

FOR REFERENCE

NOT TO BE TAKEN FROM THIS ROOM

TEACHING LISTENING COMPREHENSION

by

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1.1. Definition of the problem

The listening comprehension skill, which has been the least emphasized¹ one, seems to be the most difficult to acquire, compared with the other language skills, i.e. speaking, reading and writing skills. It may have been neglected because of the tendency to believe that it is a skill developing naturally along with the other skills. On the other hand, it is the most important skill, as the greatest bulk of communication takes place in spoken form.

The difficulty of understanding spoken language may be due, among other reasons, to the fact that spoken language is elusive and thus involves the retention capacity of the human mind as well as linguistic abilities. Stanley (1978)² maintains that the most important reason for this difficulty is the pace of delivery of natural speech. In fact, learners used to the slow classroom speech of their teachers are often at a loss faced with the spontaneous fast speech of native speakers. An important question that arises at this point is if learners should be exposed to authentic spontaneous speech of native speakers from the very beginning of teaching.

This thesis will attempt to demonstrate with an experiment that the answer is not a straightforward 'yes' as the belief of the author is such that presenting the learners with ungraded spontaneous speech at the early

stages of teaching does not yield the best results. Instead the use of graded, controlled classroom language at the beginning and gradual passage to authentic language at more advanced levels results in better achievement on the part of learners. If students are given enough practice in controlled classroom language before they are exposed to real language they will perform better. Otherwise, they will be lost from the beginning as they will not have been brought up to the level that they can understand natural speech.

1.2 Theoretical background

1.2.1. Differences between spoken and written language

Obviously, spoken and written language display fundamental differences and, as the subject of this study is the teaching of listening comprehension, which is related to spoken language, it seems appropriate first to consider these differences, for the teacher of English should be aware of them in order to be able to choose appropriate materials and strategies to teach this skill.

The most striking difference is that spontaneous spoken language is produced in an interactive situation where the speaker has to take into account the hearer. The writer also has to take into account the reader and adjust his style and content accordingly; however, he

has no immediate feedback as to the reader's attitude to his message. The speaker's advantage at this point is that he can modify his speech according to the reaction of the listener. If his reaction is one of anger or impatience, the speaker can modify his speech so as to reestablish a friendly relationship, or if the listener is puzzled by the information given by the speaker, the speaker can repeat, re-word his message to provide a clear understanding.

Another difference between spoken and written language is the fact that in spoken language there are pauses and repetitions, which help the listener to absorb what has been said and be prepared for what is to follow. On the other hand, in written language there is the possibility of reading at your own pace, stopping and re-reading when you need to do so.

Due to the pauses and repetitions in spoken language, a speech during a certain length of time carries much less content than a piece of writing read during the same length of time. The writer having more time to organize his message is more direct and so the written text is more heavily loaded with information.

Prosodic features, stress and intonation, as well as extra-linguistic factors such as gestures, facial expressions etc. are devices facilitating the comprehension of a message, available to the speaker but not to

the writer.³ On the other hand, punctuation, which is a device available to the writer is not as effective as these direct signalling devices. As a result, the writer has to rely more on the structural devices word and sentence.

Finally, the speaker may tend to use anomalies of usage such as deviations from assumed norms such as word order, slang words and expressions, and disjointed utterances. Due to all these, spontaneous conversation is on the whole informal compared with formal and careful written language. Even though prepared speeches are more formal and careful, they still carry the properties of spoken language rather than written.

1.2.2 Implications of the differences between spoken and written language for the teacher of listening comprehension.

The teacher whose aim is to develop the students' listening comprehension skill should be aware of the differences discussed in the above section and of the nature of spoken language, so that he can choose the right materials and methods to use in class. He should be aware that teaching listening comprehension is not selecting a passage and directing a number of questions to the students after they have heard the passage read out. Instead, the text chosen for listening comprehension should have the properties of natural spoken language with its

informal style, colloquial expressions, short sentences rather than long, elaborate ones, etc. They should be delivered in the fashion spoken language is uttered, with pauses before or after an important point is made, repeating or re-wording the important fragments of the message. Also, the pace of delivery should be natural: neither too fast nor too slow.

Students should be exposed to different levels of spoken language. That is, they should be familiarized with casual, informal, even slang, use of spoken language as well as more careful language of prepared speeches. Of the two skills concerning spoken language, i.e. listening comprehension and speaking, the former seems to be a more complex task than the latter. The foreign speaker somehow makes himself understood more easily than he understands the language spoken around him. This is due to the fact that native speaker listeners are able to fill in the gaps that may exist in the foreign speakers' speech or to correct his errors as they have in their minds the whole system of the language. Conversely, it is safe to assume that, disabled by the lack of this complete system in his mind, among other factors, the learner fails to understand fully the language spoken by native speakers. To deal with the problems of teaching listening comprehension successfully, the teacher should consider what kind of actual listening situations the students will be in. Only in that case can he foresee the problems that

the students are likely to encounter and tackle these problems realistically and efficiently.

1.3 Listening situations

1.3.1 Real-life listening situations

1.3.1.1 Different kinds of real-life situations

In real life, a variety of listening activities exist. Although these may not be listening activities in the strictest sense, some amount of listening is involved in all of them. Every person finds himself in a situation where he has to discuss problems, exchange information, ideas or feelings with others. In telephone conversations, which is a very common instance of listening-speaking activity, the listening task posits more difficulty since no visible speaker or gestures are available to the listener. Noise is another factor that adds to its complexity. In addition to the above activities which involve a speaker-listener verbal interaction, there are one-sided situations in which the listeners are not expected to respond verbally. Consider listening to the news, commentaries, weather forecast, etc.. on the radio or television, which causes mental activity or some other non-verbal response on the part of the listener. Relevant and desirable reaction depends on accurate understanding of the content. The listener's future behaviour may or may not be affected

depending on the extent of his comprehension of that particular item. As another instance of non-verbal response to spoken language consider receiving instructions. It is important that instructions are understood correctly; otherwise, reaching the destination by the shortest route, provided that accurate instructions are given, will be endangered. Similarly, at railway stations or airports, where information is given over the loud-speaker, the importance of the listening comprehension skill becomes apparent.

As a third area of real-life listening situation again consider listening to lectures. This also involves listening comprehension and non-verbal, as well as verbal when and if the need to ask questions arises, response in the form of note-taking.

