Introducing Listening to Adult Learners — 'The Fun Way'

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Abstract

Using songs to practice listening skills is not a new concept. However, in the context of English Language Teaching (ELT) in Bangladesh where listening remains the least practiced and most neglected of the four basic skills up till the higher secondary level of education, the very idea of listening to a recorded speech in a foreign accent far removed from whatever English they have been exposed to, appears to be quite intimidating to most learners. The paper argues that as learners, especially young adults in Bangladesh, are pretty much into English music, it can be used as both a familiar and interesting resource requiring minimum of logistics support and enhancing student participation in promoting and developing their listening skills. This paper will also discuss issues relating to maximizing listening inputs in language classrooms by using songs, the kinds of songs to be chosen, and ways to use them effectively in such classes. Keeping in view the practical constraints of using listening activities in the language classrooms in Bangladesh, the paper sets out to provide useful suggestions on using songs embracing a whole spectrum of activities designed to promote acquisition, entertainment as well as production of the target language for adult learners.

Introduction

Considering the amount of time individuals spend in total communication, (listening 45%, speaking 30%, reading 16%, writing 9%) (Rivers and Temperly 1978; Celce Murcia 1995) and its role in learning one's first language (first languages are learnt mostly by listening); it is surprising how listening had been an almost completely ignored and non-existent skill in language learning for so long. It is only fairly recently that with the vast technological advancement and

globalization when effective 'communication' has become the buzzword that oracy (the ability to participate and understand spoken discourse) and listening has begun to occupy the central stage in language learning. Nowadays, even first language learning involves projects on listening. However, because listening is one of the most elusive and complex skills, there is an ongoing debate in the discipline of Teaching English as a Foreign or Second language (EFL/ESL) on issues such as simplifying listening to texts in classroom, developing learners' confidence through listening or pursuing strategies that can become useful in making use of listening texts (Hedge 2000).

In Bangladeshi English Language Teaching (ELT) classes, however, listening remains the least practiced and most neglected among the four basic skills essential for developing communicative competence. The prime reason for this neglect is that it is not separately tested at any level (secondary, higher secondary or tertiary) of education. For learners listening thus remains one of the most dreaded skills, as the very act of it entails listening to some taped conversations in a foreign accent far removed from whatever limited English they are exposed to in and outside the classroom. Also, due to proper lack of logistics support, and guidance and student inertia teachers feel it not worth their while to invest time in an activity students can not make much of. Consequently, listening is set aside as a skill that learners are expected to learn by themselves. It is as if by 'osmosis' or through their exposure to media, internet, movies etc. they will learn listening.

However, like any other skills listening should be taught systematically and methodically. Keeping in view the practical constraints of using listening activities in the classroom, this paper will discuss ways to deal with learner inhibition and maximize learner output by choosing appropriate songs in ELT classes for meaningful and effective practice of listening skills.

The paper is divided into three sections. Firstly, it gives a brief account of the position of listening in the context of ELT in Bangladesh. Secondly, it analyses why listening is considered to be the most problematic of the four skills and suggests strategies for successful listening. In the last section, it shows how songs can act as a useful resource for introducing listening at the tertiary level to promote acquisition, entertainment as well as production of the target language for adult learners.

Teaching Listening in Bangladesh: ELT Classrooms

In ELT classes in Bangladesh, listening remains a skill that is scanted by both teachers and students in language classrooms. One of the key reasons for the lack of listening practice in language classes in Bangladesh is probably because it is not separately and systematically tested at the secondary and higher secondary levels of education. Teachers, who are pressured further for the completion of syllabuses and in a rush to meet the deadlines of examinations ever looming at the horizon, do not feel listening to be something worth investing time in. For students, to whom exams and grades are the 'be all and end all' as far as motivation is concerned, the idea of wasting time on something that will not be tested in examinations does not hold much appeal. Again, lack of proper logistics support, guide lines, class size and quality of materials remain major deterrents. Consequently, listening is shelved as a skill that learners are expected to learn. It is as if by 'osmosis' or through their exposure to the media or any other forms, or if they are motivated enough, they will develop this aspect of language learning.

