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**1. Listening, Learning, Listeners**

**Listening:** text difficulty, decoding & meaning building  
**Learning:** having a go vs. anxiety (level of challenge)

**Listener:** character traits – ambiguity and risk

**2. Examples of activities which focus on context: broaden your repertoire!**

**A Focus on the topic**

**World knowledge:**  
 To start spreading activation process



Look at the photos. What can you guess about Dan Everett and life in the Amazon? Discuss with a partner.

**Situational knowledge:**  
 To give information a 'real' listener might have or know before listening

**B Reading text**

**B Focus on the programme**

You are going to listen to part of a BBC radio programme called *Excess Baggage*. Read about the programme and write *T* (true), *F* (false) or *DS* (doesn't say) next to the sentences.

- 1 *Excess Baggage* is a holiday programme.
- 2 Dan Everett wasn't working at the university when he first went to visit the Pirahã.
- 3 Dan Everett teaches the Pirahã language.

**Excess Baggage** is a weekly BBC Radio 4 programme in which people who have spent time travelling are interviewed about the places they have been to and the things they have learnt. In this programme Dan Everett, who now works at Illinois State University in the United States, talks about his experiences with the Pirahã tribe in the Amazon jungle. He has spent much of the past thirty years living with them, studying their language and culture.

**C Focus on the speaker(s)**

Listen to the beginning of the interview. Who do you find easiest to understand, the interviewer or Dan Everett? Why? Compare with a partner.

**Speaker knowledge:**  
 To activate accent repertoires, give time to normalise to voices

**D Focus on the audio text**

What do you expect to hear on the rest of the programme? Put a tick, question mark or cross next to items 1-5. Add your own ideas and compare and discuss with a partner.

- |                                   |                         |
|-----------------------------------|-------------------------|
| 1 examples of the Pirahã language | 4 the noise of machines |
| 2 people talking at the same time | 5 <i>your ideas</i> ... |
| 3 someone laughing                |                         |

**Setting knowledge:**  
 Thinking about text features in recording context

**Schematic knowledge:**  
 Activate scripts and frames: knowledge of conversation

**3a. Some activities which focus on content: Decoding**

**1. Unknown Words** use audio-script to 'show' co-text

Read and listen to Dan talking about where the Pirahã live. Write the words or parts of the words you hear in the blanks. Compare with a partner.

If you, if you take our all the country \_\_\_\_\_ of South America, it would be right in the \_\_\_\_\_ of South America.

Do you understand the words? Can you guess, more or less, what they mean? Discuss.

**2. Phrases (to show phonological features of joined up words)**

Work with a partner. Look at the map of South America. The Pirahã live in the 'area of detail'. Make sentences to describe where they live using the phrases below. Use your dictionary.

- a. **country boundaries** (syllable stress)
- b. in the hear- t□ of Sou- thAmerica (word linking)
- c. the - y- Amazon Rainforest (intrusive linking sounds)

**3. Grammar 1** listening to snippets – see audacity refs

You are going to listen to 7 phrases taken from the audio. You will hear each one three times. There is ONE word which occurs in ALL 7 phrases. What is it? Check your ideas in the audio script.

**4. Grammar 2** using linguistic knowledge to get ahead (ish)

Look at these phrases. What do you expect to come next? Match 1-4 with a-d. Compare with a partner.

- |                                    |                 |
|------------------------------------|-----------------|
| 1 .... bring them things like xxxx | a. an adjective |
| 2 .... planning to go back xxxx    | b. a noun       |
| 3 .... they were extremely xxxx    | c. examples     |
| 4 .... sounds like xxxx            | d. a time word  |

### 3b. Some activities which focus on content: Meaning building

#### Helping listeners understand...

##### 1. Specific information

Listen to the next part of the interview and complete the answers to questions 1-4. Compare and discuss in groups.

- 1 What does Dan say about travelling in the Amazon jungle? It's better to travel ...  
a overland.      b. by plane      c. as a group.
- 2 When Dan and his family arrived, how did the Pirahã react? They  
a were friendly.  
b wanted presents.  
c asked him lots of questions.

Audio script

1.

