

Reflections on Listening Comprehension

Qing Zhang

Listening, as one of the essential language skills, is a main focus in language teaching. It is often mistakenly considered as a passive skill. Students passively receive information from teachers or the outside world and required to show comprehension capability. In most cases, students feel there is nothing they can do if they could not catch every word. However, the truth is listening is not a passive skill and not unidirectional at all. In this reflection piece, I would like to talk about the importance of using authentic listening materials and allowing students to develop listening strategies through class group work.

Based on my foreign language learning experience, I discover that only when my English reaches fluent proficiency am I able to notice the nuanced aspects of English as a language and a sociocultural instrument by myself. I believe an important way to get students prepared to reach an advanced level is to expose them to a great number of authentic listening materials. I used to be a little hesitant to use news reports or TV shows as student materials. Unlike reading materials, authentic listening materials go though fast. If students cannot process the information the moment they hear it, the words fade away quickly and next group of information is coming. But the idea of using authentic texts with simplified tasks offers me a new perspective to evaluate the usability of such materials. Even though the materials are challenging, teachers can ask students to concentrate all their attention on a specific question.

Collaborative work should be encouraged in learning practice. This idea seemed far away to me as well. When I was learning English, the teacher usually assigned us a series of listening exercises. We listened to the audio recordings and made choices. In my mind, collaborative work is more for oral than listening practice. But actually it is not. When it is promoted in developing students' listening skills, it can be equally helpful. On the Foreign Language Learning and Teaching website, group work is used after students listen to the materials. I suggest collaborative work be conducted throughout the listening task. Prior to the task, students can be grouped together to discuss the possible scenarios by inferring from the background information and activating their schema. After listening, they can exchange the information they each have to see what they miss individually. On the other hand, it requires students to monitor each other's understanding. Different people might have different interpretations on the same point. When

there is disagreement, that is the moment students can weigh different perspectives and learn from each other.

Traditionally, teachers focus on language meaning in class teaching. I suggest teachers should focus on meaning as well as form in class. Understanding how the text is said is as important as what the text says. It seems to me the latter builds the basis for the former. So in a limited time period, I think I have to offer enough information so students can step on it to acquire and appreciate how the language is said.