

From the Editors

TEACHING AND ASSESSING LISTENING SKILLS EFFECTIVELY IN THE LANGUAGE CLASSROOM: RESEARCH-BASED APPROACHERS

As stated in the last volume of the *International Journal of Listening*, “Compared with the other L2 skills of reading, writing and speaking, the field of listening is the youngest in terms of research” (Goh and Aryadoust, 2016: 6). This youth of listening skills development in the field of language teaching is partly due to availability of technological advances (audio recordings and videos) and (computer-based) teaching materials which were introduced at a later date in the classroom than paper-based materials. But a slower development of listening skills research is also determined by the fact that listening is a complex skill: it requires attention and concentration, it demands an instant recognition of an event and its related keywords, since vocabulary control and schemata knowledge (situation, topic knowledge and background knowledge) under which the listening input takes place are key factors in determining effective listening. Not only that, speaker factors (accent, intonation) and individual listener factors such as the listening strategies employed by an individual, gender or anxiety levels, are part of the listening skills construct. When we talk about assessing listening skills, together with these issues there is the question of task format in relation to both input and output requirements, the types of questions used in assessing listening skills or the number of times students are allowed to listen to a (video/audio) recording. All these aspects of listening make research in listening an intellectually and academically challenging work.

This volume presents three articles dealing with listening skills under three very different perspectives. The first article by **González-Vera** and **Hornero Corisco** deals with the advantages of using audiovisual materials to enhance speaking and listening skills. In the second article, **Martín del Pozo** tackles an important issue in academic listening: that of spoken discourse markers and how they influence listening

comprehension success in English as a Medium of Instruction (EMI) classrooms. Finally, **Natalia Norte** presents a highly innovative article that goes beyond traditional listening comprehension analyses and focuses on the multimodal comprehension of audiovisual input.

González-Vera and Hornero Corisco worked on a questionnaire to find out their students' profile as listeners, trying to identify areas of difficulty in the listening process. This is the point of departure for implementing classroom tasks with the same students focusing on the detected problems. These authors advocate for the inclusion of authentic audio-visual materials and technologies in the EFL teaching and learning process trying to ascertain their belief that this type of material aids not only listening skills development but is also helpful in the enhancement of speaking skills when we use such materials as input to overcome language difficulties, such as those encountered with specific phonemes in the foreign language.

In “Discourse Markers and Lecture Structure: Their Role in Listening Comprehension and EMI Lecturer Training” it is suggested that lecturers need a more overt signaling of lecture stages as well as being able to turn to a wider stylistic variety of discourse markers. Providing a thoroughly exemplified review of lecture phases and how discourse markers apply to each phase, Martín del Pozo analyses the importance of discourse markers in lecture listening comprehension. Contextualizing this research in the internationalization process that is taking place in universities, together with the promotion of the teaching of content subjects in a foreign language, provides an added value to this article. Results in this article indicate that the lectures analyzed in the EMI (English as a Medium of Instruction) recordings are characterized by repetitiveness and weak stylistic resources when using discourse markers. This may influence students' lecture listening comprehension since the input they get may not be as clear and staged as it could be.

In the EMI context, the vision of listening skills not as separate skills but as part of the speaking-listening continuum in conversation is particularly relevant. As the author reveals, there are two key aspects in this process from the EMI perspective. One is paying attention to the “student learning to listen” and the other one is paying attention

to the “lecturer learning to speak”. Both are closely related in a lecture situation and affect lecture comprehension on the one hand, and lecture effectiveness on the other.

In “Multimodal digital tools and EFL audio-visual comprehension: students’ attitudes towards vodcasts”, Norte examines students’ attitudes towards the use of audio-visual listening materials (e.g., vodcasts) compared to traditional audio ones (e.g., audio tracks). The author selected vodcasts that were clearly connected to the participants’ specific syllabus in an attempt to consider academic interest of the listeners/test-takers as part of the experiment design. One of the aims of the study was to observe and contrast students’ attitudes towards listening to audio tracks versus watching vodcasts. A number of relevant reasons to support the use of vodcasts become apparent. These include issues that are relevant in the literature of listening skills both in first and second or foreign language acquisition (Wolfgramm, Suter and Göksel 2016), namely, that they aid concentration, and make students understand context and situations better. These three factors are frequently surveyed as predictors for effective listening comprehension in the literature. It was also shown how for the majority of students multimodality enhances comprehension and reduces anxiety.

The volume ends with a review of *A Multimodal Analysis of Picture Books for Children: A Systemic Functional Approach* written by Arsenio Jesús Moya Guijarro. In the review, written by Mary Frances Litzler, the connection between the linguistic and the visual aspects of picture books analysed in the book is discussed. Therefore, the book identifies the verbal and visual strategies used by writers and illustrators in order to convey a representation of reality, but also to create an effective interaction with readers (children) and coherent wholes of communication, serving thus as a framework for assisting in the selection of appropriate books for young readers.

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References

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