

ASSIGNING STUDENTS TO LISTEN TO THE ENGLISH NEWS IN LISTENING COURSE

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Abstract

This paper presents one of the ways to improve students' listening ability in Listening 2 Course. At the English Department of Universitas Negeri Padang listening skill is taught in three different subjects, Listening 1, Listening 2 and Advanced Listening. Listening 2, provides students with the materials of oral communication by English native speakers and English nonnative speakers. Looking at the materials used for Listening 2, it seems that the book does not have enough tasks for the students for it has only two or three tasks for each unit. Those tasks are done in the classroom, and there is no task for homework. Learning Listening as a language skill needs practice inside and outside the classroom. To overcome the lack of task for Listening subject, assigning students to listen to the English news is one of the ways that can be done by the teachers. By assigning students to listen to the English news, whether radio or TV news, will give them real experiences in understanding spoken language. To ensure the students listen to the news, they have to record and submit the news and the tape script of the news as well

Keywords: assigning, English radio/TV news.

INTRODUCTION

The expectation of English language teaching experts to make listening skill like other language skills still has difficulties. Many conferences and researches have showed that listening skill cannot be ignored in language teaching. Many arguments are stated to convince people that listening skill is the first skill got by people. Furthermore people spend most of their time for listening. It is evident that this skill should be considered and taught like the other language skills.

At English Department of Universitas Negeri Padang, listening skill is taught in three different subjects, Listening 1 (literal Listening), Listening 2 (interpretative Listening) and Advanced Listening. Listening 1 covers the materials about English daily conversation, while Listening 2 covers the materials about oral communication by English native speakers and English non native speakers. Advanced Listening covers TOEFL like materials that

consist of short conversation, longer conversation and talks.

Nowadays at English Department, Listening 2 subject is taught twice a week for two credit hours for each meeting. It means there are thirty two meetings during a semester. The books used for this subject is *Active Listening, Expanding Skills for Understanding*, by Marc Helgesen and Steven Brown (1995) which is completed with CDs. This book consists of twenty units with two tasks for each unit. Looking at the numbers of meeting of this subject and the unit lesson the book provided, it seems that the tasks available are not enough, not only for classroom task but also for homework. Because of that reason, the teachers decided to use *World Link 2*, (book and video) by Susan Stemplesky, (2006) to complete the teaching materials. These two books are used for the materials of teaching Listening in the classroom and the teachers have to find other materials for assignments. Since listening is a skill, it needs practice to make students able to

comprehend spoken language, so that students need to listen to various kinds of listening materials from various sources.

One of the ways to provide students with Listening material, where they can find many kinds of topics, sources, and speakers is listening to the news. By listening to the news (TV or radio) students are expected to be able to comprehend spoken language and it will improve their ability in listening comprehension. There are some reasons why the students assigned to listen to the news. First, the news provides various topics. Second, news is read by many news readers from many different countries, not only English speaking countries, but also non English speaking countries. Third, the news is easy to be got and recorded. Fourth news has certain characteristics which has the lead or background events, the body and the sources. So, by listening to the news, the students are trained to listen to the listening material from different sources, topics, and accents, of the news readers. These activities also train them to understand the spoken language in limited time, because the news presenters commonly deliver the news faster.

REVIEW OF RELATED THEORIES

What is listening?

Listening is the first communication skill acquired by everyone. It is an invisible mental process that plays a vital role in daily lives. People listen for different purposes such as entertainment, academic purposes or obtaining necessary information. As for foreign language learning, listening is of paramount important since it provides the language input (Rost, 1994).

There are many definitions of Listening proposed by many experts. Listening is the activity of paying attention to and trying to get meaning from something we hear (Underwood 1989). It is the ability to identify and understand what people are saying (Yagang, 1993). This involves understanding a speaker's accent or pronunciation, his grammar and his vocabulary and grasping his meaning, Howatt and

Dakin in Saricoban (1999). Listening is also an active process which requires the listeners to participate in that process (Yang 1999). Vandergrift (2002) adds that listening is a complex, and active process of interpretation which listeners match what they hear with what they already know. Helgesen in Nunan (2003) says that listening is an active process of not only what people hear but also how people connect it to other information they have already known.

