



Improving Speaking by Listening Cultivating English Thinking and Expression

----- Probe into the Teaching of *Business English Listening*

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Abstract

The comprehensive listening curriculum occupies an important position in elementary teaching stage for English major. How could we arrange the listening class better? Considering the characteristics of comprehensive listening curriculum for English major, teachers can help students improve speaking by listening, cultivating their thinking and expression abilities. By this way, teachers can make the business English curriculum exert its effects completely, realizing the goal of proper communications and interpersonal connections.

Keywords: Listening, Speaking, Thinking, Expression, Communication

At the turn of century, the success of holding Beijing “Olympic Games 2008”, and the triumph of fulfilling manned spaceship “Shenzhou VII” symbolize China’s prosperity of economy and the progress of science and technology, showing the improvement of China’s overall national strength. With this situation and background, foreign language teaching tends to be more important. Inspired by the diligent and exploring spirits, people who are engaged in foreign language teaching should reconsider the teaching and probe into the problems in teaching practice, driving and deepening the reform of teaching for English major. In recent years, because lots of colleges and universities pay attentions to English teaching, students gain more progresses in English generally. And many colleges open ESP (English for special purpose) curriculum and business English. However, we should realize that the language abilities of students are unbalanced, especially for students majored in English in science, engineering, agriculture and medical University or college. Although most of them can reach the basic level in English reading, writing, and translating, they are not good at listening and speaking very much. Quite a lot of graduates are incapable of business communication in English.

Along with the development of foreign exchange in China, it is urgent to cultivate lots of high-quality talents who are accomplished in business English. English listening and speaking have important utility values in today’s economic construction, culture, and education fields. They are important factors for expression of thinking and ability of intercommunication. At the information times, world science and technology, and economic revolution change quickly. College students are important backbones for industry, agriculture, defense, science and technology in future. Their English abilities should not stop at understanding English articles by reading or with the help of dictionaries. They must make best use of English, as a tool, to know about the latest dynamics of world science and technology, and, at any time, to be ready in communication. In addition, they should be capable of manipulating English exactly, effectively, and properly. New situations pose higher requirements for today’s college students, and also bring about greater challenges for professionals in English teaching.

Considering self practices in teaching, the author will offer several measures concerning how to arrange listening training for English major in classes, improving speaking by listening, and cultivating students to realize effective intercommunication by English thinking and expression.

1. Enhancing the way for listening and speaking ----- reading, reciting, dictating, and retelling

Languages are mainly used for listening, speaking, reading, and writing in intercommunication. Listening and reading are input competence, and speaking and writing are output competence. Among these the listening and speaking competence tends to be more important in human communication and daily life. The primary language of human being develops from listening and speaking. During the period without letters, the only way for intercommunication is speaking. Statistical data show that as adults are in communication, who spend 45% of time in listening, 30% in speaking, 16% in reading, and 9% in writing. It illustrates the effects of listening and speaking effectively. Skilled reading is the base of speaking, and reciting is one of important ways for speaking. Reciting based on reading is an inevitable part for English listening and speaking. Similar to imitation, it is an important way to master language materials. It can help students to memorize words, and cultivate the listening, speaking, and reading competence. Besides, it is an effective way to cultivate the language intuition and to express thinking in English. Dictation is a comprehensive training method. The dictation of short articles can help students to exercise some primary language skills, such as the skill of distinguishing or differentiating different elements and tones, the skill of spelling words, and the skill of employing glossary and grammar. In teaching, we should ask students to listen and memorize more regular sentences, excellent dialogues, paragraphs, and some classic works, and dictate, retell, summarize, and generalize some sentences and paragraphs in listening, what can improve students' thinking and expression competence. If students persist in these practices and form a habit, they will pump out these phrases, sayings, and sentences naturally. Once being understood and absorbed, these language materials will be mastered firmly and employed freely by students.

2. An organic combination of intensive listening and extensive listening

In business English listening training, we should arrange and create special scenes for business negotiation, trade contract, marketing, and international finance. In order to hear the important data, characters, events, and time clearly, and master the general idea, students must integrate languages and specialties and apply them into practices. To combine intensive listening and extensive listening together, and realize trainings by turns, we can arrange intensive listening or extensive listening respectively, and practice intensive or extensive listening in turn, on one hand. On the other hand, we can separate an article or a scene into different sections, some for intensive listening and some for extensive listening. One important point is to make students understand the aim in listening, and know what information they should seize, and ask students make timely responses, such as selecting graphics, and filling out tables. To design some activities and imitate some scenes in business activities, such as filling out tables after listening, and spot drilling, which can drive students to accomplish some high-level cognitive activities, such as processing, organizing, and sorting the information obtained in listening.

The materials for intensive listening should be selected carefully, which should be easier than materials for reading, with less new words, clear records, standard tones, and slow speed. Listen in one material repetitively and take notes on details. After the listening, retell the material or answer relevant questions orally. As for materials for extensive listening, students can listen no more than three times, and no interruption in listening. Do not pay more attention to individual word or phase, in case of affecting other parts. No matter what it is intensive listening or extensive listening, we should practice each of them step by step. What's more, we can encourage students to spend at least half hour everyday in training their listening competence, and persist in it.

