
UNIT 5 LANGUAGE LEARNING

ACTIVITIES - 1 : LISTENING AND READING COMPREHENSION— SOME SIMILARITIES

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5.0 OBJECTIVES

The purpose of this unit is to introduce you to some of the communicative activities which help you to learn a language. We will take up the receptive skills i.e. listening and reading comprehension—the areas which need to be given more attention in the teaching and learning of the English language. These skills, although called receptive skills, involve active participation on the part of the learner or the reader. You will be made aware of the similarities and difference between listening and reading comprehension through some activities. These activities could also be taken up by you in the class at a later stage.

5.1 INTRODUCTION

Listening and Reading : What is common to both the skills?

In our daily life we read and listen to a great deal of language, and **WHY** we read and listen to language can be divided into two broad categories : Interest and Usefulness.

Very often we read and listen to something because it interests us—or at least we think it will interest us. A person reading a magazine, for example, chooses to read the article on 'current affairs' on page 42, rather than a film review or a book review on page 38, because s/he thinks that the former will be interesting whereas the latter will not be. The buyer in a bookshop often selects a book because s/he thinks it will interest him/her, and the discerning radio listener tunes in especially to programmes that s/he expects will be stimulating and entertaining.

Sometimes however, it is not the fact that a text may be interesting that makes a reader or a listener pay attention to it, it is rather the USEFULNESS of the text. If you wish to operate a tape-recorder for the first time, you will have to read the instructions so that you can be sure of pressing the right knobs for taping or playing the cassette. Similarly, if you are waiting at the railway station to receive your guest, you would be required to listen to and comprehend the announcements regarding the arrival time of the train.

And this brings us to the purpose—the communicative purpose of reading or listening. People read and listen to language then, because they have a desire to do so and a purpose to achieve. Usually they will have expectations about the content of the text before they start the task of reading or listening. The purpose and expectations will have important methodological implications in language learning and teaching. Hence, interest, usefulness and purpose will go hand in hand when one enters into any listening or reading activity.

Check Your Progress 1

1. We read or listen to a language because it and this includes and
2. If I have to handle the receptive skills namely and, I will have to bear in mind the and of the activities which I would take up in the classroom.

5.2 WHAT IS LISTENING?

As you know, speaking and writing are productive skills. Listening is a receptive rather than a productive skill, but it is an equally important skill. Most learners spend considerable more time in listening to the foreign language than in producing it themselves. It is not only that they must understand what is said to them during face-to-face interaction, there is a vast range of situations where they will be, the silent receivers of messages directed at them. And in such situations they cannot normally exercise any control over the language that is used, they must be prepared to extract meanings as best they can, from whatever language is directed at them.

Hence what does one listen to? What are the listening situations one is placed in?

What does one need to do for effective listening? What are the skills required for listening effectively for comprehension?

There are times when a person might find him/herself listening to something in a relaxed way, not paying attention to every word, but for the sheer pleasure of following the content of what is said. Listening to a radio programme of songs or a cricket commentary may be for deriving pleasure only — or only for relaxation, where language poses no problem. At other times the same person might find him/herself in a situation where s/he has to listen with great attention, because s/he is trying to pick up and remember a series of important instructions as in the case of the employee listening to his/her boss's orders. Now here we have two different types of listening experiences — those in which the language-level is well within the listeners capacity, and which therefore allow him/her to listen for pleasure or interest without having to make a great deal of effort, and the other situations in which s/he needs to pay more attention to content and language. The first type of listening can be called **extensive listening**. The second type of listening might be called **intensive listening**

Intensive listening is perhaps the more widely used form of listening practice in modern classrooms. Here, the students are asked to listen to a passage with the aim of collecting and organising the information it contains. There is more concrete information and often

As teachers of language you will have to give training to your students in both types of listening skills. It is also possible to break "listening" down into smaller skills — the enabling skills — the mastery of these skills would enable students to listen with more understanding.

As practising teachers you will be required to develop some of the following "enabling" skills in your students. For example:

- i) predicting what people are going to talk about
- ii) guessing at unknown words or phrases
- (iii) using one's own knowledge of the subject to help one understand
- (iv) identifying what is said and retaining relevant points; rejecting irrelevant information
- (v) recognising discourse markers eg, now, finally, then, afterwards... and other cohesive devices
- vi) understanding different intonation patterns and uses of stress, etc.
- vii) understanding inferred information eg. speakers attitude or intentions, etc.

Check Your Progress 2

1. Students need to be given practice in two types of listening skills: and

2. Discuss which Enabling Skills your students need most practice in.

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.....
.....