The entire learner situation, however, is reversed as these same students enter their tertiary level of education. As most of the course books in higher levels are written in English and most lectures are either delivered in the language or a lot of English words are used in interactive classrooms, most learners face difficulty when they come to acquire university education due to their lack of listening skills. Even extra language courses offered in public and private universities to make up for this deficit do not provide much help as these can not make up for the lack of a skill that has hardly been practiced. Listening remains a skill infrequently practiced in classrooms and even more rarely practiced outside it. At the learners' end it remains one of the most dreaded skills, as the very act of listening entails straining to understand some taped conversation in an accent far removed from the English they are exposed to, in and outside the classroom. Harmer (2001:231) aptly comments that the two main problems associated with listening can be summarized as 'panic and difficulty'.

Students often panic when they see the tape recorder/ cd player because they know that they are faced with a challenging task. The panic is bound to increase for students who do not feel up to the task knowing that the activity would only expose their individual lack of performance. This automatically raises their affective filters (Krashen 1985), thus defeating the whole purpose of listening. Thus for the majority of learners, especially for Bengali medium learners, coping with class lectures and texts written in English imposes an added burden to the already challenging and uphill task of coping with university studies.

One of the most baffling questions that Bangladeshi Language teachers often find themselves asking is, why despite learning English simultaneously alongside with Bengali for almost ten to twelve years our learners can not communicate properly in English? Often students' lack of practice and unwillingness to speak outside the classroom are held as prime reasons for their lack of fluency. What we tend to forget is, that speaking is a productive skill which requires more effort than a receptive skill (e.g. reading and listening) (Harmer 2001:46) and many learners will naturally not be readily prepared to speak. In the communicative continuum speaking comes after listening. Speaking not only means producing random words without meaning, it means uttering and producing meaningful words and also being able to decipher or decode whatever the other party is saying (Widdowson1983:1). Inability to make sense of what is being communicated results in utter breakdown of communication, which in my opinion, is more responsible for the failure of our learners being able to produce and continue conversations. With one of the basic skills severely unpracticed or underpracticed, our learners lack the ability to think and comprehend in the target language and work freely within the language system.

Also, quite frequently overlooked is the issue of exposure to a second language through the means of language learning. Indeed, it is possible to get exposed to non-productive listening and acquire a working knowledge of a language in process. Witness the way Hindi is making inroads in Bangladesh; courtesy of Indian soaps or film music from Hindi films devoured by millions! It can be argued that as far as media exposure is concerned, a wide array of English channels are available via satellite and internet to all. However, so far improving listening or speaking skills are concerned, most students feel either too intimidated, bored, culturally alienated or demotivated to watch English programs for instructive and educational purposes! Even when one is motivated enough to learn from the media, it remains a difficult task as successful listening, like any other skill, needs proper training and guidance. Thus before dumping the responsibility solely on learners, they should be trained in the techniques and strategies leading to successful listening which should be provided in classrooms by instructors.

Theoretical underpinnings of listening

In the context of ELT in Bangladesh, nevertheless, teaching listening skills is difficult due to logistical problems and lack of the kind of technical supports necessary to ensure successful listening practice, also listening remains one of the most difficult skills to be presented in classrooms. Research in SLA and cognitive

psychology, however, has shed light on the process of listening and its implications in classroom teaching and learning. Though the full nature of how we process and comprehend speech is yet to be explained, as receptive skills both share some common characteristics; like reading, listening too, can be explained with the help of the "bottom up" and "top down" processes.

Bottom-up strategies

Current knowledge of "bottom-up" strategies is derived from the investigation of three groups of researchers: psycholinguists interested in speech perception (e.g. Bever 1970; Clark and Clark 1977; Conrad 1985; Marslen Wilson and Tyler 1980); the work of communication researchers (Cherry 1957) and those interested in memory (Neisser 1982, as quoted in Hedge 2000). "Bottom–up process" makes use principally of information which is already present in speech. In listening when we use the "bottom up" process we try to pick up acoustic signals to make sense of the sound of the speech. By using the information in speech to comprehend meaning we segment speech into words, clauses, phrases and sentences. We use our lexical knowledge to assign meaning to words and use logical reasoning to establish relationship between them. We also pay attention to discourse markers, or using these strategies we try to first infer meaning from what is heard and then anticipate what might come next. For example, if we hear the following words in a news broadcast: "flood situation… worsened… country; after… the coastal regions… proceeded" we can infer from the word sequence that the overall flood situation in the country has deteriorated and then anticipate that we are going to hear about more of its destructive path indicated by the temporal marker 'after' and the verb 'proceeded'.

