# INTERPERSONAL LISTENING APPLIED TO THE PROCESS OF TEACHING/ LEARNING ENGLISH FOR SPECIFIC PURPOSES – A CASE STUDY

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**Abstract:** *This paper offers a general view of the literature which has had an impact on the evolution of listening and interpersonal skills in teaching English for specific purposes. As for the scientific context covered, the first part of the article provides some information about listening and interpersonal skills (definition, techniques) and we have also provided "some examples to demonstrate their interdependence." (see Braham, J & Elston, C 2010). It is extremely important to acknowledge the fact that listening and interpersonal skills are essential to the process of learning itself (e.g. Burkill et al, 2000). Therefore, interpersonal and listening skills will play a vital role in one's education because most of the learning situations that our students are exposed to heavily rely on these types of skills.*

**Keywords:** ESP, listening, interpersonal skills

## 1. Introduction

### Definition of listening and interpersonal skills

Interpersonal skills are broadly defined as "those skills which one needs in order to communicate effectively with another person or a group of people" (Rungapadiachy, 1999, p.193). Although there is some variation in the literature over the skills that can be included under this heading (Chant, Jenkinson, Randle and Russell, 2002), most authors tend to agree on a number of core areas in which competency is essential for effective interpersonal interactions. Interpersonal skills include the following:

- Verbal or Oral Communication – or what we say and how we say it. Clarity of speech, remaining calm and focused, being polite and following some basic rules of etiquette will help the process of verbal communication. (see https://www.skillsyouneed.com/ips/nonverbal-communication.html)
- Non-Verbal Communication – or what we communicate without words, by means of facial expressions and body movements, eye contact,gaze, gestures, posture, paralinguistic cues, such as the ton of your voic or the speed of your speech, or the so called body language. (see http://www.skillsyouneed.com/ips/nonverbal-communication.html)
- Listening Skills and Questioning – or the way we interpret both the verbal and non-verbal messages sent by others. As part of our everyday life, listening plays an important role and its purpose will entirely depend on the situation and the type of communication. (see http://www.skillsyouneed.com/ips/listening-skills.html)
- Negotiation – which involves working with others to find a mutually agreeable outcome, while avoiding argument and dispute. For instance, a win-win situation is perceivd as the best result, even if it is not always possible, but it is still the utmost desired goal. Reaching a beneficial goal or an accepted solution could lead either to an agreement between parties or to compromises regarded as positive alternatives to any arguments or disputes. (see http://www.skillsyouneed.com/ips/negotiation.html)
- Problem Solving – which means working with others to identify, define and solve problems. Solving a problem effectively may require other key skills which involve: creativity or creative thinking which is "*a way of looking at problems or situations from a fresh perspective that suggests unorthodox solutions (which may look unsettling at first). Creative*



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*thinking can be stimulated both by an unstructured process such as brainstorming, and by a structured process such as lateral thinking." (*Source: www.businessdictionary.com) (see http://www.skillsyouneed.com/ips/problem-solving.html)

- Decision Making – or exploring and analysing options to make sound decisions. Decisions can be made either through an intuitive, based on your past exprience and your personal values or a reasoned process, by using the data and information you have at hand, or a combination of those two, for more complex, confusing decisions**.** (see http://www.skillsyouneed.com/ips/decision-making.html)
- Assertiveness – or freely communicating our values, ideas, beliefs, opinions, needs and wants which can also accomplish various communicative purposes, namely the expressing points of views clearly and openly and avoiding negative conflicts. (see http://www.skillsyouneed.com/ps/assertiveness.html)

**2. Theoretical framework for the study. The interdependence of listening and interpersonal skills**

The mutuality of listening and the various interpersonal skills is clearly demonstrated by examining in more detail some of the learning situations that our students are likely to find themselves in during their English for Specific Purpose lectures.

Considering Braham, J. & Carol Elston, C. 2010 study, I have designed some exercises to boost the development of communication skills in Building Materials lectures and I have noticed that by simply giving my students a basic, plain oral presentation actually requires a series of various communication skills (expressive and receptive) many of them belonging to the interpersonal domain.

Besides presenting my information orally, my students get, on the one hand, actively involved in listening and discussions, and on the other in observing the reactions and behaviour of their audience and in replying appropriately to others' reactions.

Nonverbal forms of communication regarded and perceived as decisive part of effective presenting can also have an impact on the message expressed by both teachers during lectures and students during their presentations. In both cases, what seems important according to Burkill et al, (2000) and Brown and Manogue (2001), is preserving eye contact with your students, and assuming a position suitable for the context of the conversation.

In order for the message to be entirely comprehended, our students will have to see things from the teacher' s point of view which means they will show respect for and interest in others. In other words, they need to possess a kind of empathic understanding. (see Braham, J & Elston, C 2010).

So, what have we learnt so far? What do we know so far about listening?

That listening is the skill to precisely acquire and decipher messages during the communication process and it is the essential key to effective communication. Without this skill messages will be easily misinterpretted, misapprehended which leads to a breach in communication and a lot of frustration or irritation of the sender of the message. If there is one communication skill you, as a teacher, should aim to master then listening is it.

