Developing Listening Skills forTertiary Level Learners

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Abstract

Although ELT in Bangladesh is moving away from the traditional grammar translation approach towards a CLT framework, we still do not give emphasis to all four skills which is recommended in the communicative approach. As listening remains a neglected skill the writers argue for the need to incorporate this skill at the tertiary level in order to improve communicative competence and in particular proficiency in Academic English. The article first discusses the theoretical overview for teaching listening including listening for academic purposes. Then it presents practical and effective tasks and materials that are appropriate for the Bangladeshi university context and will develop students' proficiency in Academic English.

1. Introduction

ELT in the Bangladesh context has been undergoing a paradigm shift from the traditional grammar translation approach to the Communicative Language Teaching framework since the 1990s. Unfortunately, though the reorientation has led to some changes in syllabus and material design, most classes still focus on the literacy skills, reading and writing. This goes against the principles of CLT where

Diane Larsen-Freeman (2000, 130) mentions, "Students work on all four skills form the beginning." Moreover, this method adopts a functional view of language in order to facilitate the ability to use language for different purposes. The neglect of the listening skill, in our language classes, has meant that learners continue to be weak in understanding and producing spoken language, thereby failing to attain the CLT goal of communicative competence.

The importance of listening has been long recognized in the history of English language teaching. Marc Hegelson (2003) writes that the emphasis on listening began in the late 1800s with the Direct Method in Gouin's Series and the Berlitz School. This was continued by the Audiolingual Method where language was presented orally before being presented in the written form. With the introduction of CLT, listening was given further prominence because it was believed that learners learn through the act of communication (Hegelson : 25). Tricia Hedge feels that there is an overall emphasis on listening since "contemporary society exhibits a shift away from printed media and towards sound, and its members therefore need to develop a high level of proficiency in listening" (2001 : 229). Hedge cites statistics from research on the actual use of different skills in everyday life. She reports that "of the time an individual is engaged in communication, approximately 9 percent is devoted to writing, 16 per cent to reading, 30 per cent to speaking and 45 per cent to listening" (Hedge, 228).This has resulted in added importance been given to oracy, the ability to communicate through spoken language (both speaking and listening), in education where she has noticed "a stronger focus on listening in the classroom" (2001: 229). She thinks this is due to findings from second language acquisition research, particularly the impact of input on learning. According to Krashen's Input Hypothesis, "for language learning to occur, it is necessary for learners to understand input language which contains linguistic items that

are slightly beyond the learner's present linguistic competence" (Richards et al, 1985 qt in Helgeson, 26). So the development of listening skill becomes important not only for communication but also for learning language through comprehensible input. SLA research also suggests that learners be given a "silent period" in the early stages of learning while they are in the process of acquiring language, which again underscores the importance of listening.

Given the research findings and methodological emphasis on listening, it is surprising and shocking that language classes in Bangladesh are not giving due importance to this area. The most commonly offered rationale for the neglect of listening is the difficulty of teaching listening in the context of large classes with almost no logistical support. This has led to the absence of testing listening in final exams which in turn results in further neglect of this skill. While the resource constraints and administrative difficulties at SSC and HSC levels make the integration of listening in those classes problematic, we feel that listening can be effectively and successfully introduced at the tertiary level. Hedge (2001) has pointed out that training second language learners in listening to English is particularly important at the tertiary level because they need to comprehend the language of classrooms and lecture halls. It should be noted that much of university teaching is done through lectures, thus learners have to be able to listen and understand what the teacher says. In Bangladesh most private university classes are conducted in English, so students need to be able to understand spoken English in order to participate in the class and to follow teacher's instructions, feedback, talk, etc. In this paper, we aim to provide an appropriate methodological framework for teaching listening in Bangladesh at the university level which will develop listening strategies to facilitate the listening of both academic and general English. We intend to provide the theoretical basis and exemplify practical applications for an effective teaching of academic listening.

2. Difficulties in Listening

Listening requires considerable training because it is a difficult skill requiring multiple sub-skills and stages, which have to be undertaken simultaneously. Anderson and Lynch (1988) have identified the following stages in the process of listening:

1. The spoken signals have to be identified from the midst of surrounding sounds.

2. The continuous stream of speech has to be segmented into units, which have to be recognized as known words.

3. The syntax of the utterance has to be grasped and the speaker's intended meaning has to be understood.

4. We also have to apply our linguistic knowledge to formulating a correct and appropriate response to what has been said. (Anderson and Lynch, 4)

Shelagh Rixon (1986) like Anderson and Lynch (1988) considers listening to be a complex process requiring interdependence of different skills. She remarks that listening is not synonymous with hearing, "the recognition of sounds" (Rixon, 1986:28) because listening "implies conscious attention to the message of what is said" (1986 : 28). She puts forward the idea that listening comprises three levels--global message, grammar and vocabulary and finally the sound system.

Listening, therefore, requires the ability to understand phonology, syntax, lexis and information content within real time. Apart from time pressure, there are also problems stemming from inexplicit information given by the speaker and environmental obstructions such as distracting noise in the background, unclear voice or sound of recording, and lack of visual support to assist listening.

