

Listening – a highly active skill

Listening is often cited as the skill most difficult to master in L2 learning.
Do you agree?
Why is this so? (or not)

The late Professor John Sinclair of the University of Birmingham (UK) used to tell an anecdote about a German professor of English who complained to him that "You teach us one English, and then mumble to each other in another English that we don't understand."

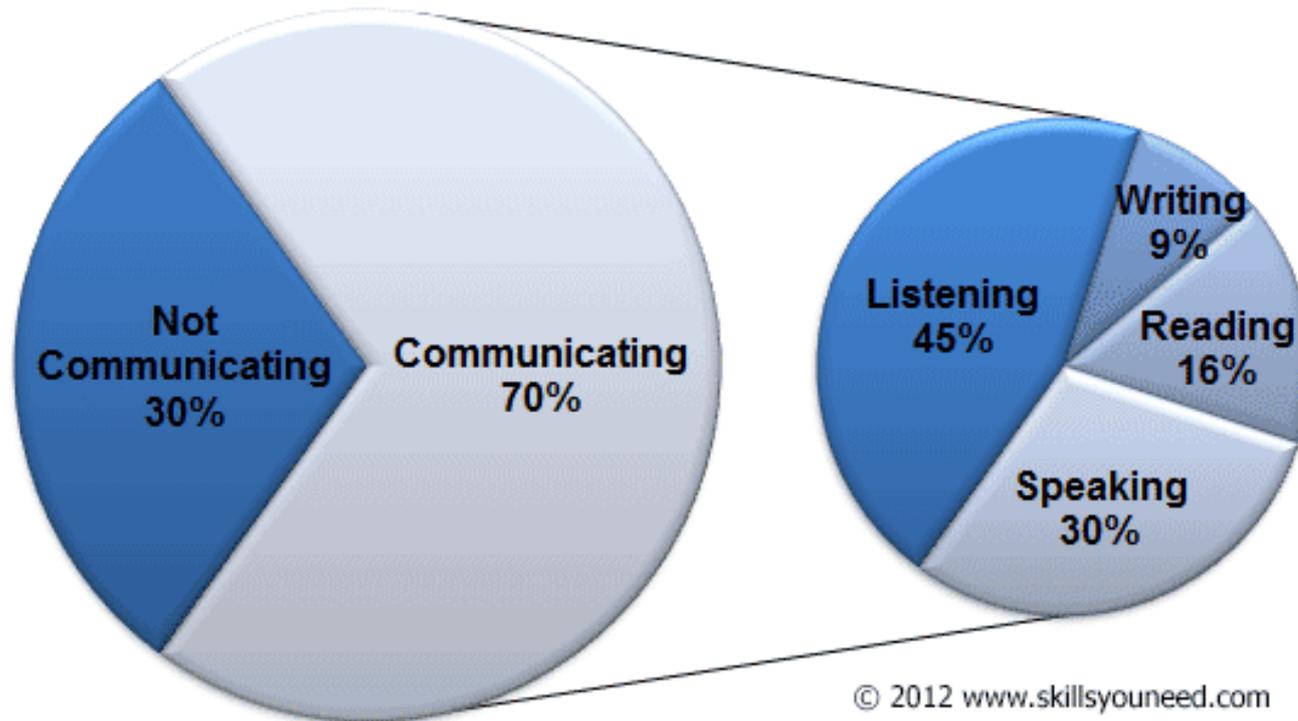
Richard Cauldwell, Speech in
Action, Birmingham, UK

- Written words stay the same, but spoken words change according to speed, position in sentence, accent, importance for message, etc.
- If you read a word you know, you recognize it. If you only hear the same word, you may not recognize it.

Research shows that even advanced-level learners have difficulty in recognizing words which are part of their active vocabulary.

(John Field 2008 *Listening in the Language Classroom*)

Time Spent Communicating



Based on the research of: Adler, R., Rosenfeld, L. and Proctor, R. (2001)
Interplay: the process of interpersonal communicating (8th edn), Fort Worth, TX:

"Listening is now rightfully considered to be the foundation of language acquisition and communicative ability."

(Christopher Candlin in the preface to *Active Listening* 2013)

How much time do you spend on listening practice in class?



Is listening difficult to teach?
Do you enjoy teaching it?
Do learners tend to enjoy listening
exercises/activities?



- What tasks focus on listening skills (not on practising vocabulary/grammar)?
- Should learners work with transcripts or not?
- Where can we find suitable recordings?
- Should listening texts be scripted or unscripted?
- Should we preteach vocabulary?
- Should listening practice real life situations only?

"...the traditional listening comprehension approach simply tests our students' listening ability; it doesn't automatically train them to listen more effectively."

(Sheila Thorn, *Modern English Teacher*. Volume 21 No. 2)

So what's wrong with listening comprehension?



"Focusing on decoding skills rather than general comprehension is probably the most effective means of improving a learner's performance."

(John Field 2008 *Listening in the Language Classroom*)

Decoding activities

- transcribing, dictation, dictogloss
- acoustic drilling, recognizing words
- becoming familiar with the features of accents

Recognizing the focus and predicting what will come next

What is the focus in each utterance?

Partner A

- 1 The bank's *downtown* branch closed today.
- 2 Is the city office open on *Sunday*?
- 3 I'm going to the *museum* today.

