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**TEACHING SKILLS: TEACHING LISTENING**

* Reasons for listening
* Different Kinds of listening

**1.Reasons for listening**

Most students want to be able to understand what people are saying to them in English,  
either face-to-face, on TV or on the radio, in theatres and cinemas, or on tape, CDs or other  
recorded media. Anything we can do to make that easier will be useful for them.

Listening is good for our students’ pronunciation, too, in that the more they hear and  
understand English being spoken, the more they absorb appropriate pitch and intonation,  
stress and the sounds of both individual words and those which blend together in connected  
speech. Listening texts are good pronunciation models, in other words, and the more  
students listen, the better they get, not only at understanding speech, but also at speaking  
themselves. Indeed, it is worth remembering that successful spoken communication  
depends not just on our ability to speak, but also on the effectiveness of the way we listen**.**

One of the main sources of listening for students is the voice of their teacher. However, it is important, where possible, for students to be exposed to more than just that one voice, with all its idiosyncrasies. There is nothing wrong with an individual teacher’s voice, of course, butthere are significant regional variations in the way people speak English in a country like Britain. For example, the ‘a’ of ‘bath’ is pronounced like the vowel sound in ‘park’ in some parts of Britain, but like the ‘a’ in ‘cat’ in others. In grammar, certain varieties of English within the British Isles use ‘done’ in sentences like ‘I done it yesterday’ where other varieties would find such tense usage unacceptable. In vocabulary, ‘happen’ is a verb in standard southern English, but in parts of Yorkshire (in northern England) it is often used as an adverb to mean ‘maybe’ or ‘perhaps’ in sentences such as ‘Happen it’ll rain’. And if there are many regional varieties in just one country, it is obvious that the different Englishes around the world will be many and varied.

Students need to be exposed to different *Englishes*, but teachers need to exercise judgment about the number (and degree) of the varieties which they hear. A lot will depend on the students’ level of competence, and on what variety or varieties they have so far been exposed to.

**2. Different kinds of listening**

A distinction can be drawn between **intensive** and **extensive** listening. As with reading, the latter refers to listening which the students often do away from the classroom, for pleasure or some other reason. The audio material they consume in this way - often on CDs in their cars, on MP3 players, DVDs, videos or on the Internet - should consist of texts that they can enjoy listening to because they more or less understand them without the intervention of a teacher or course materials to help them. It is true that there is not at present a body of material developed for extensive listening as there is for extensive reading, but this looks set to change in the foreseeable future.Students can also use tapes and CDs to listen to their coursebook dialogues again after they have studied them in class. There is a growing number of podcast sites from where students can download free materials. And another way of getting students involved in a form of extensive listening is to encourage them to go to English language films with subtitles; as they hear the English dialogue, the subtitles help them understand; as they understand, they will, to some extent, absorb the language they hear.  
 *Intensive listening* is different from extensive listening in that students listen specifically in order to work on listening skills, and in order to study the way in which English is spoken. It usually takes place in classrooms or language laboratories, and typically occurs when teachers are present to guide students through any listening difficulties, and point them to areas of interest.

**2.1.Listening sources**

A lot of listening is experienced from **recorded extracts** - on CD, tape or via MP3 players of some kind. Frequently this is commercially produced, either as part of a coursebook or as supplementary material. But there is no reason why teachers should not record their own listening materials, using themselves or their friends or colleagues. With modern recording technology available through a range of media, it is quite possible to produce recordings of reasonable quality. We can download a huge amount of extremely useful listening material from the Internet, too, provided that we are not breaking any rules of copyright.  
Recorded extracts are quite distinct from **live listening,** the name given to real-life face-to-face encounters in the classroom. To some extent all teacher talk is live listening, but in particular the term *live listening* is used to refer to situations in which the teacher brings visitors into the class or, if this is not possible, role-plays different characters for the students to talk and listen to. The main advantage of live listening over recorded extracts is  
that the students can interact with the speaker on the basis of what they are saying, making the whole listening experience far more dynamic and exciting.

**3. Listening levels**

We will want our students to hear listening material in a number of different *genres* (that is, styles or types of text) and registers. This may include news broadcasts,  
public announcements, recorded messages, lectures, phone conversations, dramatic  
dialogue, etc). But we will also have to decide whether what they listen to should be  
*authentic* or not. Authentic speech is speech that is not spoken just for language learners - in  
other words, it is language spoken for native- or competent speakers of English, with no  
concessions made for the learner. Much recorded speech on the radio or on the Internet,  
for example, is of this type. However, it is often far too difficult for lower-level students,  
and is, therefore, inappropriate for use with them. But we don’t want to give our lower level students inauthentic language (which doesn’t sound at all like the real thing) either.  
What we aim for instead is realistic language use which, while roughly-tuned to match the  
students’ level, nevertheless approximates to real-life language. But we will aim to get our  
students to listen to (and understand) authentic English as soon and as often as they can.