1.3.1.2 Properties of real-life listening situations

1.3.1.2.1. General Properties

Most spoken language comes in short chunks of discourse unless it is a long lecture.⁴ In other words, natural speech does not go on for a long period of time without being interrupted. As spoken language is mostly social interaction, the speech of one person will be interrupted by one or more; therefore spontaneity can be stated to be a second general property.

1.3.1.2.2 Listener-oriented properties

Input to the listening activity is not merely words and sentences. Visual and environmental clues as well as linguistic phenomena such as stress and intonation also help to clarify the meaning of what is heard. Therefore, when teaching a foreign language, teachers shouldn't neglect these aspects of language, which clarify, sometimes even change, the meaning of words and sentences. For instance, the intonation pattern of a yes-no question in English is a rising one. In addition to the sentence initial position of the auxiliary verb, the rising voice of the speaker gives the listener a clue that what he hears is a question and thus the meaning of the utterance is clarified. Similarly, an utterance accompanied by a gesture that shows disbelief or sneer may mean just the opposite of the meaning conveyed by the words in that utterance. For instance, if the speaker expresses an opinion saying: 'Tom is the only person who can do this job!' in a manner that shows he is convinced of the contrary, his manner or gestures change the meaning of the whole utterance.

Also, most discourse is in the form of question and answer or stimulus and response. Therefore, the listener has certain expectations and purposes and listens for specific information. People usually have a preconceived idea of the content, formality level and

so on of what they are going to hear. Otherwise, it takes them some time to 'tune in'. This preconceived idea helps them to form certain expectations about what they are to hear. Also, their expectations are often closely linked to their purpose in listening.

Once the context of the conversation is determined, it is possible for the listener to make predictions about what is going to be said by the speaker next. These predictions may not always be correct but they will be relevant. For instance, the response to a question like 'How are you?' will be something like 'Fine.', 'I'm very well thank you.' or 'I'm not feeling very well today.', but never 'There are six birds on the tree.'

The listener has linguistic expectations as well as contextual ones. For example, when we ask a question like 'What are you going to do this weekend?', we listen for the VP in the response. The rest of the sentence will be redundant. On other hand, if the question were 'When are you going to visit your friends?', then we would listen for the time expression and the other elements of the sentence would be redundant.

1.3.1.2.3 Speaker-oriented properties

Unlike the writer, the speaker gets immediate feedback from his listeners. This may be in the form of verbal

or nonverbal response such as signs of impatience and boredom or interest, distraction, taking notes, etc. The speaker can modify his speech accordingly and carry his listener(s) along with him.

A further factor that affects the speaker's message either positively or negatively is the personality of the speaker. The outer appearance of the speaker, his tone of voice, enthusiasm with which he delivers his speech, all have an impact on the quality of the speech.

A third factor is the pitch of voice and the pace of delivery, both of which may facilitate the conveyance of the message and which make it possible to place emphasis on certain points and give a hint to the listener about the relative importance of that certain fragment in the whole speech. If a fragment of speech is uttered in high pitch, it is a sign that that fragment is relatively more important. Likewise, speed of delivery is often an aid to the purpose of the speaker and a hint to the listener. Fragments uttered quickly and in a softer voice are usually less important parts or side-thoughts in the course of the development of an idea. On the other hand, if the speaker pauses after an utterance, it is usually for the listener to take in an important point.

Looking at real-life listening situations and their properties is significant for foreign language teachers, in that it can aid them to teach the listening

comprehension skill effectively.

1.3.2 Listening to English as a foreign language: Main potential problems

In the field of applied linguistics, listening comprehension skill has been the least emphasized skill until recently. This skill seems to be more difficult to acquire compared with speaking, reading or writing skills. This may be due to the fact that a foreign language is learned mostly through books or written texts. In addition, near native or native-speaker teachers are not always available. Therefore, a student who has, supposedly, learned a fairly good amount of English may often find himself in a situation where he cannot understand the language spoken by native speakers.

Factors that affect the complexity of listening comprehension may be grouped as linguistic and extra-linguistic.⁵ Among linguistic problems the following can be mentioned:

- i. hearing the sounds,
- ii. recognising familiar vocabulary and grammatical structures presented as unfamiliar sound sequences,
- iii. intonation, stress and rhythm,
- iv. prediction,
- v. colloquial speech and different accents.

Among non-linguistic ones the following can be mentioned:

- i. fatigue,
- ii. redundancy and noise,
- iii. pace of delivery and retention,
- iv. using visual and environmental clues.

1.3.2.1 Linguistic Problems

i. Hearing the Sounds

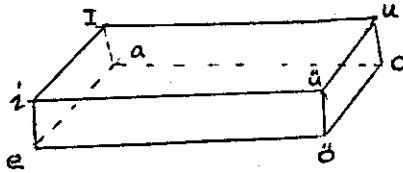
The problems inherent in hearing the sounds can be due to the differences between the phonological systems of the native language of the learners and the target language. The differences can be:

- a. The sound does not exist in the phonological system of the learner's native language, or
- b. The sounds exist in the learner's language; however, they are not distinct phonemes but merely allophones of the same phoneme in that system.

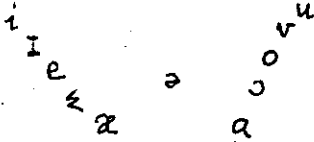
As an example for the former case, the English phonemes /θ/ and /ð/ can be mentioned. Turkish does not have these interdental fricatives in its sound inventory. Therefore, the learners of English have difficulty in both distinguishing and producing these sound segments. As a consequence, they tend to assimilate the former to /t/, /s/, or /f/, the nearest sounds that exist in Turkish; and the latter to /d/, or /z/. It can often be

observed that Turkish learners pronounce the word 'think' as /tɪŋk/ /fɪŋk/or/sɪŋk/, and the word 'this' as /dɪs/.

An example for the second category can be observed in the problems Turkish learners face in the production English vowels. Turkish has two distinctive vowel heights as opposed to the five-way distinction found in the English vowel system. The following is a chart representing the Turkish vowel system:



The English vowel system is represented by the following chart:



As there are only two distinctive vowel heights in Turkish, some of the variations that are contrastive in English are allophonic in Turkish. The following pair of words indicate the phonemic status of /ɛ/ and /æ/ in English:

/pɛn/ /pæn/

Turkish learners, however, generally tend to fail to hear and produce the difference between the two forms given above, often producing the same sound for both of them.

