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Курбанкулова А.С., Кооманова В.К.,  
Абдыкеримова У.С., Отогенова А.У.

БГУ им. К.Тыныстанова

## DEVELOPING THE LISTENING COMPREHENSION SKILLS

*Listening is one of the four fundamental skills in language. Developing the listening comprehension skills is important for students, especially in a communicative language environment where activities often revolve around interactions between English language learners. Students with well developed listening comprehension skills are able to participate more effectively in class. For this reason, listening comprehension practice positively influences second language learning, and based on this skill are regularly taught in the English as a Foreign Language classroom.*

When teachers design listening comprehension lesson, they should follow some basic principles that serve as useful guides for successful activities. This article presents the rationale for some basic principles, including descriptions for (1) motivating students to focus on the learning objective, (2) maintaining the same topic and objective for consecutive activities, (3) applying appropriate teaching methods and techniques, (4) selecting material for listening comprehension activities.

### **1. Motivating students to focus on the learning objective.**

When students clearly understand the purpose of a particular listening comprehension activity, they will be better able to focus on essential vocabulary, grammar and listening for specific information. This will help them to complete the learning objectives in a shorter amount of time. For example, if the teacher informs the students at the start of a lesson that the objective will be “understanding directions,” they can focus on listening for and remembering the vocabulary associated with given directions.

### **2. Maintaining the same topic and objective for consecutive activities.**

Learning is more effective when different activities within the lesson maintain the same topic and learning objective, as opposed to a lesson being a series of unrelated activities with changing topics and objectives. When activities share the same topic and learning objective, students will reinforce their learning through repetition continued association with a familiar topic. For example, if the topic is “True or false show”, and the objective is to understand speech that is spoken at a certain rate, teachers can maintain the same topic and objective throughout several activities in one lesson. The following example includes a warm up activity, a listening comprehension activity, controlled practice, and an open-ended listening-speaking activity.

1. Start with a warm up question to the class, such as: “What is your favorite show?” or “What is favorite show in this class?”

2. Then, introduce a listening comprehension activity in which two people have a conversation about “The True False Show”, and have students answer True or False questions based on the conversation.

3. Next, conduct a controlled practice activity, which could be a drill activity that models vocabulary or an important grammatical structure.

4. Finally, introduce an open-ended activity that allow students the freedom to practice listening comprehension and speaking, such interviewing other members in class about their favorite show and asking for further information.

In the above example, each activity builds on preceding one using the same objective throughout. The idea is that communication and listening comprehension should expand the students’ knowledge by maintaining a topic throughout consecutive activities and reinforcing the same learning objective.

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### **3. Applying appropriate teaching methods and techniques.**

When designing listening comprehension lessons, teacher should apply the following methods and techniques to make the lessons challenging, effective, and interesting to the students.

Use a variety of activities

If a teacher always uses the same activities, students will become bored. It is important to vary activities to stimulate the students? Interest and challenge them with something new. It is also important to consider activities that involve group work, problem solving, and that encourage communication and listening comprehension. Variation of the simple "Fill the missing word" listening activity is to use the same listening materials but to combine pair work with the information gap activity. For example, give student A and student B worksheets containing the lyrics to the same song, but make sure that each student has different pieces of missing information, and the answer supplied by their partner will complete the lyrics to the song. Using this technique, students have to practice effective communication by accurately forming the correct questions necessary to elicit the missing word from their partners. Finally, students can check their answers by listening to the song.

### **4. Selecting material for listening comprehension activities.**

When selecting materials, the following criteria can be used to make listening comprehension activities both productive and engaging.

When selecting listening comprehension materials, it is important to decide how relevant they are to learner's life. One way to determine this is to conduct a needs assessment of the learners: identify the students' interest, language learning strengths and weaknesses, and real life situations they are likely to encounter. Then set appropriate learning objectives. This way, the content of didactic material will be relevant and will appeal to students. This approach will go a long way towards maintaining students' interest and motivation levels.

When evaluating listening materials, carefully consider the level of difficulty and the language level of students. The responses required should be appropriate for their level. It would be appropriate to give beginning students a listening activity that requires them to give a short answer that confirms information given in the listening activity or which asks them to directly transfer what they have heard in a gap-fill activity/ these activities is more appropriate to help beginning students develop their linguistic knowledge.

Instructions for listening.

When designing listening comprehension materials, give clear instructions at the beginning of each activity and one or two examples of how to do the activity. If students misunderstand instructions, they may give teachers the wrong answer. Teacher should evaluate listening materials; carefully consider the level of the students.

This lesson is an example.

#### **Car colour and personality**

#### **Skills to be emphasized**

Listening and speaking

#### **Target structure**

Comparative adjectives: Using adjectives to compare two things.

#### **Target vocabulary**

Black, blue, brown, pink, yellow, grey, green, white, red.

#### **Objectives**

By the end of the lesson students should be able to:

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- \* say at least five sentences about colours
- \* answer the question orally
- \* say at least five sentences about car colors
- \* understand the story

**Materials:** cards, pens or pencils, pictures.

### **Activity 1: Warm up**

- Show the students pictures with colours.
- Ask them about colours
- What colour is this number?

### **Activity 2: Pre-listening**

Prepare students for listening

- Ask students: Who has a car?
- Discuss in groups next question: What is better car or minivan?
- What colour is your car?
- What car colour do you prefer?

### **Activity 3: Presentation**

#### **First listening**

1. Before reading “Car colour and their personality” tell the students they need to listen carefully to answer the following task:

\* Write the colours from the dialogue.

2. Read “Car colour and personality” to the class. After you finish, ask students to give their answers to the task.

#### **Car colours and personality.**

**Presenter:** Hello. Today we talk to Dr Alan Baker, a psychologist, about car colour and personality. Good evening, Dr Baker.

**Dr Baker:** Good evening!

**Presenter:** So, what does the colour of our cars say about our personality?

**Dr Baker:** Well, let's start with yellow. People who drive yellow cars are usually very friendly. This colour is more popular with women than with men.

**Presenter:** And white?

**Dr Baker:** A white car shows that you are careful. It's a favorite car for doctors—they buy more white cars than any other colour.

**Presenter:** What about other colours?

**Dr Baker:** Well, let's take red. People who choose red cars are usually more aggressive drivers than normal. With blue cars, it is the opposite. If you have a blue car it means you are probably quite.

**Presenter:** What about green?

**Dr Baker:** People with green cars are usually generous.

**Presenter B:** And what about black?

**Dr Baker:** Well, people who like black cars are usually serious people. Business people often choose black car.

**Presenter:** We have got time for one more colour. What about silver?

**Dr Baker:** Yes, well if you have a silver car it means you are stylish.

**Presenter:** Er, what colour is your car, Dr Baker? White?

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**Dr Baker:** No it's red, actually.

**Presenter:** Thank you very much, Dr Baker. And now we turn our attention...

### **Second listening**

1. Listen carefully again. Write the personality that matches the colour.

For example: yellow-friendly.

2. Read again and ask students to give answers to the second task.

### **Post listening**

1. Ask students to think about the answers to the following questions individually and use comparative adjectives in their speech.

- Think of three people you know who have a car.
- What colours are their cars?
- Is the person's personality the same as the personality of the car?

2. Next students should compare and discuss their answers in pairs.

3. Finally, students share their answers with whole class. Confirm the correct answers during the discussion.

### **Conclusion**

Listening demands active involvement from the students. We must make sure that all the students are actively involved because it is the best way for them to learn. We hope that the principles outlined in this article help teachers design successful lessons that motivate their students to improve their listening skills and become more communicatively competent.

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