Unit 19 – Lesson 31

Listening for details – Listening Comprehension

Being a complex process that involves perceiving and interpreting the sounds correctly as well as understanding the explicit and implied meaning of the oral message, listening comprehension includes several skills. These skills include scanning, prediction, speech decoding, comprehending and oral discourse analysis. Scanning is the ability to locate specific information in a conversation or presentation and prediction is guessing information. Speech decoding involves sound perception and recognition, word recognition and accent recognition.

What is comprehending?

Comprehending a verbal message involves the ability to

- Identify the main theme and supporting ideas
- Understand various levels
- Deduce incomplete information
- Analyse critically relevant and irrelevant information
- Identify the speaker’s attitude
- Evaluate the speaker
- Make inferences and interpret the non verbal clues and body language of the speaker

Listening can be passive and active. Passive listening is almost equal to hearing as it has no involvement rather comprehension does not take place whereas active listening is a dynamic interactive communicative process in which the listener

- Pays attention with utmost involvement
- Shows interest in the speaker and the speech
- Takes note of the speaker’s body language
- Does not get distracted
- Responds to the speaker through his body language and encourages the speaker

To be an active listener, one has to be involved deeply in listening to the speaker. His posture must reflect his interest and involvement; body language indicates the keenness to listen. Active listening includes non verbal skills improving speaker’s contribution, asking questions, making clarifications and analysing an oral message.

A good listener has to involve himself/herself during the speech session, interact with the speaker and ask questions.

Asking questions forms an important part of the listening process as it leads to some kind of rapport between the speaker and listener. Asking relevant questions shows that the listener is active and it encourages the speaker. While asking questions the listener should be polite. The
speaker should not be interrupted while he is in the course of speaking. The purpose of asking questions should be to get clarifications and indicate comprehension. Clarify what the speaker is saying by jotting down notes and summarize the key points. This serves to be the hallmark of an active listener.

As an active listener one should interpret and analyse what one hears in order to understand both the explicit and implicit meaning of the message. Infer the meaning of unfamiliar words from contextual clues; finally draw inferences and conclusions from the speech.

How to become an effective listener?

Keenly listen to signal phrases, logical connectors and transitional signal.

Examples of signal phrases:

- What I’m going to discuss is............
- The main point of the discussion today..........  
- To begin with............
- In the first place.........
- The most significant point is............  
- The best solution to the problem is............
- In contrast............
- On the other hand.............
- If we make a comparative study............
- Finally to conclude............
- I would like to sum up............

Logical Connectors and Transitional Signals:

Moreover, in addition, next, further more, similarly, likewise, in contrast, in comparison, however, nevertheless, for example, for instance, after, before, eventually, since, until, as a result, consequently, as you can see, actually, naturally, of course...

Some speakers may add a visual between the speech which enhances the presentation. Such visuals might be helpful to understand that part of the presentation.

Active Listening Quiz:

Try this simple self scoring quiz to find out if you actively listen. If you usually practise the skills below, score yourself with “2”. If you sometimes practise the skill, give yourself “1”. If you don’t practise at all, give yourself “0”. Keep this quiz with you and refer to it from time to time, so as to find out whether you have improved in areas where you were lacking and have become a really active listener. Above all, be very honest in scoring yourself. Ideal answers are
not required. This quiz is your own confidential one. So rate yourself honestly to find out how you can improve.

1) I talk with others personally __________
2) I’m asked for advice by other people __________
3) I’m the kind of person whom people feel easy to talk to __________
4) I don’t talk with someone unless I have something to talk about __________
5) I’m willing to say something to others usually __________
6) When I don’t follow what the other person is talking about, I ask him to clarify __________
7) I listen to the other person putting myself in his shoes __________
8) I listen to the other person, summarizing in my mind what he has said __________
9) I sometimes give the other person a brief summary of what he has said __________
10) I can mutually understand anybody __________
11) I can take interest in anybody __________
12) I tend to listen to others seriously __________
13) I can listen to the other person even if he has different opinion than mine __________
14) I tend to talk in a direct and persuasive way while talking with others __________
15) When I begin to talk at the same time as the other person did, I let him talk __________
16) I listened to the other person paying attention to his unexpressed feelings __________
17) When the other person is hesitating, I wait for him to talk __________
18) While listening, I’m careful not to interrupt the other person’s talk __________
19) I don’t get tired from listening to others __________
20) I ignore phones or other distractions while listening to a person __________
21) While talking to someone, I use the person’s name often __________
22) In emotional conversations, I paraphrase the speaker at key points __________
23) I thank the speaker for sharing his feelings with me __________
24) As far as possible, I avoid speaking during the conversation, unless the speaker explicitly asks me to __________
25) I am not irritated even if he repeats himself often __________