

Second Language Learning and Online Listening Platforms

Dr. Balkar Singh

Associate Professor

Centre of Professional Enhancement

School of Humanities

Lovely Professional University Phagwara, Punjab (India)

Abstract:

Present paper analysis the merits and demerits of various online listening platforms which are used by second language learners either by educationists or by the peers or unwittingly used by them to acquire English as second language. There are many benefits of using these aids as listening tools but it also causes confusion due to the lack of standardization and socio-cultural factors which are involved in the production of such creative outputs. In language learning, it is essential to have competency to understand the difference between stylistic and individualistic variation along with the standard language; however, such competency is mostly not found in the second language learners and thus sometimes such platforms fiddle with their language acquiring skills and cause them significant distress. The paper analyses the relevance of these aids and discusses the processes that can be involved and evaluated by the educationists to make these platforms more useful and recommends that these methods should be used under the able guidance of a trained professionals.

Key Words: Listening Platforms, Competency, Standardization, Aids, stylistic variations

Introduction: Listening skills is the most primary skills amongst all other skills and mostly acquired natural with a few exception where socio-physical barriers hamper the listening ability of an individual. Listening does not require any special training as humans are equipped naturally with these qualities; however in case of second language learning it becomes a cause of distress as native speakers can take many deviations and omit extra sounds, assimilate or add certain sounds; these language bypasses cause disruption in a second language learners' understanding of the language. There was a time when language learners either feel confined to the libraries or need to take a hard route to go the native speaker to understand the nuances of the languages. Both practice were pretty time consuming and also costly. The art of listening in case of confinement to the libraries

was non-existent or only reduced to available corpora of limited listening tracks. The merit of this system was that the books were mostly written by the experienced academician and also processed through censorship and standardization. In this case, readers need to fill blanks or space between the author and the reader through the understanding of their mother tongue. In the latter method, the learners need to go through many dialects and native speakers who all use their individual style or cultural preferences. With the advent of technology, first television and later online platforms like you tube, Netflix etc. there is abundance of listening opportunities for a curious language learner and the available resource has variety and vastness both. However, the vastness of resources also means that confusion in authenticity and process of standardization is non-existent. These listening platforms are often recommended by the educationist but it can create many issues as discussed below.

Discursive Field: In the present world with the multiple exposures that language learners has been exposed to, is creating a completely different scenario as multiple online platforms which individuals are using bringing many dimensions into language learning scenario. Andrew D. Wolvin in “Introduction: Perspectives on Listening in the 21st Century” states:

Against the doom and disaster of today’s dysfunctional world, people are embracing new ways to connect with each other through modern day technology, through religious organizations, and through renewed attention to personal and professional relationships alike. (1)

The modern world technology has already provided platforms to all speakers of the society, it does not matter what you are and what is your affiliation; you can create your own discourse and discursive field. In such scenario of abundance, the major problem that a reader or a listener is facing in the current scenario is the authentication. The process of standardization is too weak and almost having no agency to approve or disapprove the content. In such case, it is very important to have proper ear training as the abundance of language codes and accent also interferes with the speaking skills of the second language learner. Whereas native language speakers are able to draw the line between varied phonology scales and are able to use these sounds for stylistic purposes; second language learners are often confined to the world of confusion and start using various language codes together. This mixture of codes create new jargons which may or may not be understood by other listeners and also interfere with the unified pronunciation sounds. Thus the basic 44 sounds

of the English language has many other variation which are multiplying with the exposure to other dialects of English Language through online platforms. The critics who are in favour of such processes argue that the process of standardization is itself arbitrary as the language which get the status of main languages are not scientific and no dialects is superior than the other and apart from that individualization, even in the native speakers, is a natural variant and cannot be taken out of the equation. Moreover, language proficiency is all about understanding all variants, invariable of all trivial barriers. On the contrary, even if all these arguments are accepted still such language proficiency is a matter of amusement for the native speakers and a matter of serious concern for the professionals. In professional environment these learnt dialects with mixing of own mother tongue influences could have cultural and linguistic repercussions. Kolko and Reid states. "Language, as the building block of what occurs in cyberspace, is more ephemeral than the written word and more fixed than the casual spoken word" (213).

Standardization: Another major aspect of using online spaces is the credibility of the used sounds and language expressions. Most of the time language used by these platforms is specific to regions and cultures and using them in all contexts could hamper the process of communication and could land the speaker into trouble. Cheryl Glenn and Krista Ratcliffe states:

Perceptive listening focuses on the processes of reasoning and reflection, and its strategies allow the hearer to assess the credibility of the speech and the reliability of the speaker's character in order to make critical judgments about self, others, and future actions. (64)

One benefit of using multiple sounds and accents is that it enhances the competence of the speaker and allows him or her to navigate better in the practical world, but in term of academia this is a flawed knowledge and cannot withstand the formal scenario and thus always looked down upon.

Documentation: The documentation of the acquired knowledge in form of written format is a major cause of human progress as the documented knowledge is passable. It is difficult of accumulate such knowledge as it does not have the required standard of the academia and also cause arbitrariness. Thus such acquiring of skills is also short-lived; however can be used for the immediate requirements of an individual.

Non Verbal Cues: Another very important cog of any effective communication is non-verbal cues. These non-verbal markers are of the native speakers are often gone unnoticed by the second language learners and are also culture or region specific. By using multiple, non-standard listening platforms the meddling with the learning process of the individuals is unavoidable. It is very essential to understand the usage of such markers for effective communication and to acquire master level efficiency. Beverley Skeggs and Helen Wood rightly pointed out:

With repeated intense listening we immediately recognized that there was a clear patterning to minimal responses such as tuts, gasps, sighs, etc., as clues to affective responses. When we compared different viewing sessions to the same programmes we could see affective reactions occurring at exactly the same moment across groups in viewers' encounters with the text. (126)

Conclusion: Whatever the case is the relevance of these platforms cannot be ignored as these platforms are accessible and are widely used not just because of its educational value but also because of the entertainment factor that are the part of it. It not only makes the mundane listening interesting but also brought it close to your heart by bringing it in all shapes and sizes. Almost everybody can find their area of interest and the type of the material they are looking for. However, if these platforms are needed to be used for learning purposes, it is essential to use the help of an expert who has experience of using such tools and having valid exposure.

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