P: What's it like travelling in that part of the world?

D: It can be challenging. It's gotten **easier** over the years with the advent of float **planes** or the easier availability of float **planes**, but, er, it would take us, in the early days, with **the family**, it was a week to two week **boat** trip to get in to the tribe, a very difficult situation as it required carrying large amounts of supplies for the family **overland** through the jungle.

2.

P: You mentioned there that the Pirahã were unusual in that they didn't want any material gifts or input from the outside world. What about human input? Were they ... did they **welcome** you and **your little tribe** arriving?

D They were **very friendly**, surprisingly so. I didn't know what to expect but they were **extremely friendly**.

**Mediating difficulty level:**

By task and scaffolding through language in the task – being careful to maintain the level of challenge

**Second listening:** deals with more complex aspects of content, once students have basic content in place.

##### 2 Meaning in context (figurative language)

Listen again and put the phrases a-d in the order you hear them. What do they mean? Find them in the audio script and compare with a partner.

- a. a highly-trained parrot      b. in the early days

**Encouraging the risk-averse:** but be careful of 'test-wiseness' (here = process of elimination and so not getting the most out of listening)

##### 3 Main points / detail

Listen to the next part of the interview. Put a-c in the order you hear them. Compare with a partner.

- a. The language doesn't have words for numbers or colours.  
b. Dan was the first person to translate the Pirahã language.  
c. The Pirahã are very happy but primitive.

**Anchor the risk-takers and encourage the risk-averse:** Use propositional content to focus on listening for meaning across utterances.

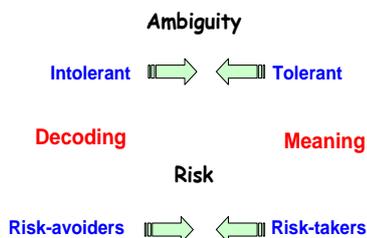
##### 4 The main point

Work with a partner and guess which option (a-c) completes the short summary of what Dan says about when he visits the tribe. Listen to the final part of the interview and check.

- a he gives them presents and they ask for news from other parts of Brazil  
b he gives them presents and the tribe talk about what they've been doing  
c they talk about what the tribe's been doing and the tribe want to know about America.

### 4. Postscript

#### Listening and Listeners



**Postscript:** By devising activities which

- focus on both decoding and meaning-building processes
- mediate difficulty-level through tasks
- help those at one end of a character trait cline benefit from the advantages of being at the other

we can help non-expert listeners build confidence and develop strategies to understand authentic listening texts.

### 5. Useful references & resources

- Anderson, A. and Lynch, T. 1998. *Listening*. Oxford: Oxford University Press
- Audacity or Wave lab (for editing, boosting volume, slow down text etc.)
- Bloomfield, A et al, What makes listening difficult? Factors affecting second language comprehension, 2010, University of Maryland, <http://www.casl.umd.edu/node/1711>
- Cauldwell, R. 2002. Grasping the nettle: the importance of perception in listening comprehension [http://www.developingteachers.com/articles\\_tchtraining/perception1\\_richard.htm](http://www.developingteachers.com/articles_tchtraining/perception1_richard.htm)
- Field, J. 2008. *Listening in the Language Classroom*. Cambridge University Press
- Field, J. 2000. 'Not waving but drowning: a reply to Tony Ridgway'. *ELT Journal*, 54 / 2: 186-95
- <http://www.hancockmcdonald.com> for listening materials, articles and talks including *Authentic Listening Step by Step* and *Pronunciation as a listening skill: understanding authentic English*
- Hancock, M & McDonald, A. 2010. *English Result Upper-intermediate*. Oxford University Press for example listening lessons based on BBC audio material.
- Lynch, T. 2009. *Teaching Second Language Listening* Oxford: Oxford University Press
- Oxford, R. 1990. *Language Learning Strategies: What Every Teacher Should Know*. New York. Newbury House/Harper & Row
- Thorn, Shelia. 2009. Mining Listening Texts *Modern English Teacher*, Vol 18 No.2
- Thorn, Shelia [www.thelisteningbusiness.com](http://www.thelisteningbusiness.com)