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SUBJECT: ENGLISH LITERATURE

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Listening: Meaning, Nature and Importance

Listening is an art, one of the most important communication skills. To be a good speaker, you have to be an excellent listener; think if you want to be an excellent speaker! You speak what you already know, but when you listen you learn something new!

*Listening= Learning*

Listening is the first step through which human being to learn about their surroundings. From ancient times to scientific research suggests that foetus in the womb reacts to external sounds. So, in the process of communication, it is estimated that 45% is listening, speaking 30%, reading 16% and writing 9%. Since act of listening comes us naturally like the act of breathing, we do not place much emphasis or pay attention to it because we “hear” and do not “listen”. Thus listening is intentional hearing. Developing good listening skills holds key to successful communication and comprehension.

Nature of Listening

Listening is the cognitive process whereby we attach meanings to aural signals. It is the active intellectual process of decoding, interpreting, understanding and evaluating messages. It is a mode of communication just as important as the other modes like speaking, reading, and writing. It is sad to note, however, that this mode has been observed to be the most neglected area in teaching English towards communicative competence. This is lamentable considering that we spend most of our working hours communicating, the greatest portion of which is spent in listening.

In today’s world, which is fast turning into a global village and where communication is highly developed, the demand to sharpen our listening power is high.

Importance of listening:

Listening is essential to your effectiveness as a speaker. To be an effective speaker you have to take feedback from the audience (listen to them, in other words) and adjust your presentations according to what works most effectively for them. So listening is important because:

* Without listening, no organization can operate effectively, nor ultimately survive. Effective listening provides the information required to enable organizations to adapt to meet the changing needs of customers and keep up with market trends.
* Good listening and skilful questioning give a powerful message to those with whom you interact. They hugely increase your capacity to influence, motivate, develop or serve people effectively.
* Listening and questioning are an inherent part of most life skills, fundamental to human interaction, and a major factor in the success of a good communicator. It also benefits personal relationships.
* Good listening allows us to demonstrate that we are paying attention to the thoughts, feelings and behaviors of the other person. This is crucial to maintaining productive relationships, and sometimes the only way to establish communication.

Qualities of an active listener:

Active listening is the ability to focus completely on a speaker, understand their message, comprehend the information and respond thoughtfully. Important qualities of a good active listener are:

* Be there: Be present in heart, mind and spirit with the person. Begin with a clear intention to understand the other person before you seek to have him/her understand you because you really need to hear what s/he has to say first. If you don’t have the time, or don’t want to listen, wait until you do. Displaying the proper attitude with open body language is important, as well as matching your tempo and tone with the tempo and tone of the person you are listening to.
* Listen carefully to the person: Don’t plan what you are going to say. Don’t think of how you can interrupt. Don’t think of how to solve problem, how to admonish, how to console, or what the person “should” do. Refuse to be blinded by your own prejudices. Don’t think or struggle to react, just listen.
* Accept the person and his/her feelings: The meaning of what the person is trying to say is in a combination of content and feeling. Accept the person and their feelings without judgment or reservation. Don’t stereotype the person even though s/he may be very different from you. Also, accept the person’s feelings may be or how they may differ from what you think a person “should” feel.
* Stay with the other person’s point of view without becoming that person: Put yourself in the other person’s shoes at his/her point of reference. Don’t become that person, but understand what s/he is feeling, saying, or thinking.
* Trust the person enough to keep out of it: Trust the person’s ability to handle his/her own feelings, work through them, and find solutions to his/her own problems. Stay objective. Refrain from offering solutions in order to keep yourself removed. Don’t intrude on what the person is trying to say.

Principles of listening:

A good listener will listen not only to what is being said, but also to what is left unsaid or only partially said. Effective listening therefore involves observing body language and noticing inconsistencies between verbal and non-verbal messages, as well as just what is being said at any given moment. Listening is therefore not just a matter of using your ears, but also your eyes. Some of the principles behind really good listening are:

* Stop talking:

Don’t talk, listen. “If we were supposed to talk more than we listen, we would have two tongues and one ear.” -Mark Twain. When somebody else is talking listen to what they are saying, do not interrupt, talk over them or finish their sentences for them. Stop, just listen.

* Prepare yourself to listen:

Relax.

Focus on the speaker. Put other things out of mind. The human mind is easily distracted by other thoughts- what’s for lunch, what time do I need to leave to catch my train, is it going to rain- try to put other thoughts out of mind and concentrate on the messages that are being communicated.

* Put the speaker at ease:

Help the speaker to feel free to speak.

Remember their needs and concerns. Nod or use other gestures or words to encourage them to continue. Maintain eye contact but don’t stare- show you are listening and understanding what is being said.

* Remove distractions

Focus on what is being said.

Don’t doodle, shuffle papers, look out the window, pick your fingernails or similar. Avoid unnecessary interruptions. These behaviors disrupt the listening process and send messages to the speaker that you are bored or distracted.

* Empathize

Try to understand the other person’s point of view

Look at issues from their perspective. Let go of preconceived ideas. By having an open mind we can more fully empathize with the speaker.

* Be patient

A pause, even a long pause, does not necessarily mean that the speaker has finished.

Be patient and let the speaker continue in their own time, sometimes it takes time to formulate what to say and how to say it. Never interrupt or finish a sentence for someone.