

Teaching listening: one way listening

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Introduction

One-way listening is a psycholinguistic process in which the listener receives, interprets, reacts to the source of the aural input but does not respond communicatively. The listener is engaged in listening but does not interact with the speaker such as asking for clarification, slower speech or repetition. Listening to the radio, TV, films, online recordings, and live lectures are some examples of one-way listening. This type of listening is in contrast with two-way, reciprocal or interactive listening situations such as face-to-face and telephone conversations. In daily life and work place, language users sometimes listen and receive information without a need to make responses. They do not have genuine needs to do so. This is because the purpose of one-way listening is to understand messages in the input, e.g. a speaker, on TV, on the radio, internet video clips, PA in the public places/ on the transport, in a meeting etc. One-way listening has a role to play in English listening learning. Teachers and material developers may arrange various one-way listening tasks to cater for the needs and interests of learners.

What is one-way listening?

The table below lists the differences between one-way listening and interactive listening:

Features	One-way listening	Interactive listening
Number of Participants	One (the listener)	Two or more persons taking part in the interaction
Flow of communication	One-direction: listening only	Dual direction: listener alternates as speaker and listener
Function of language	Transactional	Transactional, interactional, and /or social
Goal of listening	Receive information and interpret meaning	Receive information and interpret meaning, initiate, respond and/or re-initiate, interpret and negotiate

		meaning, establish social relationship
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Richards, J.C. (1990). Vandergrift, L. & Goh, C. C.M. (2012).

From the table, it is understood that one-way listening is transactional listening and is used primarily to acquire information, e.g. news broadcasts and lectures. The listener does not aim to seek clarification from an existing participant/ speaker in the listening work. In contrast, Interactive listening is highly contextualized, involving interaction with a participant/ speaker. Participants involved in interactional listening seek to satisfy their social or work related needs, e.g. in casual conversations and business meetings.

One-way listening should not be associated with any inference on the passive attitude and low motivation of the listeners. Typical passive listeners have no motive and no necessity to listen and act on input even if they are supposed to do so. Listeners in one-way listening try actively to perceive and interpret the meaning of the aural input. These listeners are involved in discriminating, identifying, guessing, anticipating, interpreting, and organizing by making use of their prior knowledge and language knowledge and the contextual clues.

In everyday life, people engage in one-way listening in various situations and they react to the input, but not responding communicatively, in various ways taking into consideration the nature and objectives of listening. Below is a categorization of the one-way listening situations:

Domain	Examples
On-site entertainment	The audiences in a concert, in a cinema or TV studio do not need to respond interactively. They just watch the show unless the audiences want to cheer the performers.
'Offshore' infotainment	The listener is not connected with the speaker while receiving information in mass media for information (TV news, radio interviews) or for entertainment (movies). However, online video conferencing device has changed the nature of one-way listening. A listener can listen and respond to the speaker at the other end before the computer. Real time interaction is possible.
Studying	In the classroom, e.g. in a conventional lecture, the students do not need to speak in response to the lecturer/ teacher in the

	room.
Workplace	Some jobs require one-way listening. For example, a staffer listens to the voice mails of clients left on the hotline and makes notes for follow-up. A secretary listens attentively in a company meeting and takes notes of the discussion of other people in the meeting.

One-way listening in language learning

As seen above, one-way listening takes place necessarily in daily living. In fact, one-way listening may also be related to first language acquisition. Human beings learn their mother tongue by modelling and examples, i.e. listening to parents, siblings, relatives, neighbors speak. Infants cannot talk but during listening, they ‘save’ the input in their brain, and at the right time, they will speak their first word (usually ‘mama’ or ‘papa’ (father or mother) in many languages).

One-way listening has an advantage of catering for special needs of some learners. Total physical response is a typical approach to describe one way listening in both first language acquisition and second language learning. Total physical response in kindergarten language classes is non-threatening for children who are not ready to express themselves in the language. Young children move around the classroom as they follow the directions given to them by their teacher.

For learners of other age groups or proficiency levels, total physical response may help these learners. They are not ready to produce the language with sufficient confidence. But they may be active in listening and show their understanding by performing some acts. For instance, new immigrants to a country may join language proficiency classes. These students are not required to speak and interact verbally with the teacher in the first few sessions or until they get used to the speaking environment and have sufficient confidence to speak.

If some learners are not ready to express themselves or interact with others, e.g. a new student to a school, or a student with special learning needs, they will feel insecure and need more time to adapt to the class, and to digest the language content. These learners may benefit from one way listening. The suitable content for one-way listening practice tasks are phonics skills, songs, and oral language arts. Learners will become more confident when they read aloud, sing or perform verses to themselves,

which is a step to interactional listening and other forms of communication.

When teaching English to students, it is important to accommodate the learning styles of the students when planning instructions. The auditory learners are apt to a strong auditory orientation in processing information. They can learn better or faster with aids such as lectures, tapes, films, or online /e- learning resources without a need for partners in practice tasks. One-way listening may help these learners achieve particular learning objectives through the listening modality. Teachers should provide such type of learners with opportunities to process information aloud themselves through individualized learning activities in audio lingual programs.

