

Chapter 17

Priority of Listening Materials for Autonomous Intermediate Language Learners

Vehbi Turel

The University of Bingol, Turkey

ABSTRACT

In this chapter, the author offers suggestions to help in determining the priority of listening materials both for self-access Foreign Language Learning (FLL) centres and for home/self-study from the standpoint of view of autonomous intermediate language learners. To be able to make accurate, objective, reliable, and valid suggestions, firstly the author describes and then re-categorises the types of listening materials from the point of availability. Later, he accounts for some main features that he thinks pedagogically and psychologically need to be considered in giving priority to listening materials in terms of FLL and autonomous intermediate language learners. Finally, the result of the comparison is analysed, and some suggestions and hypotheses regarding their priority are made.

INTRODUCTION

As a result of rapid developments in the field of educational technology, nowadays there is a wide range of listening materials. In this chapter, we are going to put forward some suggestions to help in determining the priority of listening materials both for self-access foreign language learning (FLL) centres and for home/self-study from the standpoint of view of autonomous intermediate language learners. To be able to make accurate,

objective, reliable and valid suggestions, firstly we will describe and then re-categorise the types of listening materials from the point of availability. Later, we shall account for some main features that we think pedagogically and psychologically need to be considered in giving priority to listening materials in terms of FLL and autonomous intermediate language learners. Finally, the result of the comparison will be analysed, and some suggestions and hypotheses regarding their priority will be made.

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BACKGROUND

From a historical point of view, the human voice was the first instrument of education, and it is still the most commonly used one today. Before technology made recording the human voice possible, it was used as teaching/learning instrument solely during face-to-face interaction. Over time with ever increasing educational technology, it became possible to use such an invaluable tool in different ways. From the point of listening skills, firstly it was used through radio programmes, later through tape cassettes, and then came television and later videotapes. Most recently hypermedia (i.e. interactive multimedia) environments (HMEs) have emerged. Inevitably, with the rapid developments in the field of educational technology, different ways of presenting listening materials such as audio only (i.e. tape cassettes, radio programmes), audio-visuals (i.e. video cassettes, television programmes) and multiple media combinations and their instantaneous delivery on the same digital environment (i.e. interactive multimedia applications/HMEs) have become available.

All of these listening materials, which come from a very wide variety of sources, are not however, produced for foreign language learning (FLL) objectives. While some are created for FLL, most are produced for broadcasting and entertainment, which can also be used for FLL. Therefore, according to their made purposes, (available/potential) listening materials can be categorised into two groups: (1) those made for native speakers (NSs) (i.e. for broadcasting and entertainment purposes) and (2) those made for FLL purposes.

In terms of the presence or lack of visuals, another taxonomy of listening materials can be made: (1) audio-visual listening materials such as television programmes, videocassettes and HMEs, and (2) audio listening materials such as tape cassettes, radio programmes and audio-Internet materials. In terms of authenticity, listening materials can be categorised into two groups: (1) authentic listening materials (i.e. those created for

native speakers/ broadcasting and entertainment purposes) and (2) inauthentic listening materials (those specially simplified or scripted and created for language learners).

As seen, the categorisation of listening materials can be different from different standpoint of views (i.e. made-purposes, presence/lack of visuals, authenticity/inauthenticity). What we are interested in here is which ones can help autonomous intermediate language learners most both at FLL centres and home during self-study. In other words, which type of materials should, and need to, be given priority in terms of autonomous intermediate language learners. In order for us to be able to compare and evaluate the listening materials precisely, and to come to more objective and accurate conclusions, first of all, we need to re-categorise and sub-categorise listening materials in a way which covers all of the above perspectives. Therefore, listening materials are firstly going to be grouped and sub-grouped in a way that covers all of the above basic determinant standpoints, and later will be compared in terms of the aspects which are believed that pedagogically and psychologically need to be considered in giving priority to them in terms of autonomous intermediate language learners (Table 1).

Let us now give some more detailed information about the above-mentioned listening materials although they have some common features, and then compare them in terms of different aspects (Tables 2, 3, 4, 5 and 6).

THE COMPARISON OF LISTENING MATERIALS

Before comparing them, we had better firstly indicate in terms of which aspects we are going to compare them, and why these aspects need to be considered in such a comparison. The so-far mentioned listening materials are going to be compared in terms of six main aspects. These are: (1) visuals, (2) authenticity, (3) feedback and

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