While listening and employing these strategies memory plays a vital role in comprehending and retaining what we hear. Research on listening has shown that while syntax is lost to memory within a very short time, meaning is retained for a much longer period. Thus 'echoic memory' helps us to hold word sequences for a few seconds where only initial analysis of language is possible by helping us to concentrate on key words or pauses or other significant clues or features. The load on short–term memory is quite heavy as listeners try to hold various parts of the text in mind inferring meanings and deciding on the parts they feel should be retained. This is where choice of text is crucial as overload can occur; if there is too much unfamiliar information the greater part of the text might get lost. Ultimately it is more the gist of the listening text than its detailed structure that is stored and retained in long term memory (Underwood 1989). Although the working of memory as an 'active' and constructive process is yet to be fully

understood, what ever information we have on it has implication for choosing texts and tasks for facilitating listening (Neisser 1982 as quoted in Hedge 2000).

Top-down strategies

A "top–down" process or approach, on the other hand, makes use of previous knowledge ("higher level knowledge") in analyzing and processing information which is received (words, sentences, discourse etc.). Often called 'inside the head information', top-down comprehension strategies involve the knowledge that a listener brings to the text. Top-down listening involves inference from contextual clues and making connection between the listening text and the existing prior knowledge that the learner brings with him/her. Contextual clues refer to the learners' prior knowledge, which is also termed as schematic knowledge (de Beaugrande and Dressler 1981; Carrell and Eisterhold 1983) which refer to one's knowledge of a particular situation; for example, the number of speakers, their relationship to each other, the setting (home, office, school etc.), the topic, the purpose of the spoken text and linking the discourse with what has been said earlier.

Schema Theory

According to schema theory, our memories retain mental frameworks of various topics and settings. For instance, tables in red and white chequered tablecloths, in set with plates and forks, and chairs arranged around them, would immediately trigger restaurant schema in our mind. Miscommunication and misunderstanding can arise even amid speakers of the same language, when schematic knowledge differs, due to, cultural, regional or other differences.

While listening, listeners usually employ two kinds of schema. One is formal schemata where one has the knowledge of the overall structure and format of the speech event, e.g. 'Once upon a time there was' would automatically trigger the story schemata in our mind where we would expect to have characters, events, conflict, outcome, possibly a moral outcome with the ending like '….and then they lived happily ever after'. The other one is content schemata which involves general world knowledge, socio–cultural knowledge, and topic knowledge. Local knowledge would be necessary for inferring meanings, e.g. on the eve of Qurbani if one asks 'Cow or goat?' one needs to have the knowledge that animals are sacrificed on this religious festival of Muslims and the speaker is asking which one they have bought. Again, in contrast to the above example, many listening situations may be quite predictable. There are situations where one has elaborate mental frameworks or routines for those situations stored in

memory. Schank terms these as script and defines it as 'an elaborate casual chain which provides world knowledge about an often experienced situation' (1975: 264 as quoted in Hedge). Asking for doctor's appointment, asking for information, going to shopping, going to restaurant, booking a ticket, asking for direction etc are typical examples of scripts that we often use.

In actual listening, the "bottom–up" and "top-down" strategies and schematic and contextual knowledge are not mutually exclusive; rather, they work in conjunction to make us comprehend whatever we are listening to. Thus in real life listening, listeners first work out the purpose of the message from contextual clues, the content and setting; then they will activate their schematic knowledge and knowledge of script to make sense of the content; finally, they will try to match their perception of meaning with the speakers' intended meaning. Any mismatch between the two can result in communication breakdown.