Brown and Yule (1983) have also listed some factors that complicate oral language. First of all, the speaker, his/her style,

accent and even number of speakers affect the spoken text. The listener's role also has an impact on listening, whether it is participatory or non-participatory, whether response is required or the listener is an eavesdropper. Another factor is the content of the text and finally whether or not it is accompanied by visual aid for support. Richards (1985) registers the following features of oral/spoken language that makes listening difficult: the clausal basis of speech as opposed to the sentence unit of written discourse; reduced forms which appear in spoken language to express meaning quickly; the frequent occurrences of ungrammatical forms; the component of pauses in spoken language, consisting of hesitations, false starts, corrections, filler pauses or silent pauses that make it difficult to follow a text; the rate of delivery affects understanding; rhythm and stress of the English language; the information content, which in interactive texts, involve the participation and cooperation of the listener making listening even more challenging; and, finally even the interactive quality of spoken discourse, verbal and non-verbal signals and/or formality/informality create further hurdles for the listener.

Besides shortcomings in grammar and vocabulary, the non-native ear has to face the alien quality of the sound system itself. Rixon (1986 : 36) argues that the sound of English is a major problem for the L2 learner making listening the most difficult skill. She lists four sources of difficulties arising from pronunciation:

1. The weak relationship between English sounds and the way they are spelt in the written language
2. Changes in sounds when they occur in rapid, connected speech.
3. The rhythm pattern of English speech.
4. Different ways of pronouncing the 'same' sound.

The problem with sound is that when English is spoken the words are not very clear or emphatic since natural talk is unrehearsed; full of pauses, repetition, hesitation and it is swift, slurred or even unclearly articulated. Rixon (1986) shows that words sound different depending on whether the word is spoken in isolation or in connected speech. For instance, some words are very clear when pronounced in isolation, such as "you" / 'ju:/ but when it is part of connected speech it is unstressed so that: "Will you come?" becomes /wi jƏ 'kʌm/. Another problem is that of elision, the loss of sounds that occurs in rapid speech. Rixon gives the example of the word "probably" which becomes "probly" and the word "discussed " transforms into /diskʌt/. Finally, there is assimilation, which refers to changes speakers make to pronunciation in order to save effort. Thus "ten bikes" becomes "tem bikes", / tem baiks/ (Rixon, 40).

Hedge (2000) lists some problems which are internal to the listener such as: "lack of motivation towards the topic, negative reaction to the speaker or to the event; anxiety to rehearse one's own contribution to a debate or the next part of a conversation, to the extent of missing what the current speaker is saying; or distraction by the content of a talk into thinking about a related topic thereby losing the thread of the argument" (237). She also mentions that lack of topic knowledge can lead to mishearing or misunderstanding. While native speakers, L1 learners, have to deal with the difficulty of processing information and message quality of the listening text, L2 learners confront added challenges of language and cultural unfamiliarity.

3. Theories of Listening
3.1 Bottom-up Model
Traditionally, listening had been treated as a receptive skill, similar to reading, as both require processing input. Hence models of listening followed the same analogies as reading,

namely bottom-up and top-down processes. Rixon (1986 : 30) mentions that in the 1950s listening was based on "separate building blocks" of the language, that is the sounds, words and structures. It was a parts-to-whole approach where the listener moved from sound to grammar and vocabulary and finally to global message. Hedge (2000 : 230) explains that in such an approach the learner uses knowledge of language and ability to process acoustic signals to make sense of the sounds that speech presents to us. She further states one has to "segment speech into identifiable sounds and impose a structure on these in terms of words, phrases, clauses, sentences and intonation patterns." By paying attention to lexical references, placement of stress and accompanying non-verbal behavior one can arrive at the meaning, function and implied message of a text. The problem, however, is that processing so much information-stress, vocabulary, non-verbal actions, demand concentration and ability to remember a considerable amount of data. This places a heavy load on short-term memory and one has to have a good "echoic memory" to retain words and their sequences (Hedge, 231). Anderson and Lynch (1988: 9) describe the attempt to listen by remembering as tape-recording where the listener has become a "tape-recorder." This is an apt analogy for bottom-up listening because it captures both the process and the inherent problems. A tape-recorder can only record or retain information; it cannot analyze or comprehend the input. Similarly in bottom-up listening the listener is striving towards recall instead of understanding. Like a tape, the listener's memory will also at one point run out of space and be unable to retain any more information, thereby limiting listening. Moreover, the tape-recorder is passive and unable to comprehend or interpret.

Helgesen (2003 : 28) points out that bottom-up listening may become frustrating because one has to pay attention to each individual part and remember all of them before making sense

of the complete text. The bottom-up approach is further problematic as it implies that the learner has to hear and understand every single word, which is a challenge for learners. Rixon (1986) found that most learners were anxious and frightened of listening because they thought they were unsuccessful listeners since they could not understand all the words in a text. This is in contrast to what native listeners do; " native speakers do not rely entirely on what their ears tell them, but fill in parts of the message, usually unconsciously, according to what they *expect* to hear" (Rixon, 30).
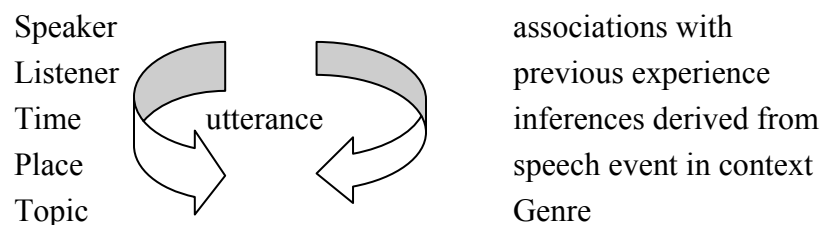
3.2 Top-down Model of Listening

A more effective means of processing listening is the opposite type of processing, the top-down approach. This counters the limitations of the tape-recorder by underscoring the active role of the listener in actual listening. Here the listener uses his prior knowledge or background knowledge as well contextual clues to make sense of the texts. The listener has to construct "a coherent interpretation" (Anderson and Lynch, 1988 : 11) by linking what is said with what is known and then inferring, or interpreting, the message. As a result, the listener creates "a mental model", which is the listener's personal representation of what he has heard, by combining previous knowledge and experience with the just received input. Anderson and Lynch (1988 : 11) refer to such listeners as "active model builder." To arrive at such listening comprehension, they suggest that three sources of knowledge are needed: schematic or background knowledge, context and systemic knowledge.