3. Do the course books you teach provide suitable types of listening exercises to help students practise the listening skills they need? Do you adapt more relevant material from other sources for listening exercises? Discuss the material(s) that you adapt. What is the reason for your choice?

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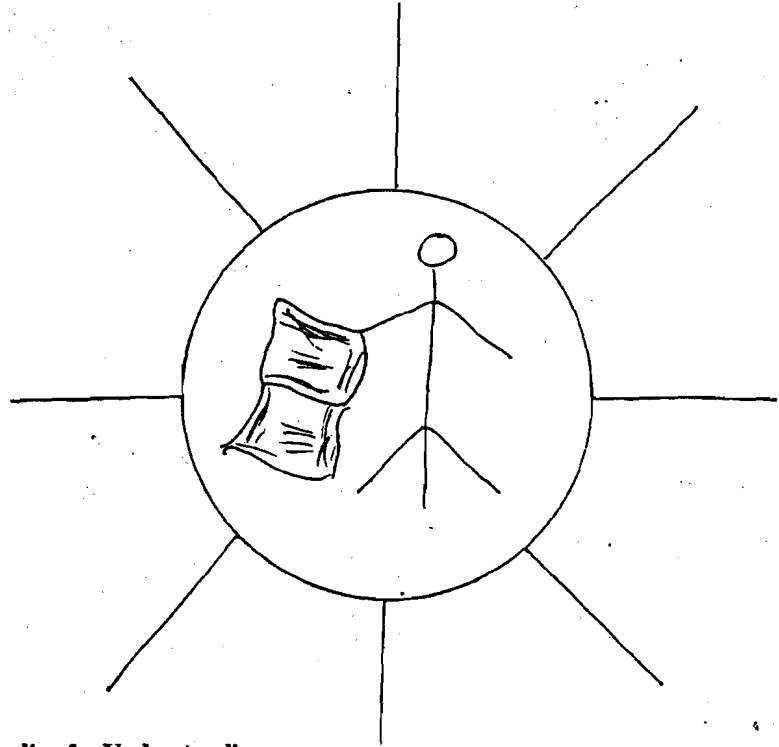
5.3 THE READING SKILL

Let us go onto the next receptive skill i.e. Reading.

Have you ever thought over this fact: "Why do we need to give practise to our students in

reading? What do they do when they read a text?"

Activity I: Here is a brain-storming activity for you. Given below is a web chart, fill in as many blanks as you can to show what goes on in one's mind while one reads a text?



5.3.1 Reading for Understanding

Step I - Look at the passage and the sentences in the boxes below and identify which uses of the text develop the student's skill in reading for understanding

7
Where was the old man sitting?

1
Mind your spelling of pneumonia

6
Where is the simple past tense used in the text? When do you use it?

The old man sat on the bench overlooking his village. Pneumonia had left him weak and shaky yet he could not keep himself away from the little spot he loved so much. The children were at play. Their shrill laughter and gaiety made him feel it's a good world we live in.....

2
How do you know that the old man was happy?

5
If you were the old man would you think it's a good world we live in?

4
What do you think pneumonia means? Which other words help you to work out its meaning?

3
No, your pronunciation is wrong. Listen to me and repeat.

Step II After reading the above boxes you will find that the following boxes help a student in understanding the text: 2,4,5,7, (No 4 helps students in understanding the vocabulary)

**Language Learning Activities-1:
Listening and Reading
Comprehension—Some
Similarities**

Therefore

Reading is for
understanding
and
What do
you read

PLEASURE

Letters from
friends, magazines,
fiction, poetry,
biographies, and
soon

.....
.....
.....
.....

FOR

WORK
Notices,
advertisements,
business letters,
reports, articles,
catalogues, instructions,
letters, official
documents, etc.

.....
.....
.....

SURVIVAL

bus and train
notice bills,
receipts,
time tables,
street signs,
etc.

.....
.....

After reading this chart, if you wish, you could fill up the blanks with more "type of things".

Check Your Progress 3

1. What goes on in your mind when you read?

.....
.....
.....

2. What do you do when you read?

.....
.....
.....

3. What all do you read? Mention any four text-types.

.....
.....
.....

THINK OVER

- a) What 'text types' will some of your students need to be able to read with understanding outside school or college? Why?
- b) Do their text books contain interesting reading passages on topics relevant to their needs?

