

While-Listening Activity in Listening Class

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The great leader Comrade **Kim Jong Il** said as follows.

“Without improving teaching methods, it would be impossible to convey to students the essence of the contents being taught or to succeed in the cause of educating workers, no matter how well the contents of the educational material are compiled.” (“**KIM JONG IL SELECTED WORKS**” Vol. 1 P. 152)

To set teaching stages correctly and use right teaching methods in the language teaching classroom is of great importance in ensuring success of language teaching. In listening classes, too, every stage should be designed in such a way as to achieve teaching objectives and teaching methods at each stage should be used scientifically.

This paper presents practical issues concerning the while-listening stage in listening class such as the length of the listening text, the number of listening times, and ways of listening.

The while-listening stage in a language class is the very stage at which students actually listen. Technically, it is the time when voice signals from the recorder or player are received and processed in the auditory sense. While-listening activity can be in the form of intensive listening and extensive listening according to listening purpose, its amount and level of attention.

Intensive listening is the kind of listening that deals with listening material which is appropriate in length to deal with within a class and which demands a high level of attention. It involves listening to speech sounds, words, phrases, and grammatical items, listening for specific information, and listening for implicit messages. It requires a very high level of attention on the part of the listener, because its difficulty level is very high due to phonetic, lexical, grammatical, syntactical and pragmatic factors as well as the number of speakers, and the background knowledge.

Whether a listening passage is dealt with as intensive or extensive listening depends on how difficult a listening text is as well as how a listening task is set. If a task is one that asks students to determine whether the topic of the text is sports or art, the listening activity can be extensive even if the particular text is difficult. However, if the task requires that the listener remember and analyze a lot of details it cannot be called extensive listening even if it uses a long text which is not difficult.

As with intensive reading, intensive listening activity has an objective of providing practice in specific skills to students within the class time, and at the same time either giving or consolidating certain linguistic and background knowledge. For this reason, the materials used in intensive listening activity should match the level of the students' language skills. It is not suitable to use lengthy texts in intensive listening class, because it involves various teaching processes such as explanation, practice, checking, confirming, and consolidation and also demands a high level of attention on the part of students. The length of text for an intensive listening activity can be 1-2 minutes for elementary level, 3-4minutes for intermediate level, 5-6 minutes (not exceeding seven minutes) for advanced level, although it can change a little depending on the length of the text and the level of its difficulty.

The uninterrupted listening time, which is the time starting from the moment the tape recorder or

media player starts playing until it stops, should be determined to suit the form of exercise beforehand. For example, students can either listen to the whole text from the beginning to the end with the questions covering the whole content or listen to it in parts. With video materials, which provide rich visual clues, the level of attention does not drop even if listening time is longer.

How many times students should listen to a particular text is also an important pedagogical question. In real-life listening, people rarely listen to the same thing twice. Therefore, the ultimate goal of listening practice is to make students understand what they listen to with one-time listening. Listening exercises should be geared to the achievement of this objective. On the other hand, if students listen only once, the pedagogical effect will not be achieved.

It would be difficult to give an absolute answer in one word to the question of how many times is most suitable to listen in an intensive listening activity, because the condition of each listening class, the nature of listening materials and task, and students' knowledge of the listening material are all different. However, it is recommended to decide the number of times as follows.

To begin with, the planned listening material can be played once focussing on global understanding and then it may be played once more depending on the response from students. For this, the teacher can give two or three questions about the main idea of the listening passage, or ask students to mark the words they hear from the list of words which are given to them in advance, or to mark the pictures related to the text out of the ones that are also given to them in advance. Or the teacher can ask students to rearrange pictures or sentences in right order.

Whether a listening text is read by the teacher or played on the recorder, it is advised not to stop on the way. Uninterrupted listening is more like real-life listening and can help students with global understanding. Once the first listening is over, the teacher will ask students to check their answers in pairs or in groups before they check it with her.

The second listening focusses more on comprehension of details. It is advised to vary the types of listening exercise wherever possible. The questions should not only ask for factual information but also inferences of implicit meanings. This is all the more important in teaching advanced students. In listening activities for specific information, it is advised to pause the playing where necessary so that students can take notes.

After the second listening, the teacher checks students' comprehension of the text going through the main exercises. At this stage, students either check the answers with themselves or with the teacher. The teacher gives confirmation to the item for which most of students have correct answer. For the item for which most of students have wrong answer, the teacher does not give confirmation and leave it in order to give students another chance to listen to it even if there are some students whose answer is correct. For the next listening she can give students a clue that can lead to the correct answer.

