



## Acquiring Listening through Intuitive Heuristics

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### Abstract

Language acquisition happens with the exposure of the learner to the four skills namely Listening, Speaking, Reading and Writing. Of these, listening and reading are considered passive skills whereas speaking and writing are active skills. The key elements of listening are listener function and listener response. Function is a psycholinguistic process and hence it can be measured by the listener response. Listeners are allowed to pay attention to some aspects of the codes (words) which are carefully designed as tasks. This intuitive heuristic activity involves the learners in recognizing the familiar words and differentiating their parts of speech. Since it is heuristic, the learners acquire the skill at a fast phase. The article states the end result of the applied heuristics performed in an English language classroom. The result has proven that the task which is focused to the single activity provokes the learners to respond. In short, the learners at the initial stage can be trained to inculcate listening skill using this closed response to the given task.

**Keywords:** Acquisition, Psycholinguistic. Recognizing, differentiating, closed response

### Introduction

English is being taught and learnt in Indian context as a Second language (SL) and First Language (FL). A learner acquires the language by constantly been exposed to the language in general and academic words in particular. Special care has been taken to design and formulate text books and materials relevant to the area of research. The Tamilnadu State Council of Educational Research and Training (TNSCERT) the National Council of Educational Research and Training (NCERT) and leading textbooks enumerate the importance of four skills – Listening, Speaking, Reading and Writing - required for learning English. Learners imbibe the language by constantly practising the activities or tasks suggested in the text. A competent learner acquires the language through constant practice.

Designing task is considered a very important part in imparting listening. A carefully designed task is expected to give results by the listeners. However, formal inputs pertaining to the sub skills of listening have to be introduced by designing tasks dealing with it. Task is a useful way of cognitively involving the learners. It makes the learners do something and hence emphasizes learning by doing. A task is only one manifestation or realisation of the ability being tested. There could be task(s) which teacher(s) can think of, all focusing on the ability. The question/task should match the operation/purpose envisaged in the first step, as far as possible. This will ensure the validity of the test. The task will also need to be put into a suitable format with the instructions for doing it.



Heuristics refers to the process of ‘self-discovery’ on the part of the learners. The path to acquire listening has elaborately been discussed through various techniques. Experts working in the path to design listening have stated that in the absence of any empirical support, language skills are taught in isolation more for logistical than for logical reasons. Fragmenting the skills bring a tangible, interactive nature of language and language use. Heuristics is a macrostrategy highlighting the importance of providing rich textual data for inference and internalization underlying rules governing grammatical usage and communicative use. Internalization of listening demands the careful selection on the type of teaching activity. It is believed that the type of teaching activity has the potential to create and utilize learning opportunities depending largely on the teaching style of teachers and learning strategies of learners. In face-to-face interaction, listening entails complex interpretive processes. An intricate web of situational variables interacts to determine what meanings are derived in conversation. Processing requirements such as reciprocity of interlocutors’ perspectives, the etcetera principle (filling in the gaps of what one hears with knowledge of the language and the word), and combined retrospective and prospective meanings all come into play. Until recently, listening comprehension activity in FL and SL classrooms is limited to testing listening comprehension. The success of this skill lies in the automatic decoding of the aural version of the structures and vocabulary they learn in their textbooks. Knowledge of target language syntax and lexis is deemed sufficient to enable this retrieval.

## Literature Survey

Listening is now treated as much more complex activity and one that is the cornerstone of language acquisition (Krashen, 1994). Recognition of listening as complex activity and of its critical role in the language acquisition process has greatly influenced contemporary language teaching practice. The view that listening as an active and interactive process has, for example, cast the learner in a role other than the passive receiver of aural input (Rost, 1993). Classroom emphasis is now on aural intake through active negotiation of meaning with others. This mutual negotiation of meaning between speakers activates the cognitive and socio cognitive processes necessary for language acquisition to occur (Breen & Candlin, 1980; Pica & Doughty, 1985). In short, listening has been recast as an activity central to the L2 acquisition process (Dunkel, 1991; Krashen, 1985; Rost, 1993), and a skill integral to overall communicative competence (Brown, 1994; Savignon, 1991). Anselm (1968:31) says as much: “meaningfully organized subject matter taught by competent teachers can generate considerable drive for learning as an end in itself.” Such a cognitive motivation can be achieved by “meaningfully organized subject matter”.

Finding a text plays a crucial role in meaningful acquisition of listening. The reasons satisfying the concern for the selection of the text are

1. The student deliberately decides not to attempt to understand the text,
2. The student treats the reading of the text as a routine communicative activity
3. The text does not include anything new for the student,
4. The student does not understand the text either because of the ignorance of the vocabulary and grammatical structures or because there is a gap between the knowledge that is taken for granted by the author of the text and the student’s actual knowledge.

(Mikolaj Rychlo : 2009)



### Methodology

Task, an artefact, is individualized with the computer – especially with the involvement of audio and video features. The S-Net software is utilized for exposing listeners to this activity. Questions are shared through this networking software from the teacher console to the learner console. Here, the listeners are allowed to listen to an audio preceded by the sharing of question paper with appropriate instructions.

The learners are allowed to listen to the tape having the tape script being shared in individual monitor.

The screenshot shows a 'Quizing' window with a passage titled 'The Iceman's Last Meal'. The passage contains 20 numbered blanks for a cloze test. To the right of the passage is a list of 20 numbered questions, each with an input box. The interface includes a 'Submit' button at the bottom and a timer showing '00:24:11'. The status bar at the bottom right indicates 'Unanswered:25'.

A cloze test is chosen for assessing the listeners with an aim to involve the learners to the listening task. As an initial step, the learners can be permitted to read the instruction and the question posted to their individual monitor.

While taking this listening test, learners are found involved as the audio matches with the tape script shared via networking. The involvement of the listeners is assessed by the number of answers attempted by the learners individually.

No. of questions	No. of questions attempted – max.	No. of questions attempted – min.
20	20	18



It is noted that the number of questions unattempted is deduced. Since the text and the involvement of the listeners are assessed, it is proven that it induces the listening activity.

The problem of the choice of the text for listening is crucial because the quality of a text determines the educational potential of the listening done by the students. The audio is played allowing the learners to answer the questions simultaneously. This kind of top-down processing permits the learners to actively involve themselves in the listening task. Learners whose mother tongues are different can be benefitted by this listening task.

### Conclusion

The tape script and the question are similar. Therefore, learners could easily get involved in these kinds of learning practice. A continuous practice in this activity accelerates the involvement of the learners to the listening task. The use of mp3 files serves as a tool for involving the learners to the words pronounced by the speaker. Learners learn the art of pronunciation, range of linguistic variations in English through this activity. In short, learners' auditory perception is simulated towards listening to the words, variation in tone and pronunciation to a large extent. Hence, this type of heuristic approach induces learning English in general and inculcates language proficiency in particular.

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