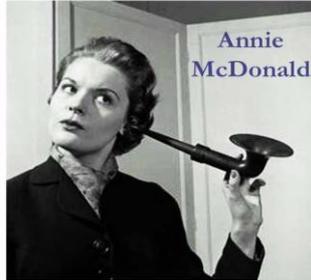


BRAZ-TESOL 2012

Helping Students Become
More Effective Listeners



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These activities are based on about 5 minutes worth of listening text, divided into 5 sections. Taken together, they give the flavour and main content of a 30 minute BBC radio programme.

1. Focus on Context: Choose one or two of the following task types:

Task A: Focus on the programme. Write a short introduction of the programme – the type of information a person who chose to listen to it would know about. Devise *true*, *false* and *doesn't say* statements. For example,

Task A: reading text

Excess Baggage is a weekly BBC Radio 4 programme on 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. ²

Focus on the programme (A)

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. ³

Task B: Focus on the speakers. If your audio has speakers with different accents / dialects - select a short snippet from the beginning of the programme. Ask students to listen and discuss who they find easiest to understand and why.

Task C: Focus on the topic. Select 3 pictures which give a flavour of the topic. Ask students to discuss in groups what they can guess about the topic. Class brainstorm. Don't comment.

Task D: Focus on the audio text. After students have listened to a short snippet, give them a list of about 4 examples of things eg. content information, qualities of spoken language, aspects of speaker styles, and general features of audio texts (background noise, music etc.). Ask students to tick, put a cross or a question mark next to each one to indicate if they expect to hear these things in the rest of the audio. Students can add their own ideas, and then discuss in pairs or groups. Ask students to justify their answers, but don't give feedback. They could return to this at the end of the listening.

2. Focus on Content: Helping listeners decode. Study your audio script and select elements of the text your students might have trouble decoding. Do 1 or 2 of the following activity types before the main listening sections. Keep the activities short.

Task A: Select 2 or 3 topically-connected key phrases. Cut the phrases from the audio and play each one 3 times for students to tune into how they sound. Ask students, in pairs or groups, to make a sentence containing the phrases.

Task B: Focus on grammar (1). Give students different snippets containing the same linguistic item but in different environments.

Grammar (1)

You are going to listen to 7 phrases taken from the audio.

You will hear each one 3 times.

There is **ONE** word which occurs in **ALL** 7 phrases. What is it?

Check your ideas in the audio script.

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Grammar (1) answers

1. They didn't want any material gif ...
2. I didn't know what to expect ...
3. I don't know if they ...
4. They didn't have any numbers ...
5. I haven't been able to be with them...
6. No, they wouldn't be interested at all...
7. Dan's book, Don't Sleep There are Snakes, ...

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Task C: Focus on Grammar (2). Give students different snippets containing similar sounding structures, along with a gap fill activity. For example,

Grammar (2)

Listen to the phrases. You will hear each one 3 times. Complete the gaps.

1. It _____ be right in the ...
2. It _____ take us
3. All the travel I _____ ever really ...
4. ... first travel I _____ ever underta...
5. No, they _____ be interested at all...

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Grammar (2) answers

- It **would** be right in the ...
- It **would** take us
- The first travel I **had** ever really ...
- No, they **wouldn't** be interested at all...
- All the travels I **had** ever really ...

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Task D: Focus on Grammar (3). Select a couple of incomplete phrases for students to use grammatical information to predict what type of information comes next.

Grammar (3)

Look at these phrases. What do you expect to come next?
Match 1-5 with a-e. Compare with a partner. Listen and check.

1. ... a very difficult situation as xxx	a. an adjective
2. ... they were extremely xxx	b. a noun
3. ... sounds like a xxx	c. examples
4. ... planning to go back in xxx	d. a reason
5. ... bring them things like xxx	e. a time word

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Grammar (3) answers

1. ... a very difficult situation as d it required carrying ...	a. an adjective
2. ... they were extremely a friendly	b. a noun
3. ... sounds like a b really tough expedition	c. examples
4. ... planning to go back in e June, 2009	d. a reason
5. ... bring them things like c coffee, sugar, candles	e. a time word

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Task E: Focus on Grammar (4). Use a short section of the audio transcript to help students understand how pronouns refer to nouns within and across sentences, as well as to things understood in the context (in this case, between the speakers).

Grammar (4)

Listen again and read the beginning of the interview.

What do you think the following words refer to?

them they you it

Presenter: OK, well, er to start with, let's er p-put **them** into some sort of geographical position. Whereabouts are **they**, how how many of **them** are there?

Dan: There are about 350 Pirahã spread out over 300 miles of the Maici River. If **you** if **you** take out all the country boundaries of South America, **it** would be right in the heart of South America, right in the middle, in the middle of the Amazon rainforest.

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Grammar (4) answers

them - members of the tribe

they - members of the tribe

you - indefinite, impersonal 'you' = anyone

it - the tribe

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2. Focus on Content: Helping listeners understand. Do 1 or 2 activity types for each of the main sections of your audio.

Task A: Focus on specific information. Moderate the difficulty level through the number and wording of the options. This activity can also be used in conjunction with more taxing activities based on a second listening of the same section of the audio.

Multiple choice

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

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

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Audio-script for questions 1 and 2

Bold and underlined words indicate what students will need to understand to identify the correct option.

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**

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Task B: Understanding meaning in context.

Sequencing and discussion

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
- c a really tough expedition
- d your little tribe

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Task C: Identifying the main points / detail. Make sure the options are simple summaries of the points made by the speakers.

Sequencing

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

Students read ...

- a. The Pirahã language doesn't have words for numbers and colours.
- b. Dan was the first person to translate the Pirahã language.
- c. The Pirahã are more primitive than other cultures Dan's met.

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Audio-script

The speaker says ...

- a. no numbers / no colour words
- b. first person / translate / language
- c. most primitive ever seen

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Task D: Identifying the main point. Think about the number of propositions in each summary option and the differences between each one. The more content, the more the student has to remember while listening. The closer the options, the greater the cognitive load.

Summary selection

Read sentences a – c. Work with a partner and guess which short summary reflects what Dan says in the final part of the interview. Listen and check.

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

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3. Focus on learning.

Section 4 of the handout for this talk, also available at <http://hancockmcdonaldelt>, gives information on ways you can help students develop their listening skills over a period of time.

The material for this talk is based on Hancock, M & McDonald, A. (2010). *English Result Upper-intermediate*. Oxford University Press. There are 5 listening lessons in the course, all based on BBC audio material and illustrating a range of listening activities which can be used with different authentic audio materials.