



Make Listening and Speaking More Enjoyable

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As a teacher of English language, I'm interested in the interactive teaching methods of EFL. I'm going to focus on articles on the topic "Authentic Materials In The Teaching Process". Current interests are learning more about interactive teaching methods of EFL and how to apply them in the teaching process in a more effective way. I enjoy working with students and sharing teaching experiences with my colleagues.

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Introduction

Developing students' listening skills is fundamental to their progress in acquiring the language. In the same way, giving them opportunity to develop their fluency, to try things out in the language without fear, to make mistakes and learn from them, is very important. However, listening classes are often difficult and even boring for students because the listening piece itself is not interesting for them or, because teachers expect them to hear *everything* and answer lots of questions. It becomes stressful, instead of enjoyable. In order not to face this difficulty teachers need to recreate the motivation that engages all the students in the topic and really make them *want* to listen. But how can the teacher do that? Not all the students are interested in every single topic that the teacher brings to the classroom. However, real teachers' job is to motivate their students to listen, whatever the topic. Giving students' a choice about which piece of information they would like to listen for from any listening task is a way of creating an effective reason to listen. Other things the teacher can do are:

- Always to have a lead-in, e.g. engaging the students in the topic .Pictures and other visuals on the target listening material can be helpful to the teacher in this step.
- To make a link between the topic and the students' own lives and experiences (personalization).
- To have a pre-listening task which helps students to focus on the **task** that the teacher require the students to do when they listen., e. g. prediction from some extracted information (key words, title); read questions about the listening; students compose their own questions.
- To set a clear global listening task; Global tasks focus on gist e. g. guess the title; put events in the correct order; check texts against predictions made beforehand.



- To set a clear specific listening task; Specific tasks focus on specific details (e.g. answering questions about specific items of information; using the text to fill in a form etc.), require more comprehensive understanding (e.g. comprehension questions; discussion of issues; comparison of viewpoints etc.), and test individual language items (grammar or vocabulary; working out meaning of words from context).
- To do a follow- up task if relevant, e.g. speaking (role-play, debate, or writing task).

Background

In the present EFL classroom, the teaching of listening and speaking relies heavily on the language labs and tape recorders. The main reason for this is that most EFL

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teachers are non-native English speakers and thus may lack proficiency in English. That's why sometimes native English speakers have been invited recently to teach listening and speaking in an integrated form and to achieve better results. These teachers have made listening and speaking classroom more lively and even have made passive students listen more attentively. However, while observing these kind of classes we can easily see that yet all students are not involved in the class, only the better students take the opportunities to talk in group work. Furthermore, it's these students who speak for most of the discussion time. These students are able to monopolize discussions for the following reasons:

- *The large size of the class:* This makes it difficult for teacher to control the whole class in group work and to get feedback from all students.
- *Affective factors:* Some extroverted students tend to be talkative and learn better in oral work, while the introverted ones remain quiet.
- *Lack of interesting authentic materials:* Listening materials depend to a large extent on the text-book. Even teachers who are very proficient in English are not encouraged to make tapes of their own for the students.

In order to enhance the listening competence of the students and at the same time to involve all the students in the listening process the teachers should follow the several tips given below:

1. Use short recordings. Two or three minute-listening material is often enough.
2. Give the students a slightly higher listening than their level but make sure the task is easy.
3. Vary the tasks that the students do before, while, or after listening.



4. Let the students check their answers in pairs before taking feedback from the whole class.
5. Allow the students to control the recorder sometimes.
6. Vary listening materials as soon as possible. The teacher can bring different songs or sound-tracks to the classroom and do various activities with them ,etc.

Now, I want to share my class-experiences on the last point of tips. Sometimes I prefer to make listening classes more enjoyable as it provides excellent learning opportunities for students. It can also be a very memorable way of learning. I usually find the activities described below very helpful and useful for developing the students' listening and speaking skills in an integrated way.

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Activity 1

The teacher assigns the students to choose their favorite sound tracks and bring them to the classroom, but the chosen pieces of music should be popular ones. During the class the students one by one plays their sound tracks. After listening to the piece of music, the rest of the class gives different kind of questions to the presenter-student in order to find out the names of the film and singer.

Example

The soundtrack of “The Bodyguard” plays. And the students who have already listened to it begin to ask these kind of questions:

1. Is it a romantic film?
2. Does the singer her/himself star in a film?
3. Does the singer love the main hero of the film?
4. How does the film end? etc.

After getting their answers the students sound their answers. And finally, the presenter defines the correct answer: - “Yes, it’s true.” The correct answer is the film “Bodyguard” and the singer is Whitney Houston. Then the other student follows the same procedure till all the students perform their sound-tracks.



