

HOW TO IMPROVE ENGLISH LISTENING SKILL FOR VIETNAMESE STUDENTS

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When being born, a baby can naturally learn how to speak a language from the environment where he grows up. A Vietnamese baby growing up in an American family from the day when it was born surely speaks English as well as the other members in this family. Also, an English baby can speak Vietnamese language as clearly as other Vietnamese people when he grows up in a Vietnamese family right after he was born. The baby can do that because he can listen to the people speaking their language and gradually understand what they mean. One day the baby speaks the language with the meanings they have already acquired from the environment. The babies gradually grow up with the sounds of the language people use in the family and in the society and they understand all things surrounding them through communication with other people by listening and speaking.

1. A golden rule for a successful language acquisition

Acquiring a new living language requires learners to start with the voice of the target language if they want to learn and use this language successfully. This is the golden rule for anyone who wants to learn another living language for a successful communication.

2. A problem with learning English of Vietnamese students

Students in Vietnam learn English without keeping this golden rule and they cannot be effective English learners. There are so many complaints on the results of learning English of Vietnamese students: Lots of students cannot use English effectively after leaving their high-school with so much time spent on learning English; there are also many Vietnamese students who cannot use English after leaving University. This problem raises a big question on the approaches used for training students in their learning English. The bad thing many Vietnamese students face with in using English language is that they cannot understand people when they use English in their communication.

3. A process of listening training

This essay tries to suggest a way to help students to improve their ability of using English and focus on acquiring English through a process of listening training.

3.1 Basic stage

The first stage in this process is to make students listen to the basic English sounds systematically. This step is carried out by using software “SPEECH SOLUTIONS”. This software consists of 52 lessons on the basic sounds in English with many practical exercises. Students are trained with each lesson for 45 minutes. They have to listen and repeat each English sound until they reproduce exactly what they have listened before that.

Each lesson is practiced and drilled through 4 steps: [1] Listening for pronouncing the basic sound; [2] Listening for comparing the minimal sounds; [3] Listening for distinguishing the different sounds; [4] Listening to a language unit for comprehension. The first lesson is presented as in the following example:

EXAMPLE LESSON

Sound /i:/

1. Sample words

ee easy eventually enoughefficient
need cheese unique complete piece
money only she empty hungry

2. Comparative words

eat - it even - oven ease - is sheep - ship seat - sit
teak - take leafed - left he - hay least - list we'll - will

3. Listening discriminative sounds

- (1) Be careful you don't *sleep/slip* on the boat.
- (2) The cameraman took pictures of the *feast/fist*.
- (3) Are you going to *leave/live* there?
- (4) The young man acted like a *snake/sneak*.
- (5) I can't go; I *feel/fell* sick.

4. Sentences

- (1) Eva has never been on that street.
- (2) Christine would like Jean to repeat that question.
- (3) The Easter feast was the best meal I've ever had.
- (4) Would Enid like to meet me at the real estate office to complete the deal?
- (5) We weren't sure if there was a reason that there were so many people at the police station.

3.2 Second stage: Listening to VOA special English Program

VOA special English is a good program for students to be trained in improving their listening comprehension skill in English. This is the training English program for people who want to learn English for communication all over the world. It is suitable for students with many topics in the normal areas such as Agriculture, Science, Economics, Health, and Technology. The lectures are short enough with suitable vocabulary in standardized English sentences. The speakers are carefully chosen and they can make students acquire the English sounds in the context correctly. The time for each training lesson is about 90 minutes. There can be three levels in this training program.

3.2.1 Primary level

The training is carried out with the following steps:

- [1] Choose a suitable lecture.
- [2] Choose 20 simple English words in the lecture to have been recognized when listening to the lecture.
- [3] Give students the transcript without 20 chosen words.
- [4] Let students listen to the lecture 2 times for recognizing the missing words in the transcript.
- [5] Let students listen to each sentence in the lecture for correcting and acquiring the whole sounds of a sentence to get experience.
- [6] Clear out the difficulties and make students understand the idea in each sentence.
- [7] Let students listen to that sentence against and ask them to repeat that sentence, one by one; sentence by sentence.