It may be argued that the student will always have

the context as an aid to understanding, therefore hearing the difference between sounds that are allophones of the same phoneme in the learner's native tongue is not of vital importance. Yet, speech is fast; there may be too many of such instances and the learner may not always be exposed to enough redundancy to be able to correctly guess the appropriate meaning in that context. Therefore, it would be justified to say that learners should be given enough practice to differentiate the sounds that may cause problem.

ii. Recognising familiar items in their spoken forms

This is a very common problem among learners, especially among students whose native language is syllable-timed, such as Turkish. In fast, casual speech certain words in English are reduced, sometimes even omitted altogether. The listener who does not have full competence in all the phonological rules of the language will have difficulty in supplying all the deleted phonological information. This problem can be coped with by presenting the listener, from time to time, with the written text of what he is listening to and, in so doing, familiarizing him with the phenomena of reduction and deletion, which may not exist in his own language.

iii. Intonation, stress and rhythm

Intonation, stress and rhythm may also cause the

learner to have difficulty understanding spoken language. In languages like Turkish, the number of syllables determines the length of pronouncing a certain length of utterance. On the other hand, in English utterances are divided into "'tone groups', strings of syllables run together to form a single sequence and generally characterised by one heavily stressed 'tone'. The rhythm of speech is based on these 'tones' and to a lesser extent on other minor stresses."⁶

Penny Ur (1984)⁷ quotes examples from J.C. Richards' article 'Listening Comprehension'. Richards states that it takes about the same time to say: 'The CAT is INTERested in proTECTing its KITTens.' as it does to say: 'LARGE CARS WASTE GAS.', both of which have four syllables. Intonation often influences the meaning of an utterance greatly. Certainty, doubt, irony, humor or seriousness can be expressed by characteristic intonation patterns as much as choice of segmental elements.

iv. Prediction

The ability to predict what is going to be said next makes it possible for native speakers to ignore redundancies and to start anticipating the next significant piece of information. Prediction is difficult for a foreign language learner as his knowledge in the target language is limited. A knowledge of intonation,

clichés, idioms and proverbs as well as vocabulary and grammar facilitates correct prediction. A sentence pronounced with the intonation of hesitation or doubt is usually followed by reservation. 'I quite like her...' is usually followed by 'But...'. The cliché 'It's all very well...' is also followed by an objection to what has been said before. In sum, correct or relevant prediction becomes possible as the learner's knowledge of the target language increases.

v. Colloquial language and different accents

When students learn a new word, they recognise it by the way it looks on paper and the way it sounds when carefully pronounced. So they are often dismayed when they hear how it sounds in informal colloquial speech. Some syllables are lost; sometimes even negation disappears. In spoken American English can't /kænt/ becomes /kæ n/ in linked speech.

I can come. /aI kən kʌm/

I can't come. /aI kæn kʌm/

Another example of colloquial pronunciation is:

Did you eat? /dʒi:t/

Students used to the accent of their teacher find it difficult to understand people having different accents. As it is not possible, or desirable, to teach all the different accents, it seems reasonable to teach

the two main English accents, namely the British and American standard accents and then let them hear, for the purpose of ear-training, some other accents as well.

1.3.2.2 Extra linguistic problems

i. Fatigue

Fatigue is one of the negative forces that hinder learning in general. In a long listening exercise it has a negative effect on the learner's grasp and concentration, which is better at the beginning and gets worse as the activity goes on. Therefore, the teacher who is teaching listening comprehension should take this into account when preparing exercises. Even if student motivation is high at the beginning, long and tedious tasks bring about fatigue and the learner's grasp and concentration weaken. Long and difficult listening exercises should, therefore, be split into reasonable lengths and the type of activity for each section should be varied. In order to arouse the students' interest, the teacher should start the lesson with a short pre-listening activity, which may consist of a discussion of the topic of the listening comprehension text or of relevant vocabulary, eliciting the students' knowledge or familiarity with the subject, or even of a short discussion of the subject in the students' native tongue. Using the students' native tongue shouldn't be a taboo; on the contrary, the teacher

may succeed in getting even the poorest students interested in the subject, who would otherwise be lost from the very beginning. However, the pre-listening activity should not be too long, as there is the danger of exhausting the subject even before the actual listening activity starts.

ii. Redundancy and noise

Noise is another factor that interferes with comprehension of heard material. Some words may be drowned due to noise of various kinds and others indistinctly pronounced. The learner finds it more difficult to fill in these gaps in a foreign language than in his own. Penny Ur (1984) states three reasons for this difficulty. First, due to lack of knowledge the number of gaps is much larger in a foreign language than in one's own. Second, the learner is not familiar enough with the target language to make predictions and guesses as to what was missing. Third, many foreign language learners are obsessed by the idea that they have to understand everything. Because of this third reason, the learner cannot realise that he won't be able to grasp the meaning quickly unless he learns to eliminate the redundancies.

The above mentioned author states that, "Once the learner has moved over from intensive to extensive listening in the foreign language and got used to coping with noise and redundancy, his own native language skills

will come into play; but he needs conscious practice in making the transition." (p. 15)

Language teachers should, therefore, give the learners enough practice in recognizing redundancies and sufficing with the part of speech that is heard in the attempt to understand the whole message.

iii. Pace of delivery and retention

Speech is more difficult to understand compared with written language, for when one reads a text he reads it at his own pace and there is always the possibility of going back and re-reading a certain fragment. The immaterial nature of speech renders this impossible. Human mind has a limited capacity for better retention one needs to repeat what he hears in his mind. In normal speed of delivery there's no time to do that. So the learner has difficulty following the speech and may even lose track of it completely. All this discussion should not lead to the conclusion that the pace of delivery should be slowed down for the learner to follow easily. On the contrary, he should be exposed to natural speed of delivery-not fast speech by any means - from the very first day. Also, as the student's knowledge of the target language increases, so does his ability of retention, because among other things he will have learnt to concentrate on important information and ignore unimportant items by then. As a result, the load of the mind will be

reduced and more retention will take place.

iv. Using visual and environmental clues

Finally, many learners fail to make use of environmental clues to get the meaning of a not so well understood utterance. The reason is again his anxiety to hear and understand everything. The learner, anxious to understand the speaker's 'words', fails to take advantage of aids such as a picture, an object or a gesture by the speaker, which would otherwise be very helpful to understand the message.