View of Listening: Product vs. Process

Implicit in all skills is the dual concept of product and process. It was in the 1980s and early 1990s, what with more attention being paid to human beings as language processors that the focus on language teaching shifted from "product" to "process". Earlier language was deemed as a "fixed system, 'a finished product' where 'texts' (whether written or spoken) were presented as objects to be understood" (McDonough and Shaw 2003). The "process" view of language learning is important for all skills, but more so for receptive skills like listening, given its transient nature compared to the stability of, for example, written texts.

At the processing stage, a competent listener processes listening at two levels — at the level of sound and at the level of meaning; comprehension is achieved by combining the two. At the sound level one has to segment the stream of sound, and recognize word boundaries and contracted forms. This is a complex process, especially in spoken discourse, as sounds often overlap. This is particularly true in English where in connected speech one sound runs into another; for example 'what is happening?' in spoken discourse sounds like 'whatzappening?' Also, contracted forms like 'Am I not your friend' (Ain't I your friend too?) pose comprehension difficulty. One also has to recognize the vocabulary, clause and sentence boundaries, stress patterns, speech, rhythm, accent intonation speed of delivery etc. while processing sounds.

Processing meaning, on the other hand, takes chunks of listening texts and divides them into meaningful sections. In processing meaning one has to pay attention to linguistic clues like "however", "although", "nevertheless", "next" etc.

One also has to recognize cohesive clues which Brown and Yule (1983) terms as "co-text", linking larger chunks into a meaningful whole. Compared to reading and writing spoken discourse is often more simple in structure and less dense. In conclusion, speakers often repeat what they say directly or indirectly and a competent listener often identifies redundant materials and turns them into useful strategies to gain extra-processing time. One also has to activate one's schema and contextual knowledge to analyze language data and anticipate what a speaker is going to say next, e.g. someone saying he /she was late in class due to traffic jam will possibly go on expounding what happened.

What is successful listening?

Considered in isolation, the micro–skills discussed so far might make listening appear like some kind of complex, internal process taking place with the brain of the listener and language divorced from real, everyday life. Successful listening , however, is a complex and automatic process which involves a combination of the micro–skills of processing sound and meaning, use of both "top-down" and "bottom–up" strategies where needed, and activating our previous knowledge of the world and contextual knowledge which contribute to comprehension and successful listening. The current model of listening is thus an interactive one where linguistic information, contextual clues and prior knowledge interact to enable comprehension. All the subskills that make up the overall skill of listening can be listed under the following headings—

- Perception skills
- Language skills
- Knowledge of the world
- Dealing with information
- Interacting with a speaker (G. White 1998: 8–9 as quoted in McDonough and Shaw 2003)

Competent listeners call upon, engage and activate the requisite combination of subskills simultaneously while processing spoken discourse: the choice of skills in turn depends on the text, situation and reasons they are listening for (*ibid.*).

Purposes for listening

In our day to day life we are required to listen for a variety of purposes. We listen to news, socialize, ask for information or direction, listen to class lectures or attend conferences etc. Listening can be reciprocal and participatory, requiring

the listener's active participation (e.g. chatting with friends) or non-participatory (e.g. listening to news). Sometimes the main purpose of participatory listening is to get information for a specific purpose such as asking for direction or finding out how to book an E-ticket via internet. Brown and Yule (1983) termed the purpose of exchanging information as transactional (one–way informational flow from one speaker to another) and the social purpose of communication as *interactional* (two–way speech). However, in real life listening can not always be divided into such neat segments, and often actual listening is an interplay and merging between two purposes e.g. conversation between two friends about how to go about applying to the university of their choice, which will involve a move between the interactional and the transactional.

Learners: active or passive?

In keeping with the view of listening as 'product', the role of listeners have traditionally been regarded as passive, where they simply receive the incoming language data and interpret them. Rost (1990 as cited in McDonough and Shaw 2005) however, point out that in case of interactional speech the communication is 'collaborative' as in such situation we work as both listeners and speakers in shaping and controlling discourse. He is critical of the view of learners as passive language processors who supposedly perform action in a fixed order. Listening is not a one-way traffic where listeners just receive incoming data and processes it as passive receptors. He points out that a listener interprets what is being said, constructs meaning and finally responds on the basis of that interpretation. Thus a listening context is open-ended and flexible where the listener acts as a key figure in regulating the shape of the spoken discourse. Listening, in other word, does not only mean comprehension; it also involves regulating shared meaning with speaker on which the listener will act.