[8] Let students listen to the whole lecture for the last time.

[9] Ask some students some questions about the contents of the lecture and make them answer to these question or give the summary of the lecture

[10] Let students talk to one another about what they get from listening to this lecture.

EXAMPLE LESSON

Students have to listen to the disc and choose the right words to complete the given text.

Building a Windbreak to Protect Crops

ANSWER		GIVEN WORDS
Number	Correct answer	
01		[A]soil
02		[B]barrier of trees
03		[C]windbreaks
04		[D]grain harvests
05		[E]blowing soil away.
06		[F]loss of soil.
07		[G]around their fields.
08		[H]formed by trees
09		[I]conservation methods
10		[J]sixty to eighty percent
11		[K]shorter trees
12		[L]protect land and crops
13		[M]protect soil
14		[N]protect areas
15		[O]some kinds of trees
16		[P] two lines
17		[Q]plants
18		[R]damaging effects

Building a Windbreak to Protect Crops

This is the VOA Special English Agriculture Report.

Soil [1]_____ help farmers protect their land from the damage caused by farming and the forces of nature. One method of soil conservation is the use of windbreaks.

Windbreaks are barriers [2]_____ and other plants. Farmers plant these barriers [3]_____.

Windbreaks help prevent the [4]_____.

They stop the wind from [5]_____. They also keep the wind from damaging or destroying crops.

Windbreaks can be highly valuable for protecting grain crops. For example, studies have been done on windbreaks in parts of West Africa. These studies found that [6]_____ were as much as twenty percent higher in fields protected by [7]_____ compared to fields without them.

But here is something interesting about windbreaks. They seem to work best when they allow some wind to pass through the [8]_____ or plants around a field.

If not, then the movement of air close to the ground will lift the soil. Then the [9]_____ will be blown away.

For this reason, a windbreak works best if it contains only [10]_____ of the trees and plants that would be needed to make a solid line.

An easy rule to remember is that windbreaks can [11]_____ up to ten times the height of the tallest trees in the windbreak.

There should be at least [12]_____ in each windbreak.

One line should be large trees. The second line, right next to it, can be [13]_____ or other plants with leaves.

Locally grown trees and [14]_____ are considered the best choices for windbreaks.

Studies have shown that [15]_____ can grow well even if the quality of the land is not very good. One kind of tree is the white pine. Another is the loblolly pine.

Windbreaks not only [16]_____ from the wind. Surplus trees can be cut down and used or sold for wood.

Trees reduce the [17]_____ of wind and rain.

Their roots help [18]_____ from being washed away. And trees can provide another valuable service for agriculture. They can provide grazing animals with shade from the sun.

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These studies found that [6]**grain harvests** were as much as twenty percent higher in fields protected by [7]**windbreaks** compared to fields without them.

But here is something interesting about windbreaks. They seem to work best when they allow some wind to pass through the [8]**barrier of trees** or plants around a field.

If not, then the movement of air close to the ground will lift the soil. Then the [9]**soil** will be blown away.

For this reason, a windbreak works best if it contains only [10]**sixty to eighty percent** of the trees and plants that would be needed to make a solid line.

An easy rule to remember is that windbreaks can [11]**protect areas** up to ten times the height of the tallest trees in the windbreak.

There should be at least [12] **two lines** in each windbreak. One line should be large trees. The second line, right next to it, can be [13] **shorter trees** or other plants with leaves. Locally grown trees and [14] **plants** are considered the best choices for windbreaks. Studies have shown that [15] **some kinds of trees** can grow well even if the quality of the land is not very good. One kind of tree is the white pine. Another is the loblolly pine. Windbreaks not only [16] **protect land and crops** from the wind. Surplus trees can be cut down and used or sold for wood. Trees reduce the [17] **damaging effects** of wind and rain. Their roots help [18] **protect soil** from being washed away. And trees can provide another valuable service for agriculture. They can provide grazing animals with shade from the sun. And that's the VOA Special English Agriculture Report.