FOOTNOTES

¹Rivers, Wilga (1969)

"A long neglected area, listening comprehension has its peculiar problems which arise from the fleeting, immaterial nature of spoken utterances."

²Stanley, John A. "Teaching Listening Comprehension"
TESOL Vol. 12 No.3 Sept. 1978

³The Process of Paragraph Writing Reid, Joy M. and
Lindstrom, M. Prentice Hall Inc. 1985

"Whether you speak in English or in your native language, you use many things in addition to your words to help you express your ideas. You may use intonation to show that you are asking a question or expressing surprise. You can speak louder or softer. You may use facial expression and body movement to help you communicate. However, when you are expressing your ideas in written form, these elements of communication are not available to you".

⁴Penny Ur-Teaching Listening Comprehension (1984).

⁵This classification is based on Penny Ur's (1984) discussion on pp. 11-21

⁶Penny Ur-Teaching Listening Comprehension (1984)

⁷Ibid.

CHAPTER II

THE EXPERIMENT

2.1 The aim

The experiment is aimed at demonstrating that students show better achievement when faced with authentic language if they have been given enough practice in controlled classroom language. It is not unusual to observe that learners who do quite well in class are at a loss when they first speak with a native speaker. They do not understand a word. This is because they have been exposed to the artificial classroom language throughout their training. On the other hand, it would be a fallacy to imagine that the students would learn better and perform better when they speak with a native speaker if the teacher used recordings of spontaneous speech of native speakers as teaching material from the very first day. Such language would have no grading with respect to vocabulary and structures, therefore, would be too difficult for the learners to understand. However, this argument should not lead to the conclusion that the teacher should avoid using authentic spontaneous language of native speakers in the classroom. On the contrary, the ultimate goal of the teaching program should be bringing the learners up to a level at which they will speak the language as closely as possible like native speakers and

which they will understand the speech of native speakers without any difficulty. To achieve this objective, the teaching program should try to provide a smooth transition from graded classroom language to natural authentic language.

As language is learned cumulatively, a gradation of the teaching material from the simple to the more complicated seems necessary. When the learners have mastered the basic vocabulary and structures, they will cope with authentic language more easily. Besides, even at the elementary level small portions of authentic language, e.g. greetings, short everyday conversations, announcements, etc., could be used by the teacher. If the passage from contrived classroom teaching material to authentic spontaneous teaching material is realized step by step, that is by introducing more authentic language as the learners' knowledge and competence increase, the learners may be expected to understand the speech of the native speakers better when they go out into the real world.

2.2. The scope and the subjects

The scope of the experiment relates to a problem area for Turkish learners, namely tense and lax vowels. As tenseness is not phonemic in Turkish some Turkish learners do not distinguish between them when they speak

English. For example, they cannot distinguish between /ɪp/ and /i:p/, which may lead to confusion or misunderstanding. The tests used in the experiment were actually based on the high front tense and lax vowels, /I/ and /i:/.

The subjects were twenty elementary level students, in the preparatory year of Boğaziçi University in the academic year of 1985-86, in the age range of 18-20. All of them had come from state schools and had very little back-ground knowledge of English. During the experiment they were divided into two groups, Group 1 and Group 2, each consisting of ten students. This grouping was made for the purpose of testing the end result of using two different types of language, controlled classroom language and authentic spontaneous language.

2.3 The method

The experiment was carried out in three phases over a period of four weeks. In the first phase, the two vowels in question were introduced to both groups together to provide an awareness of the phonemic distinction between them. Following this, the twenty subjects were given two tests to evaluate their recognition. In the second phase, Group 1 and Group 2 were administered different sets of tests. The tests given to Group 1 were based on controlled classroom language prepared by the author

of this thesis and the ones given to Group 2 were based on the recordings of real interviews from the book Viewpoints (1974) by R. O'Neill and R. Scott. The aim of this practice was to trace the achievements of students when controlled and real language were used. In the third phase, the two groups were brought together again and were given a final test based on real language. The aim was to determine the expected different achievements of the two groups. The prediction of the author was that Group 1 would perform better in the last test, as they had been exposed to controlled classroom language until they had gained competence in the sounds being focused on before they were confronted with authentic language.

2.4. The results

2.4.1 Interpretation of the results

The results of the experiment showed that both groups scored high in the first two tests, which and the same content Group 1 92% and Group 2 93% and 64%. Test I was based on the recognition of the two vowels, /I/ and /i:/, in isolation, and Test II in sentential context. Group 1 scored high with an average score of 91% in Test III too, which was also based on recognition of the two vowels in sentential context. Test IV given to this group consisted of a short dialogue and questions on this dialogue. The average score for this test was 70%.

The average score achieved by Group 2 on the third test was dramatically lower than those on the second and third tests: 45%. And that on the fourth was even lower: 22%. As these two tests were based on authentic language, these results did not contradict the initial prediction of the experiment. It was significant that the results of these tests were lower than the results obtained by Group 1 on Tests III and IV, as Group 1 had scored lower on the first two tests than Group 2.

Finally, both groups were given the same test, Test V, which was based on authentic language.

Group 1 had on average score of 31%, while Group 2 had 30%. The small difference between the performances of the two groups can be accounted for by the following considerations: Firstly, Group 1 consisted of students with lower achievement on the first two tests, although the difference was slight. The average scores of Group 1 on these two tests were 92% and 62% as opposed to those of the second group', 93% and 64%. Furthermore, Group 2 had already become familiar with the recorded material used as the basis of this last test, having had two tests, Test III (Group 2 only) and Test IV (Group 2 only), based on that type of language earlier. This might have provided an advantage for them over the other group.

On the other hand, the low achievement of Group 2 on Tests III and IV, which were based on recordings of real interviews taken from Viewpoints (1974), can be accounted for by the fact that the language of these interviews had characteristic features of spontaneous spoken language, such as elision, deletion, contraction, sandhi variations, unfinished sentence fragments, false starts, etc. Sometimes the interviewer spoke over the speaker or vica versa. The speed was rather too fast for the beginners to understand. Therefore, the students in Group 2 did badly on these two tests, although they had done quite well in Tests I and II. That was because the students were not ready for Test III yet, as they hadn't been given enough exercises in controlled language.