However, in reality, especially in ESL/EFL classes learners are still treated as passive over-hearers of   taped materials, which is far removed from actual listening and does not prepare second language learners for the complex task of listening in real life situations where they are required to employ a daunting array of skills to understand whatever is said in a foreign tongue!

Problems encountered while listening

Owing to its complex nature, listening can sometimes be tricky and can pose comprehension difficulty even for L1 speaker-listeners. External factors like too much background noise (traffic noise, phone ringing, loud conversation),

ambiguous or indistinct message or speech, mutterings, mismatch between local, regional or cultural knowledge etc. can prove distracting and make understanding difficult. Similarly, internal pressures like lack of motivation or interest in the topic, negative feelings towards the speaker or event, anxiety to contribute to a conversation or debate, and insufficient knowledge of the topic can make one loose thread of what the speaker is saying (Hedge 2000). The complexity of listening for L1 listeners clearly points out to the difficulties that L2 listeners are bound to encounter in processing listening, since they also have other uncertainties to deal with. Hedge (2000:237) refers to a number of such uncertainties; for example, uncertainties of confidence, uncertainties deriving from the presentation of speech, uncertainties due to gaps in speech, uncertain strategies, uncertainties of language, uncertainties of content and finally visual uncertainties. Underwood (1989) also lists seven main reasons for learners' anxiety while listening;

(i) Learners-listeners cannot control the speed of delivery.

(ii) They cannot always get things repeated.

(iii) They have limited vocabulary.

(iv) They may fail to recognize 'signals'.

(v) They may lack contextual knowledge.

(vi) It can be difficult for them to concentrate in a foreign language.

(vii) Learners may have established learning habit, such as a wish to understand every word.

Listening Materials

These findings and what we know of the nature of listening as a skill have implications for materials designing. Listening materials should be sensitive to learners needs and should be able to expose them to samples of authentic language use in different situations if we intend them to handle real–life listening.

It is, however, very difficult to present an authentic stretch of conversation (the definition of *authentic* being any text not created for language teaching purposes) in the class due to the interruption, shortness, background noise, ellipses, redundancy, and physical gestures of the speakers which at times might be impossible to recreate in language classrooms without proper logistics support (Ur:2-10) To further complicate the problems there are also issues of different registers, accents, dialects and use of colloquial languages and expressions which might appear intimidating to learners.

Let us consider what happens in a real–life listening situation. Unless we are talking over the telephone, in real life we are usually face to face with the speakers and as such get cues from the speaker's body language which gives us a lot of clues to what the other person is saying even if we do not understand each and every word of what s/he is uttering. Also, background noise is part of any conversation which though not impossible to produce in a taped-conversation is not always reproduced for fear of creating too much distraction (ibid). Such efforts to present naturalistic conversation in the language classroom often become a pale replica of the original. As a result, in most cases listening texts provided in the listening classroom for training learners is not *real-life listening* (italics mine).

Listening text in Bangladeshi language classes: Most listening texts designed for classroom use are discourse, dialogue or spontaneous speech that is improvised, or a fair imitation of it. The most popular form of listening texts in Bangladeshi language classes is usually listening comprehension followed by comprehension questions or listening exercises. Due to lack of logistics support, the sole material available and used in most EFL/ EFL classes is taped materials.

Strategies for successful listening

Difficult as it may appear, like any other skills, there are certain strategies that can enhance beginner learners' listening skills. While introducing listening in a class, it is important for teachers to remember three basic points. Priming learners to these strategies beforehand can go a long way in ensuring successful listening to any stretch of conversation.

Looking for key words — In real–life conversation we do not pay equal attention to everything that is said; rather, we look for key words or phrases. Similarly, it is not important to understand each and every word in a given piece of listening material.

