

ADAPTING LISTENING TACTICS TO ENHANCE STUDENTS' PERFORMANCE IN LISTENING SECTION OF NATIONAL EXAM

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ABSTRACT

This article focuses on Agustin, an English teacher who is currently teaching listening and speaking skills in Indonesia. Knowing that the new curriculum limits her chance to teach listening, Agustin needs a new idea to prepare her students for the listening section in UN. I believe that adapting listening tactics (Goh, 2002) in the teaching and learning of listening activities is one way to overcome Agustin's problem. To explain my arguments briefly, I would firstly describe Agustin's problem. Then, I will address the problem by reviewing some literature related to listening tactics in which I believe could help her. Lastly, I will put the literature into Agustin's context so that she could determine which tactics are suitable to teach.

Keywords: *listening tactics, national exam, Senior High School*

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background

Although the Article No.58 of Decree no.20/2003 states that the government puts the authority of evaluating students' learning development to teachers, the articles no.35 and no.57 of the same document mentions that a nationwide evaluation to assess the national standard of education is still needed (Furqon, 2004 in Umam, 2014). The national examination or UN will then be used to determine whether a student pass his school term or not (Ministry of Education and Culture, 2003).

As English is taught nationally in Indonesia, it becomes one of the subjects being examined in the UN (Ministry of Education and Culture, 2005). Thus, it is the English teachers' duty to help their

students perform well in the UN. This obligation does not give much burden to the teachers if the skills being tested are the skills that were taught in the classroom. However, since the major shift to 2013 Curriculum (K-13), the teachers are in a big trouble because K-13 puts much emphasis on only certain skills which are not being examined in the UN. In my observation of five UN English manuscripts (2005, 2007, 2010, 2012, and 2015), the skills being tested are limited to listening and reading. On the other hand, the K-13 puts a strong emphasis only on the development of students' productive skills in English such as speaking and writing (Ministry of Education and Culture, 2013).

The implementation of the curriculum is also reflected in the textbooks that are provided by the government. The books for Senior High School (Year 10-12) such as English Language X, English Language XI,

and English Language XII (Ministry of Education, 2013) mostly focus on speaking and writing. Reading materials are limited while listening materials are even scarce and almost non-existent. Furthermore, the books do not provide any listening records. Thus, this makes the time allocated to teach of reading and listening in Indonesia will be limited.

In this essay, I would like to focus on Agustin, an English teacher who is currently teaching listening and speaking skills in Indonesia. Knowing that the new curriculum limits her chance to teach listening, Agustin needs a new idea to prepare her students for the listening section in UN. I believe that adapting listening tactics (Goh, 2002) in the teaching and learning of listening activities is one way to overcome Agustin's problem. To explain my arguments briefly, I would firstly describe Agustin's problem. Then, I will address the problem by reviewing some literature related to listening tactics in which I believe could help her. Lastly, I will put the literature into Agustin's context so that she could determine which tactics are suitable to teach.

1.2. Research Problem

Agustin is a novice part-time teacher who has been teaching English in a State Senior High School in Malang, East Java, Indonesia for about three years. Her career in English language teaching started in 2013 when the new curriculum, K-13, is freshly implemented in her school. As part of a teaching team, she has to split the duty of teaching English to two Year 11 classes and one Year 12 class with a colleague. Agustin's colleague who is more experienced than her teaches the writing and reading skills for 45 minutes a week while Agustin focuses on teaching the listening and speaking skills for the same allocated time.

As stated in the K-13, the basis of English language teaching and learning activity in Indonesia is Communicative Approach. Thus, the idea of students being competent to produce English in real life context is emphasized (Ministry of Education and Culture, 2013). This aim is almost unquestionably hard to accomplish since English is neither the official language nor the lingua franca in Indonesia. There is also a tendency that students will only employ their reading and writing skills in certain tasks, i.e. when they pursue a higher education or work. Therefore, English teachers in Indonesia focus more on the development of students' written language rather than oral language (Putra, 2014). Agustin's duty to teach listening and speaking then is viewed to be less important than her colleague's duty to teach reading and writing.

