extension to the first. The teacher will transform his/her introduction into a teacher-student and then, if possible, a student-teacher-student discussion through asking for their personal conceptions of the topic and experiences with it, and gradually involving them in a light debate.

The teacher is central to this stage, encouraging the students to talk about their ideas with whatever language ability at the moment, and should avoid more-than-necessary functional

corrections. He/she must persuade the students to use the vocabulary and structures presented to them in the first phase.

The pre-discussion should be brief and short, as it is merely intended for the orientation of the students with the language and context they are to encounter.



This stage should take about 3 to 5 minutes, based on the class' population.

PHASE THREE: GENERALISED LISTENING DRILL

This phase essentially depends on the format of the exercise itself. In exercises with a dual-task approach, the first task is usually easier than the second and thus requires less preparedness and vigilance from the students.

Understanding the task and its purpose is vital to the effectiveness of the exercise. Without recognising what the students must do and making them understand it, any attempt at a fruitful listening session will be absolutely futile. Hence the teacher must prepare the students by telling them exactly what they must listen for, what information they should elicit while listening, and how to present the collected information.

The teacher reads out and explains the task and then, after making sure that everyone has understood their purpose, asks the students to listen to the audio and write down the information they are asked for. After the audio has been played once, the teacher will check answers at random and if the number of wrong or truncated answers is considerable, tries to reach a common understanding of the answers through asking students to complete each other's answers or logically guessing answers where applicable.

By and large, it is not advisable to repeat the audio to find the correct answers, but if the level of comprehension has been very low, it is for the teacher to decide.



This stage usually takes between 3 to 5 minutes.

PHASE FOUR: ELABORATE LISTENING

The second task commonly involves the extraction of more detailed information from the audio and requires a higher level of concentration and attention from the students.

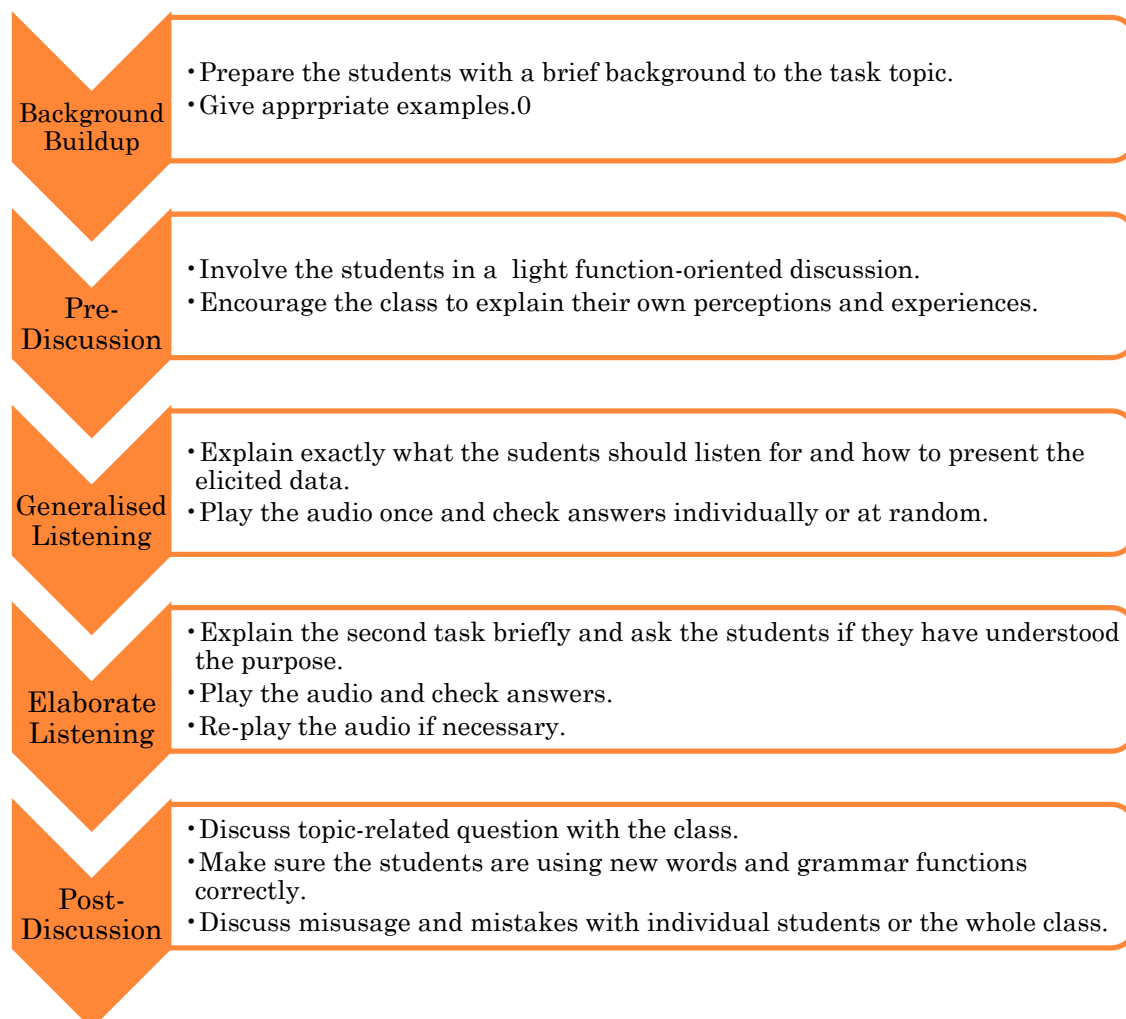
Like the previous phase, the teacher will start by explaining the purpose of the task and the presentation method, but keep in mind that, as the students have listened to the tape once, it will be easier for them to pinpoint the information and thus, the teacher must avoid over-explanation in this stage and leave more of the task comprehension load to the class themselves. The rest of the phase will go on similar to the previous phase.