Brown and Yule (1983) place great importance to background knowledge, particularly the understanding of context for successful listening comprehension. They state that listeners encounter spoken language in real life in a context of situation. The native listener usually has a prior knowledge about this context, which helps him to deal with the difficulties associated with spoken discourse. Brown and Yule (1983 : 61) break

down the necessary knowledge in terms of speaker, listener, place, time, genre, topic and co-text. Listeners relate the new text with the previous knowledge and try to fit in the new information with past experience. They mention the principle of analogy, which accounts for the fact we expect new experiences to match our past experiences and our expectations. If the new is different from the past experience, then we adopt the principle of minimal change where we assume things are as like as possible to how they were before. We limit our expectations to the most probable rather than the most improbable. They explain the relevance of these analogies to language processing in this way:

> We operate with these two fundamental principles in our processing of language just as we do with life in general. We assume that a speaker known to us will behave in the way he has behaved before – that he will be equally friendly, kind or critical, that he will maintain the same sort of views on the same range of topics, that he will behave in a manner consistent with the mental image we have of him. From time to time a speaker's mood may vary, his interests may change, but we will attempt to interpret his behavior in the light of previous experience, adding the limited new information as accretions to the established information (Brown and Yule, 1983 : 64).

Brown and Yule (1983) illustrate their model of listening by showing how previous knowledge and context interact to create meaning for the listener.

Speaker   associations with
Listener   previous experience
Time utterance inferences derived from
Place   speech event in context
Topic   Genre

Figure 1: Role of background knowledge and context. Adapted from Brown and Yule, 1983, 67.

Since top-down processing gives considerable attention to prior knowledge, it is sometimes thought that such processing is akin to contextualized guessing. But Brown and Yule argue that comprehension here is not 'simply the reduction of uncertainty' but the 'integration into experience.'(69) This implies that top-down listening is not a matter of chance but the result of a strategic approach, which can be taught with considerable practice and by imparting strategies that native's speakers use for effective listening.

While native listeners usually take advantage of the situation context, there are times when they are also listening to texts "out of context" as when they hear radio programmes or encounter a conservation that has already started. In such cases they have to work out the context cues in a determined way, here discourse knowledge of genre and topic based on previous experience helps the listener to place the text in a familiar schema. The text will open up a wide range of possibilities and the listener will work towards narrowing down these to a particular type of text (Brown and Yule, 70).

Top-down processing is a whole-to-parts approach where considerable stress is given to context. Hedge recommends the following strategies for top-down listening:

- Listeners will work out the purpose of the message by considering contextual clues, the content and the setting.
- Listeners will activate schematic knowledge and bring knowledge of scripts into play in order to make sense of content
- Listeners will try to match their perception of meaning with the speaker's intended meaning, and this will depend on the many different factors involved in listening, both top-down and bottom-up. (Hedge, 2000 : 234)

3.3 Interactive Model of Listening

Hedge's last point is very important because like Helgensen (2003) she also feels that over-reliance on one approach will be detrimental. One cannot always arrive at the meaning of a text by solely depending on previous knowledge and context and neglecting the text, the words, grammar and intonation/stress. Therefore, both writers identify the interactive model of listening as most appropriate for listening. Hedge (2000 :234) points out the two processes are mutually dependent and function simultaneously. She considers that linguistic information; contextual clues and prior knowledge must interact to create comprehension. This is also very similar to the bases of knowledge, which Anderson and Lynch have categorized as necessary. Richards (1985) sums up this interactive approach in his comment that though understanding propositions is the goal of comprehension, it still depends on language, specifically grammatical competence, because "propositions are represented indirectly in the surface structure of utterances"(190). He states the listeners make use of both knowledge of the syntax of the target language and real world knowledge for listening comprehension.

4. Aim of Teaching Listening

While comprehension remains the goal of most teaching activities of listening, Hedge (2000) reminds us that it is not the whole picture. First of all, total comprehension is not feasible for the message may be incomplete, the listener may lack adequate background knowledge and the listener with his limited memory may not retain everything he has received. Hedge (2000) supports Brown and Yule (1983) who argue that comprehension is reached when the listener arrives at a "reasonable interpretation" of the speaker's intention. This is a pragmatic and achievable target for second language learners. Hedge further states that comprehension should not be the only aim of teaching listening. In some listening situations one

needs to respond and to do so, he will have to evaluate and interpret the speaker's message. She quotes Rost who asserts: "the end of the communicative act is not in reception of the communicative content but in the consequences of the act (1994; 6 in Hedge, 2000 : 235). Hedge contends that listening is more than comprehension, and it depends on the purpose of listening.

