Five Keys to Boosting Students’ Listening Comprehension Skills

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Purpose

• Highlight factors that affect comprehensibility for ESL students (and their parents, if applicable).
• Demonstrate (simple) Web-based services, browser extension/mobile apps, and software that can enhance listening skills.
• These tools won’t take 2,000 hours to learn.
Presenter’s Background

• Started creating online listening content in 1997 in Japan (https://www.esl-lab.com).
• Instructional approaches have sprung (and evolved) from this work.
Technology and Pedagogy

- A careful balance of these elements can help us expand students' abilities to use the language.
General Concepts

• Listening and speaking are reciprocals skills.

• *Testing* listening is not *teaching* it.

• Just because you can't remember something doesn't mean you didn't understand it at the time you heard it.
When students don’t understand they . . .

• give up.

• pretend to understand.

• ask effective questions.
Step 1

Identifying Comprehensibility Factors
Comprehensibility Factors

1. Rate of speed (learner is a "limited processor")
2. Acoustic blur (word reductions due to unstressed syllables)
Acoustic Blur

• Jeet yet?

• No, Joo?

Did you eat yet?

No, did you?
Comprehensibility Factors

1. Rate of speed (learner is a "limited processor")
2. Acoustic blur (word reductions due to unstressed syllables)
3. Vocabulary, idiomatic expressions, and grammatical structures

- Keep your nose clean
- Have your nose in a book
- Keep your nose to the grindstone
- Keep your nose out of something
- Thumb your nose at something
- Pay through the nose
- Follow your nose
- Stick your nose in something
- Be on the nose
- Have a nose for something.
Comprehensibility Factors

4. Lack of background schemata or cultural knowledge

Familiarity with topic helps learner draw on that knowledge.
House - Same Word, Different Interpretation

love, transportation, honesty, friendship, a good meal, the ideal pet
Comprehensibility Factors

4. Lack of cultural understanding

5. Limited exposure to decontextualized (messy and disjointed) speech patterns with false starts and incomplete grammar structures.
The Non-Linear Nature of Our Lives

At times, life follows its own path no matter how much we try to alter it.
6. Test items sometimes distort and exaggerate the amount of information that even native speakers could process.
Step 2

Blending Pedagogy and Technology to Improve Comprehension
Keys to Teaching Listening . . . with any or no technology

• Choose content within the linguistic and cultural reach of your students.
• Progress from semi-authentic speech to genuine authentic speech.
• Don't use tasks that result in cognitive overload.
• Build upon learners' background knowledge.
• Allow time for collaborative listening and discussion to clarify and restate ideas.
Technology - General Concepts

Don't use something just because you can.

- Just because technology exists doesn't mean that it has a pedagogically-rationale sound for instruction and learning.
- Determine instructional goals based on course objectives and THEN select your tools.
- Be mindful of high-resource, low-resource environments.
Technology

Only use technology when it supports your assessment objectives, not just because it looks good or sounds nice.
Technologies that Work!

Don't abandon what already works for you.
Online Services and Tools

1. Video Speed Controller for Google Chrome (Browser extension) and YouTube Speed Settings
2. Lyricstraining.com
3. YouGlish.com
4. Cloud QR Generator (mobile app)
5. VLC Player (software)
Adjust the Speed Settings
Audio QR Codes
Cloud QR Generator

• Creating audio QR codes for listening activities (app for iPhone / Android)
Possible Uses of Audio QR Codes

• Teacher introduction on a syllabus
• Program announcements
• Book reviews
• List of vocabulary words for pronunciation practice
• Audio treasure hunt
• Audio listening tasks for homework
To activate speed control feature:

Go to . . .

Tools >>
Customize Interface

http://portableapps.com/apps/music_video/vlc_portable
VLC Portable Media Player

http://www.videolan.org/vlc/

• Play a variety of media formats.
• Slow down the playback with very limited distortion.
• Stream media directly from the Internet, including YouTube videos.
• Portable version available that doesn’t require installation.

http://portableapps.com/apps/music_video/vlc_portable
Seeing the Big Picture

The guy who invented the wheel was an idiot.

The guy who invented the other three, he was a genius.

---Sid Caesar
American Comic Actor
“It’s a Mad, Mad, Mad, Mad, Mad World”