



How Technology Can Help in teaching Listening

In the present era, referred as the "information age" the role of electronic media in communication is increasing almost daily. The telephone call has all but replaced the personal letter; tape pals, and even cyberpals, coexist with pen pals; newspapers are struggling to remain competitive with radio and television; classroom walls have been expanded via distance learning; commuters listen to audiobooks as they drive to work; live theater shares the entertainment stage with film and video. Furthermore, recording and playback equipment make it possible for us to store audio or video documents transmitted from distant sources to listen to or view at our convenience. Every day we use new technology to overcome both distance and time, the limitations to human communication imposed by nature.

The aim of our article to see how presently available technology can facilitate second- or foreign language listening comprehension.

Technology-mediated communication has become so much a part of our lives that we normally give little thought to how various electronic media differ among themselves or to how technology-aided communication differs from face-to-face communication.

Of the media useful for the teaching of listening, audio has the longest history and is surely the least costly, the most convenient, and the most widely available. Shortwave radio broadcasts, audio magazines, and foreign music recorded on cassettes or compact discs can bring the target language into classrooms and learning centers or accompany students as they drive, jog, or shop. Lightweight cassette decks and compact disc players are easily transportable, and neither represents a great investment. Furthermore, most teachers and students are very familiar with audio technology and require little, if any, instruction in its use.

Can we conclude, then, that audio is an unsatisfactory medium for teaching listening? Not at all, as we shall see in the following discussion. Radio is a venerable medium, and over the years radio professionals have learned to compensate for lack of visual support in a number of ways. Working without the "visual safety net" provided by video, the best radio commentators have become excellent verbal communicators, choosing precise words, employing figurative language to evoke images in the minds of their listeners, and using intonation and expressive language to advantage. Creators of radio dramas, aware that meaningful sound is not confined to dialogue, add sound effects (dishes clattering, a thud when the corpse hits the floor), emotional sounds such as laughter, sobs, or screams, and music to set a mood or create suspense. Good audio can motivate and hold the attention of the listener, while providing rich verbal input.

Unlike radio, television requires listeners to process simultaneously **two** types of stimuli, visual and auditory. Furthermore, visual stimuli include both images and text (a sign indicating that a certain establishment is a school, for example). How viewers process these various stimuli is a question that has intrigued a number of scholars.

Foreign language specialists tend to think of television as being the more complete medium because of the extralinguistic and contextual clues to meaning provided by the visual image.

Computer-assisted multimedia comes closer than the other audio and visual media to meeting the standard for listening embodied in face-to-face communication. Presence, interactivity, control, multisensory input, and multiple sources of assistance can be incorporated into this sophisticated technology. The most obvious advantage of such computer-assisted multimedia applications is instantaneous random-access to any sentence or segment on the sound source, usually a CD-ROM or videodisc, and the ability to replay and relisten with ease to difficult passages. While this feature, in and of itself, is of considerable help to listeners, interactive multimedia programs facilitate listening in additional ways by adding text and providing a number of easily accessible online helps believed to contribute to the comprehension process. In the following analysis of selected multimedia programs, it will be helpful to keep in mind the benchmark of face-to-face listening with its characteristics of immediacy, interactivity, control, multisensory input, and the availability of various options for obtaining help.