4.1   What should be the purpose of listening? Which functions should we focus on?

To make the listening class relevant and motivating for learners the first thing is to establish the purpose of listening. It is important to recognize and identify the different functions that learners may have in different situations. Brown and Yule (1983) identify two types of language functions – transactional and interactional. They mention that in interactional conversation the emphasis is on interaction and most of the time people share background information about the topics. Since conversations depend on context, participants are able to fill out the details using top-down comprehension and that is why it is not necessary to specify things clearly. On the other hand, transactional language is mainly used for communicating information. In this case the texts are "message oriented" rather than "listener oriented." Here coherence, content and clarity are very important, as well as obtaining confirmation that the message is understood. In this connection, Richards (1990 : 54) writes, "The interactional uses of language are those where the goals of communication are social. The emphasis here is on creating harmonious interactions between participants rather than on information." As examples of interactional language, Richards mentions "greetings, small talks, telling jokes, giving compliments, making casual chat" etc whereas transactional speech can be news broadcasts, lectures, descriptions, instructions etc. Richards suggests that while teaching listening

we should focus on exercises and activities that develop the interactional and transactional language functions and that reflect on the different processes and purposes involved in listening. Tikunoff (1985,in Richards 1990) mentions that students in classroom situations need command in both interactional and transactional functions. He points out that interactional functions are needed in order for the student to interact with the teacher and peers and to "acquire new skills, assimilate new information and construct new concepts" (1990 : 56) while accomplishing tasks in class. In school and college levels in Bangladesh our students interact most of the time in Bengali with their peers, and they have very little interaction with the teachers. As the medium of instruction in most primary and secondary schools is Bengali most of the language functions are also carried out in this language. However, many of these students have to perform the interactional functions in English at tertiary level, particularly when they attend private universities. In addition, most tertiary level classroom instructions and lectures are delivered in English thereby forcing students to cope with transactional functions in English.

5. Specific Listening Skills/Micro Skills of Listening

Although students require training in both interactional and transactional language, we need to specify the particular sub-skills that our students should attain in listening in order to make the teaching of listening effective.

If we adopt a communicative approach/method to teaching listening we must begin with learner's needs for listening. While most listening activities can be categorized under intensive listening or extensive listening, we still have to select carefully the micro-skills most relevant and appropriate for our learners.

5.1. Which skills should we teach?

There are a number of sub-skills that our students need to develop in order to improve their listening skill. Harmer (1990) divides the skills into two categories. According to him the first category or Type 1 skills are those, which students perform in a text when they 'tackle' it for the first time. "The first thing the students are asked to do with a text concerns its treatments as a whole. Thus students may be asked to listen to a text and extract specific information, they might listen to get the general picture, they might listen to perform a task, and they may attempt to conform expectations they have about a text" (1991 : 188). Type 2 skills Harmer (1991 : 188) believes are generally "concerned with a more detailed analysis of texts and for these reasons are generally practiced after Type 1 skills have been worked on" (1991 : 189).

- At tertiary level we think our learners need to listen for the
- following reasons:
- To comprehend class lectures
- To take notes
- To evaluate (what is relevant and what is redundant)
- To follow instructions
- To carry out tasks and
- To interact with teachers and peers

For all these we will have to select carefully the micro skills most relevant and appropriate for our learners. Helgesen (2003 : 37) quotes Rost (2002) to pinpoint the most important strategies for listening, which are: predicting, inferring, monitoring, clarifying, responding, and evaluating. Since our learners are in an academic context, academic listening skills must also be included in the inventory of skills taught. Richards (1985 : 199) presents the following micro skills as necessary for academic listening.

- Ability to identify purpose and scope of listening
- Ability to identify topic of lecture and to follow topic development
- Ability to identify relationships among units of discourse
- Ability to identify role of discourse markers
- Ability to infer relationships
- Ability to recognize the key lexical items related to subject/topic
- Ability to deduce meanings of words from context
- Ability to recognize markers of cohesion
- Ability to recognize the function of intonation to signal information structure
- Ability to detect attitude of speaker toward subject matter
- Ability to follow different modes of lecturing
- Ability to follow lecture despite differences in accent and speed
- Familiarity with different styles of lecturing: formal, planned, unplanned
- Ability to recognize irrelevant matters: jokes, digressions, meanderings
- Ability to recognize function of nonverbal clues as markers of emphasis and attitude
- Knowledge of classroom conventions
- Ability to recognize instructional / learner tasks (warnings, suggestions, recommendations, advice, instructions).

We should also keep in mind that our learners have not had much exposure to listening so far. For this reason, some general listening materials and listening tasks must be included to provide exposure to the sound system of English. As recommended by most researchers, a variety of texts and tasks with lots of opportunity for practice is the best option. Due to the limits of class time, however, we have to be selective and emphasize the academic skills over others. Yet we should

include other skills, such as bottom-up strategies of identifying phonemes through exercises dealing with minimum pairs that can be a useful source of practice and preparation. Attention should also be paid to other features of spoken language such as stress, intonation, contractions and short/long vowel sounds (See Appendix 1). Such activities can be carried out with the currently available ELT materials used in classes such as *Advancing Language Skills* or *The New Headway Series*.

