

sult has been positive. When I first arrived at my rural school, I noticed that during English lessons more than two-thirds of the class was permanently outside. But the situation changed dramatically when I started teaching English spiced with these songs.

Nowadays, I do not need the tolling bell to announce the beginning of the English period. As soon as the mathematics teacher, who precedes me, finishes and I step into the classroom, my students start singing our latest song. After allowing them to sing, I ask them questions about grammatical or lexical items in the song. There is always a scramble to answer my questions.

If I am delayed in the staff room, a crowd of protesting students immediately comes to inform me that time is passing. So no pupil wants to miss 90 minutes with the English teacher, alias choirmaster.

Conclusion

Textbook objectives become even more interesting when revised to suit specific classroom realities. I fervently believe in Zofia Chlopek's article (*Forum*, July 1995) which states that "...it is really not necessary to stick to an old, orderly syllabus." I also concur with Williams (1983), who feels that "the textbook will continue to play an important role, but it will not be a tyrant." So to add variety to my lessons, I consult the shelves of my memory for themes to adapt into songs that help me present language points and add fun and relaxation to my lessons.

This system of spicing the language meals I serve with songs has endeared me to my pupils and has distanced me and English from its negative reputation. Thus, my magic tonic remains songs, songs, and nothing but songs since I now consider singing to be a necessary ingredient in my English class.

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CHINA

Actively Involving Students in Listening

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Listening, is one of the four fundamental skills in any language. Regrettably, here in China the teaching of listening has been neglected for a long time, but changes have been taking place very quickly. Each of the four language skills has been given its balanced weight in our national syllabus of English teaching.

Our National Test for English Majors Band 4 (TEM 4), an annual criterion-referenced test for second-year English majors, has shown that listening is an inseparable part when the comprehensive language skills of the students are tested.

Listening objectives

Our national syllabus of English teaching for English majors (1989) clearly states that after the first two years of studying in the university, a second-year English major should be able to

- understand speeches by or conversations with native English speakers about daily and social life;
- understand listening passages, with the difficulty level being comparable to that of the mini talks in TOEFL;
- grasp the main idea, argument, or plot of the listening materials;
- deduce or analyze the listening materials;

- understand the writers' attitudes and intentions in the listening passages;
- take brief notes while listening; and
- understand the news broadcasts of BBC and VOA at normal speed.

(The listening part of the TEM 4 includes statements, short dialogues, and VOA and BBC news broadcasts.)

To fulfill all these requirements listed in the Passive to Active Listening syllabus and to ensure that our students can do well in the TEM 4 is no easy task. Moreover, most of our students have been taught under a language learning situation in which listening is treated as a purely passive activity. Thus, our students have maintained a passive and subordinate role in the classroom. Usually the teacher prepares everything for them, leaving no space for the students to act as participants in class.

Bearing in mind that there should be changes in the teaching of listening, we shift our focus from passive to active listening beginning the first day our students step into the university classroom. Since understanding the news broadcasts of the BBC and VOA is usually the part our students find the most difficult, we have designed the following activities to help them.

Let's share activities

What our students find to be the problem in understanding BBC and VOA news broadcasts is their unfamiliarity with the background behind some of the news items. Moreover, some of the foreign names and places are unknown to them.

So before the listening class, we select a few recorded authentic news items with known background and well-known figures. During the listening class, we let the students listen to a recorded news item once or twice, then we pick out the words, phrases, and names of places or people that need to be discussed or explained.

The following short news item is an example:

The British minister responsible for Northern Ireland, Sir Patrick Mayhew, has said that there is now an unrivaled opportunity to achieve peace, stability, and prosperity in the province. In a speech to a Protestant gathering, Sir

Patrick said every day the IRA cease-fire continued could bring the government closer to a conclusion that is meant to last. Yesterday, the Prime Minister, John Major, said he was still waiting for a clear-cut assurance from the IRA that its campaign of violence was over for good.

(A news report from BBC in 1994.)

For this news item, we divided our students into several groups and asked them to hold a brief discussion about the problem of Northern Ireland: how the problem was caused and what the Irish Republican Army (IRA) has been doing. Discussions like this generally stimulate the students because they are eager to share their own knowledge. Usually the students can come to an explicit understanding after their discussions, so that the next time they come across a news item relating to this special issue, they will find it easier to understand.

In another activity, we encourage voluntary work from our students. The students can decide on any topic that is of interest to them and give a short presentation in class. They can choose from topics such as Cuban refugees, an introduction to specific organizations such as NATO, or world famous figures such as Nelson Mandela.

From what we have done so far, we have found that our students are very motivated; they have participated very seriously in these activities. We have heard many marvelous presentations. For instance, one student found some interesting information about World War II on a CD, and he recorded it onto a tape that he brought to the classroom for the whole class to enjoy. These class activities help our students deepen their understanding of the news items and enlarge their knowledge about the world as well.

What's new this week?

Out of the three teaching hours assigned to listening class every week, we set aside 20 to 30 minutes especially to do the following pair activity. Each student chooses a partner, and every Thursday morning one pair gives a news presentation in class. The students who are responsible for the presentation have

previously recorded some of the important news items of the week that they want to share with the rest of the class. Every pair is given 15 to 20 minutes to make a presentation, and the pairs can decide their own way of presenting the report.

Up until now, we have found that our students are actively involved in this class activity. Each pair has tried to do its presentation differently and better. Some start with the prelistening questions; some begin with the introduction of the background; others introduce the possible difficult words in the news; and still others offer the whole class the news summary that they have done.

During the activity the speaker might stop from time to time to explain an item or to answer any questions. If the speaker is not sure of some parts, he/she may ask the whole class for help. All the students become so active and competitive in class, since each pair wants to be better than the previous one. Finally, a brief summary from the teacher gives this activity a nice ending.

