THE ROLE OF TECHNOLOGY IN TEACHING LISTENING

Listening is the language modality that is used most frequently. It has been estimated that adults spend almost half their communication time listening, and students may receive as much as 90% of their in-school information through listening to instructors and to one another. Often, however, language learners do not recognize the level of effort that goes into developing listening ability.

Far from passively receiving and recording aural input, listeners actively involve themselves in the interpretation of what they hear, bringing their own background knowledge and linguistic knowledge to bear on the information contained in the aural text. Not all listening is the same; casual greetings, for example, require a different sort of listening capability than do academic lectures. Language learning requires intentional listening that employs strategies for identifying sounds and making meaning from them.

Listening involves a sender (a person, radio, television), a message, and a receiver (the listener). Listeners often must process messages as they come, even if they are still processing what they have just heard, without backtracking or looking ahead. In addition, listeners must cope with the sender's choice of vocabulary, structure, and rate of delivery. The complexity of the listening process is magnified in second language contexts, where the receiver also has incomplete control of the language.

Given the importance of listening in language learning and teaching, it is essential for language teachers to help their students become effective listeners. In the communicative approach to language teaching, this means modeling listening strategies and providing listening practice in authentic situations: those that learners are likely to encounter when they use the language outside the classroom.

The one of the best ways introduce students to listening strategies is to integrate listening activities into language lessons using multimedia technology. As multimedia technology (interactive videodisc, CD-ROM, CD-I, etc.) becomes more accessible to teachers and learners of other languages, its potential as a tool to enhance listening skills becomes a practical option. Multimedia allows integration of text, graphics, audio, and motion video in a range of combinations. The result is that learners can now interact with textual, aural, and visual media in a wide range of formats.

The past two decades have brought to language teaching and learning a wide range of audio-visual technologies. From among these, no single tool for teaching and learning has had greater impact than the personal computer. Today, individual learners can, in addition to interacting with computer-generated text and graphics, control combinations of analog and digital sound and images. Arranging these combined media into intelligent, pedagogically-driven material is a challenge to teachers.

Over the years, a wide variety of teaching aids have been placed at the disposal of language teachers. Charts, slides, tape-recorders, videos, overhead projectors and many other technological innovations have taken the place of traditional chalk and board, though not completely.Not long ago a languagre

laboratory was widely used in leraning listening as it was tied to the belief that individual listening practice with audiotape helps build a learner's ability to understand and speak the target language. Technology continues to be perceived as an enhancement to the process of language acquisition. The large-scale infusion of computers in language instruction programs in the past decade attests to this belief. The rationale behind what is now growing support for Computer Assisted Language Learning (CALL) is not unlike earlier enthusiasm for audiotapebased technologies. That is, both media provide individualized access to target language material that the learner can control and use in a self-study format. However, expectations for CALL in general, and multimedia in particular are much higher. The fast and powerful computational capacity, in conjunction with the orchestrated video, text, and graphics of today's multimedia learning systems would predict more sophisticated paradigms within which students can interact with the target language and, consequently, more effective learning. Learning a language via individualized instruction with the computer — especially when audio and video are involved — is an extremely appealing proposition, one that has sold to many an administrator in search of instructional panaceas.

Listening skills fall into three categories: *Passive listening* (listening for pleasure or entertainment); *Active listening* (listening to learn and retain information); and *Critical/Analytical listening* (listening to critique or make judgments about what one has heard). Modern, computer-based technology fosters listening skills by providing a multitude of opportunities for listening to spoken language. A good language teacher will be aware of these current and emerging technologies to immerse their students in the spoken language experience.

Jack Richards (1985) describes listening competency as being comprised of a set of "microskills". These are the skills effective listeners employ when trying to make sense of aural input. Let's examine potential correspondence between multi modal processing opportunities for language learners in a multimedia environment and how these can interact to complement listening skills acquisition.