Self-directed learning is promoted in school and further education. Some learners especially adult learners choose to learn in a self-directed way. These learners identify their professional enhancement needs or would like to start a new hobby or interest and prefer to learn the skills at their pace. In many cases, self-directed learners do not have a learning partner and they do not need to attend classes except for occasional tutorials and seminars. One-way listening is a choice for these learners and they rely on audio lingual methods to improve their listening and read aloud skills.

Resources and activities

Teachers may integrate one-way listening in their second language learning programs. By doing so, they can help students overcome anxiety in second language learning. There are many one-way listening methods and activities, which can be conducted in intensive listening and extensive listening modes.

For intensive listening, students are supposed to understand what they hear *completely* including every word, sentence, paragraph and the meaning in the text (bottom-up processing). Intensive listening aims at developing a range of listening skills. Students do not need to make responses to the speakers. The problem with ‘intensive listening’ is that the students work at all levels of the language (sounds, words, sentences, paragraphs) and this draws on cognitive demand and time.

As for the tools of one-way listening tasks, teachers tend to use audio lingual methods for drilling and repetition, focusing almost solely on accuracy over fluency. Students are arranged to work on listening tasks to tackle comprehension questions in multi-media learning room. Audio lingual methods are chosen as a convenient way to

manage a class of large size. Students listen and repeat the words, or the input they hear. And they may also work with audio clips and learning materials only. One-way listening task types may be assigned by teachers as in-class tasks or self-learning one-way listening tasks with use of multi-media and websites.

Samples of one-way listening task types:

One way listening comprehension tasks	Intensive listening (in classroom)	Intensive (self-directed learning)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Listing ✓ Restoration ✓ Reconstructing 	<p>The learners complete a blank filling exercise (the aural input is a dialogue, a poem, a recount, a biography, or a report with omitted words)</p>	<p>The learner downloads online audio recordings (with a tape script). Without reading the tape script, the learner listens and writes down the text and checks the work later with the tape script for accuracy.</p> <p>The learner listens to songs on music or song websites and focuses on the gist. Then the listener summarizes the themes from memory and produces a check list of ‘my favorite songs’.</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Sorting ✓ Matching ✓ Categorizing 	<p>The learners are given a set of sentence strips from a story. After listening, they put the sentences in the correct order to reflect the plot. The content may contain physical attributes, features, genres, themes, facts & opinions, etc.</p>	<p>The learner listens, and takes short notes during live presentations or speeches on some occasions or on TV. Then the learner restores the content based on the notes in a complete text.</p>

		The learner gets a movie genre list (e.g. comedy, sci-fi, romance) from any movie websites and watches and listens to some trailers. After listening, the learner matches the movie with the appropriate genres, and marks rating on the movie.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Comparison/contrast ✓ for similarities and differences 	In a detective game, learners listen to the description of a criminal and then choose from a set of photos of suspects for the most possible match.	<p>The learner listens to two TV commercials on the same type of products, e.g. washing powder, and notes down the information and compares the special features of the brands and chooses the one he or she would like to buy.</p> <p>The learner listens to the same news item on a radio channel and on TV and finds out the similarities and differences in the two reports.</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Ranking ✓ Evaluation 	<p>Learners listen to the presentations in a speech contest in their school and cast votes for the best speaker.</p> <p>Learners listen to the speeches of some candidates for the Chair of an academic</p>	The learner listens or watches any interviews on radio or TV and writes down three good points made by the presenters.

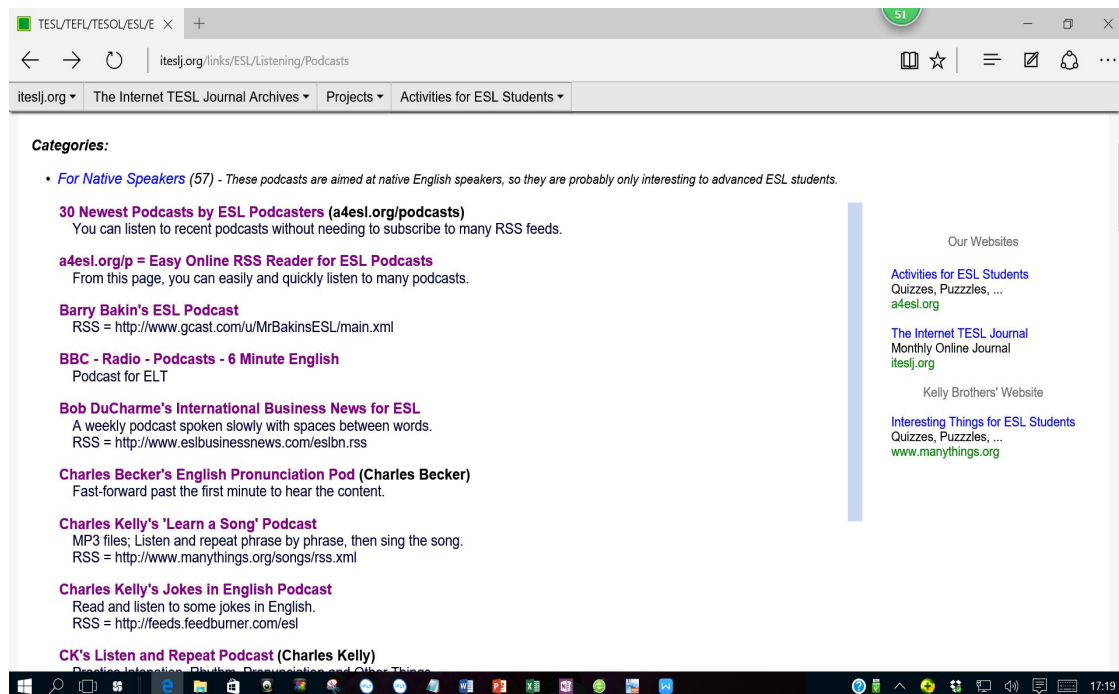
	society in school, then they choose a candidate and give reasons.	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Diagrams or pictures ➤ Routes on maps ➤ flow charts 	Teachers collect some floor plans, sketches of people or objects, mind maps, maps and routes, all which are accompanied with video/audio explanations by the organizations. Learners listen to the clips and complete the texts according to the instructions.	The learner targets at authentic situations such as airport announcement, promotional messages broadcast in shopping malls. Then the learner notes down the gist or details. This practice will be counted into the entries of a listening diary.

