

A LISTENING COMPREHENSION LESSON

Lim Teik Leong

Read any article on listening and you will be told that it is an area that has been neglected (shamefully and sinfully so, it is implied). I've read a few articles and so have my friends and we all agree it is a neglected area. To help fill the gaps I've suggested two exercises based on Backward Buildup (Templer and Rivers) which you can try out in class.

The main idea in the lesson is to focus the attention of the pupils on meaningful units of spoken language. English is heard as a stream of sounds. Our overloaded pupils who may have problems with their other subjects, besides having trouble with mastering the skills of reading and writing in English, have to recognise words – and their meanings – from that stream of 'noise'. We, as teachers, can help them by breaking up speech into meaningful segments and letting them practise identifying the segments. For example, the sentence 'Where's your father?' can be broken up into 'Where's/your father?'

Pupils are taught, though not overtly, that there are two meaningful units in that utterance. They will find it easier to handle sentences if they can be broken up in this way. Most pupils, because of limited vocabulary, are more interested in tackling individual words – a technique they usually apply to reading, but one which will not work in listening to English.

In Backward Buildup we choose sentences which represent spoken language which the pupils are likely to hear. We then tape these sentences, pausing after each chosen segment. The sentence is played again and the pupils repeat the last segment. The sentence is played again and the last two segments are then repeated and so on. For example:

Tape : Where's/your father/gone to?
Pupils : gone to?
Tape : Where's/your father gone to?
Pupils : your father gone to?
Tape : Where's your father gone to?
Pupils : Where's your father gone to?

Listening and speaking are taught at the same time.

Below are two exercises you can carry out with your class, followed by suggestions on writing and taping such exercises.

Exercise 1

Repeat the last segment when you hear the sentence the first time. Repeat the last two segments when you hear the sentence the second time, etc.

- (a) Savings/please.
- (b) Could you/tell me/what I've/to do?
- (c) You've got/to fill up/these forms first.
- (d) I'd like to open/an account here.
- (e) Do you want/to open a savings/or a current account?

Dialogue:

A : 'cuse me.

B : Yes?

A : I'd like to open an account here. Could you tell me what to do?

B : Do you want to open a savings or a current account?

A : Savings please.

B : You've got to fill up these forms first.

Exercise 2

(a) First floor/on the right.

(b) D'you want/a leather one/or PVC?

(c) Could you tell me/where to go?

(d) I'd like to buy/a suitcase please.

Dialogue:

A : 'cuse me.

B : Yes?

A : I'd like to buy a suitcase please. Could you tell me where to go?

B : Do you want a leather one or PVC?

A : Leather.

B : First floor on the right.

Procedure

1. Tell pupils what is expected of them.
2. Give an example.
3. Play taped sentences. Pupils repeat as directed. Replay the sentences if necessary.
4. After all the sentences for the first dialogue are completed, give pupils the whole dialogue. They now practise speaking (not reading). To ensure that they are not reading, make pupils look at sentences for as long as they want but insist that when they speak they look up.

How the sentences should be recorded

1. Insert pauses at the end of each segment in the first 'reading'.
2. In the second reading, pause at all segments except the one before the last segment, for example:

1st reading : Could you (pause) tell me (pause) what I've (pause) to do?

Pupils : to do?

2nd reading: Could you (pause) tell me (pause) **what I've to do?**

Pupils : what I've to do? etc.

3. Always 'read' as if you are speaking naturally despite the pauses.

For those who want to write their own material

You will find that pupils enjoy lessons like these. For weaker pupils, though, you need to insert more pauses (in between more segments).

As the language is spoken language, short forms (I've, He'll, etc.) are used. Sentences should not be too lengthy and care should be taken when breaking up sentences. Compare:

The man who lives over there bought his son a bicycle which was red.

The man living over there bought his son a red bicycle.

To make the language more authentic, insert exclamations like: Have you heard? Heard the latest? etc.

When the sentences are sequenced for practice, they are sequenced *according to complexity*. Thus the sequence does not follow that of the dialogue to be practised later.

Should structures be controlled? There will always be debate about this. My belief is that if the construction is short enough and if the utterance is useful in its entirety, teach it by all means even if it is not a syllabus item. The same goes for vocabulary. The main criteria is that pupils know the meaning and have mastered basic English sounds.

Finally, always keep in mind that we are teaching listening and speaking. We are not testing. Pauses should be obvious enough for pupils to recognise the segments after some time. Give them sentences they can handle. Concentrate on stress and intonation rather than pronunciation in the early stages. Let them get the rhythm first. Do not put them under pressure. Make the lesson light without too much control and discipline. After a time, watch your pupils' interest in English lessons increase as they gain confidence in speaking.

Readers are invited to submit, for publication, articles on any of the following:

Teaching methods, Suggestions on overcoming problem areas in English Language Teaching, Case studies with regard to the implementation of the English Syllabus in your School, Book reviews, Topics in Linguistics and lastly Letters to the Editor.

PLEASE SEND YOUR ARTICLES TO:

**The Editor
The English Teacher
P.O.Box 539
KUALA LUMPUR.**