Based on theory of communication, Rost (2002) views listening as a part of transactional process in which all participants are simultaneously 'sending' and 'receiving' messages. He says definitions of listening based on four orientations or perspectives. First, from the perspective of receptive, listening is viewed as receiving what the speaker actually say. Second, from the perspective of constructive, listening can be defined as constructing and representing meaning. Third, viewed from collaborative perspective, listening is negotiating meaning with speakers and responding it. Fourth, from the view of transformative perspective, it means creating meaning through involvement, imagination and empathy.

The process of listening

Listening is an internal process. Some experts describe what happens as we listen. According to Underwood (1989) there are three stages of aural processes.

1. The sounds go into echoic memory for a very short time to be organized into meaningful units according to the knowledge of the language the listener already has.
2. The information is then processed by the short time memory. In a matter of seconds, words are checked and compared with information already held in the long-term memory and meaning is extracted.
3. The meaning extracted is stored in the long-term memory for later use.

Flowerdew and Miller in Amelia (2011) describe the process of listening as follow: Auditory messages are first received by the sensory memory from the environment around us. The sensory memory activated, and the message is held for a period of not more than one second. In this period, the message is held in its exact form. Then depending on a number of factors, such as the quality of messages, the urgency of the messages, and the course of messages, it is either passed on your short term memory or lost.

Wilson (2008) distinguishes the process of listening comprehension into two categories; bottom-up processing and top-down processing. Bottom-up processing refers to the listener's decoding of the incoming message by analyzing it at the level of sounds, words and sentences. Top-down processing refers to the listener's use of background knowledge such as previous knowledge of the topic, situational or contextual clues, schemata or script stored in long term memory. However comprehension can only occur when the listener can place what is heard in a context.

Broadcast News

There are two kinds of media used for broadcasting news. They are television news and radio news. TV as an audio visual media provides voice and picture, while radio as an audio lingual media provides only voice of the news reader. The TV audiences are helped by the presence of the news read by the news reader, the pictures, and texts screened. The TV audience can predict what the news is about by watching the pictures and read the text provided. Yet the radio listeners just listen to the news read by the news reader.

Sissons (2006) says that news on radio and television delivered are the latest and most important news to the viewers and listeners and the stories of broadcast news are short where the opinion are kept to a minimum. The goal of it is to be understood by everyone.

Broadcast news tends to use informal language as if it talks to audience personally. According to Flemming (2006)

one of the strength of radio or television is that they talk to the individual rather than a mass media. Broadcast news should sounds natural when spoken and avoid complicated sentences and unfamiliar words. It is an informal conversational style, less hide-bound by the rule of grammar than news paper writing.

The newsreader is likely to speak at a reasonable pace, enunciate clearly and to have an accent which is not very strong. The listener can expect the text to be well organized. Vocabulary can be wide ranging and certain grammatical features occur more frequently, such as the use of the Present Perfect, Basquille (2012).

Structure of News

News story has several structures. Hutchison (1996) says that the basic structures of the news story are lead and body of the story. Lead of the story lures the audience into the body of the story. In a good lead the most important news is placed at the first part. The initial sentence of the lead is usually less than 25 words because media readers and listeners have difficulties carrying words and phrases from the first part of a long sentence to the end.

News lead can be identified by the questions they answer in the first few words. If the lead answer the question "what happened?" it is a "what" lead. If the lead answers the question, "who is involved?" the lead is a "who" lead. A "where" lead immediately answers the question, "where did it happen? It occurs also for the other WH and H questions. The good news lead can answer the 5WH + H questions. In the body of the news story, it bears the burden of communicating the important information, which is placed after the news lead. This part of the news story provides the detail information revealed in the news lead.

Semi (1995) states other structure of the news story. According to him the news story consists of: (a) a lead, the summary of the news which is put in the beginning of the news story. It is the important part of

the news that will help readers or listeners to know the content of the news, (b) body. It is all of the stories in the news that explain the news lead. Similarly Suparyo and Muryanto (2011) say that the structure of the news consists of news worthy or news lead, background events and sources. News worthy or news lead is the summary of the news and background event tells about what has happened, for whom and how. Sources are the comments from the actors, witnesses and the experts in the events.