5.2. Which activity types should we select?
As mentioned earlier, Bangladeshi students who have completed secondary schooling are often weak in 'general' English. Therefore we need to begin by fostering listening skills with intermediate level English for General Purpose language and concentrating on what R.R. Jordan refers to as "non-EAP components" (1997 : 75). These units serve as supplements to the main study skills and they work towards improving vocabulary, grammar and pronunciation. In this section of the paper we have suggested some tasks for the tertiary level learners, the materials have been developed focusing on the needs of our learners such as:
- Listening for specific information
- Listening for general information
- Listening for detailed information
- Listening for transactional and interactional functions
- Listening for academic purposes

6. Sample materials/tasks for our learners
We often listen to something because we want to get specific information. We may listen and concentrate only when particular things which interests us comes up. The skill of listening to extract specific information is very important for our learners because it teaches them to decide what is important and what is not, that they can concentrate on the main information and disregard the irrelevant information. To develop this skill following Harmer (1991) we can use the following materials.

6.1. *Listening for Specific Information / Scanning Using Weather Forecasts*

We can tell our learners that they are going to listen to a weather forecast. Before they listen we can give them a list of words pertaining to the weather such as *cold*, *cool*, *dry*, *drizzle*, *shower*, *fog, centigrade, farenhight, southeast, northwest,* etc. We can discuss the meaning of these words either by giving the definitions or asking students to guess the meaning. Then students will be given a table or a chart with the words they have just discussed, and they will have to fill in either the other weather condition or the place names as they listen to a weather forecast. They can also be instructed to take additional notes on the weather. Here Harmer believes (1991) the background knowledge about the topic of discourse, weather in this case, can help in the form of 'schemata' and facilitate the understanding of the text they are about to hear. This type of task can train the students about how to extract specific information. Regarding this type of task, Harmer (1991 : 217) writes "the task is simple but the listening extract itself is fairly complex with some difficult construction and some extra vocabulary." But the pre-listening task can make it easy and the students can easily extract the specific information and it can be an important skill for the students.

Using News and Newspaper Stories
Listening to the News on BBC / BTV

Since we have very limited resources and logistic support the exposure to FL is very little in our classrooms. Therefore we suggest going outside the classroom and developing the habit of listening to the target language on our own. Teachers can definitely play an important role here by guiding and motivating the learners to develop this habit of listening to English instead of Hindi and Bengali all the time. Students should be asked to listen to a particular radio news programme in English (e.g. BBC). The teacher must specify the hour or time of the news broadcast so that the whole class listens to the

same news. The teacher herself should listen to this programme and make note of the stories and facts reported. Then the next day she will start the class by discussing the main news items. In this way students will be able to check whether or not they understood what they had listened to. It will also develop among the students the habit of listening to English. Consequently, learners will gain learner autonomy and self-learning strategies, as they will be listening on their own.

6.2. *Listening for General Ideas: Skimming Using News and Newspaper Items*

A variation on this activity is to use printed news material, such as the widely available English newspaper. Richards (1990 : 62) suggests that we can use the printed news to develop students' listening skills, primarily the bottom up processing.

This can easily be done by using the newspaper in the pre-listening phase of the classroom listening to the news. We may ask students to read newspapers or give them news headlines to read. Students should try to guess the stories from the news headlines. Then we make them listen to the news on television or radio, whichever medium is available. Richards (1990 : 62) states "both of these pre-listening tasks can help the learners to develop a schema that they can apply to a subsequent listening task." After listening the news for the first time students can complete tasks like identifying where the incidents took place. As they listen it for the second time they can do a multiple-choice activity where they have to select the most appropriate statements that summarise key information of the news stories. They can also be given statements and asked to say whether those are true or false. Richards (1990 : 62) believes the task here focuses on identifying the gist or main points of the news instead of focusing on specific words as in the weather forecast activity. "The tasks here reflect valid purposes in listening to news broadcasts in identifying what has happened and where it happened." It also allows for students to develop a top-down approach rather than a bottom-up approach to listening.

6.3. Extensive Listening

One of the main purposes of listening in real life is to obtain a general idea or the gist of the text. Therefore we must incorporate extensive listening, which is not focused on minute details. In addition we need to introduce variation in materials and activities to keep students stimulated and also to provide a range of listening input and functions. These aims can be combined and attained in activities using literary or creative texts such as short stories, poems or evensongs.

Using a Story: (See Appendix 2)

Using a short story in the class can be very effective because this is a material with great potential for the language class. To begin with, a story is short in length, entertaining, emotionally engaging and also the fictional narrative can be a welcome break from the more serious topics of university lectures. In addition, stories can be easily found.

If there is a lack of logistic support making it impossible to use audio equipment, then teachers can read the story aloud**.** Before listening, students can be given the title of the story and they can be asked to guess what the story is about. Alternatively they can list some features or details they expect to hear. After they have listened to the story students can check if any of the things they wrote apply to the story or not. Next they can be asked to give the gist of the story or write a summary of the story.

For learners with some practice in listening, songs can be used. This is a popular technique for listening since students find music very interesting. However, it should be noted that identifying words and understanding a lyric are more difficult than listening to the slower clearly enunciated prose of short stories. But songs can be exploited to foster more critical and interpretive skills of inferring meaning through mood or understanding attitude.

6.4. Intensive Listening

We can also use the short story or song for intensive listening. Students can be asked to scan for detailed information, such as a sequence of events or series of reasons. For this type of task, a single listening or the first listening may not be enough. In order to help learners obtain the necessary information the tape must be played more than once or the teacher must read out the text more than once, usually three times. The first listening should be to gain the overall meaning or gist of the text, the second to note the details and a third time to re-check what they have written down. Exercises such as filling in the gaps, matching columns, circling the correct word etc. can be used to develop the skill of listening to detailed information.