It would be suitable to repeat the audio program if it is demanded by the class or if the teacher feels the comprehension levels have been lower than required or the class' reaction to

the audio is slow. In such cases, the teacher must rather play the audio in parts, pausing after every long sentence or important part including important information, vocabulary or functional grammar, explaining the matter and emphasising their importance. Asking the students to repeat key parts of the audio is also sometimes favourable, as it would contribute considerably to the students' intonation and stress control improvement.



The length of this section depends on the length of the audio program and the time allocated to repeating the audio, but usually must not exceed 5 to 10 minutes.



PHASE FIVE: POST-DISCUSSION

The teacher will now present the class with a number of questions about or related to the subject of the listening exercise, the answers to which would involve using the structures, vocabulary, and information presented in the audio program, and the class will then enter a short debate over the presented questions.

Here the teacher must see to it that the students are using the target functions and words and that their usage and pronunciation are correct. If a student is using a word or grammar incorrectly, or if the syntax of the grammar is not correctly understood, based on its importance, the teacher may re-explain the usage or syntax for that student or for the entire class. The debate will end when the questions are answered and the teacher has made sure that his/her class have mastered the words and functions.



This stage usually takes between 3 to 5 minutes.

CONCLUSION

This method provides the Interchange teacher with a reasonable and task-oriented approach to exercising listening skills in the class. I have utilised this approach in many Interchange classes with adult students and the results have been quite positive. It lessens the students' fear of listening exercises and prepares them for a better and more complete understanding of the audio, in the class and in other settings. Of course it is evident that the teacher should be ready for the exercise, having studied the context of the audio and prepared enough material to conduct the above-explained cycle. If followed, this method will assist the students in overcoming their common gruesome pre-conception of listening drills and enjoying them, as well as utilising the target vocabulary and functions in the exercise and hearing the structures and words from their classmates and teacher which makes it more convenient for them to digest and receive.