Chapter 38
Interactive Multimedia and Listening

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ABSTRACT

The topic of this chapter is concerned with the use of interactive multimedia in teaching listening skills to English language learners. The chapter starts with the difference between listening and hearing, the definition of interactive multimedia, and interactive multimedia listening environments. Explanation is then given to why listening is so important. The chapter also addresses main types of listening, active listening process, and obstacles to listening. This chapter additionally shows the benefits of and rationales for listening using interactive multimedia resources in comparison with audio-only listening materials regarding visual support, authentic content, comprehensible input, vocabulary acquisition, and student motivation. The chapter concludes by suggesting some Internet sources and materials for listening practice as a part of learning English as a foreign or second language.

INTRODUCTION

With the development of information and communication technology (ICT), teaching with multimedia resources is becoming a trend in foreign language teaching environments. Recent researchers (e.g., Warshauer, Shetzer, & Meloni, 2000; Lombardi, 2007) tends to agree that interactive multimedia learning environments offer language learners a source for authentic materials, specialized materials, a place for authentic communication, a collection of tools which allow learners to share their ideas, knowledge, and student-or teacher-created materials. Especially, listening practice with multimedia materials offers learners appropriate support, guidance, training, and scaffolding. Language learners can choose the materials so that interactive multimedia materials enables them to become more autonomous, which is one of the skills learners need to develop today, as well as the materials allow them to monitor their learning and take on responsibility for their learning. Language learners can also use the Internet for self-study purposes without the need for a teacher. Moreover, interactive multimedia materials give learners the opportunity to acquire and practice essential 21st century professional skills such as critical thinking skills, problem-solving skills, cooperatively working skills, etc.

In this chapter, I shall first give the definitions of key terms such as listening, listening comprehension, and interactive multimedia listening environments. I then review some studies on the importance of developing listening skills of language learners as a part of learning English as a foreign/second language. I additionally discuss the types of listening, the stages of listening, and the factors that influence listening comprehension. I also review some research on the benefits of the use of interactive multimedia resources in listening practice. I finally suggest some Internet sources and materials (see Table 1, 2, 3, 4, 5 and 6) for listening as a part of learning English as a foreign/second language.

MAIN FOCUS OF THE CHAPTER

What Listening Is

Listening is the vital skill that provides the basis for the successful communication and successful professional career. According to Purdy and Borisoff (1997), listening is a primary skill among the basic skills that bring success in our everyday life. "There is no meaningful communication without listening," (p. 4). It is said that people learn to listen first, then speak, read, or write, (p. 4). Research has indicated that among the four communication skills: listening, speaking, reading, and writing; people spend more time listening than the other three skills, (Cotton, 1986). Regarding foreign language learning, Nunan (1989) states that that foreign language learners spend over 50 percent of their time on listening. Brown (1987) also notes that "of foremost importance is the role of listening in language acquisition," (p. 5). There have been several definitions of listening, and it appears some confusion between listening and hearing. So, what are the differences between listening and hearing? And what is listening comprehension?

Listening vs. Hearing

There has been a variety of the definitions of listening comprehension process. One of the earlier definitions given by Lado (1961) emphasises that listening comprehension is "recognition control of the signalling elements of the language in communication situation," (p. 206). Another definition of listening indicates that listening is a complex communication behavior, involving a process of receiving, attending to, and assigning meaning to verbal and/or non-verbal stimuli," (Coakley & Wolvin, 1986, p. 20).

Chung (1994) defines listening as a communication activity in which listeners receive messages and understand the messages through the three types of information including oral messages (i.e. words and sentences), paralinguistic messages (i.e. extra-speech sounds) and non-verbal messages (i.e. facial expressions, gestures, eye contacts, etc.), while Nation (2009) claims that listening occurrs in two ways: the process of transmission of information (one-way listening) and the process of social interaction (two-way listening).

Therefore, listening is an active process in which listeners make their concentration and conscious effort to understand and respond to spoken and non-verbal messages. In other words, listening requires focus on and attention to what is said, how it is told with the use of language and voice, and how the speakers use his or her body language (i.e. gestures, facial expressions, and eye-movements, eye contact, body movements, etc.), (Brownell, 2010). For example, when we listen to a good song, a weather broadcast, an education report, etc. we give our full attention, which is different from hearing traffic noise or a child's shouting on the playground.

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