6.5. Listening for Interactional Function

To foster the skill of interactional function in the classroom is rather challenging. Most interactional speech events are unrehearsed and unscripted therefore learners can never have complete practice. Whenever we try to replicate the conditions of social or casual conversation we do create an artificial situation. However, our purpose is to help students develop the ability to participate and respond to interactional speech and this can be done through listening to recorded conversations and to "live conversations."

Teachers can play conversations found in listening materials or even extracts from plays to expose students to this speech event. Here teachers should highlight the features of spoken language and help learners understand natural. Students need to get acquainted with ellipsises, variation in accent and pronunciation, speed of delivery and all the other problems of the sound of English as identified by Rixon (1986). These features are more problematic in conversations than in news or lectures. In classes where audio equipment is not available the teacher with a colleague or a group of students can read out the tape script or the conversation (Appendix 3).

To allow students to take part in "live" listening, we can use role-play. We can give students different role cards and ask them to improvise the dialogue on the spot as in an impromptu skit/play. Here each student will have to carefully listen to other speaker(s) as no one has had any rehearsal and he or she will also have to respond in real time, making the live listening into a participatory listening exercise. If learners are not proficient enough to create such dialogues the teacher can ask students to come to the front of the class and she can take a "mock interview" of the student. To make the activity enjoyable and to reduce anxiety, the student can be asked to assume a role, such as pretend to be a celebrity. We recommend role-play activities because this gives students the chance to learn some strategies for listening including asking for clarifications, repetitions and making use of facial expressions and body gestures to understand. Furthermore, there is the added benefit of transforming the listening class into an interactive one.

6.6. Academic Listening and Note Taking

The above mentioned activities are used mainly to prepare students for academic listening. While students may have some background knowledge when they attend lecture classes, most students still complain that they are unable to comprehend what was said. Research findings indicate that the problems can be grouped into three main areas, which are:

*   Decoding – identifying what was said
*   Comprehending – understanding the points of the lecture
*   Taking notes – recording or writing down the ideas and points presented (James 1977 in Jordan, 1997 : 179).

Students who have some experience of listening in English may be able to deal with straightforward decoding; yet, they still need to appreciate the special qualities of Academic English for better comprehension. For this reason, we feel that students require extra work on developing their ability to listen to lectures.

For effective listening students must realize that the register of academic lectures is more formal and consists of specialized vocabulary. Jordan writes that one reason for the difficulty is the genre of lecture itself and problems emerge from:

> The requirement to be able to concentrate on and understand long Stretches of talk without the opportunity of engaging in facilitating functions on interactive discourse, such as asking for repetition, negotiating meaning. (Flowerdew, 1994 in Jordan, 1997 : 179)

Interestingly, Flowerdew (1994) discovered that the more informal conversationally style lectures are more likely to cause problems for the non-native speaker than the formal traditional monologue (Jordan, 1997 : 182).

Listening Cues

Regardless of the style of lecturing, formal or conversational, most lectures contain listening cues, which can be very helpful for the student. In class teachers should analyze recorded lectures or read out transcripts of lectures to acquaint students with these cues, which can be of three types:

*   Prosodic –
*   Subordinate syntactic structures
*   Lexical discourse markers

Discourse Markers

Researches done by Chaudron and Richards (1986 in Jordan 1997) show that the traditional "reading style" lecture contain two types of discourse markers – the *macro markers* and the *micro markers*. They noticed that the macro makers signal significant transitions in the lecture whereas the micro markers are used as intersentential connectors. They state that a lecture with more macro markers is easier to follow than one with micro markers. Decarrico and Nattinger (1988 in Jordan, 1997 : 185) also express a similar view. They suggest that macro

organizers such as topic-markers, topic-shifters, summarizers, amplifiers, relators, evaluators, qualifiers and aside markers play significant roles in lectures and that is why emphasis should be given by teaching these. Jordan states that for the benefit of the students they can be provided with the "overall framework or structure of a talk" and can be taught the discourse markers or cues. Jordan feels that in the early stages it is necessary for "students to have practice in writing down the words that they hear in order that they hear them" (1997 : 189). But once they have increased their listening proficiency they should try to take notes with the use of these discourse markers.

Taking Notes
A major difficulty of listening to lectures has to write down points as students listen. Note taking should be addressed in the language class as it pertains to both listening and study skills. Effective note taking can only be accomplished if learners can comprehend and know how to take notes. As Jordan (1997 : 188) points out "note taking as a skill is not easy in one's own language in a foreign language the difficulties can become very serious." That is why it is more important in a L2 course, particularly in the listening class, to prepare learners to follow lectures. They need to be taught the following skills:

- Distinguish between important and less important information
- To decide when to record points
- To write clearly and concisely
- To decipher and recall the essence of the lecture

Rost (1990 in Jordan 1997 : 187) emphasises the teaching of note taking cues to train students in this area. He highlights the following note taking cues:

- Topic relation cues
- Concept ordering cues (sequence cues, hierarchy cues)

- Relation ordering cues
- Focusing cues
- Revisions

When students take notes it is also important to realize how spoken language differs from writing. Walters and Walters (2005) state that when listening to a lecturer, students need to consider the following:

- The way of speaking (which includes the speed of speech going up or slow, using less or more emphasis, repeating a point etc.)
- Use of aids (OHP, blackboard etc.)
- Use of set expressions (right)
- Use of hint
- Record facts and process accurately

It is also important to teach learners to look for ideas and the ways they are connected together. Information is usually organised into some kind of pattern or framework. Actively looking for this information can help us to see how the parts fit together.