3.2.2 Intermediate level

The steps in this stage of English listening training are the same as the ones in the primary stage, however, students are required to recognize from 3 to 6 words with groups of sounds in each sentence and they are not given the transcript of the words. They have to recognize these words by themselves. In this way, they are trained not only in recognizing the meanings through the simple sounds but also in remembering the ideas in the group of sounds at the same time. If they cannot do that, they cannot understand what people talk to them.

EXAMPLE LESSON

Adding Up the Costs of Lost Travel in Europe

Last updated at: 04/22/2010 12:00 AM

This is the VOA Special English Economics Report.

Air traffic over much of Europe came to a halt for six days in April because of [1] _____ in Iceland.

The economic costs added up [2] _____ they were trying to go.

At its worst, the crisis [3] _____.

About one hundred thousand flights [4] _____.

The International Air Transport Association [5] _____.

But that [6] _____ that growers in Kenya and Israel had to destroy.

Or all [7] _____.

Other businesses that depend on air travel, [8] _____, also suffered.

The crisis [9] _____ from Washington to Pakistan.

The crisis came just as Europe [10] _____ in generations.

Greece -- a popular travel place -- continues to face a debt crisis that [11] _____.

The United States [12] _____ after the terrorist attacks in two thousand one.

The travel ban in April [13] _____ in some European countries.

Critics [14] _____ of being slow to react, then overreacting to the possible risk to airplanes.

The volcano eruption [15] _____. Hundreds of thousands were stuck.

Some [16] _____ except the airport. Others tried to make their way by train, bus, boat or car.

Vacationers have had to change or cancel plans. And [17]_____.
An American stuck in London, already [18]_____, found
that her hotel had doubled its prices.

Some embassies [19]_____.

Passengers [20]_____ may be able to get back at least some of the
money they had to spend.

The crisis brought new attention to [21]_____.

About thirty percent of Americans [22]_____ when they travel.

Some credit cards [23]_____ and could also face claims.

The volcanic eruption was the second time in two years that Iceland [24]_____ to the
east.

The first time was [25]_____ during the world financial crisis.

And that's the VOA Special English Economics Report.

Adding Up the Costs of Lost Travel in Europe

Last updated at: 04/22/2010 12:00 AM

This is the VOA Special English Economics Report.

Air traffic over much of Europe came to a halt for six days in April because of [1]**the huge cloud of ash from a volcano** in Iceland.

The economic costs added up [2]**as airlines flew everyone to where** they were trying to go.

At its worst, the crisis [3]**affected nearly a third of world air travel**.

About one hundred thousand flights [4]**were cancelled or delayed**.

The International Air Transport Association [5]**estimated the cost to airlines at nearly two billion dollars**.

But that [6]**does not include costs like the tons of flowers** that growers in Kenya and Israel had to destroy.

Or all [7]**the fruits and vegetables that could also not be flown to Europe**.

Other businesses that depend on air travel, [8]**including hotels and vacation places**, also suffered.

The crisis [9]**affected airports** from Washington to Pakistan.

The crisis came just as Europe [10]**is trying to recover from its worst recession** in generations.

Greece -- a popular travel place -- continues to face a debt crisis that [11]**has sharply raised its borrowing costs**.

The United States [12]**halted air travel for three days** after the terrorist attacks in two thousand one.

The travel ban in April [13]**lasted twice as long** in some European countries.

Critics [14]**accused European air transport officials** of being slow to react, then overreacting to the possible risk to airplanes.

The volcano eruption [15] **cost time and money for travelers**. Hundreds of thousands were stuck.

Some [16]**had no place to stay** except the airport. Others tried to make their way by train, bus, boat or car.

Vacationers have had to change or cancel plans. And [17]**not all businesses were sympathetic**.

An American stuck in London, already [18]**one of the world's highest priced cities**, found that her hotel had doubled its prices.

Some embassies [19]**offered emergency loans to their citizens**.

Passengers [20]**delayed on European airlines** may be able to get back at least some of the money they had to spend.