Another observation made during the experiment was that many students in Group 2 gave up before the end of Tests III and IV and the proportion of unanswered questions was higher than those answered incorrectly, although most of the students in Group 1 answered all the questions, whether correctly or incorrectly. It may be concluded from this evidence that learners tend to shrink into their shells when confronted with language most of which they don't understand and thus make the teacher's job more difficult. To prevent this, it would be advisable to give the students a feeling of achievement so that they can make progress more easily and quickly. Therefore, at the beginning level, learners should be

presented with language they can cope with easily. Afterwards the degree of difficulty, with respect to both content and type of language used, may be increased and the material may be made more challenging.

2.4.2 A schematic representation of the results

Group I (controlled classroom language)

Group II (Uncontrolled Authentic Language)

	Test I	Test II	Test III	Test IV	Test V		Test I	Test II	Test III	Test IV	Test V
Student 1	100	70	90	100	30	Student 11	100	70	75	10	20
Student 2	100	60	90	50	30	Student 12	80	60	50	50	30
Student 3	100	70	100	100	50	Student 13	100	80	50	40	50
Student 4	100	60	90	100	30	Student 14	90	50	25	20	30
Student 5	80	50	90	50	20	Student 15	90	50	50	20	30
Student 6	80	50	90	50	30	Student 16	90	60	25	0	10
Student 7	100	70	100	50	25	Student 17	90	50	50	30	30
Student 8	70	50	90	75	45	Student 18	100	80	50	10	20
Student 9	100	80	80	75	30	Student 19	100	80	25	20	50
Student 10	90	60	90	50	20	Student 20	90	60	50	20	30
AVERAGE %	92	62	91	70	31	AVERAGE %	93	64	45	22	30

2.5 The conclusion

Given the results of the experiment, it may be concluded that materials selected for teaching listening comprehension should be based mainly on graded, controlled language for beginning levels.

One argument in favour of using controlled language at beginning levels may be that the four skills cannot be taught in complete isolation from one another and thus students should be given listening practice on the material they have learned in other skill areas. Therefore, it is obvious that the material to be used in listening comprehension exercises will inevitably be based on the language already studied, and hence contrived. In fact, in the experiment Tests III and IV administered to Group 1 consisted of vocabulary and grammar known to the students at that level. When the results of these tests are compared with the results of Tests III and IV administered to Group 2, we can see that the achievement of the first group is significantly higher.

CHAPTER III

SUGGESTED ACTIVITIES

The main point this thesis attempts to emphasize is that in the teaching of listening comprehension, as in the teaching of other skills, learners should not be dipped into uncontrolled spontaneous language in the anticipation that the more they are exposed to real language, the better they will learn. Mere exposition does not effect the expected good results. Instead, learners should be systematically prepared to face with such language by being exposed to small portions of authentic language with a degree of difficulty which they can cope with fairly easily. Also, listening comprehension activities should aim more at teaching to hear and understand items already familiar in their written forms than at teaching new items.

In this chapter, some activities which may be helpful in preparing the learner for spontaneous speech will be suggested. These activities will be grouped together as:

1. Exercises on segmental level,
2. Exercises on supra-segmental level, and
3. Exercises based on comprehension.

It is advisable to follow the suggested order as such ordering would go from the easier task to the more difficult. It should be noted that this thesis does not attempt to cover all the problem areas for learners or all the possible types of exercises. For the sake of brevity, only a few problem areas will be chosen and related exercises will be suggested.

3.1 Exercises on the segmental level

In the elementary stage, the sounds of the language should first be taught in isolation in their ideal forms. It is up to the teacher's own initiative, though, whether to teach all the sounds or to deal with the ones that cause problem, if and when they do. Let us take as an example of problematic sounds for Turkish learners the voiceless dental fricative /θ/. The dental fricatives /θ/ and /ð/ do not exist in the Turkish sound inventory. As a result, Turkish learners tend to produce the nearest sounds that exist in their language instead of these sounds. In the case of /θ/, they produce /t/, /s/ or /f/ which are similar to it with respect to point of articulation, all dental. In the exercise below, the /θ/ sound will be shown in contrast with /t/, one of the possible consonants replaced for /θ/.

Exercise 1:

The teacher puts the phonetic symbols /θ/ and /t/

on the board, numbering them 1 and 2 respectively, and pronounces each one several times. Next, he pronounces words with these two sounds in them.

T. Listen to the following words with the sound /θ/:

1. /θIn/
2. /θænk/
3. /θi:m/
4. /θɜ:m/
5. /θIk/
6. /θɔ:rn/
7. /θri:/
8. /θrɛd/
9. /θʌg/
10. /θaI/

Now listen to these words with the sound /t/:

1. /tIn/
2. /tænk/
3. /ti:m/
4. /tɜ:m/
5. /tIk/
6. /tɔ:rn/
7. /tri:/
8. /trɛd/
9. /tʌg/
10. /taI/

Now, listen to these pairs:

1. θIn - tIn
2. θænk - tænk
3. θi:m - ti:m
4. θɜ:m - tɜ:m
5. θIk - tIk etc...

After the students have heard the teacher pronounce the two sounds, they are asked to recognize them. Different types of recognition exercises may be employed. Below is a 'same - different' type exercise.

T. Say 'the same' if you hear the same sound twice, 'different' if you hear two different sounds.

(The students write down their answers and check if they are correct as the teacher later gives them the correct answers.)

1. θɜ:d - θɜ:d
2. θɔ:n - tɔ:n
3. tIk - θIk
4. θri: - tri:
5. tri: - tri: etc...