Partner B

- 1 Where / When
- 2 Where / When
- 3 Where / When

Bottom-up activities

- awareness-raising of features of spoken English:
 - accents, elision, position in sentence, etc.
- word grab
- transcribing/dictation/gap-fills
- dictogloss
- listen and read
- sound discrimination – acoustic drilling

Acoustic drilling

These phrases have been written as they sound.
What is the correct written form of each one?

- 1 Whadyawan?
- 2 Djenoim?
- 3 I'll payfrit in cash.
- 4 This is the waiter cut it.

High frequency problems

- Vowels disappear or are added
- Consonants disappear
- Word boundaries shift
- Chunks merge into one word





https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/HMS_Bounty

Minimal pairs



<https://modernfarmer.com/2017/12/6-facts-sheep-might-not-know/>
ETAS 2018/Zofingen

We need also to escape the temptations and expectations of the forms of the written language, the graphic substance, which is the means by which most language teaching and learning takes place. We have to come to terms with the idea that students need to master the transient sound substance that is invisible and shaped by the speaker in real time.

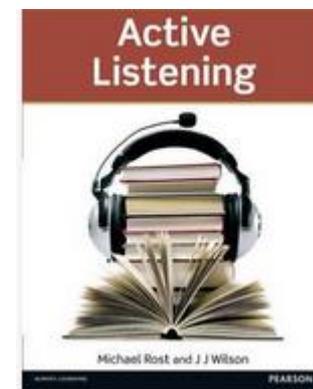
Cauldwell, R. (2014). Listening and pronunciation need separate models of speech. In J. Levis & S. McCrocklin (Eds). *Proceedings of the 5th Pronunciation in Second Language Learning Teaching Conference* (pp.). Ames, IA: Iowa State University.

Useful sources of research, ideas and materials

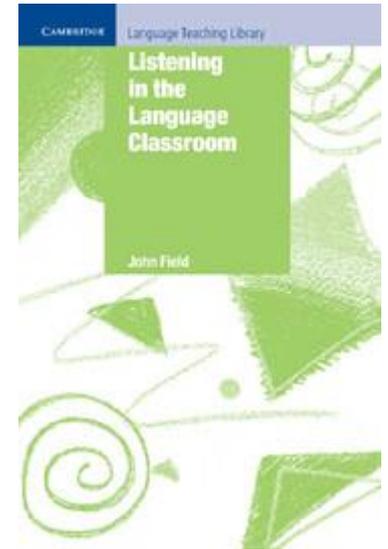
Simply Business
Cornelsen Verlag
by Angela Lloyd



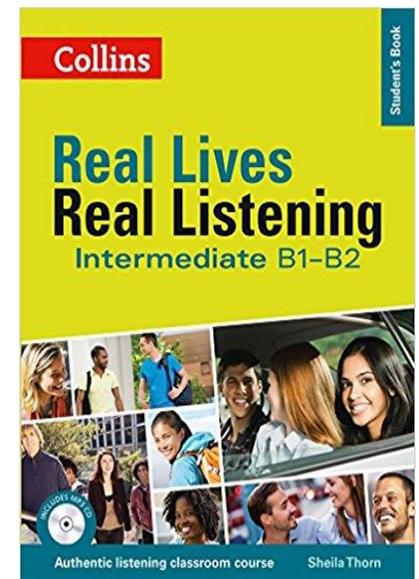
Active Listening
(Routledge Research and
Resources
in Language Teaching)
by Michael Rost, J.J. Wilson



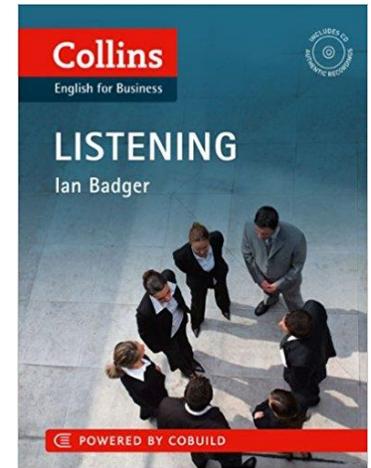
Listening in the Language Classroom (Cambridge Language Teaching Library) by John Field



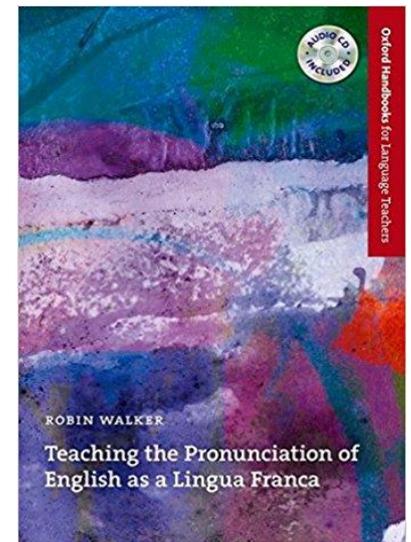
Real Lives, Real Listening Collins by Sheila Thorn



Listening
English for Business Harper Collins
Publishing
by Ian Badger



Teaching the Pronunciation of English
as a Lingua Franca
Oxford Handbooks for Language Teachers
by Robin Walker



Useful websites:

youglish.com

tubequizard.com

[elfpron.wordpress](http://elfpron.wordpress.com)

accent.gmu.edu (Speech Archive)

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Thank you for your active participation!

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