The crisis brought new attention to [21] **the billion-dollar market for travel insurance**.
About thirty percent of Americans [22] **buy policies to cover unexpected problems** when they travel.
Some credit cards [23] **offer a form of insurance** and could also face claims.
The volcanic eruption was the second time in two years that Iceland [24] **has shaken its neighbors** to the east.
The first time was [25] **the near-collapse of Iceland's banks and currency** during the world financial crisis.
And that's the VOA Special English Economics Report

3.2.3 Advanced level

At this stage, students are required to recognize more than 8 words with a lot of sounds after each time of their listening. The steps for training students are the same as in the previous stages. After listening to the lecture, students have to discuss the problems raised in the lecture.

EXAMPLE LESSON

A Credit Downgrade for Japan, but Some Signs of Hope

This is the VOA Special English Economics Report.

On August twenty-fourth, Moody's Investors Service

[1] _____.

The [2] _____ one step from Aa2 to Aa3.

Japan's finance minister said [3] _____ by the action.

Moody's said it acted because of [4] _____ since the two thousand nine global recession.

Japan's public debt is [5] _____.

Japan has [6] _____.

Moody's said another reason was [7] _____.

Japan has had a [8] _____ since two thousand six.

Japan struggled more than many other countries [9] _____.

Japan said [10] _____ of 1.3 percent from April through June.

It was [11] _____ in a row.

The earthquake and tsunami in March [12] _____.

Shortages of parts [13] _____ for Toyota, the world's top selling carmaker.

Yet [14] _____.

Economists had expected a bigger decrease [15] _____ that followed.

But there is concern that [16] _____.

A high exchange value makes [17] _____.

Hours after Moody's action, Japan announced a [18] _____.

The goal is to [19] _____.

Bond traders said [20] _____ was not a surprise.

The action had [21] _____ for the Japanese government.

Still, at about one percent, Japan enjoys [22] _____.

On August fifth, another credit rating agency [23] _____ for the first time.

Standard and Poor's blamed [24]_____.

Foreigners hold much of [25]_____ of the United States and some other countries.

But ninety-five percent of [26]_____ are held by Japanese, mostly banks and retirement funds.

For VOA Special English. I'm Carolyn Presutti.

A Credit Downgrade for Japan, but Some Signs of Hope

This is the VOA Special English Economics Report.

On August twenty-fourth, Moody's Investors Service [1]**lowered its credit rating for Japanese government debt.**

The [2]**credit rating agency downgraded Japan** one step from Aa2 to Aa3.

Japan's finance minister said [3]**trust in the economy "will not be shaken"** by the action.

Moody's said it acted because of [4]**Japan's large budget deficits and buildup in government debt** since the two thousand nine global recession.

Japan's public debt is [5]**twice the size of its economy.**

Japan has [6]**the world's third-largest economy.**

Moody's said another reason was [7]**Japan's political situation.**

Japan has had a [8]**series of prime ministers** since two thousand six.

Japan struggled more than many other countries [9]**after the worldwide financial crisis.**

Japan said [10]**its economy shrank at an annual rate** of 1.3 percent from April through June.

It was [11]**the third quarter of shrinkage** in a row.

The earthquake and tsunami in March [12] **hurt manufacturing.**

Shortages of parts [13]**led to a big drop in sales and profit** for Toyota, the world's top selling carmaker.

Yet [14]**the report on the economy was good news.**

Economists had expected a bigger decrease [15]**following the disasters and the nuclear crisis** that followed.

But there is concern that [16]**a rise in the yen could hurt growth.**

A high exchange value makes [17]**Japanese exports costlier and less competitive.**

Hours after Moody's action, Japan announced a [18]**program of one hundred billion dollars in loans to support business spending.**

The goal is to [19]**help weaken the yen and lift economic growth.**

Bond traders said [20]**Moody's downgrade of Japan** was not a surprise.

The action had [21]**the expected effect of raising borrowing costs** for the Japanese government.