Correct answers are:

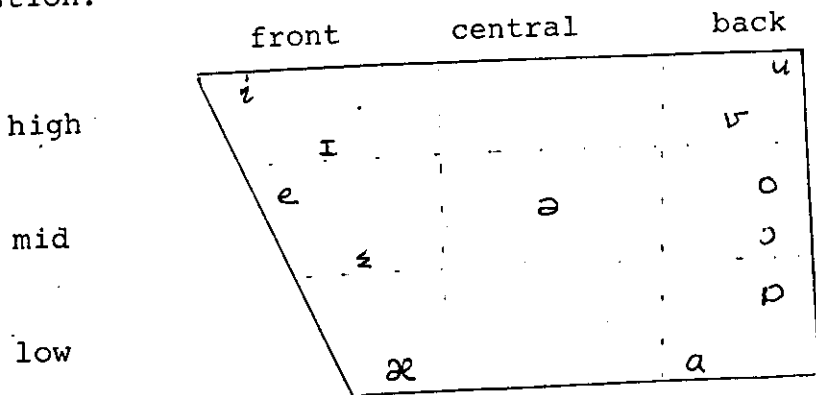
1. the same
2. different
3. different
4. different
5. the same

Lastly, the teacher has the class repeat the two columns separately and then the minimal pairs, if he aims to pass from the stage of recognition to the stage of production.

Another problem area on segmental level is vowel gradation. As this phenomenon is unfamiliar to Turkish learners, it often causes problems. In Turkish stressed or unstressed, all vowels are fully pronounced. Therefore, many Turkish learners do not distinguish between strong and weak forms of vowels in English. In Exercise 2, the conversion of the front low vowel /æ/ to mid central /ə/ sound in unstressed syllables is taken as an example for vowel gradation in English.

Exercise 2:

The teacher puts the phonetic symbol /æ/ on the board and pronounces it several times for the students to hear it. Then, he gives a simple description of it. He may also wish to put the English vowel chart on the board as an aid to the recognition of the two sounds in question.



Now listen to the following words. All of them have the /æ/ sound in them:

1. /æ/
2. /æn/
3. /ænd/
4. /kæn/
5. /hæv/
6. /hæz/
7. /hæd/
8. /æz/
9. /mæn/
10. /lænd/

It would be a good idea to put the written form of the words on the blackboard so that the students could recognize the fact that the same word is pronounced in two different ways depending on whether it is stressed or unstressed, e.g. /kæn/ and /kən/. Next, the teacher puts the phonetic symbol /ə/ on the board and pronounces it several times.

T. Now listen to these:

1. There's a book here.
2. I want an orange.
3. Some bread and butter.
4. I can do it.

5. I would have done it.
6. She has had it.
7. Mary had known it.
8. Fast as lightning.
9. Policeman.
10. England.

The teacher writes the following on the board for the students to copy in their notebooks or hands them out in printed form.

T. Underline the parts which you hear as /æ/:

1. I can see some birds.
2. Can you see them?
3. Yes, I can.
4. "Either Mary or Jane will come." "No. Both Mary and Jane will."
5. Will you pass the bread and butter, please?

Now, underline the parts which you hear as /ə/

1. Penguins live both in the sea and on land.
2. He lives in England.
3. If I had one, I'd give it to you.
4. He works in an office.
5. The policeman's standing there.

3.2 Exercises on the supra-segmental level

On this level, exercises that aim at familiarizing

students with features characteristic of spoken language such as contraction, elision, deletion, stress and intonation, etc. will be suggested. Among these characteristics, contraction, word boundary and intonation will be taken and relevant exercises will be suggested, due to the limited scope of this thesis.

The first exercise in this section is based on contraction and word boundary. It is a dictation exercise.

Exercise 3:

T. Listen to the following sentences. Each one will be repeated twice. The first time you hear the sentence, just listen. After you hear it the second time, write it down.

1. I've heard about it.
2. It's a book.
3. It would've been easy.
4. Don't look at me.
5. It isn't easy at all.

The aspect of spoken English that will be dealt with next is the basic intonation patterns such as statement, question, etc. This specific exercise tests the students' awareness of the intonation pattern of questions.

Exercise 4:

T. You will hear five utterances. Which ones are questions?

1. Mary!
2. Mary?
3. Ten.
4. Here?
5. Tomorrow?

3.3 Exercises based on comprehension

Doubtless to say, the ultimate goal of the teacher of English should be to use authentic language in the classroom. However, the transition from controlled to uncontrolled, authentic speech should be smooth. To provide this smooth transition, radio excerpts seem to be very suitable. They are natural as they are not intended to be used for teaching. Also, their objectives are more clearly determined as opposed to real authentic speech and they don't get out of control with respect to both subject matter and style. Furthermore, when the teacher wants to use recordings of real language, the native speakers, conscious of being recorded, may move away from naturalness. On the other hand, if they are not aware of being recorded, the conversation may tend to become less focused, as pointed out above, and turn out to be inconvenient for teaching purposes. All these

facts considered, radio excerpts seem to be ideal to be used in class. A third convenience of using recordings from the radio is that not always may native speakers be available. Therefore, the radio is a valuable resource available to the language teacher.

For elementary levels, recordings of weather forecasts and news programs, or other structured programs such as the drama hour, seem to be very suitable as they have an easy enough structure to understand. The following exercise is based on a radio excerpt published in Forum.¹

Exercise 6:

Transcript:²

Weather Report - West Coast

Announcer: Bob Edwards

(Music)

BE: Here's the weather for the western part of the country: in Denver today, sunny with a high of 82 degrees; Albuquerque, sunny and 92; San Diego, fair and 77; Boise, sunny and 88; Portland, fair and 78; Las Vegas, sunny and 85; Seattle, fair and 74; Los Angeles, sunny and 85; Spokane, fair and 74; and in Anchorage today, fair with a high of 68 degrees. That's the weather for Monday, July fourth.

Pre-listening activity

The teacher teaches— or revises— the following vocabulary:

fair	warm	temperature	Denver
sunny	hot	degree	Albuquerque
clear	cool	Fahrenheit	San Diego
cloudy	cold	Centigrade	Boise
dull			Portland
rainy			Las Vegas
windy			Seattle
stormy			Los Angeles
snowy			Spokane
			Anchorage

While-listening activity

The students study the following questions for 3 min. and answer them as they listen to the recording.

1. What will the temperature be in Albuquerque?
2. Which city will be warmer, Las Vegas or Los Angeles?
3. Does Mr. Burns, who lives in Anchorage need to take his umbrella with him this morning?
4. What's the date today?

Post-listening activity: Writing

The students are assigned to write a weather report for the following day.

Announcements from railroad stations, airports, etc. give useful practice in hearing the necessary information in the medium of noise.

Exercise 7: At the airport

Transcript³

British Airways announces the departure of Flight 720 to Paris. Boarding now at Gate 7.