In a listening class a useful note-taking activity can be completing a table or a chart. Students can also be taught to take notes using webs/ spider graphs, mind maps, lines and arrow or flow charts. Additionally, students should be made aware of abbreviations and short-hand symbols and should be encouraged to jot down points or ideas in short phrases or single words instead of copying down entire sentences. These note-taking activities can be carried out with non-academic texts and thus can be easily integrated in any part of listening course or class.

6.7.   Text-Types for Listening

One aspect of listening, which has been a matter of debate and discussion among teachers and material designers, is the difference between authentic and non-authentic texts. Authentic texts according to Harmer (1991) are those, which are mainly designed for native speakers and are used in real life situations. On the other hand non-authentic texts are those that have been written especially for language classes. The aim of these texts Harmer (1991) states is to teach and concentrate on language. "This type of language is artificial in nature and the conversation may not be right. But all over the world these type texts are used to teach listening and make students better learners" (1991 : 185). Harmer thinks such materials cannot prepare learners for real life situations. Underwood (1989) also expresses a similar opinion and suggests that authentic texts because of their natural rhythm, natural intonation, pronunciation, normal rate of delivery, fillers, overlaps, and relatively unstructured language give students a 'feel' of real language.

Conclusion

Then what type of listening texts should we use? As our learners have very little exposure to unscripted spoken English and as listening is not focused or taught in the S.S.C or H.S.C levels, using authentic materials suddenly at the tertiary level may create difficulties for the untrained L2 learner. These materials may create pressure on our learners and they may find listening classes too scary. Their failure in understanding such texts may ultimately make them non-motivated and demoralized. As a result the goals of using these materials will not be achieved. Therefore we believe that the use of non-authentic texts especially in the first few classes can help our learners by building their confidence. That is why we suggest using non-native English texts such as recorded news, weather forecasts, or conversations from Bangladeshi T.V. channels.

Richards (1990 : 51) also believes that the knowledge gained from these texts may act as "background knowledge about the topic of discourse in the form of schemata in understanding similar kind of texts" spoken by native speakers. These we believe can prepare our learners gradually to tackle those texts and can be useful for them. Authentic materials should definitely be used but mid-way through the course instead of at the beginning classes.

By following these guidelines teachers can create an effective methodology for teaching listening at the tertiary level. Teachers should keep in mind that a listening class should not focus on just playing lots of recordings and testing grammar, vocabulary or writing skill. John Field (1998) asserts that most listening activities provide practice but does not teach the skill (111). He contends, "Under the present 'comprehension' approach, success in listening is measured by correct responses to questions in tasks. Teachers focus upon the outcome of listening rather than upon listening itself, upon product rather than process.(1998)" Anderson and Lynch (1988) also recommend that teachers exploit listening exercises to assist understanding spoken language instead of assessing the amount students actually understand. They quote Underwood (1979) who asserts:

> It Is Important That Exercises Should Not Be Treated As Test Items. They Are Designed As Aids To Aural Comprehension Practice, Directing The Students' Attention To 'Focal Points' On The Tape So That They Will Learn To Listen More Effectively. (Anderson And Lynch, 1988 : 67)

In order to move away from the test approach and provide a more enabling approach to listening we feel that teachers need to be considerate of and sympathetic to student needs and problems. We must remember that we are teaching them listening instead of assessing their listening ability. Teachers must also be pragmatic, which is they have to be realistic and work within constraints of resource limitations and classroom realities (large classes, poor acoustics etc). We have to be

careful in task and text selection. We should move gradually from simple to complex tasks and "small to big" or shorter to longer texts, from monologue to dialogue and then too more complex conversations. We must not put too much pressure on our learners' memories, thus we should use short texts and play the texts more than once. We suggest our aims in teaching should be to expose our learners to a range of listening experiences, make listening purposeful, help students to approach the listening task in an appropriate manner and finally build up their confidence in their own listening ability. Listening classes should be designed with this goal in focus that an effective listening class develops students' habit of listening to English and takes listening beyond the four walls of the classroom.

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Appendix 1

Tick the words you recognise in the sentences you hear:

1.	a) Pen;	b) Pan
2.	a) Men;	b) Man
3.	a) Said;	b) Sad
4.	a) Gem;	b) Jam
5.	a) Pet;	b) Pat
6.	a) Bed;	b) Bad

Tape script

1.	I've bought a new pan.
2.	Did you see the man?
3.	He is sad to live alone.
4.	That's a very expensive jam.
5.	Don't pet the dog.
6.	These are bedclothes.

(From **'*Ship or Sheep?*'** *by Ann Baker.1981*: 14)

Listen and repeat:

Sound 1 Sound 2

look   Luke

pull   pool
full   fool
foot   boot

Now listen to the dialogue and identify the words that you have practised:

Dialogue:
In a good school

Miss Luke: *Good afternoon, girls.*

Girls *Good afternoon, Miss Luke.*

Miss Luke: *This afternoon we're going to learn how to cook soup. Open your books at twenty-two.*

Prue: *Excuse me, Miss Luke.*

Miss Luke: *Yes, Prue.*

Prue: *There's some chewing gum on your shoe.*

Miss Luke: *Who threw chewing gum on the floor? Was it you, Prue?*

Prue: *No miss Luke. It was June.*

Miss Luke: *Who?*

Prue: *June Cook.*

June: *It wasn't me stupid. It was Sue.*

Sue: *It was you.*

June: It wasn't me, you stupid fool. My mouth's full of chewing gum. Look, Miss Luke.
Sue: *Stop pulling my hair, June. It was you!*
June: *You!*
Sue: *You!*
Miss Luke: *Excuse me! You're being very rude. You two nuisances can stay in school this afternoon instead of going to the swimming pool.*
(From **'*Ship or Sheep?*'** *by Ann Baker.1981*: 35-36)

Appendix 2

The Wig and the Walkman Shortcut to Exam Success

An undergraduate history student in India has created history of sorts in the use of unfair means in examinations. In a hi-tech attempt to pass the annual examination – which he had earlier failed twice – the student used an earphone concealed under a wig.