Inferencing: Even when one may not understand every word, a skilled listener always makes intelligent guesses from the contextual clues in a conversation. In any given piece of listening there are usually other sentences related to the main topic and it is often possible to infer what the speaker is trying to convey even if one misses or does not understand some part of the speech.

Understanding the theme: As long as one has understood the central message of the conversation, successful listening has been achieved.

However, it will be difficult to implement these points in a listening task in

a second language and proper guidance and practice will be required. Often, it so happens that in trying to understand every word uttered in a listening task learners lose thread of what the listening task is all about. This is where songs can come in handy as listening materials to promote acquisition and entertainment simultaneously while keeping the learners' affective filters low.

Why Songs?

Using songs for listening is not a new or revolutionary idea. However, songs have often been used in listening classes as fillers or for purely entertainment purposes (Mc Rae1991: 35, Ur 1984: 64). Moving away from this usual practice of using songs as fillers, this paper will discuss ways to deal with learner inhibition and ways to maximize adult learners' output in language classrooms by choosing appropriate songs for meaningful and effective practice of listening skills. Keeping in view the practical constraints of practicing listening skills in the classroom and student inhibition, this paper suggests the use of songs providing topical and relevant materials in listening classes as a motivating and enjoyable tool for introducing and practicing listening. Songs can be a great way to begin listening classes, especially with adult learners, and for multiple reasons:

- Firstly, in Bangladesh, English songs have always been a part of youth culture. Most learners are familiar with chart busters in both UK and USA. Thus starting from the premise that they are well acquainted with hit songs, we can help lower student anxiety and make them feel more relaxed as they start from a familiar ground, rather than expose them immediately to some drab or boring dialogue, or give them listening comprehension lessons or description tasks.

- Also, playing songs require minimum logistics support as procuring a CD player does do not usually pose any difficulty.

- Songs can help learners understand the nature of listening and activate both "bottom-up" and "top-down" strategies. L2 learners are often uncertain about which strategy to employ while listening and tend to focus on micro–skills like phonological decoding of the speech. Tasks like looking for key words in songs and anticipating what might come next are good exercises that can initiate learners into looking for 'key words' to unlock the meaning of a listening text instead of trying to understand it word by word. Similarly, asking them to focus on what the 'message' of the song is can make learners aware of the fact that communicative purpose is achieved not by decoding the spoken text in

its entirety but by coming to a reasonable interpretation of the 'gist'.

- No learning takes place in a void. L2 learners do not come to class as empty receptacles; rather, they have a rich and varied knowledge of the world that if successfully employed can act as springboards for further learning. While listening in a foreign language, L2 learners often have the tendency to suspend their mother tongue skills and 'hear' rather than 'listen' to whatever they are supposed to listen. This tendency coupled with their anxiety to rehearse what they are going to deliver, prevent most of them from listening properly, reducing the speech to a stream of blurred, unintelligible sounds making no sense at all (Hedge 2000). Songs are particularly effective in countering these feelings as they trigger learners' song schema and make them more relaxed and receptive to the input they receive.

- In most Bangladeshi ELT classrooms the only resource for practicing listening are either the teacher reading aloud from written a text or playing taped materials. While these are useful resources, the problem with the first method is that it does not expose listeners to authentic listening as variations in accent, speed of delivery, colloquialism, background noises and interruption, different registers and other subtle nuances that are part and parcel of spoken discourse are absent in it and can not be simulated in such practice. While many of the above–mentioned features can be captured with taped materials, they fall short in replicating authentic speech. This is because taped conversations are often marked by slower pace, exaggerated intonation patterns, Received Pronunciation (RP), regularly repeated structures, more formal language, complete utterances, grammatically correct sentences, infrequent ellipsis, minimum background noises etc. for learners' benefit (*ibid.*). Songs, however, are authentic materials and unlike other materials there is no need to improvise or 'tamper' with them. Exposure to different genres of songs (rap, rhythm and blues, rock etc.) is an excellent source to help learners 'notice' (Schimdt 1990 as quoted in Harmer 2001) different features of speech. McRae (1996: 37) comments that it is possible to introduce different registers, dialects and accents through songs without making learners feel inhibited. It is not important to teach these features or even analyze them in-depth.