After the third listening, the teacher checks students's answer again. If there is still an item for which students can not give a correct answer, she should think about its cause. In other words, she should check if it is due to structural complexity, or vocabulary, or phonological factors, or background knowledge. If she finds out the cause, she can give relevant explanation and play back the problem part again. Once the problem part is cleared, then the whole text can be played all over again, which

will give students auditory experience that is different from the one they get from the first listening. Students may not have afforded to appreciate its meaning at the first listening, because they were not so sure. Now they can afford to appreciating its meaning, feel successful and at the same time build up more auditory experiences. If the material is in several parts, it is possible to listen to them all once more in the end. This is not of course an absolute recipe, so it can be decided differently by the teacher depending on the length and nature of the text, the level of difficulty, the state of mind of students and time available for listening.

The intensive listening activity should strike a good balance between the amount of listening and the amount of exercises. If the amount of exercise is too less than the amount of listening, it can not keep students' attention sustained, causing boredom and eventually impairing the effectiveness of the exercises. The most popular forms of intensive listening exercise include dictation, listening for numbers and figures, spelling, speech sounds, abbreviations, getting directions, locations, time and dates, ordering and comparing.

Extensive listening is a form of activity that uses texts that are longer than those used in intensive listening. It is an important listening exercise together with the intensive listening.

The theoretical ground for an extensive listening activity is, first of all, that listening skills, which are important components of listening ability, presuppose mastery. Mastery is formed through constant practice. For this reason, listening to a great deal is important in improving listening ability.

Another theroretial ground for extensive listening is that in real-life listening, there are many situations in which one should listen for a long time. There are many situations in real life in which one listens more than ten minutes such as listening to lectures, speeches and news reports. In order to cope with the real- life situations one should be able to listen long.

The important issue in extensive listening class is, first of all, to detemine the difficulty level of the listening text and the task. It is an important requirement for achieving the objective of extensive listening.

Listening itself, which occurs in time, is an act demanding a high level of attention. In reading and speaking, whoever does it can stop and change the speed of the act, but in listening the listener is forced to understand at the speed of the speaking once the speaker start speaking. Even while the listener is precessing what he has heard, streams of words keep coming in. The higher the level of difficulty of processing the words, the greater the burden becomes that is imposed on the listener. Therefore, in principle, in extensive listening exercise, the text and task should not be difficult. Their level should be such that it facilitates comprehension and allows students to maintain their attention. However, if a text is too easy, students may end up achieving nothing, so there should be something to achieve. In an extensive listening class, task can be devised in the form of questions that will guide students to comprehension of the main points of the text.

Another important issue in the extensive listening class concerns determing the length of the text.

Extensive listening, as the term suggests, puts emphasis on extended listening, so the text should be long enough. The length of text can be about 10~30minutes. The video materials can be longer than audio materials. Films can be 50~60 minutes long.

If a listening text is too short, it will lose its usefulness as such. Therefore the teacher should

make sure that the length of the text for extensive listening should be no less than 10 minutes.

Conversely, the teacher should also guard against the a text being too long, because if a text is too long, there will not be enough time to go through different teaching stages. It will also make it difficult for students to maintain their attention.

Another important issue in extensive listening class is providing students with interest. Listening to something interesting contributes to decreasing the mental fatigue and memory burden that come from long-term listening. Listening materials should be interesting and at the same time related to each other in content, so that students will keep listening in relation to what has gone before.

The uninterrupted listening time in an extensive listening activity can be as long as the length of the whole text. It is even better not to interrupt it particularly in viewing video materials like films. However, it is a good idea to pause just once or twice halfway with a view to checking students' comprehension before proceeding further.

As for the question of whether or not to play the whole text once more, there are different arguments, but it is recommended to play it once more from a pedagogical point of view. It will give students a chance to listen to the things that they missed at the first listening and to check the things that the teacher explained and pointed out to. In this regard, it gives greater pedagogical effect to listen once again to what has been listened to than to listen to something new of the same amount. However, if a text is too long to play again, it is recommended to play again at least the part that most of students had difficulty with or the part that the teacher sees as a problem part.

When presenting extensive listening material for after-school listening assignment, it is advisable to give exercises such as comprehension questions to understand the main points and give important words and expressions together, which will make the exercise effective. It is suggested that the CDs that accompany simplified readers be used as such or in revised forms as extensive listening materials.

As explained above, if we solve the practical problems concerning the intensive and extensive listening activities, we can increase the effectiveness of listening classes and improve students' listening ability.

We should put foreign language teaching on a more scientific basis by intensifying the research into the content and methods of teaching.