

An Exploration of Teaching Strategies for News Listening in College English Test Band 4

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Abstract: After the reform of CET-4 listening test, news listening has become another obstacle for students to improve their listening level. Aiming at the generally weak English listening level of non-English majors in independent colleges, this paper analyzes the difficulties in the news listening part of the CET-4 reform based on the characteristics of English news, and puts forward corresponding teaching strategies to develop students' proficiency in English news listening.

Keywords: College English Test Band 4; News listening; Teaching strategies

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1. Introduction

Since June 2016, the listening part of CET-4 has been reformed again. On the basis of canceling the original short conversation and short essay dictation, a new content of short news listening has been added. News listening, which was originally a type of question in TEM-4, now appears in College English Test Band 4. The requirements for students' listening level and its difficulty can be imagined. At the same time, the author conducted a survey among the sophomores in three classes of the Institute of Changchun College of Electronic Technology, and found that nearly 80% of the students think that the main failure point in the listening test is news. Therefore, this paper will combine the characteristics of news reports, summarize the difficulties of CET-4 news listening, and put forward the corresponding teaching countermeasures. It is hoped that this paper will help students develop listening proficiency and arouse teachers' thinking and the improvement of news listening teaching.

2. Characteristics of English news and analysis of listening difficulties in College English Test Band 4

Different from other ESP (English for specific purpose) such as scientific English, agricultural English, and legal English, news English has specific vocabulary, syntax, structural features, and background information.

If students are not trained enough in news listening, they will lack the understanding of news features, the accumulation of background knowledge, and the summary of listening skills, thus causing difficulties in listening comprehension, which are embodied in the following aspects.

2.1. Memorization of news words

The subject matters of CET-4 news listening involve politics, economy, culture, sports, science and technology, military, and other aspects. In terms of language, news language is easy to understand and conforms to the features of written language. On the basis of simplicity and regularity, common basic words and some proper nouns used in daily life have also become indispensable components of news language characteristics. Therefore, mastering news English vocabulary has become an inevitable way for students to improve their news comprehension ability^[1].

Another difficulty in vocabulary examination is the conversion of synonyms, that is, the similar expression of a word. For example, the word tested in the question is “promote,” while what you hear in the news is “boost,” “encourage,” or “enhance.” If students can link these synonyms together, they need to generalize and summarize more synonyms in English learning.

2.2. Mastery of news syntax

The most common sentence structure of news is embedded structure, which is determined by the fact that the concise sentences of news need to accommodate highly condensed content. Sentences are mostly extended by subject-predicate or subject-predicate-object structure, and insert attributive, adverbial, appositive, participle, or clause are used as modifiers^[2]. Many students’ grammatical awareness is weak, only understand from the visual input. It is relatively difficult for students to reprocess information from the auditory approach. For instance, students often confuse the predicate or modifier components of the main sentence and clause in listening.

2.3. Understanding of news structure

In terms of the structural characteristics of news, English news reporting is also rather different compared with Chinese news broadcasting. Most of the English news reporting methods are organized and arranged according to the importance of news events. The author puts the most important, exciting, and most concerning parts at the beginning of the article, the secondary parts later, and the least important parts at the end. This pattern of decreasing the importance of information is still relatively fixed and routine in English news reporting. The common news structure in CET-4 is the “inverted pyramid” structure, that is, the most general and condensed information is placed at the beginning of the news report, usually the first sentence, also known as the news lead. The relatively minor information is followed by a description^[3]. The news lead summarizes the core content of the whole news, which is stated by the six elements of the news composed of five Ws and one H (who, what, when, where, why, how). If students do not understand the news structure or fail to grasp the key information in the news due to nervousness, they will not be able to grasp the news content as a whole, resulting in a loss of marks.

2.4. Familiarity with background knowledge

Whether students can understand the content of news largely depends on the accumulation of background knowledge. For example, to understand news about the “Palestinian-Israeli conflict,” they must be familiar with the geographical location of the two countries, the history, politics, and religious origins of the conflict, and

the information about the Islamic resistance movement. Only in this way can they have a deep understanding of the news and get the topic right. However, many students have not formed the habit of reading books and newspapers, paying attention to domestic and foreign events, and have little understanding of news, which will inevitably cause obstacles in listening comprehension.

2.5. Use of listening skills

Students will learn news listening skills in class, such as introduction, prediction, catching keywords, paying attention to synonym conversion, etc., but many students cannot use them flexibly in the actual exam. Without the listening method as a guide, it is difficult to capture important information while listening. In addition, students should master the skills of understanding questions. Many students analyze questions slowly. They cannot finish reading questions before listening, so they would read questions while listening. Without good short-term memory ability, they would get fuzzy information and hesitate to answer questions.

3. Teaching strategies

Based on the above analysis of the difficulties in news listening, it shows that as long as students understand the characteristics of news and listen and practice more, they can improve their CET-4 news listening scores relatively quickly. Therefore, when teaching, teachers should combine the characteristics of news for explanation and listening practice.

The first strategy to be noted for English listening training is the meta-cognitive strategy.

Meta-cognitive strategies are the consciousness of human cognitive activities and the self-assessment and coordination during the activity process. They mainly involve learners' learning attitudes, training methods, learning process management, and learners' self-regulation. Meta-cognitive strategies are particularly important for students training their English listening skills, as they can actively control cognitive behaviors.