Additionally, as I have observed, the new curriculum puts the importance of teaching productive skills on top of the teaching of receptive skills. Teachers have to teach their students sets of predetermined competencies that have been decided in the curriculum. The competencies of employing writing and speaking skills in arranging and editing texts, in K-13, are encouraged more frequently compared to the competency of using reading and listening skills to identify and understand texts (Ministry of Education and Culture, 2013). In the English textbooks supplied by the government, i.e., English Language XII, the focus on productive skills is also highlighted. Based on my observation on the book, it is found out that the students will learn to speak and write first before they are exposed to some reading materials and a limited amount of listening materials (Appendix 1). Hence, K-13 conditions Agustin to prefer teaching speaking skill more often to the listening skill.

On the other hand, Agustin must remember that her students desire her to teach listening skill separately and intensively in order to pass the UN. This expectation confirms Sulistyó's (2009) finding in which students in Indonesia expect their learning activities to meet the standard of UN, which obviously focus on listening and reading skill. Thus, besides delivering the materials stated in K-13, Agustin has to bring in UN-related materials in the classroom.

However, it is hard to find the UN-related materials from the textbooks provided by the governments since the books are curriculum-based. On the other hand, the listening materials written in the book are supplied without any records. Hence, Agustin has to recite by herself the text in front of the class (See Appendix 1). It is disparate to what the students will be exposed to in the listening section in UN in which the texts and questions are pre-recorded and played using audio player. Agustin is also at a disadvantage knowing that the school does not allow her to ask her students to buy additional textbooks due to some criticism made by the parents. According to Minister of Education and Culture's Decree No.34/2014 verse 5, it is actually the school duty to provide students with additional textbooks using the grant given by the government. However, since the curriculum is new, Agustin confesses that there are lacks of quality textbooks available which suit what her students need. Thus, the school is reluctant to spend the money to buy new books. Consequently, Agustin relies only on the government's made textbook, English Language XII, to deliver the listening lesson.

Agustin has to face another problem regarding the school's infrastructure. She finds that her school does not have appropriate listening laboratory for her to deliver the listening lesson. The school,

however, provides her with laptops and portable speakers to assist her in delivering the listening lesson in the class. However, since the listening materials are not supplied in the textbooks, Agustin creates the materials from the texts she found on the internet.

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

2.1 Relevant Theories

a. Listening Strategies

Listening strategies defines as the set of a conscious plan to help learners in listening teaching and learning (Lynch, 2009). Although it is hard to prove whether a listener is aware when using certain listening strategies while listening, Martin (1982) and Young (1997) in Berne (2004) argue that listeners do apply some common sequences when they are listening. It is confirmed that 'listeners are actively orienting themselves to the listening task' (ibid).

Lynch (2009) based on (Goh, 2002; Vandergrift, 2003; and Kondo and Yang, 2004) categorises listening strategies employed by the learners into three types which are metacognitive, cognitive, and socioaffective. The metacognitive type relates to the learners' self-awareness of the listening task, where learners possess key listening strategies at hand and know how to implement it whenever possible (Vandergrift and Goh, 2012). The cognitive type, alternatively, relies on learners' self-competence to make sense of what they heard (Lynch, 2009). Both metacognitive and cognitive types are distinct from the socioaffective type which relies on direct feedback from both sides of interactants to reach desired meaning (ibid).

The notion of listening strategies in the teaching of listening has been discussed among researchers in the last three

decades (Berne, 2004) and it continues in last few years (Chang, 2008; Lynch, 2009; Vandergrift and Goh, 2012; Dong, 2016; and Vahdany et al., 2016). Although its effectiveness has not yet been firmly supported (Lynch, 2009), some researches show that good listeners (Rost & Ross, 1991; Chao, 1993; Moreira, 1996; and Vandergrift, 1997b in Berne, 2004) and even test-takers could gain benefit (Chang, 2008; Vahdany et al., 2016) by employing listening strategy during listening.

b. Difference between Proficient and Less-Proficient Listeners

Berne (2004) summarises that less proficient listeners possess distinct characteristics compared to the higher-level listeners. Firstly, less-proficient listeners tend to process the input into small units such as words while proficient listeners are able to process larger chunks. Secondly, lower-level listeners are less likely to implement listening strategies consciously compared to higher-level listeners. These differences between listeners infer that not all of the listening strategies in Table 1 can be implemented by every level of the listener. Vandergrift (1993, 1997b; in Berne, 2004) notices that proficient listeners make use of their world knowledge and monitor their comprehension more frequently compared to less-proficient listeners. On the contrary, less-proficient listeners tend to choose less effective strategies such as translating (ibid).