3. An organic combination of emotional teaching and specialty knowledge

Emotion, as an important part of psychological activities, is the attitude experience of people toward objective facts. Arnold & Brown (1999) think that an extensive emotion includes feelings, senses, moods, and attitudes that restrict behaviors. Emotional factors are a compounding of a group of complex psychological factors, which are uncertain and changeable. Positive emotions can create a psychological state that benefits for the study, while negative emotions will affect the normal exertion of study potentials. Emotional factors associate with learners' motives, self-respects, worries, and controls. In listening teaching, teachers should create a favorable condition as much as possible to motivate students' language knowledge and non-language knowledge to participate in understanding, and make students to give oral or non-oral responses. Pay attention to training good qualities such as students' competence of self-study, independent thinking, and self-confidence. Most students could not speak English well due to psychological timidity. In listening classes, teachers should encourage students actively and point out their merits. Even for very small progresses, teachers should offer their praises timely, which will give students a sense of achievements. Teachers should observe and coordinate the relationship between different psychological factors in purpose, and help students build up confidence and overcome inferiority, inspiring students with emotions. Secondly, as for mistakes in speaking, it is not necessarily for teachers to correct them thoroughly. If these mistakes do not affect normal communication, teachers should allow their existence in speaking. After all, mistakes are necessary steps toward success. By turning negative factors into positive factors, teachers can motivate students' enthusiasm for speaking to a great degree. By this way, all students will participate in the listening class actively though their personalities are different. The atmosphere in class will be relaxed.

4. Blending special cultural background knowledge in business listening and speaking training

Different nationalities have different cultures and conventions. Their logical thinking and language habits are different. In communication, people may find it is hard to understand each other. Listening means not only to understand the literal contents of words and sentences, but also the deep and implied meanings. For example, in China as we come across acquaintances, we usually say: “----- Do you go for a walk? ----- Do you repair your car? ----- Do you wait for somebody? ----- Did you have lunch?” Or we just ask: “----- Where will you go?” In English, these questions seem to be stupid. Since you know what I am doing, why do you ask again? As for the last question, Englishmen will regard it as an interference with their privacy. Their reply may be: “Mind your own business!” “That’s none of your business!” “I’m going to meet my girlfriend, so what?” Another example: as Chinese say hello to elders, they may congratulate their health. Elders will feel happy as they hear this kind of compliments. However, if we translate the compliment into English directly, it turns into: “You are in such an old age but you are still in good health!” How do elders in England and America respond to this sentence? First of all, elders in England and America do not like the word “old”. Secondly, the word “but” may hurt their feelings. They may think: “I am so old that I should not be in good health.” Or “It’s abnormal that for people of my age to be still in good health.” Therefore, the compliment for elders in China seems to call somebody “old bastard” in England and America.

Due to different living habits and aesthetic values, Chinese usually pass the time of day differently with English and American. In communicating with foreigners, we should be careful. If we want to master English and manipulate it freely, we must firstly understand the culture of English-speaking countries. In listening trainings, teachers should introduce these countries’ histories, traditions, and living habits, including literary quotations, original idioms and background knowledge, to students, which can help students express their thoughts more exactly and properly in communication with foreigners.

5. Creating and imitating real content of situation, and supply conditions for thinking and expression

The phase “content of situation” is firstly advanced by Malinowsk, a Polish human linguist. It includes scenes and contents, and also teaching, asking, explaining, answering, and retelling in English in classes. In order to realize an integration of thinking and expression, firstly we should create a nice language atmosphere by imitating real business scenes and selecting excellent listening materials. At present, listening materials in most colleges and universities are arranged in advance. In a sense, students almost can not know about the real communication between foreigners from English-speaking countries. As a result, they can not understand foreign movies, news, and interviews. Therefore, teachers should supply students with practical intercommunication scenes to improve their thinking and expression.

Teachers should select real materials for listening carefully. And these materials are not for students at an initial stage. Sophomores can take these materials step by step, such as some materials for specific scenes, including a meeting with foreigners, business negotiation, and marketing, and news, TV interviews, and materials about English-speaking countries’ culture, economy, and society. Meanwhile, teachers can arrange students to watch spot business scenes, English teaching videos, and world classic films. By this way, it can not only effectively enhance students’ language sensibility, improving their English thinking and expression, but also expand their visions and understanding toward western culture and economic background, benefiting for the improvement of their comprehensive competence. On one hand, teachers should provide students with an environment for listening and speaking in classes. What’s more important, teachers should integrate the class training with extensive out-of-class training together, encouraging students to participate in “English Salon” and “English corner” organized by schools ,department and classes, plays for sorts of business scenes, English speech matches, English intellectual contests, English debate contests for college students, and English poetry recitations held periodically. In these activities, students can obtain more opportunities to practice English. By arranging this kind of activities, teachers should consider college students’ intellectual factors and growth needs, inspiring students’ motives and enthusiasm for learning to a big extent, and helping them to realize an organic combination of specialty knowledge and languages. In addition, teachers can ask students to listen to college English broadcasting and make best use of language lab and network resources, improving speaking by listening, thinking and expressing thoughts in English, and extending the scope of intercommunication in English.

In a word, the teaching of listening for business English should follow three principles: That is, intercommunication, step by step, and practice. In listening trainings, teachers should instruct and influence on students’ thinking to learn all listening skills imperceptibly, and motivate their enthusiasm and subjective initiative. It is not easy to arrange listening classes effectively. Teachers and students should cooperate with each other in order to realize a positive effect. Based on continuous exploration and summarization, listening classes will become more effective gradually, which will improve students’ English thinking and expression competence significantly.

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