According to the guidelines of meta-cognitive strategies, teachers should negotiate with students on the methods and strategies of English listening training based on their own current characteristics, so that students can carry out English listening training in a planned manner according to their own situations. More importantly, in this situation, students will be able to supervise themselves through self-assessment and self-reflection. It should be encouraged that teachers evaluate students and students evaluate each other, thereby stimulating students' initiative and enthusiasm in learning English.

3.1. Carrying out dictation training of vocabulary

Vocabulary is the basis for listening comprehension. Students usually memorize words in the news through reading, so the vocabulary they accumulate is visual vocabulary, not auditory vocabulary. In order to change the visual vocabulary into auditory vocabulary, they should pay more attention to the pronunciation of the words, and consolidate it with dictation training. The content of dictation training should be paid close attention to. Before the dictation, the teacher could classify the vocabulary, such as proprietary vocabulary, abbreviated word, new words, etc., to facilitate the students' memory; In dictation, do not take a single word as a unit of dictation, but to take classified words into the corresponding news phrases and sentences, which is conducive for students to grasp the pronunciation and usage of vocabulary as a whole.

3.2. Developing the ability to listen for key words

When students listen to the news, not every word or detail of information can be understood, nor do they know

which information is important or not important, so how to grasp the key information when answering the questions is what students need to learn. First of all, teachers should teach students to grasp the key information in the news lead—five Ws and one H (when, where, what, who, why, and how) ^[4]. Secondly, teach students to pay attention to the division of sentence meaning groups, find the key words in long, difficult sentences, such as predicate, object, attributive, adverbial, etc., and pay attention not to confuse the main sentence and the components of the clause. Finally, teach students to underline the key words, that is, the corresponding information of the question test points and options, and catch the corresponding key words in the news, generally they are synonyms. During training, teachers can use the retelling method to ask students to retell the key words of each sentence, and cultivate students' ability to filter secondary information and grasp the core of the sentence.

3.3. Strengthening the ability to read and retell news

Promoting listening by reading and speaking is the most effective way to improve news listening. Teachers can collect hot news reading materials from English newspapers and magazines or the Internet regularly and send them to students to read after class. In reading, students are required to sort out and memorize the key words involved in the news, analyze the structure and syntactic structure of the news, and summarize the general idea of the news through the lead. In class, students are required to retell the general idea of the news to give feedback on their reading. Then, the teacher plays and reads the relevant news listening materials for students to listen to, and then retells the key content after listening. In this way, reading and listening can be repeated. Through reading, students can expand their vocabulary, accumulate their background knowledge, and consolidate what they have listened to. Therefore, it is very necessary to read and speak the news.

3.4. Stimulating learning interest through audio-visual integration

To do a good job in English listening training, teachers should start from the perspective of students' learning. Efforts must be made to break the original mode of "listening," achieve "audio-visual integration," bring new vitality to students' learning, and thereby stimulate students' interest in learning English. This requires teachers to carry out various news listening training activities for students in class or during their spare time.

Students can experience and immerse themselves in specific scenarios in the forms of "simulated real-time messages," "travel simulation," and "message broadcast simulation." Establish a complete and orderly knowledge system through teaching both inside and outside the classroom to stimulate students' interest in learning. A perfect knowledge system of news English will improve students' learning efficiency and increase their interest in learning. For students, through the rich content and training materials of English courses, they can listen to more English news and gradually organize a systematic knowledge system of English news. At the same time, mobilizing multi-sensory learning is conducive to creating students' initiative and enthusiasm in learning and optimizing the classroom atmosphere for news English listening training.

3.5. Improving students' memory

Meta-cognitive strategies at the macro level have various specific training strategies, such as memory strategies. Memory mainly includes working memory, short-term memory, and long-term memory, while the processing of information for learning and memory strategies in the process of English listening mainly depends on working memory and short-term memory. However, due to the limitations of short-term memory and storage time, listeners must adopt appropriate note-taking strategies to record detailed information about long articles,

such as age, time, location, and other related information. During the learning process, one should be able to digitally remember and store the unique pauses that capture English breathing and rhythm to record necessary information, including abbreviations, associations, or self-created symbols. Remember and activate the understanding and analysis of the original information by means of symbols^[5].

During the news listening test, students often forget information while listening. Due to the vague information they remember, they often hesitate when answering the questions. Many students attribute the reason to nervousness, not knowing that there are other factors. Memory is the prerequisite for understanding, and understanding is the sublimation of memory^[6]. To improve memory, one should also apply techniques, such as taking notes while listening, except more reading, listening, and speaking after class to enhance the understanding of news. Following the speed of the announcer, write down the key points of the news, including data, time, place, cause, process, and result etc. In order to achieve short-term shorthand, students could use the first letters, symbols, or abbreviations of the words they understand more often instead of complete words, such as prof.-professor; Am-America.

4. Conclusion

In conclusion, as a rigorous formal genre, English news listening materials exhibit their particularities in terms of sentence structure, syntactic features, vocabulary, culture, etc. This poses higher requirements for both the implementers and participants of listening activities, and definitely determines that English news listening teaching, as an important component of listening teaching, is different from other styles' listening teaching.

The proficiency of English news listening cannot be improved overnight. Students need to constantly reflect during training, discover their own learning weaknesses, find corresponding solutions, and persist in training. Teachers should center on students' learning, grasp the difficulties in news, adopt effective teaching methods, and establish a supervision mechanism to help students overcome obstacles. Only in this way can they help students improve their English news listening comprehension ability more effectively and thereby comprehensively enhance their English listening comprehension level.

Disclosure statement

The author declares no conflict of interest.

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