There are some tools and resources for use in one-way listening activities. With advancement of information technology and numerous learning websites, self-directed one-way listening is easy and practical. One way listening can be a very effective way for a person to improve listening at his or her own pace.

Podcasts (i.e. a program (as of music or talk) made available in digital format for automatic download over the Internet (<http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/podcast>)) can be used for the purpose of motivating students in listening to English, and providing them with an exposure to different accents of English speakers. Podcasts offer second language learners a wide range of possibilities for extra listening. Learners can listen to lots of recordings on a wide range of topics (e.g. culture-specific, career-related, or academic subjects-based). They may download the recordings to an mp3 player. Learners do not need to worry about not being able to catch up with fast speakers as they can play the recording as many times as possible. For some podcasts, there are speech speed choices of slower, slow, medium, fast and very fast.

Owing to the emphasis on target language focus in in-class intensive listening, the materials tend to be scripted and stilted. Thus the wide range of options and the authentic conversations in extensive listening provide fresh interest to learners. A good design of second language learning podcast may contain the text, the audio tape, pre-listening information, the script for follow up reading, questions to answer while listening, answer key, relevant listening strategies. And some key /difficult words/phrases may be underlined with links to online dictionary pages. Listeners may

check the meaning and pronunciation readily. User friendly design and reliable and speedy downloading device are essential to a helpful learning podcast. Some examples of podcasts can be found in an e-journal website: <http://iteslj.org/links/ESL/Listening/Podcasts/>



Whereas teachers should suggest different ways to make use of e-resources and the real world situations for listening practice, adult learners may also plan their learning in the same manner as far as they can identify the listening needs and skills required. If a learner can plan the schedule of listening and reflect on his/her practice including what has been achieved and what is yet to be improved, then there will be a high possibility for the learner to sustain interest and effort in practice.

Listening diary is a tool for self- assessment and a continuous listening practice task. First, a learner can set a period or schedule for one-way listening. The practice may take the form of listening to the audio CDs or online radio, podcasts, TV or any real life situations where target language spoken texts are available. Then the learner listens and writes notes about what has been listened and keeps a diary to record the practice. The reflective part of the entries helps the learner find ways to overcome difficulties and set new goals of listening. The content of listening diary entries may contain the following information: date and the duration of each listening practice, kind of material and title, if available, any listening strategies, reactions and questions and what the learner learned from the listening. Below is an extract of some entries of a second language learner:

October 23

11:30 p.m. - about 12:00?

Movie: Field of Dreams, Kevin Costner

I put in the video again after I took my bath. I listened a little as I was getting ready for bed. I went to bed with the video on. I think I listened for about thirty minutes before I fell asleep. I closed my eyes while I was listening. Even though I wasn't watching the TV, I could imagine the scene in my mind. I like to listen with my eyes closed because I can concentrate better.

October 25

8:00 a.m. - 8:45 a.m.

I listened to the tape I made yesterday while going to school. This time I was concentrating a little. Yesterday I was reading a magazine as I was listening so I didn't think so much about the words but today I am only listening. I tried to understand the words of the chorus. I think I can understand some of the lines. When I go home today I am going to check if my thoughts are correct. The words to the songs are in the CD cover so I can look at the words.

On the whole, teachers should take into account the objectives of their language learning program, the strengths and weaknesses of the students, and the resources available for skills practice when choosing one-way listening as a part of practice for the students. Teachers should arrange one-way listening and interactive listening to help students develop listening skills. Self-directed one-way listening tasks should be devised with built-in reflective elements so the students will monitor their progress in listening skills and strategies and make improvement in listening.

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