This is the final call for British Airways Flight 504 to Brussels. Boarding now at Gate 21.

This is an urgent call for passenger Mr. Richard Chisholm. Would Mr. Chisholm please go to the Information Desk.

British Caledonian announce the departure of Flight 107 to Ibiza. Boarding now at Gate 17.

This is the final call for Alitalia Flight 409 to Milan. Boarding now at Gate 3. British Airways regrets that all flights are subject to delay. This is due to a shortage of baggage handlers.

British Airways announces the departure of Flight 191 to Madrid. Boarding now at Gate 11.

Length: 1 min. 25 sec.

Number of speakers: 1

Setting: Announcements being relayed over the loudspeaker system in an airport departure lounge.

Pre-listening activity

The teacher teaches and practices or revises the

following vocabulary and structures:

Vocabulary

Announce	Flight No.	British Airways
Board	Departure	British Caledonian
Regret	Arrival	Alitalia
Arrive	Information Desk	Paris
Depart	Gate	Brussels
Take off	Final call	Ibiza
		Madrid

Structures

... regret that ...

Boarding now ...

This is the ...

While-listening activity

The teacher gives out the worksheets for the students to study. The exercises may consist of completing the missing information on a chart, true/false questions or comprehension questions to be answered, as the teacher finds suitable for his students. The following is a sample of true/false type questions.

T. Write T on the left-hand side of the question number if you think the statement is true, F if you think the statement is false.

1. The plane from Paris is boarding at Gate 7.
2. The plane to Brussels is soon taking off.

3. Flight 17 goes to Ibiza.
4. Flight 409 goes to Milan.
5. All flights with British Airways are expected to be on time.

The key to the exercises is:

1. F
2. T
3. T
4. T
5. F

Post-listening activity: Reading and speaking

The teacher may bring to class a plane or train time-table in English (photocopies enough for the number of students in the class). The students examine it for a period assigned by the teacher and then the teacher asks comprehension questions and elicits answers from the students. Also, the students may ask one another questions.

Recordings of news programs or interviews broadcast on the radio can very conveniently be used for taking notes, which is a very useful skill for students. Note-taking is a relatively more difficult skill than answering comprehension questions after or while listening to a text. Therefore it is advisable to use this type of exercise at later stages of the elementary

program. The students may be asked to reconstruct the news items from their notes as a post-listening writing activity. The following is part of an interview broadcast on NPR.

Exercise 8:

Transcript⁴

Announcer: Faith Fancher

Reporter : John Rudolph

Speaker : Richard Rovsek

FF: This fourth of July is not only the nation's two-hundred-and-sixth birthday, it's also the ninety-eighth birthday of the Statue of Liberty. Some people are worried that the statue, whose precise name is "Liberty Illuminating the World," may not last for another ninety-eight years, and so a major campaign to rebuild the statue has begun. John Rudolph reports from New York city.

JR: First, her torch-bearing right arm became weak, and was closed to visitors several years ago. Now, the entire one-hundred-and-fifty-two-foot-high copper-and steel sculpture is in danger of crumbling.

RR: Here we have the statue of Liberty in the middle of New York Harbor, and it's... uh... it literally receives all of the wind and sea, ...uh... and that has actually rusted and corroded the inner

structure.

JR: Richard Rovsek is one of the creators of a nationwide campaign to raise millions of dollars to rebuild the Statue of Liberty in time for the statue's one hundredth birthday. The money will also be used to restore nearby Ellis Island, the place where seventeen million immigrants entered this country. Rovsek says that while the statue's green copper exterior is in fairly good shape, much of the interior ironwork that supports the statue needs to be replaced.

The Statue of Liberty was given to the United States by France on July 4, 1884. The quarter of a million dollars it cost to build the statue was donated by French school children. Organizers of the restoration project have a similar idea for raising money.

Pre-listening activity

The teacher teaches or revises the following vocabulary and structures:

Vocabulary

Liberty	Rebuild	Statue of Liberty
Statue	Restrre	New York City
Campaign	Replace	New York Harbor
Interior	Crumble	Ellis Island
Exterior	Rust	
	Corrode	
	Donate	
	Raise (money)	

Structures

Not only ... but also

Gerunds after prepositions (...in danger of crumbling...)

Present participles as adjectives (... her torch-bearing
right arm...)

While-listening activity: Note-taking

As the students listen to the recording they make notes of important facts about the Statue of Liberty.

Post-listening activity

The students answer the following questions from their notes

1. What are some people worried about?
2. What may happen to the statue if it is not rebuilt?
3. Where is it located?
4. What is the importance of Ellis Island in American history?
5. How are the organizers of the campaign to restore the statue planning to raise money for this job?

In this chapter only a limited number of exercises have been included in accordance with the limited scope of the thesis. Many more different types of exercises may be designed for use in class. The most important point that this chapter tries to make is that all the

exercises used by the teacher of listening comprehension should be geared towards preparing the students for the kind of language they will face in real life. The contention of the author of this thesis is such that if a listening comprehension program included exercises like those suggested above, i.e. exercises that combine the right proportion of authentic language with graded classroom language, it would be safe to assume that the learners would be best prepared for real life communication with native speakers. The amount of authentic language used in class material should be increased gradually until, at more advanced levels, it is entirely authentic.

FOOTNOTES

¹Forum Vol. XX No. 2 April 1982

²The excerpt is taken from the radio broadcasts published by National Public Radio, U.S.A. The following exercise is added by the author of this thesis.

³The text is taken from Task Listening (1981). The exercise was added by the author of this thesis.

⁴Forum Vol. XXI No. 4 1982.

APPENDIX

I. Test I

1. Write S if you hear the same sound twice, D if you hear different sounds.

- i. /bIt/ - bIt/
- ii. /sti:L/ - /sti:L/
- iii. /pIk/ - /pi:k/
- iv. /ti:n/ - /tIn/
- v. /mIL/ - /mi:L/

2. Write 1 if I say a word with the /I/ sound, 2 if a word with the /i:/ sound.

- i. /Ip/
- ii. /kIk/
- iii. /hi:t/
- iv. /i:t/
- v. /hIt/

Key to Test I

- | | | | | |
|---------|-------|--------|-------|------|
| 1. i. S | ii. S | iii. D | iv. D | v. D |
| 2. i. 1 | ii. 1 | iii. 2 | iv. 2 | v. 1 |

II. Test II

You will hear some sentences. Fill in the blanks in the sentences on your paper as you listen to the sentences. You will hear them only once.