This activity is good for developing the students' both listening and speaking skills. Firstly, the students listen to the lyrics of the sound-track and it's enjoyable for them and in itself an interesting piece of listening material for them. Even sometimes they sing themselves together with the singer. It motivates a positive emotional approach to language learning and introduces students to the music and culture of particular interest to them in the target language community. Russian methodologists consider works of art – poetry, prose, paintings, songs, etc.- to be effective tools that stimulate the content of foreign language

Speech (Gurvich, P. 1974. The basis of teaching spoken English at foreign languages departments. Vladimir, Russia.)While listening to a song, students begin to recognize the words and notions easily understood by native speakers but which may present difficulty for foreigners. Secondly, it provides good opportunity for students themselves to share their ideas, feelings on the playing piece of music. It creates a suitable atmosphere that allows students to express themselves freely and make them feel eager to communicate. Furthermore, the classroom, thus, is a non-threatening environment where students are eager to communicate and where the focus is on the process of learning, not on error correction. Here the errors should be viewed as a natural part of learning process, never as a drawback.

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Activity 2

This activity is good for giving the students some listening practice if the teacher doesn't have access to a cassette recorder or CD player.

The teacher calls one of the students outside of the classroom and narrates him one story and assigns him or her to retell the same story to one of his group-mate in 2 or 3 minutes(it depends on the length of the story). The listener-student is not allowed to ask any questions of misunderstanding. S/he is only passive listener in this game. The main task of a listener-student is to listen attentively and try to get as much as specific detailed information. The retelling procedure goes on till all the students share this story with one-another .Finally, the last student comes and presents the students' story to all class , and also the students listen to the original story narrated by the teacher. At the same time they guess how different and funny form of the story they've made in the process of listening and narrating.

Example

The Story-----A Question of Choice

Many years ago, when a person who owed money could be thrown into prison, a merchant in London had the misfortune to owe a huge sum to a money lender. The money-lender, who was old and ugly, wanted to marry the merchant's beautiful daughter. He proposed a bargain. He said he would cancel the merchant's debt if he could have the girl instead.



Both the merchant and his daughter were horrified at the proposal. So the cunning money lender suggested that they let Fate decide the matter. He told them that he would put a black stone and a white stone into an empty money-bag, and then the girl would have to pick out one of the stones. If she chose the black stone she would become his wife and her father's debt would be cancelled. If she chose the white stone she would stay with her father, and the debt would still be cancelled. But if she refused to pick out a stone, her father would be thrown into prison, and she would starve.

Reluctantly the merchant agreed. They were standing on a stony path in the merchant's garden as they talked, and the money-lender stooped down to pick up the two stones. While he was picking up the stones the girl, sharp-eyed with fright, noticed that he picked up two black stones and put them into the money-bag. He then asked the girl to pick out the stone that was to decide her fate and that of her father. The girl put her hand into the money-bag and drew out a stone. Without looking at it, she fumbled and let it fall to the path where it was immediately lost among all the others.

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“Oh, how clumsy of me,” she said, “but never mind, if you look into the bag, you will be able to tell which stone I took by the colour of the one that is left.”

After I called on one of the students and narrated this story to him, he followed what I did. So he also retold the same story to his other group mate, and this procedure went on till all students in the group became aware of the given story, but certainly in a quite different content. While listening and retelling the given story, the students who didn't get the unknown word, or may be because of less attention that was really needed in it, began to invent it in their own ways in order to have something to retell.. Finally, the last student entered the classroom and produced the invented story.. I, in my turn also narrated the original story. The students who listened two quite different stories first became shocked, and then burst into laughing because at the end of their story the merchant's daughter and the money lender got married, they were very happy with many merry children.

As previously said, in this activity, the focus is again on the process of improving both listening and speaking skills and how the teacher can do it in an interesting way. All along the narrating process, students are stimulated to gain accuracy and fluency, keeping in mind that errors should be corrected so as to have students learn from their own mistakes. On the other hand, stimulations fulfill the requirements of interactive method of teaching where they hear and use the target language in order to get more specific information on the plot of the story and reproduce it effectively to his /her partner. Also stimulations keep students highly motivated, giving them a chance to be involved in creative language use, to be exposed to the language as a system, and to develop strategies that will be of importance in their learning processes.



Conclusion

A teacher of English should always be creative and innovative. Songs and stories in ELT will help him or her to make the learning process more enjoyable and effective. Furthermore, the use of songs and stories in teaching and improving the students' listening and speaking skills is

1. motivating because the students consider them a game;
2. relaxing because it is a way of creating a less tense EFL class;
3. confidence building because it makes students realize they can understand and have fun with a language different from their mother tongue;
4. exciting because it is a challenge to catch as more detailed information or words as possible;
5. easy to do for the teacher because you need only a song or a story and CD-player;

References

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