As language teaching has evolved towards methods based on comprehension, listening to learn has gained an important role in ESL and ESP lectures, and it is perceived as a key constituent of many language programmes (see Van Duzer, C. 1997). Therefore, substantial attention has been conferred on developing the techniques and the methods to stimulate the expansion of skills in this area (Wilson & Wooside, 2003).



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Moreover, the prominence given to teaching methods focussing on students has led to the evolution and increase of interpersonal and listening skills which have gained an even more dominant position at the university level.

Efficient methods of teaching listening skills could range from interactive exercises to multimedia resources. Whether or not your group of students is rather large or small, you can practice any of the subsequent examples to expand your own ways of teaching students how to listen effectively.

One efficient, harmless and generous method to cultivate stronger listening skills is by means of interpersonal activities, such as storytelling and interviews. For instance, you need to divide your students into small groups of two or three, and to assign them a certain listening activity to fulfill. For example, you may ask one student to interview another for a job within a civil or mechanical engineering company or for an article they read in a magazine. If you choose a storytelling activity, based on the answers to the question "Why did you choose the civil or mechanical engineering career?", you can offer them the chance to ask queries and further on to use and rehearse active listening skills.

Another helpful method for teaching your students listening skills would be to assign them larger group activities. For the first part of the activity, you need to split your students into larger groups (five or even six) and to motivate them to make clarifying inquiries during the activity, also encouraging them to take notes if necessary.

For instance, you can ask your students to list as many safety items as possible a civil or mechanical engineer should be wearing to avoid catastrophes, injuries or casaulties.

For the second part of the activity, students can sit in a large circle, and they can exchange his/ her list to the group members. This second part of the group activity can also trigger supplementary listening exercises. For example, you may invite students to list and name a number of restrictions placed on building sites or shipyards identified during the sharing session.

You can also teach listening skills by using audio or video segments of radio or TV programs, online instructional lectures, documentary films and other audio or video messages. First, you need to guide your students to get ready for listening/ watching by taking into account anything that they are eager to find out from the content of the audio-video fragment. After they have listed and shared their views, you can actually run the audio/ video fragment, allowing them to take notes, either during or at the end of the activity, if helpful.

For instance, in case you are using a video fragment, first you can watch the segment with the sound off and talk about it together with your students. You can also embolden your students to determine and predict the content of the video fragment. Watch the fragment again, this time with the sound on, allowing your students to take notes. At the end of the video fragment, you can ask them to write a short summary/ the gist of the fragment, or as a follow-up or a group activity you can compare their notes with their initial expectations.

No matter the method you might be using, you need to keep in mind a few instructional pieces of advice that will help you and your students cope with teaching and learning listening skills:

1. Your expectations should be simple, since not even the most experienced listener would remember entirely and precisely the whole message.
2. Your instructions should be attainable, easygoing and giving students the chance to ask elucidating questions, and making mistakes.



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3. Last , but not least you need to help students overcome their anxiety, in terms of communication, by focusing on proper activities for their skill and by boosting their confidence level, emphasizing the methods used and the ways they evolved.

It is understandable why some disciplines such as English for Specific Purposes, namely English for Civil Engineering or English for Mechanical Engineering "are actively developing students' interpersonal communication and listening skills using role-play, video feedback and other interactive activities. However, one limitation of these initiatives is that many of the learning resources supporting the interactions are specialist in using, for example, case studies which relate to specific client groups." (see Braham, J & Elston, C 2010)

Considering the significance of listening when learning or teaching a language, it is vitally critical for language teachers to assist their students in becoming efficient listeners. In the communicative approach, this involves molding listening strategies and simulating listening practice in authentic contexts which means that learners will be exposed to a real use of the language outside the classroom.

Finally, here is an example of a listening activity I have drawn for my Civil and Mechanical Engineering students and the procedures or strategies your students need to follow to develop both the ability and the confidence to handle communication situations they may be exposed to.

**3. Case study or how to apply and teach interpersonal listening skills**

**Ways of predicting earthquakes and other catastrophes**

Before listening you need to plan for the listening task:

And how do you do that? You have to:

- Establish a goal or set from the very beginning what to listen for
- Determine whether your students need more linguistic or background knowledge
- Decide if to approach the text from the top down (attend to the overall meaning) or from the bottom up (focus on the words and phrases)
- As a warming up or pre-listening activity, for instance, you might ask your students to look at some pictures and to state what might have caused the catastrophes, you might review vocabulary or certain grammatical structures, or you might read something relevant to help them with the listening, you might ask your students to predict the content of the listening segment.

**A. Do this quiz**

**For the following questions choose the most appropriate answer in your opinion:**

*1. What is important for a good earthquake prediction?*
*A. Things that may be observed a while before it actually occurs.*
*B. The number of earthquakes that occurred previously.*
*C. Research on ocean flora.*
*2. Quake locations can be found …*
*A. observing old cracks in the surface.*
*B. reading history documents.*
*C. watching the movement of different stars.*
*3. The time frame for an earthquake can be measured …*
*A. if animals seem to be abnormally anxious.*
*B. if there is a full moon.*
*C. with a mathematic formula.*



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During and after listening/ viewing you have to monitor comprehension. And how do you do that?