Sissons (2006) states the complete parts of the news structures that consists of:

1. The intro/cue/lead.

In intro or cue or lead, the writer or reporter gives the gist of the news story which has no more than thirty words. It needs to have something particular to say and mention who is involved in the story, what happened, where it happened and when did it happen. The most important thing is all cues or leads should tell the reader something new and interesting. He adds that there are two kinds of intro or cue or lead namely: (a) *who intro*, it is when the person/s is more important than the event, so the reporter has to highlight that person/s and describe what they have said or done. When the person is recognizable, it is appropriate to exploit it in the intro or lead by naming them. (b) *what happened intro*, if it is an important or unusual event, the reporter has to highlight what is the significance or importance of it.

2. News stories/body/background.

In this part, the writer or reporter will tell the reader or the listener about the rest of the story. It is arranged like inverted pyramid, where the most important information is at the top, supporting information is in the middle and less important material is at the bottom.

In short it can be said that the structure of the news consists of news leads,

background events and sources. News lead is the important part of the news and tells the gist of the story that informs persons or things. The background event tells the rest of the story in detail. The last is source which tells the statements of the person involved in that news that can be found in the background events.

Listening to the News

Ur (1984) summarizes six features of most real-life listening. Not all of these are relevant for listening to the news.

1. We listen for a purpose and with certain expectation.
2. We make an immediate response to what we hear-not to the speaker, but sometimes to co-listener.
3. We see the person we are listening to (TV).
4. There are some visual or environmental clues as to the meaning of what is heard (TV).
5. Stretches of heard discourse come in short chunks.
6. Most heard discourse is spontaneous.

There is no doubt that listening to radio news is a much greater challenge for the learner. TV news on the other hand, provides visuals which give the learner clues to what is being said. Not all learners make the most of these supports. It is important for the teacher to provide students with opportunities to practice developing non-linguistic strategies such as predicting, so that they can make the most of their schematic knowledge.

Learner Problems in Listening

Underwood (1989) identifies the problems encountered by listeners as

- Lack of control over the speed at which speakers speak.
- Not being able to get thing repeated.
- The listener's limited vocabulary.
- Failure to recognize the 'signals'.
- Problems of interpretation.
- Inability to concentrate.
- Established learning habits.

Basquille (2012) says the problems encountered by listeners in listening to the

news are more than others. When listening to the news, the learners will encounter some difficulties because on television news, there is often strident background music playing while the news headlines are being read. The speed of delivery can be quite fast and of course there is no possibility of asking the speaker to repeat or clarify. However there are certain factors which should be less problematic. For example the range of the topic is quite limited and the students should be able to predict to some extent what they will be if s/he listen to the news on a regular basis. Many learners believe that their greatest difficulty with listening is their inability to control the speaker's speed (Underwood, 1989).

Besides the above problems, learners still have problems identifying sounds and words. Although the news is clearly articulated, some problems with connected speech cause difficulties. One of such difficulty is assimilation i.e. the blending of words at their boundaries (Basquille, 2012). Field in Basquille points out that learners often fail to recognize a known word when they hear it in continuous speech because the end of the word has been modified.

The problems listed above are challenges for the teachers to do something in order to minimize the students' problems even though not all of them can be overcome. The teachers need to facilitate students. Underwood says that in their objectives the teachers have to include:

- Exposing students to a range of listening experience.
- Making listening purposeful for the students.
- Helping students understand what listening entails and how they might approach it.
- Building up students' confidence in their own listening ability.

DISCUSSION

Having limited listening tasks for listening course, assigning students to listen to the news is one of the ways to make students keep on practicing listening. By

listening to the news they are not only familiar with authentic material but also with the other challenges such as listening to correct pronunciation, understanding unknown words and accents of the news readers. The goal of assigning students with this task is to train them with the 'challenging' listening material and finally they are expected to improve their listening ability.

There are several reasons why students are asked to listen to the news.

- News stories are short, usually lasting for 3-4 minutes each.
- News stories provide students with various topics on events happening around the world.
- News stories provide students with various accents of the news readers.
- News stories introduce students to new vocabularies and expressions set in natural context.
- News stories provide the integrated skills of language.
- News stories can be got and recorded easily.