1. Please ... this
2. I want ...
3. ... needs cleaning
4. I saw a ... at the seaside.
5. It's ...
6. You musn't ... it.
7. It's ...
8. You musn't ... it.
9. ... going.
10. ... is going.
11. Yours is ... no. 1
12. They're ...
13. They're ...
14. I'm ... of it.
15. He ... the dog.

Key to Test II

- | | | |
|-------------|-------------|-------------|
| 1. eat | 6. heat | 11. seat |
| 2. these | 7. sleeping | 12. leaving |
| 3. his | 8. hit | 13. living |
| 4. sheep | 9. He is | 14. rid |
| 5. slipping | 10. His | 15. bit |

Test III (Group 1 only)

Study the following pairs of sentences and as you listen to them, mark the one that you hear

1. a. His seat's in the front
b. He sits in the front
2. a. It's still.
b. It's steel.
3. a. They're in their tins.
b. They're in their teens.
4. a. It's a ship.
b. It's a sheep.
5. a. When did he live?
b. When did he leave?
6. a. Hit it.
b. Heat it.
7. a. We bit it.
b. We beat it.
8. a. It's near the sill.
b. It's near the seal.
9. a. Put the pill in the box
b. Put the peel in the box.
10. a. Fill it.
b. Feel it.

Key to Test III

- | | |
|------|-------|
| 1. a | 6. b |
| 2. a | 7. b |
| 3. b | 8. a |
| 4. a | 9. b |
| 5. b | 10. a |

Test IV (Group 1 only)

Read the following questions and answer them as you listen to the conversation.

1. What does John suggest?
2. Why does Mary like the idea?
3. What must she do? When?
4. What does Mary ask John to do for her?
5. What is John's second suggestion? Why doesn't Mary agree?

Text:

John - Hey, Mary! Shall we go to the mill up the hill?

Mary - Good idea! We can have our meal there. But I must take this pill before the meal.

John - Why? Do you feel ill?

Mary - A little. Could you fill my glass, please?

John - Certainly. Shall we race up the hill?

Mary - I can't. I'm wearing high heels.

Key to Test IV:

1. Going to the mill up the hill.
2. They can have their meal there.
3. Take a pill before the meal.
4. Fill her glass.
5. Racing up the hill. She's wearing high heels.

Test III (Group 2 only)

(The teacher plays the sentences on the tape-recorder and stops the tape-recorder after each sentence for the students to write their answers.)

1. Write the second word of the quotation that you will hear.

...

2. What is the second word of this quotation?

...

3. Write the whole utterance.

...

4. What is the first word that you hear?

...

Transcript

1. You feel that your duty then ... to try to prove this man is innocent.
2. On this particular occasion ...
3. Yes, indeed.
4. These are the professional criminals.

Test IV (Group 2 only)

I. Encircle the word that you hear.

- | | |
|-----------------|---------------|
| 1. Live - Leave | 5. Bit - Beat |
| 2. His - He is | 6. Sit - Seat |
| 3. Hit - Heat | |
| 4. This - These | |

You will hear the conversation again. This time answer the questions:

II. What did the criminal that the solicitor talk about first do at the bus station?

III. What did he do to the children?

IV. Who tried to stop him?

Transcript:

Narrator : In this part, the solicitor describes a violent crime he had had to defend.

Solicitor : I can think of a man who used to live... in a caravan, and his marriage broke up, and shortly after the break-up of his marriage he... had a serious mental illness ...//

Interviewer: Hmm... //

S. : Umm ... and one particular night ... he ... committted a crime, fair degree of seriousness ... umm... he went into a bus station. For no apparent reason he ... hit an elderly man, on the face, as he entered the bus station. Two children then ... umm ... came to his notice and he chased these two children on to a bus. Uh... he beat the two children. When another elderly man who was also sitting on the bus, which was going to depart, //

I. : Hmm... //

- S. : tried to prevent him beating the children,
he beat the elderly man and then, departing
from the bus station, he assaulted another
woman... //
- I. : Hmm... //
- S. : Umm... on his way out.
- I. : Mm...
- S. : No apparent reason at all... um... we had
extensive medical and psychiatric reports,
a social report by the probation service,
because this man had been in trouble before.
An when it really boiled down to it, he was
just anti-social.

Key to Test IV

- | | |
|------------|----------|
| I. 1. Live | 4. These |
| 2. His | 5. Beat |
| 3. Hit | 6. Sit |

II. hit an elderly man on the face.

III. beat them.

IV. another elderly man who was also sitting on the bus.

Test V (Both Groups)

I. Listen to the interview and encircle the words that
you hear

- | | |
|-----------------|----------------|
| 1. Leave - Live | 4. Eats - It's |
| 2. We'll - Will | 5. Beat - Bit |
| 3. Least - List | |

You will hear the interview again. This time answer the following questions.

II. When do drinkers usually break into homes?

III. Say whether True or False:

1. The people involved in thefts usually live in pubs.
2. The solicitor thinks violence is easy to explain.
3. People break into homes for some more beer money.

Transcript:

Narrator : Part I. The solicitor says why he thinks thefts occur, and then he gives his views on violence.

Solicitor : In thefts I would say that the motive ... strongest motive is not to work.

Interviewer: Hmm...

Solicitor : Uh... for theft, and very often there is a pattern of drinking.

I. : Hmm...

S. : Umm... involved in the theft, //

I. : Hmm...//

S. : They leave the pub, they go out, they see a house which is in darkness, with a couple of milk bottles on the door- step, they think, "Right we'll do that house and get a bit more beer money for tomorrow."

I. : What about violence, do you deal with //

- S. : Violence, yes I don't like violence, it's
one thing I find least easy to explain, //
- I. : Hmm... //
- S. : Umm... because very often it's not explicable.
- I. : Hmm...
- S. : Umm... I have very frequently found there
is a pattern here too, umm... especially
the juvenile offenders, broken homes...//
- I. : Hmm... //
- S. : and uh... large uh...//
- I. : You mean they come from broken homes...//
- S. : Yes... from broken homes, or large, unhappy,
rather poor families.

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