1. **Retention of information in short term memory.** Most current multimedia applications allow the student some control over the rate of language presentation. That is, users can start, stop, and review pieces of information to better understand and remember the aural text. The addition of video provides a clear, logical flow of events so that linking (remembering) new information to old is facilitated.
2. **Discriminate the sounds of the target language.** User control over language presented in more than one modality supports a student's ability to discriminate where words begin and end. The synchronized display of text along with the aural text assists the learner in distinguishing phonetic groupings and boundaries. When learners can see the faces of those speaking in the video, moreover, they can additionally make use of facial movements to understand the sound-meaning correspondence in the target language.
3. **Recognize patterns of stress, rhythm, and intonation and how they signal information and intent.** Stress, rhythm, and intonation are automatically

highlighted when aural language is divided into syntactic units. When we speak, the logical breaks in our discourse (the places where we pause ever so slightly) occur at syntactically predictable junctures. When specific words are stressed and patterns of intonation used, learners can be cued to closely examine the visual and spoken reactions of interlocutors in the video presentation.

4. **Understand reduced speech**. Multimedia is particularly well suited to assist learners in their understanding of reduced forms of target language speech. Having the written version of fast, naturally-paced aural text on the computer screen allows the learner access to both the written and spoken forms simultaneously. That is, the learner may hear "wadjagonnado?" but will read "What are you going to do?" In this way, learners can come to understand the two different forms of the target language – spoken and written – as well as learn to decode these reduced forms.

5. **Recognize core vocabulary and the rules and patterns of words used to communicate**. Coordinated aural, visual, and textual information on the computer screen at the same time makes up an ideal laboratory for student problem-solving at the level of individual words and sentence structures. The learner has at her disposal rich visual and contextual clues that can assist in breaking the code of the written and aural text. The multi modal cues can be cross-referenced for word, sentence-level and broader understanding.

6. **Understand communicative functions of utterances according to context**. Video can be a very rich source of context for language processing. In a multimedia format, learners are provided control over the rate and order of video presentation and can therefore take advantage of starting and stopping the action in order to study language in a well represented context. Video also typically boasts tight correspondence between what is seen and what is heard. That is, in only very rare cases is the audio portion of video temporally disconnected to what is being viewed. By studying target language communication in a multimedia format, learners can experience and come to understand the connections between utterances and how they function within a visually depicted context.

7. **Process different speech styles, different rates, and performance errors.** Rate and style of audio naturally vary according to the genre of the video selection. Many situation comedies, for example, exemplify slowed speech. Interlocutors speak slowly and deliberately so the joke can be processed and understood. There are other kinds of programming, talk shows, for example, that are very fast-paced and difficult for non-native speakers to comprehend. Multimedia that includes varied genres permits a broad experience of different voices with differing rates and speech styles. Students can control the aural text so they have sufficient time for their individual processing needs.

8. **Recognize that meanings can be expressed in different grammatical forms.** Redundancy in video presentations is common. That is, interlocutors and narrators frequently repeat the same information in different ways so that meaning and intention is made clear to the viewer. In a multimedia format, phrases and sentences that carry the same or similar meaning can be highlighted for users and/or the learner can be prompted to highlight those phrases and sentences she feels express like meanings.

9. **Infer meaning and make predictions using personal knowledge, experiences, and strategies**. Video is a medium to which language learners come well equipped. Students are very accustomed to inferring meaning and making predictions from what they see and hear on the screen. In a multimedia format, these viewing/comprehension strategies can be cued and guided by, for example, posing pre-viewing questions on top of the stilled first frame of the sequence they are about to watch. Inference, predication, and calling up prior knowledge and experience can thus be activated.

