

ABSTRACT

The Pre-listening Stage in L2 Listening Instruction to A2 - B1 Adult Learners

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This dissertation deals with listening instruction to adult EFL learners in the Czech Republic and the phenomenon of pre-listening, which is currently under-researched. It examines adult EFL students' perspectives and perceptions of listening instruction and of the inclusion of different pre-listening techniques, particularly at CEFR A2-B1 proficiency levels. The theoretical part of the study focuses on current developments in listening research and the historical context of the development of listening instruction in classical FLT methodology.

The pre-listening stage has been integral to L2 listening instruction since the beginning of Communicative Language Teaching. However, some controversial issues have recently been raised. For example, teachers are sometimes suspected of spending too much time on the pre-listening stage (Field 2002; 2008) and the overall usefulness of previewed comprehension questions in testing listening has been challenged (Sherman 1997). Moreover, adult students' listening needs and their perceptions of listening instruction have not yet been thoroughly researched (Graham 2006; Graham and Macaro 2008). This study argues that we should ask the students about their perceptions because we assume that learners and their needs determine how effective listening instruction and the pre-listening stage will be.

The dissertation was inspired by a quantitative study of learners' needs (a 2006 survey of one hundred learners at A1-A2 levels) and a 2008 qualitative inquiry (semi-structured interviews with A2 learners), which identified speaking, listening and vocabulary as preferred areas for learners' improvement in general English courses (Ždímalová 2009a). It draws on initial 2011-2012 classroom observations and primarily on a 2012 quantitative inquiry based on a large-scale online survey conducted at the Department of Language Studies, ICL, Academy of Sciences of the Czech Republic. The survey was carried out with adult students of face-to-face courses in order to learn about their opinions, attitudes, needs, and preferences regarding listening instruction and pre-listening techniques. Altogether, data were collected from 473 foreign language learners (at varying levels of proficiency); the sample focused on 374 EFL learners.

The empirical study focuses mainly on four research questions: 1) How do students perceive the time devoted to listening instruction in their EFL courses? 2) How do teachers use the pre-listening stage? 3) How do students perceive the usefulness (or otherwise) of pre-listening for

listening comprehension? 4) Which pre-listening techniques are perceived as the most effective for listening comprehension from the students' perspectives?

The dissertation findings (i.e. classroom observations and the 2012 survey results) confirm that, according to adult learners, (1) listening instruction should be allocated more time in the course / curriculum (approx. 30% of class time), (2) teachers do not overuse the pre-listening stage (pre-listening takes approx. 4 minutes), and (3) the pre-listening stage is considered 'definitely useful' by the majority of the students. The findings also indicate that (4) the most effective pre-listening techniques are deemed to be those that focus on lexis (brainstorming topical lexis and pre-teaching less familiar key words).

These findings apply to all levels of proficiency but appeared to be particularly important for lower-proficiency levels. Implications from the study for teaching listening to adult EFL learners at A2-B1 proficiency levels are drawn.