Besides, Macaro et al. (2007, in Vandergrift and Goh, 2012) notes that proficient listeners will more likely to employ various kinds of strategies since they have a better understanding of the strategies compared to less-proficient listeners. Macaro's argument supports Goh's (2002, in Berne 2004) finding which explains that from 11 strategies identified to be used by all level of listeners; more proficient listeners employ 11 strategies altogether, whereas, less-proficient listeners only employ 7 of them.

c. Listening Tactics

Goh (2002) notices that listeners do not apply a whole listening strategy, i.e. metacognitive or cognitive strategy when they are listening. Instead, listeners tend to operate and combine certain techniques from general listening strategies (Table 1) which suit their listening tasks' demand (ibid). For example, when listening to certain unfamiliar words, listeners will be apt to operate comprehension monitoring, directed attention, selective attention, and inferencing tactics rather than employing every metacognitive and cognitive strategy available. From two types of research, Goh (2002) identifies 44 listening tactics which are consciously used by the listeners. Half of the listening tactics identified belongs to six metacognitive strategies while the other 22 tactics lie under eight cognitive strategies.

Table 1. Listening Tactics (Goh, 2002)

Cognitive	Metacognitive
<p>Inferencing (collecting information and guessing the meaning)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use contextual clues • Use familiar content words • Draw on knowledge of the world • Apply knowledge of the target language 	<p>Pre-listening preparation (preparing mentally and emotionally for listening)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Preview contents • Rehearse sounds of potential content words • Encourage oneself to relax

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- Use visual cues

Elaboration (explaining an information to make it meaningful and complete)

- Draw on world knowledge
- Draw on knowledge of the target language

Prediction (anticipating contents before and during listening)

- Anticipate general contents (global)
- Anticipate details while listening (local)

Contextualisation (putting new information into wider context)

- Place input in a social or linguistic context
- Find related information on hearing a key word
- Relate one part of text to another

Translation (changing words, phrases or sentences onto L1 before interpretation)

- Find L1 equivalents for selected key words
- Translate a sequence of utterance

Fixation (Focussing on understanding a small part of a text)

- Stopping to think about spelling
- Stopping to think about meaning
- Memorise/repeat the sound of unfamiliar words
- Memorise words or phrases for later processing

Visualisation (Forming mental picture)

- Imagine scenes, events, objects, etc. being described
- Mentally display the shape (spelling) of key words

Reconstruction (Using clues to recreate meaning)

- Reconstruct meaning from words heard

Selective attention (noticing specific aspects)

- Listen for words in groups
- Listen for gist
- Listen for familiar content words
- Notice how information is structured
- Pay attention to repetitions
- Notice intonation features
- Listen to specific parts of the input
- Pay attention to visuals and body language

Directed attention (monitoring attention and avoiding distractions)

- Concentrate hard
- Continue to listen in spite of difficulties

Comprehension monitoring (checking understanding while listening)

- Confirm that understanding has taken place
- Identify words/ideas not understood
- Check current interpretation with context of the message
- Check current interpretation with prior knowledge

Real-time assessment of input (Determining the value of specific parts of the input)

- Assess the importance of problematic parts that are heard
- Determine the potential value of subsequent parts of input

Comprehension Evaluation (Checking interpretation for accuracy, completeness, and acceptability after listening)

- Check interpretation against some external sources
 - Check interpretation using prior knowledge
 - Match interpretation with the context of the message
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- Reconstruct meaning from notes taken
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Goh (2002) observes that listeners will gain benefits by employing listening tactics. Primarily, listeners can take advantage from listening tactics by orienting themselves to the basic of the tasks and less likely to be burdened to find the exact meaning of certain words. Additionally, listeners can understand the context of the listening text they heard more quickly (ibid). Indeed, we must be aware that although Goh (2002) claims that the benefits of listening tactics are evident, there is a lack of support from further study in this area. Nevertheless, despite the lack of supports from other researchers, Berne (2004) admits that Goh has taken the study of Listening Strategies into new areas and put a clearer definition on how listeners gain comprehension.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Listening strategies might be helpful to empower Agustin's students who are preparing themselves for the UN. By actively engaging themselves to listening strategies during the listening section of English in UN, students can focus on pointing their aim to understand the context rather than only focus on miniscule details of the task (Goh, 2004). However, Agustin needs to consider that the strategies employed mainly need long practices to master and only high-level listeners can employ various strategies (Vahdany, 2009). Time will most likely become a big constrain for Agustin as teaching all of listening strategies available in Table 1 to her students might consume most of her constricted listening teaching period. Moreover, as I have mentioned earlier, students mostly speak another language than English outside the class. Consequently, it is hard to assume that Agustin's students are advanced listeners. Based on my assumption on Agustin's