Reasons for listening activities

We have tried different ways of teaching listening because we feel that there is a need for variation. Some of our justifications for including these activities in our classroom are as follows:

Language requirement. It is mandatory that every secondary school child learn a foreign language in China, and generally English is chosen as it is the language most people in the world use to communicate with.

Some universities even connect the certificate of TEM 4 with the bachelor's degree. (If the student cannot get a certificate of the TEM 4, she/he will not be granted the degree.) Hence, the certificate for passing TEM 4, or later TEM 8 (in the fourth year), is a strong motivation. Difficult as the listening and understanding of genuine BBC and VOA news broadcasts may be, it is imperative that our students understand them. A reasonable amount of time assigned to this part is welcomed by our students, as this activity helps them to fulfill the language requirement.

Job prospects. A certificate of TEM 4 proves a good mastery of English, which usually leads to the possibility of a good job after graduation. This is closely linked to our students' motivation in learning English as a foreign language in China.

The actual results are much more significant. Experience has shown that a good mastery of English will lead to career enhancement. The applicants for well-paid jobs are expected to be able to use English competently. It can be safely said that employment opportunities contribute significantly to motivating our students to learn a foreign language, especially English.

The academic reason, on the other hand, is comparatively less important since only a small percentage of our students travel or study abroad.

Social prestige. Mastering a foreign language is challenging; yet it has prestigious value, as not many people in China are skillful in using a foreign language. Anyone who has a good mastery of a foreign language has more prestige, is generally respected, and has more opportunities, thereby contributing greatly to his/her success in society. With the respect of the society, one has personal satisfaction.

Conclusion

Listening is no longer seen as a passive skill but an active one, because listening demands active involvement from the learners (Rost 1991:81). When we talk about practical classroom teaching, we must make sure that all the students are actively involved, because it is the best way for them to learn.

Our activities in this listening course have proven successful. Our students have done very well on the national test. All the students except one passed the test, and their scores on the listening part were excellent. Former students used to complain that the news section was very difficult. However, this class did not have the same feeling. For these students, it is no longer as difficult.

One of the main reasons for the success lies in the fact that what we are doing in class is what our learners really need. These activities have helped them

in their academic studies, which ultimately will contribute to satisfactory careers. We have realized that only when our students have the motivation, which is one of the main determinants of foreign language learning achievement, and they are actively involved in the classroom, can we hope to see successful results in our students.

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CUBA

Motivating EFL Learners

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Motivation is one of the most important factors in language learning, which is why teachers of English as a Foreign Language have always tried to find new approaches or strategies that introduce practical uses of EFL in the classroom. Unfortunately, many students dislike learning English; and although they attend lessons, they are not interested in speaking properly. They only want to pass the compulsory exams.

Finding the students' likes and dislikes concerning EFL learning and applying new teaching techniques to improve the command of language use have been major goals. Surveys conducted with learners and teachers at the School of Nursing in Holguin have focused on finding out why students reject learning foreign languages. The results showed that most of the second- and third-year students in the nursing career did not like studying English because they did not find any relation between English and their own careers. They did not think that English would be useful in their future jobs; they felt that they spent too much time learning boring, unpleasant, and difficult things.

In Cuba, the Kernel Series books are used to teach General English to nursing career students from the first to third years. English for Specific Purposes (ESP) is taught to students in the fourth year. Surprisingly, data showed that ESP learners liked studying EFL, while the ones studying in General English disliked it.

A new approach

A few years ago, a new teaching strategy was introduced in some nursing student groups. This technique consisted of interrelating English and the students' careers. So, General English began including such items as situations, expressions, phrases, and terms which were part of the contents that learners were studying in their specialties. In other words, General English in this school now adds specific

nursing-related language chunks into those general themes appearing in the Kernel Series.

The purpose is to allow learners to behave as if they are using the language to communicate their own experiences about their lives and careers. They talk about topics they are interested in and like. For instance, students are taught the steps in giving an injection and in treating a septic wound. They also learn parts of the body, terms for the most commonly used medical instruments and devices, as well as nursing care and nursing intervention vocabulary.

Aside from vocabulary activities, many activities were added to improve the students' interest learning English. Lessons included meaningful situations: language games to establish patterns, contests to gauge the students' language mastery, assignments to talk about things related to their own experiences, comments about love, and so forth. The students were also encouraged to talk about exciting topics at precise times or whenever they felt motivated. They could talk about things that had really happened to them.

Some of these activities were developed incidentally, and others were inserted into the school syllabus. Specific changes were made to eliminate uninteresting activities and topics. For example, sections of the Kernel Series were substituted by exercises related to the students' specialties.

Enriching activities

To enhance the English classroom atmosphere and encourage learning, advertisements, warnings, posters, bulletin boards, pictures, puppets, drawings, and photos are posted on the walls. The students are surrounded by items that resemble the culture of the target language and that give learners the feeling of "learning the language."

Because music also increases motivation and learning, teachers play it when learners are tired, bored, or discouraged. The selection of music reflects the culture of the English-speaking countries.

While students listen to songs, they complete comprehension exercises. First, they attempt to state the topic of the song, and they try to write down the words.

Answers to the Lighter Side

Sound alike: 1. tail, 2. isles, 3. tears, 4. ring, 5. won, 6. see, 7. bored, 8. cereal, 9. reign, 10. bear, 11. hear, 12. rose, 13. pines, 14. missed.

Look alike: 1. quarters, 2. plots, 3. dough, 4. charge, 5. run, 6. smoke, 7. lighthouse, 8. beds, 9. tracks, 10. bark.