   What is important is student exposure to these wide-ranging varieties; to the way 'rules are broken', to differences between written and spoken (or, here sung forms); and to colloquial, local, sectorial,

racial, social and regional expressions in English (*ibid.*).

- Again, with taped materials, in most cases, the only role learners are required to play is that of passive, non-participatory overhearers (G. White 1998). Most taped conversations are transactional in nature and leave little scope for interactional and participatory conversation. This leaves out and underplays the interactional part of speech although it is vital in communication. Any communication by nature is interactional and collaborative. Songs can be useful in emphasizing the participatory, collaborative nature of listening-speaking skills as we do not simply listen to songs as passive receptors but respond to them affectively. We often talk about songs we like or dislike, the genres we prefer, the singers we like and so on. As music is something most young adults are very much into, songs can induce them to generate a lot of integrative activities, pair and group work, open discussions etc. enhancing the interactive and participatory nature of communication.

- Visual cues are a very important feature for interpreting listening. Often non-verbal visual clues e.g. facial expressions, gestures, and the body language of the speaker tell us more and help us to make sense of a speaker's intention. Songs are particularly useful here, especially in limited resource set-ups, as unlike other listening texts it is not important to see a singer to understand a song.

- Although human beings are often compared to language processors, one essential difference between them and computers is that we cannot retain hundred percent of what we hear or have committed to memory. L2 learners, however, while listening to speech, have the unreal expectation of themselves having to hurry to remember a text word by word. This leads them to overburden their memory and they loose thread of what is being relayed. For example, while recalling or recounting a past conversation we seldom repeat it word for word. We rather focus on the gist. Songs can easily be used to expound the process of listening to learners. Just as we listen to songs holistically by not focusing on just the lyrics or the music separately but in there entirety, similarly listening should be approached as a multi-level process where learners must not focus on phonological decoding at the expense of semantic decoding.

- Spoken discourse is often less densely packed and more straightforward than written discourse. We often repeat and reemphasize what we say. Using refrains in songs as analogy, learners can be made aware of redundancy in speaking. Recognizing redundancies is a good strategy

for gaining extra-processing time while listening.

- The fun element in song can help lower L2 learners' affective filters considerably. The notion of affective filter suggested by Krashen (1985) refers to affective factors such as attitude, anxiety, competitiveness and other emotional responses which help or hinder language learning. Adult learners are often self-conscious and easily demotivated. Although the precise functioning of a filter in language learning is yet to be explained, it is widely agreed that affective filters play a crucial role in language acquisition. Due to the type of listening activities prevalent in ELT classrooms that test learners' comprehension ability without contextualizing the text or activating their schemata, learners often end up having a negative assessment about their listening ability. Introducing listening with songs keeps learners relaxed and students receptive. They usually try to figure out if it is a song they have already heard! If they conclude that it was not that song the element of fun involved creates a healthy atmosphere of competition, be it in individual or group work as students vie with each other to find out who has got most of the meaning.

- Class size does not matter, as it is possible to use songs with fairly big classes.

- It is possible to recycle old materials. Good songs are timeless and students do not mind listening to numbers they have already heard, while they are also open to new songs and eager to introduce the lyrics of their favorite songs.

- Finally, the best part about using a song is it is not antiquated, exclusive, inaccessible material that learners only get to hear in the class. It is easy for them to get hold of the songs played in class and practice in the privacy of their home.

However, while using songs for teaching listening issues like song selection, how to use them effectively and turn them into useful language learning experience should be taken into account.

Selection of Songs:

Although most songs are entertaining and quite fun to listen, not all songs are fit to be played in a listening classroom. Keeping in mind the reason for playing songs, namely enhancing learners' listening skills, it is important to choose songs with elements of a story, a character clash, a point of view, or some social, moral or political message. Although it is totally up to the teacher to choose appropriate

songs depending on the level of the learners and objective of the course, for beginners it is best for them to choose slow numbers for example, country songs or soft rock numbers with minimum background noise, acoustics and sound effects. It is also important that the pronunciation and rendition of the singer is clear. As McRae (26) suggests that learners first acquaintance with register, dialect and accent will very often come from 'exposure to text from songs and rap music' and this can indeed act as a very useful resource for introducing learners to linguistic variety.