The Internet is suitable place to practise languages as it offers the possibility, with the right software, of using images and audio resources at the same time, combining sounds and images as in communicative situations in the real world. It also provides users with a highly appealing and innovative format. But only when the sources are properly selected can the internet be useful in learning environment.There is a plethora of educational video and audio material available online and accessible via Web search engines such as Google.com. But practice shows that the best way to find good web sites is to listen to a collegue's suggestions who actually searched the site on his/her own or find a "serious" web site which may actually help. For example, Skype application is increasingly used as a part of listening development process throughout the world today. Skype is an internet-based application that enables Voice over Internet Protocol (VoIP) calls. It has a useful user-interface that enables the users easy and effective use. What's more, there are similar online applications such as MSN Messenger and GoogleTalk and the likes. MSN Messenger also has millions of users worldwide and is used to improve speaking and listening skills by L2 students. Skype and MSN Messenger increasingly create newer possibilities for the users. These softwares can also transmit video at the same time when the users speak to each other. So, this feature raises the level of interaction between practisers. Such level of interaction is also effective because of the highly useful features and user-interfaces of the applications.

As an alternative, internet TVs and radios can be used to develop listening comprehension skills of a student in an entertaining atmosphere; however, there is a relatively new emerging phenomenon: YouTube.com! This is a video upload-watch-download site and is increasing its popularity day by day. According to statistics, the site has more than six million videos and the total time necessary to watch all these videos is 9.305 years! This huge video pool offers priceless opportunities to practice listening in an entertaining and convenient environment. Television/radio shows, news, documentaries, music videos and any videos beyond the imagination of people are just one click away. All you need is an internet connection. The rest is almost totally free; however, videos should be carefully selected and prepared by the instructor to maximize comprehension and minimize frustration of learners and they hope that improvement in search tools for videos will allow the teachers to find the right video clip for supporting language class.

As BBC has always been seen as a genuine source of "right" form of English, it cannot be disregarded for English Language Teaching. Being aware of its educative role, BBC has been publishing books, audio/video materials and so on. With the rise of the internet, BBC has prepared an English Learning Page which is one of the best of its kind. The site gives ideas to the learner about material development and how to work efficiently with the aural input. Maintaining the publication at http://www.bbc.co.uk/worldservice/learningenglish/, BBC provides the visitors with quizzes, videos, podcasts and games as well as radio archives and voice recordings. As regards listening activities, there are many activities based on listening comprehension.

Apart from that, songs can be highly useful for developmental process of listening skills of a student. As music is everywhere in human life to change or boost the emotions and feelings, we can include music and songs in language learning as well. Besides, karaoke is also beneficial in that it requires a recitation which eventually leads to improvement in speaking skill.

Lastly, computer aided games can also have striking effects on student's listening comprehension. Games are proved to be useful during their language education process. When games' attractiveness unites with convenience and flexibility of computers systems, it may cause positive results as well.

In conclusion, we may say that using technology in the classroom

- allows teachers to add multisensory elements, text, sound, pictures, video, and animation, which provide meaningful contexts to facilitate comprehension
- allows teachers to increase authentic materials for study
- encourages greater interaction between teachers and students and students and peers
- emphasizes the individual needs of learners
- allows learners to hear the available input as many times as needed until they feel they understand it
- allows learners to develop their autonomy to review and practice materials as many times as they wish
- allows to reduce the learning stresses and anxieties
- allows learners to build their self-instruction strategies and self-confidence
- promotes second language learners' learning motivation.

However, there are disadvantages and obstackles in using technoogy for improving listening skills in terms of financial barriers, content considerations, technical features and pedagogical perspectives.

There is no doubt that technology offers teachers and learners vast amount of materials and communication possibilities to enhance their language teaching and learning. For successful integration of multimedia technology in language courses, both teachers and learners need to be prepared to adopt new roles and use the available technology in appropriate ways. Teachers should be prepared with

professional skills which include pedagogical and technical skill because the more enthusiastic and more knowledgeable language teachers are, the more successfully they can implement Internet in the language classroom. Learners can only benefit from technology – based activities provided that these activities are relevant to their needs and interest.

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