students, it is not wise to treat them as proficient listeners by teaching all of the listening strategies. Nevertheless, Agustin could be selective in choosing the best-suited strategies to teach.

Instead of teaching all of the listening strategies, Agustin could lay emphasis on bits of listening strategies or as Goh (2004) call it, listening tactics. Additionally, Agustin might also look at the requirements of the listening task in UN. By reflecting on the test, Agustin could decide what tactics suits the demand of UN and worth teaching and what tactics are better left out. For example, since the nature of the listening tests is non-interactive, Agustin can omit socio-affective strategies. Another characteristic of the UN listening texts are that it uses intermediate English vocabularies and mainly limit the topics on Indonesia knowledge. The limitation of vocabulary level and context could ease the students who have limited arrays of vocabulary and world knowledge. Thus, Agustin does not need to put too much focus on building students' lexis and schemata.

Based on my observation on five UN's English manuscripts, the listening tasks comprise three sections. The first section consists of seven questions that require students to listen to short dialogues (Appendix 2). The dialogues are between two to three speakers who are talking about their daily activities. The next four questions in the second section of the test, which is almost similar to the first section, asks the students to hear short dialogues between two speakers who mainly talk about items description. The last section obliges students to listen to three monologues.

In the first section of the listening test in UN, the listening texts are focused on interpreting what the speaker have done.

Based on my observation, the answer to each question can be found on the utterance of the second speaker, mostly. If the students fail to comprehend this last part, they will most likely fail to correctly answer the questions. For example, in Appendix 2.1, the information about the duration of the trip is explained by the woman (second speaker) in her last turn. Thus, students can gain benefit by practising their selective attention strategies, predominantly by focusing specific parts of the text (last turn of the second speaker) and inference the content that part using familiar word (weeks and days). Agustin needs to make the student aware that there is some part of the texts that are rich with information and might help them to answer the questions.

In the second section of the test, the listening texts are short dialogues between two to three people with the emphasis on describing things. Mostly, the answer to each question is mentioned in small chunks throughout the whole text. As we can see in the text, the speakers mentioned small characteristics related to the thing being described (car wheel) bit by bit in different parts of the dialogues. It is important for Agustin's students to be able to add up every clue that is mentioned and draw a conclusion from it. Thus, cognitive listening tactics such as drawing on world knowledge and imagining objects being described are essential to be taught.

Finally, to answer the last section of the listening test (Appendix 2.3), students have to find the answer that is explicitly stated in a narrative. All of the questions being asked in this section do not require students to interpret since the answers are clearly stated in the text. However, students need to train their metacognitive tactics such as concentration since the

narrative is quite long, students also should notice any repetition and reformulation from the narrative. It is suggested that students could comprehend the gist of the texts rather than only focusing on some chunks of information from it.

The tactics mentioned above are not the only tactics that Agustin can teach to her students. She could add any additional tactics to teach if she finds it useful for UN. However, one thing that Agustin should remember is that the tactics described above are test-taking strategies meant to help her students overcoming the UN. Mastering a small number of listening tactics might not benefit to the learners' listening skills in general.

CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTION

In this paper, I have addressed Agustin's problem in preparing her students for listening test in UN. I have reviewed the relevant literature about listening strategies and listening tactics in which I believe could overcome the problem. Finally, I applied the literature to Agustin's context. By teaching some sets of listening tactics, I believe that Agustin could help her students to face the UN and manage her limited listening teaching time.

I suspect that Agustin is not the only English teacher in Indonesia who faces a similar problem. Applying listening tactics for other teachers' context, however, seems not answering what the real problem is. A review of the curriculum needs to be highlighted, mostly on its tendency to put emphasis only on certain skills. Additionally, an evaluation of the English skills being tested in the UN also needs to be considered as these skills are not highly encouraged to be taught in the curriculum.

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