Activities:

It goes without saying that choosing appropriate songs plays a crucial role if one is to turn it into a successful enterprise for both learners and teachers. Once the teacher decides on the song it is up to them what kind of activities they would like their students to practice. It is possible to teach both micro and macro skills through songs (Rivers and Temperly 1978: 65). If the target is to just practice listening skills the teacher might play the song once at first. This part is non–verbal and intended to acquaint them with the song. The second part is verbal where the teacher can play the song again and elicit responses to ascertain how much students have understood. Finally, the teacher can provide the lyric sheet on overhead slides or handouts and replay the song with the whole class singing the song. Thus after the initial introduction of the song and listening tasks the teacher can use the same material (song) to initiate multiple follow-up activities. For example, students can do research on the singer or the song and present their findings in the next class for oral practice or to hone their presentation skills. Students can also write their feelings or reflections on the theme of the song, or to make it more fun, find Bengali songs with similar themes, comparing and contrasting local and Western presentations and treatment of the same theme and commenting on the cultural differences between east and west. Again, if it is a vocabulary task then students can be given a list of key words from the lyrics and raise their hands whenever they listen to the words from the list. As a variation of the same task students can have the lyric sheet with blanks and fill in the gaps as they listen to the song. In this way learners can be taught 'focused listening' where they will realize that it is not important to listen and comprehend every word in a piece of listening task to get to the central message. To make the activity more competitive and fun the whole class can be divided into two groups and the group which can identify the most number of words along with the central meaning of the song will be the winner! Also, working in groups in introductory listening classes will make students feel less inhibited as the burden of success or failure is shared instead of being shouldered by any single individual. Thus once the text is presented, depending on the teacher's creativity and

student's level and adaptability, the directions a lesson can take are numerous. The list is by no means exhaustive. Like any other language teaching materials it is possible to use songs simultaneously to enhance listening skills along with a whole spectrum of activities from teaching language points, structures, verb-tenses, cloze, re-writing, practicing inferencing skills to even role-playing!

Finally, choice of songs will largely depend partly on the teacher-student's choice, on what is easily available or can easily be acquired. As Ur (1984: 66) points out, since fashions change rapidly, tastes differ; it is not easy to recommend songs. Students are unlikely to enjoy songs they do not like, but again if teachers do not enjoy the songs they use they will probably not teach them very well. Because the FM radio stations and music phones students of Bangladesh are acquainted with both Bengali and English music; there are even Bengali versions of some popular English classics, e.g. the Bengali versions of John Denver's 'Country Road' or 'Anne's Song'. These songs are pretty popular, frequently broadcasted and can be played alongside the English version for comparison and contrasting exercises. Also, before deciding on which song to play teachers can also ask students about their favorite English songs and can pick and choose from the most heard or common ones. As pointed earlier, good songs are timeless and students rather enjoy listening to familiar tracks. Thus starting from familiar grounds will keep the students relaxed while the element of fun and competition will keep their affective filters low, leading to better acquisition.

Conclusion

To achieve communicative competence like other aspects of language learning, usage (knowledge of linguistic rules) and use (use of these rules for effective communication) of language are both equally important (Widdowson: 3). With one of the basic skills severely underpracticed, it is not possible for learners to work freely within any language system. Because there is no debate regarding the sad state of listening in Bangladesh, little is being done to improve the situation. It is important to realize that instead of dumping responsibility on learners and thinking 'listening will take care of itself' it has to be taught methodically like any other skills in language classrooms. The efficacy and therapeutic power of music and, its use in learning has been emphasized since olden times. Since listening is mostly dreaded and shunned by language learners in Bangladesh, this paper advocates using songs as to develop listening skills, thus turning one of the most favorite pastimes of EFL learners in Bangladesh into something enjoyable, educative and productive to practice one of the most essential and least practiced of the four basic skills.

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