Understanding the information of the news, needs to answer the 5 "WH and H" questions (Who, What, When, Where, Why and How), Sissons (2006). So by answering those questions the listener can understand the text thoroughly, because the answers of all questions are found in the lead, the body and the sources of the news stories.

At the English Department at Universitas Negeri Padang for Listening 2 subject the students are assigned to listen and to record the English news weekly (weekly assignment). They may choose any topics they like from national or international radio or TV stations, even though when they are assigned to listen to the news they tend to choose TV news because it provides visuals which give the them clues to what is being delivered.

The steps of doing this assignment are:

1. Each student has to record and listen to the news, and write the audio script as well. It will be submitted in every meeting.

2. In every meeting two or three students are asked to report the news they have recorded for about thirty minutes.
3. The other students are asked to watch the video /listen to the news and take some notes about it. They may ask the presenter if they do not understand the news.
4. Later they have to answer the 5 WH questions by making mind mapping.

The first task the students should do in the series activities of listening to the news is recording the news. The students have to select the TV or radio stations to be recorded. There are many choices available like CNN, VOA, Al Jazeera, NHK, ABC, BBC. Every TV station has its own style in broadcasting the news. Even though all TV stations deliver the news in English but not all of the news readers are English native speakers. The speed and the accents of the news readers vary one to another. These two things can be the first challenges for the students to understand the news.

Once they have decided the news (news video) from a TV station, the next step is recording the news. After recording the news they have to make the audio script of the news. This task could be the most difficult one for many students, because they have to make the script of the news which is read by the news reader as it is. In order to understand the news they have to listen to the news many times, and even they need their friends' help to discuss the news to make them understand the content and the context of the news. This is the process when they have to be familiar with the pronunciation and the accents of the news readers. They have to pay full attention to the news they listen to. They have to try harder to understand the news. If they do not understand well, they will come to the wrong audio script, for example, the news reader reads: "the **UN** general secretary...." The student listened and wrote the script: "the **you and** general secretary....." The similar sounds of the words read by the news readers lead them to misunderstand the news, if they do not

understand the content and the context of the news.

In writing the audio script of the news, the students will listen to the unfamiliar words, phrases, and sentences. For some students these difficult task 'force' them to check the words on dictionary in order to comprehend the news. Even though they have listened to the news for many times, but sometimes they still do not understand the news. Checking the words in the dictionary is meant and hoped to enrich their vocabularies. However few students tend to skip the unfamiliar words, phrases and sentences in the script. It caused confusion in reading it. The worse the students have done in writing the script (if the news has many unfamiliar words, phrases or sentences) is the students did not record the news completely. They cut the news and record half of it. This 'trick' would be noticed when the recorded news was played in the class. In addition it caused questions and comments from the other students that cause another difficulty for the students who present the news report.

After writing the audio script, the next task the students have to do is making the mind mapping of the news. The map should contain the answer of the 5 WH questions. When the students do not understand the news well, they will make the simple answer for the 5 WH questions. If they understand well they will make the long and complete answer of the questions. Furthermore the branches of the map also show their understanding of the news. This is what they are going to present in listening class after showing the video of the news.

There are some advantages of assigning students to listen to the news. (1) The students have a lot of practice to listen to the correct English pronunciation. (2) The students are familiar with various accents of English. (3) The students are skillful in understanding unfamiliar words, phrases and sentences. (4) The students can enrich their vocabularies, since the news provides a wide range of vocabularies. (5) The

students are skillful in mapping their minds, especially related to what they have listened to, which is important in listening comprehension. (6) The students have also a lot of practice to listen to the 'normal' speed of the speaker (news reader) even though it is hard for first few weeks. By doing these activities every week, it is expected that it will improve the students' listening ability.

CONCLUSION

Assigning students to listen to the news is aimed to improve their listening ability. This assignment includes making the script of the news reporting and answering the 5 WH + HOW question found in the news. The students are challenged to listen to the listening materials which have special characteristic which are different from the listening material they have in the classroom. By doing this assignment the students will know the wide range of vocabulary, pronunciation of unfamiliar words, and accents of the news readers. When this activity is done continuously it will improve their listening comprehension

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