5.3.2 How do We Read?

Generally the main ways of reading are as follows:-

- **Skimming** - quickly running one's eye over a text to get the gist of it.
- **Scanning** - quickly going through a text to find a particular piece of information.
- **Extensive reading:** As extensive reading is for pleasure, it also usually involves reading longer texts for one's own pleasure and interest. This is an activity which mainly involves global understanding.
- **Intensive reading:** involves reading of shorter texts, to extract specific information. This is an activity which mainly involves reading for detail.

For developing these skills for reading let us now discuss what are the enabling skills that can help students develop efficient reading techniques?

Here are a few skills

- (i) predicting what the writer is going to talk about and interpreting it
- ii) recognising words and phrases in the English language.
- iii) using one's own knowledge of the outside world to understand the text
- iv) extracting specific information for summarizing or note-taking
- v) skimming to obtain the gist and recognise the organisation of ideas within the text
- vi) retrieving information stated in the passage
- vii) finding out the relevant information from the given text or distinguishing between relevant and irrelevant information
- viii) deducing the meaning and use of unknown words, ignoring unknown words/phrases that are redundant, i.e. that contribute nothing to interpretation
- ix) understanding the meaning and implications of grammatical structures: eg, tense or adverb clauses of cause, result, purpose, reference in time, etc.
- x) recognising discourse markers like: therefore, however, etc.
- xi) understanding relations within the sentence and the text, layout, use of headings, etc.

5.3.3 Enabling Skills which are Common to Both Reading and Listening?

After discussing what enabling skills are required for developing the skills of reading or listening, let us now look at a few skills which are common to both.

1. Predictive Skills

An efficient listener or reader predicts what s/he is going to hear or read, and the process of understanding the text is the process of seeing how the content of the text matches up to these predictions. First, the reader or listener will try to predict as a result of his/her expectations - and as s/he continues to listen and read, however, his/her predictions will keep on changing as more information is received from the text. It is precisely this skill which a language learner will develop in himself/herself or you as a practising teacher will help develop in your students.

An example of how to predict is given as follows:-

By looking at the title of the unfinished passage, the reader or listener of this passage will be able to say what the writer is going to talk about.

Similarly if this passage was read to the class or presented as a 'talk on radio', the students could say what the passage was about.

(You as practising teachers could take up such activities in the class.)

BUYERS across the country have traditionally shopped till they dropped for all the wrong reasons - limited stocks, little choice, indifferent staff and long delays. But a clientele, which is now demanding both convenience and style in shopping, has led to a rash of supermarkets and department stores in most Indian towns.

Borrowing the "one-stop-shop" concept from the West, most of these stores stock a wide range of products, from electronics to textiles and gift articles, besides groceries and toiletries. And that too in relatively spacious air-conditioned interiors, with piped music playing in the background, and at prices on a par with other shops. Attractive displays and personalised attendance round off the new shopping experience. Says N. Chenniappan, the owner of Nilgiri's supermarket in Bangalore: "All over the country in major metros and busy towns, the old Kirana (grocery) shops are giving way to better organised department stores."

Department stores are not a new concept - co-operative stores have existed for years. But the privately-run souped-up new versions are providing to be a boon for harried consumers. And good business for the promoters. Targeted mainly at middle and upper middle class families and working couples these stores cater to the ...

Predictive Skills

Text: unfinished
passage

Specific aim: predicting/guessing

Activity: Reading or listening to it.

Check Your Progress 4

Here is an unpunctuated passage. Can you put the punctuation marks? Start a new paragraph when you think it is necessary and don't forget part of the text may be a dialogue and will have to be punctuated as such.

But what propels habib to do all this -

- giving free hair-cuts and shaves to the needy - it is the moral duty of every human being to devote some time and energy to the needy. This is the only way a small man like me can serve them and derive some satisfaction he says.

Can you write the:-

1. Specific aim of this activity:-

.....
.....
.....

2. Skill involved:-

Why? When supplying the missing punctuation of a text, we try to predict where the sentences are likely to stop and look for certain words functioning as signals of a new sentence or paragraph

2. Extracting specific information

Very often the listener or reader is involved in the use of receptive skills for the sole purpose of extracting information. In other words, the reader for example, may look at a piece of written language not in order to understand it all, but for the purpose of finding out only one or two facts. S/he may quickly read (scan) a film review only to find out the name of the stars. The listener may turn on the radio and listen to only old film songs that s/he wants to hear. In both cases the reader/listener will disregard everything except the information that s/he is interested in.

This skill when applied to reading is often called **scanning** and concentrates on extracting specific information.

Check Your Progress 5

Here is a set of advertisements on sale of property.

