Listening micro-skills

Summary of the taxonomies developed by Richards (1983) and Brown (2007).
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Retrieved from https://tesolidarity.wikispaces.com/Listening+micro-skills

Richards’s (1983) list, recorded below, is a useful tool for lesson planning: once the learners’ listening needs have been identified and the target discourse has been analyzed for its salient features (what kinds of listening situations will the learners find themselves in), this list of micro-skills can serve as a guide for planning the objectives of instruction. Input and task selection and design should target the development of the micro-skills that students will require in expected communication types. Richards’s (1983) list focuses on conversational listening and listening to lectures, but additional micro-skills can be added for different listening types. He does not claim the list to be exhaustive.

Richards’s (1983) listening micro-skills for conversational listening:
1. ability to retain chunks of language of different lengths for short periods
2. ability to discriminate among the distinctive sounds of the target language
3. ability to recognize the stress patterns of words
4. ability to recognize the rhythmic structure of English
5. ability to recognize the functions of stress and intonation to signal the information structure of utterances
6. ability to identify words in stressed and unstressed positions
7. ability to recognize reduced forms of words
8. ability to distinguish word boundaries
9. ability to recognize typical word order patterns in the target language
10. ability to recognize vocabulary used in core conversational topics (high frequency)
11. ability to detect key words (i.e., those which identify topics and propositions)
12. ability to guess the meanings of words from the contexts in which they occur
13. ability to recognize grammatical word classes (parts of speech)
14. ability to recognize major syntactic patterns and devices
15. ability to recognize cohesive devices in spoken discourse
16. ability to recognize elliptical forms of grammatical units and sentences
17. ability to detect sentence constituents
18. ability to distinguish between major and minor constituents
19. ability to detect meanings expressed in differing grammatical forms/sentence types (i.e., that a particular meaning may be expressed in different ways)
20. ability to recognize the communicative functions of utterances (speech acts), according to situations, participants, goals (pragmatic competence)
21. ability to reconstruct or infer situations, goals, participants, procedures
22. ability to use real world knowledge and experience to work out purposes, goals, settings, procedures
23. ability to predict outcomes from events described
24. ability to infer links and connections between events
25. ability to deduce causes and effects from events
26. ability to distinguish between literal and implied meanings
27. ability to identify and reconstruct topics and coherent structure from ongoing discourse involving two or more speakers
28. ability to recognize markers of coherence in discourse, and to detect such relations as main idea, supporting idea, given information, new information, generalization, exemplification
29. ability to process speech at different rates
30. ability to process speech containing pauses, errors, corrections
31. ability to make use of facial, paralinguistic, and other clues to work out meanings
32. ability to adjust listening strategies to different kinds of listener purposes and goals
33. ability to signal comprehension or lack of comprehension, verbally and non-verbally

Richards's (1983) micro-skills for listening to lectures:
1. ability to identify purpose and scope of lecture
2. ability to identify topic of lecture and follow topic development
3. ability to identify relationships among units within discourse (e.g., major ideas, generalizations, hypotheses, supporting ideas, examples)
4. ability to identify role of discourse markers in signaling structure of a lecture (e.g., conjunctions, adverbs, *gambits*, routines)
5. ability to infer relationships (e.g., cause, effect, conclusion)
6. ability to recognize key lexical items related to subject/topic
7. ability to deduce meanings of words from context
8. ability to recognize markers of cohesion
9. ability to recognize function of intonation to signal information structure (e.g., pitch, volume, pace, key)
10. ability to detect attitude of speaker toward subject matter
11. ability to follow different modes of lecturing: spoken, audio, audio-visual
12. ability to follow lecture despite differences in accent and speed
13. familiarity with different styles of lecturing: formal, conversational, read, unplanned
14. familiarity with different registers: written vs. colloquial
15. ability to recognize irrelevant matter: jokes, digressions, meanderings
16. ability to recognize function of non-verbal cues as markers of emphasis and attitude
17. knowledge of classroom conventions (e.g., turn-taking, clarification requests)
18. ability to recognize instructional learner tasks (e.g., warnings, suggestions, recommendations, advice, instructions)

Building on Richards's (1983) aural skills taxonomy, Brown (2007) offers a simplified list of micro-
skills AND macro-skills (for conversational listening). The macro skills isolate those skills that relate to the discourse level of organization, while those that remain at the sentence level continue to be called micro skills.

Brown's (2007) listening comprehension **micro skills** (for conversational discourse) (p. 308)
1. Retain chunks of language of different lengths in short-term memory
2. Discriminate among the distinctive sounds of English
3. Recognize English stress patterns, words in stressed and unstressed positions, rhythmic structure, intonational contours, and their role in signaling information.
4. Recognize reduced forms of words.
5. Distinguish word boundaries, recognize a core of words, and interpret word order patterns and their significance.
7. Process speech at different rates of delivery.
8. Recognize grammatical word classes (nouns, verbs, etc.), systems (e.g., tense, agreement, pluralization), patterns, rules, and elliptical forms.
9. Detect sentence constituents and distinguish between major and minor constituents.
10. Recognize that a particular meaning may be expressed in different grammatical forms.

Brown's (2007) **macro skills** (for conversational discourse) (p. 308)
1. Recognize cohesive devices in spoken discourse.
2. Recognize the communicative functions of utterances, according to situations, participants, goals.
3. Infer situations, participants, goals using real-world knowledge. (pragmatic competence)
4. From events, ideas, etc., described, predict outcomes, infer links and connections between events, deduce causes and effects, and detect such relations such as main idea, supporting idea, new information, given information, generalization, and exemplification.
5. Distinguish between literal and implied meanings.
6. Use facial, kinesic, body language, and other nonverbal cues to decipher meanings.
7. Develop and use a battery of **listening strategies**, such as detecting key words, guessing the meaning of words from context, appealing for help, and signaling comprehension or lack thereof.

References