The student had connected the earphone to a walkman hidden in a belt-bag concealed under his shirt. The walkman played a cassette with recordings from the textbook on ancient Indian history at slow speed. The system was apparently used to answer the questions during the annual examination.

The student, from Delhi University's Kirori Mal College, was caught by the vigilant principal, Bhim Sen Singh. The principal, on a routine check, was apparently surprised at the student's dishevelled hair. "Why have you grown your hair so long?" Dr. Singh asked the student.

As the principal touched the student's long and dishevelled hair, the wig came off in his hands. It left the principal bewildered, and the student petrified.

"It was a chance discovery and I was quite shocked," the principal was quoted as saying. The earphone and walkman were seized. The student was later allowed to answer questions on a separate answer sheet as he had reportedly threatened to commit suicide.
The issue was being examined by a disciplinary committee of the university's examination branch, university officials said. The committee would match the answers written with those recorded in the seized cassette.

Use of illegal means during examinations has become very common. Students try innovative methods to pass examinations without studying. Several Indian state governments have even

tried to pass legislation providing for strict punishment to erring students.

In the northern Indian state of Uttar Pradesh, the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) government has introduced legislation under which a student caught using unfair means can be put behind bars. As a result of this strict legislation, the success rate of students in the state has reduced dramatically.

(From *Advancing Language Skills*: 2006: Department of English, University of Dhaka, p. 44)

Activity 1

Listen to the title of the story. What do you think the story is about?

Activity 2

Now listen to the story which of the following sentences are true and which are false?

a. An undergraduate philosophy student used unfair means in examinations.
b. He used a mobile phone to cheat.
c. The student was from Calcutta University.
d. The student has hidden a walkman in a belt bag.
e. The walkman played a cassette with recordings from textbook on Modern Indian technology.
f. The principal was surprised at the student's dishevelled hair.
g. The student's answer script was seized and cancelled and he was thrown out of the examination hall.

Activity 3

Now listen to the story again and fill in the blanks with appropriate words.

In Delhi India, an _____ _____ created _____ _____ _____ in using a _____ method of _____ the examination. He was caught by the _____ principal of _____ college who was shocked by his _____ discovery. The _____ committee of the

university is now _____ the matter. Such attempts to _____ the examinations are _____ seen in India.

Appendix 3

A Friend in Need

Tareq and Zahid are both students of the University of Dhaka. Unfortunately, neither of them was able to get a seat in any of the residential halls. For the present they are both living off-campus. Tareq is having problems with his landlord and has come to Zahid for advice.

Zahid: What's up, Tareq?
Tareq: Oh, it's my landlord again.
Zahid: You're always in trouble. What's it this time?
Tareq: Well, just read this.
Zahid: Not another note! Well, did you?
Tareq: Did I what?
Zahid: Leave the front door open?
Tareq: I honestly don't remember. I got back late from the library, you see. Anyway, the landlord is always complaining. First, I play music too loudly . . ..
Zahid: Why don't you look around for another place?
Tareq: Well, it was hard enough to find this one. I looked at the paper this morning, though. There are a few ads . . ..
Zahid: But the places are too expensive as usual.
Tareq: It's not that. They're too far away from campus for me.
Zahid: I was just thinking . . .. Why don't you come and share with us?
Tareq: But there are four of you in the flat already, aren't there?
Zahid: Yes, but Jalal's leaving at the end of the month. He's got admission at the University of Virginia. We have a spare room which you can use for the time being. It's rather small but you can sleep there till Jalal leaves.

Tareq: It doesn't sound a bad idea. I've never shared, but I'm willing to give it a try. What are the arrangements?

Zahid: Oh, we share all expenses, of course – rent, electricity, gas. We don't have a telephone, but there are many shops nearby which offer mobile phone service.

Tareq: What about food?

Zahid: Oh, we share food expenses too. We take turns to do the shopping. It works out fine. And you can make as much noise as you like. We do. There's just one thing.

Tareq: What's that?

Zahid: Don't leave the front door open. Strange people wander in!

1 Choose the most appropriate answer from among the alternatives:

1 It is clear that Tareq often talked about
   a. finding a place to live.
   b. his difficulties in the house.
   c. his studies.
   d. the parties he went to.

2 Tareq wanted to move but he wanted to find a place
   a. that was inexpensive.
   b. that was quiet.
   c. that was close the campus.
   d. that was big.

3 When Zahid invited Tareq to share his flat, Tareq was
   a. unhappy.
   b. pleased.
   c. surprised.
   d. excited.

4 The expenses that Zahid and his friends shared did not include
   a. telephone calls.
   b. electricity.
   c. rent.
   d. gas.

5 Tareq will probably go to live with Zahid. In that case, he will have
   a. more food.
   b. more expenses.
   c. more freedom.
   d. more money.

(From *Advancing Language Skills*, 2006, Department of English, University of Dhaka, p. 9-10.)

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