Read and find out which colony has 2-3 bedroom houses for sale.

1. Can you now write the specific aim of this activity?

.....

2. Skill involved

.....

Why? This skill helps students in finding out the required information and reject what is irrelevant.

Here is an activity you could try out in the classroom.

Prepare an audio cassette with the announcements regarding the arrival of trains on a platform.
Questions on the arrival of particular trains could be asked.

3. Getting the general picture

Readers and listeners often read or listen to something because they want to get the general picture. In other words, they want to read something and as a result of their reading have a general idea of the main points of what they have read; it is the main points that they are interested in, not the details. Indeed the skill of reading in order to get the general idea (often called **skimming**) presupposes the reader's ability to pick out the main points and discard what is irrelevant. The reader is able to skim rapidly over the information that is given and get the gist of the text. The skill of getting the general picture, then, is concerned with rapidly assessing the main points of a text and not paying attention to irrelevance (often redundancy) or detail.

In listening, also, this skill is necessary particularly since the speakers often repeat themselves, and deviate from the main points.

Activity: Here is a passage. Read the passage and find out what is the general idea of the passage.

To be a good teacher, you need some of the gifts of a good actor. You must be able to hold the attention and interest of your audience; you must be a clear speaker, with a good, strong, pleasing voice which is fully under your control; and you must be able to act what you are teaching in order to make your meaning clear.

Watch a good teacher, and you will see that he does not sit motionless before his class: he stands the whole time he is teaching; he walks about, using his arms, hands and fingers to help in his explanations, and his face to express feelings.

Listen to him, and you will hear the loudness, the quality and the musical note of his voice always changing according to what he is talking about.

What is the general idea of this passage?

.....

4. Inferring opinion and attitude

A reader or listener often has to work out the writer's or speaker's opinions and attitudes particularly since they are not always directly stated. The experienced reader or listener will know, from various clues s/he receives while reading and listening, whether the writer or speaker approves of the topic s/he is discussing or whether his/her opinion of say the personality s/he is describing is favourable or not. The ability to infer opinion and attitude is largely based on the recognition of language style and its use to achieve appropriate purposes.

5. Deducing meaning from context

Even in the mother tongue a speaker or a reader often comes across words in written and spoken texts that they do not understand. Usually, however, the fact that a word is unknown to them does not cause any particular problem. Based on the context in which the word occurs (the sentences, information and grammar that surrounds it) the reader or speaker guess its meaning. Usually this guess is right. The point is that deducing of meaning is important for a language user who will often meet unknown words, and as teachers you should try to train students in this skill as well — to guess the meaning of unknown words. Of course, reader/listeners may not be able to deduce the meaning from the context when there are a great number of words that they do not understand.

Check Your Progress 6

In reading or listening the meaning of some words can be _____. And this is one skill which has to be developed in students while teaching a language.

5.4 LET US SUM UP

In this unit, we have acquainted you with some of the skills required for efficient listening and reading (receptive skills). We have pointed out some of the similarities between listening and reading. We have also tried to make you aware of the strategies that are required to make you a good listener and reader.

In subsequent units, we shall give you more details on these receptive skills.

5.5 KEY WORDS

receptive skills	reading and listening
extensive and intensive reading	extensive reading means reading a number of texts in order to get a general idea of what is read. It is intended to develop good reading habits and encourage a liking for reading. Intensive reading is at a slower speed, and requires a detailed understanding of a text.
skimming/scanning	skimming refers to rapid reading of a piece of text, when the reader wants to get the main idea or gist of a text. Scanning occurs when a reader wants to locate a particular piece of information.

5.6 SUGGESTED READINGS

Grellet, F. 1981. *Developing Reading Skills. A Practical Guide to Reading Comprehension Exercises*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Ur, P. 1984. *Teaching Listening Comprehension*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

5.7 ANSWERS

Check Your Progress 1

1. We read or listen to a language because it interests us and this includes enjoyment, pleasure and intellectual stimulation.
2. If I have to handle the receptive skills namely listening and reading, I will have to bear in mind the interest, purpose and usefulness of activities which I would take up in the classroom.

Check Your Progress 2

1. Two types of listening skills: extensive and intensive listening.

Check Your Progress 3

1. Reading for understanding, pleasure, work, survival, interpretation, evaluation, interest, etc.
2. I read for understanding and pleasure.

Check Your Progress 4

1. To make predictions and guesses when reading a text.
2. Predicting.

Check Your Progress 5

1. To extract specific information
2. Scanning.

Check Your Progress 6

guessed from the context