Still, at about one percent, Japan enjoys [22]**the lowest borrowing costs of any major developed nation.**

On August fifth, another credit rating agency [23]**downgraded United States government debt** for the first time.

Standard and Poor's blamed [24]**the political fight over the nation's debt.**

Foreigners hold much of [25]**the public debt** of the United States and some other countries.

But ninety-five percent of [26]**Japan's debt securities** are held by Japanese, mostly banks and retirement funds.

For VOA Special English. I'm Carolyn Presutti.

3.3 Third stage: Listening to normal English

3.3.1 Listening to get the main idea and some details from a lecture.

The students continue improving their listening comprehension skill in the following training process.

[1] Let students listen to a lecture from a disc or watch a short piece of document film

[2] Students have to get the main idea of the lecture and some essential details when they listen to the lecture and put their notes on the paper.

[3] Let students exchange their ideas with one another and discuss

[4] The teacher asks the students some questions on the contents of lecture and corrects the mistakes if any.

EXAMPLE LESSON

SUCCESSFUL MARKETING (Market-Leader Pre-Inter Unit 7; Exercise 7.2; 7.3; 7.4)

[A] Listen to the first part of an interview with JONATHAN TURNER, Managing Consultant at Oxford Strategic Marketing, and complete the notes.

Keys to successful marketing:

- have a passionate curiosity for the [1]_____
- get a deep understanding of their [2]_____ and their[3]_____
- analyze all the business [4]_____ and market [5]_____ constantly.
- have a strong business [6]_____
- have an instinctive understanding of how [7]_____

[B] Work in small groups. Discuss in what ways the following points also contribute to successful marketing.

- An awareness of the company's strengths and weaknesses
- An understanding of the opportunities and threats the company faces
- Good communication skills
- A good, creative campaign

WHICH ONE DO YOU THINK JONATHAN WILL MENTION NEXT?

[C] Now listen to the second part of the interview and see if you were right. Do you agree with JONATHAN?

[D] Listen to the last part of the interview and see if you were right. Do you agree with JONATHAN?

[1] What kind of company is Oxford Strategic Marketing working for at the moment?

[2] How does *the technique called 'market segmentation'* work?

[3] What did Oxford Strategic Marketing do for their client?

[4] What was surprising about the results of the research?

3.3.2 Listening to conversations

The training process for listening to conversations is the same technique as the one for listening to the lecture. However, students have to play the role of the characters in this conversation

EXAMPLE LESSON

LESSON 1

BOB'S DAY AT WORK

Bob works as a manager in a furniture store. Peter, his boss, is not happy about sales. Bob's new advertising campaign hasn't helped. Peter decides to fire him.

Peter: Bob, I hate to **break the news**, but our sales were down again last month.

Bob: Down again, Peter?

Peter: Yeah. These days, everybody's shopping at our competition, Honest Abe's Furniture Store.

Bob: But everything in there **costs an arm and a leg!**

Peter: That's true. They do charge **top dollar**.

Bob: And their salespeople are very strange. They really **give me the creeps!**

Peter: Well, they must be doing something right over there. **Meanwhile, we're about to go belly-up.**

Bob: I'm sorry to hear that. I thought my new advertising campaign would **save the day**.

Peter: **Let's face it:** your advertising campaign was a **real flop**.

Bob: Well then I'll **go back to the drawing board**.

Peter: It's too late for that. You're fired!

Bob: What? You're **giving me the ax?**

Peter: Yes. I've already found a new manager. She's as **sharp as a tack**.

Bob: Can't we even **talk this over?** **After all**, I've been working here for 10 years!

Peter: There's **no point in** arguing, Bob. I've already **made up my mind**.

Bob: Oh well, **at least** I won't have to **put up with** your nonsense anymore! Good-bye to you and good-bye to this **dead-end job**.

Peter: Please leave before I **lose my temper!**

4. Conclusion

Listening skill plays an important role in improving English for communication for all people who want to use English effectively in their social and working life. Some techniques for training English listening skill as presented above may help Vietnamese students to be better in acquiring English.

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