- By verifying predictions and checking for inaccurate guesses. These include top-down strategies such as listening for the main idea, predicting, drawing inferences and summarizing.

**B. Writing activity**

**1. Comment upon the importance earthquake prediction has on saving human lives. Give your arguments in about 100 words.** (see Ionitiu, I. 2014)

For instance, you can design a multiple-choice exercise or a completing cloze (fill-in) exercise and ask your students to choose the correct answer according to the segment they listened/viewed. But before the listening activity actually begins, you need to have your students review the questions they will answer orally or in writing after listening. Listening for the answers will help students recognize the crucial parts of the message.

- By deciding what is and is not important to understand. You can make use of bottom-up startegies in which students are encouraged to rely on the language in the message, on the combination of sounds, words, and grammar that creates meaning. For instance, you could extract some technical words from the fragment and ask your students to find the proper synonyms or antonyms.

**C. Vocabulary practice**

**C.1. Give the proper definition to the words listed in the box below:**

| | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| *earthquake* | *tsunami* | *tornado* | *flood* | *eruption* | *volcano* |
| *casualty* | *storm* | *wildfire* | *blizzard* | *avalanche* | |

**C.2. Complete the audioscript: Four sentences have been removed from the text. Select the appropriate sentence for each gap in the text. There is one extra sentence which you do not need to use.**

*"A. Such precursors are valuable since their appearance can permit prediction of a quake to within hours of the primary rupture.*

*B. Since the insurance was available beachfront construction has boomed and land erosion has increased the dangerous rate.*

*C. As continents receive the horizontal thrust of seafloor plates, crustal strains develop.*

*D. Stations must extend over a wide area, yet be placed at measured intervals to obtain precise readings.*

*E. However, when the time interval between quakes is great, locating active faults is only a beginning."* (see https://gmatclub.com/forum/modern-methods-of-predicting-earthquakes-recognize-that-quakes-far-fr-284164.html)

*AUDIOSCRIPT*

*"Modern methods of predicting earthquakes recognize that quakes, far from being geologic anomalies, are part of the periodic accumulation and discharge of seismic energy. (1)… Accumulation of strain can take anywhere from 100 years in certain coastal locations to over a millennium in some inland regions before a critical point is reached and a rupture occurs. In both areas, the buildup of strain is accompanied by long – and short - range precursory phenomena that are crucial to earthquake prediction.*

*Quakes along active faults are usually frequent; scientists designate such areas as quakeprone. (2) … Geological scars of past subsidence, cracks, and offsets are useful in*



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*determining potential quake locations, as are seismicity gaps, areas where no small quakes have been recorded.*

*Seismologists may also consult the historical record. Primary sources range from eyewitness accounts of ancient quakes to recent official documentation of quake- related damage.*

*Once the perimeters of a quake-prone zone are established, a network of base stations can monitor precursory phenomena. (3) ... Changes in geochemical readings (electric currents, radon concentrations) and in groundwater levels, as well as the occurrence of microearthquakes, are valuable precursors. Crustal movements - tilting, rising, and expansion or contraction of the ground surface – can be read through triangulation and leveling surveys taken over the course of decades. Theoretically, if an area's critical strain is known – the magnitude of strain necessary to produce a rupture- subtracting the measured accumulated crustal strain from the critical strain will indicate a time frame for an impending quake.*

*Violent tilting and foreshocks are among phenomena classified as short-term precursors. Many are still being identified as new quakes occur. (4) ... Here, too, historical documents are useful. Seismologists recognized the liquefaction of sand as a precursor after a 1964 quake in Japan."* (https://gmatclub.com/forum/modern-methods-of-predicting-earthquakes-264323.html, see Ionitiu, I., 2014)

After listening/ viewing, you can also evaluate comprehension and the strategies used either by evaluating comprehension in a certain assignment or field or by assessing total evolution in listening and in particular types of listening tasks. You may connect a post-listening activity to a pre-listening activity, such as forecasting, foretelling; you can extend the topic or analyze the language of the audio-video text/ audioscript; or you can shift and use the audioscript for reading, speaking, or writing activities.

For example, as a post-listening activity, after listening to / viewing a set of instructions, one might repeat them to someone else; after watching and listening to a play or video on earthquakes, one might discuss the story line with his friends.

**D. Writing activity/ Conversation:**

**Is there anything you, as engineers to be, could do to prevent these from happening? (100 words)** (see Ionitiu, I. 2014)

## Conclusions

As a conclusion, this paper analyzed different perspectives/ methods of listening and interpersonal skills adapted to the process of teaching English for Specific Purposes and the way these interpersonal skills had been merged within English for Specific Purposes.

We should be aware of the fact that there are many things that can get in the way of listening and, many barriers and bad habits can alter the effective listening. We all wish for our students to be or to become good listeners, to demonstrate their 'active listening' by responding appropriately to what we are saying. - (but bear in mind that appropriate responses to listening can include both verbal and non-verbal communication to positively reinforce the fact that our students are actually listening).

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