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A report on academic listening development of second language users of Afrikaans at Stellenbosch University

Abstract

In 2005, Stellenbosch University (SU) started presenting academic literacy courses, including language-support courses, to address the problem of poor levels of academic literacy. This article focuses on research conducted by the SU Language Centre's Unit for Afrikaans and English to report on an academic literacy intervention in the Faculty of Engineering for the period 2006 to 2009 for first-year students for whom Afrikaans was a second language. Particular attention is given to the students' ability to engage successfully in the academic discourse by employing effective listening skills in their second language. Listening tasks were developed within the theoretical and practical framework of active listening. The discussion will focus on the theoretical approach and methodology applied by the course designers with specific reference to strategic listening development and metacognitive awareness of listening development within an academic context. Furthermore, the impact of the intervention will be discussed by means of an analysis of the qualitative and quantitative data, gathered for this purpose. Deductions made from quantitative and qualitative findings were cross-validated in order to draw conclusions about the possible influence of a listening intervention on the students' academic listening abilities. It appeared that students' academic listening skills improved and students indicated that they found the intervention valuable because the course provided them with the strategies and self-confidence to survive within an Afrikaans academic environment. One could, thus, conclude that the intervention had a positive influence on the development of the students' academic listening skills.

Keywords: academic literacy, language teaching, second language acquisition, classroom interaction, multilingual education, active listening, academic listening strategies

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1. Introduction

According to the Stellenbosch University (SU) language policy and plan (2002a), the University is committed to the use and sustained development of Afrikaans as an academic language in a multilingual context. The language policy also recognises the particular status of Afrikaans as an already developed academic language and accepts the additional responsibility of promoting it, while taking into account the value and status of English as an international language of communication and the need to develop indigenous languages such as isiXhosa as academic languages. Since 2005, SU has gradually started implementing academic literacy courses, including language-support courses, to combat the poor levels of academic literacy as well as to address the issue of low throughput rates.

Van Dyk, Van Dyk, Blanckenberg and Blanckenberg (2007:155-156) explain that first-year students in particular, find it difficult to focus during lectures where they have to listen both extensively and intensively. In addition, students battle to reason, argue and debate orally. Communicative skills are amongst "the basic compencies or skills that every graduate [should] have" (Diamond, 1997; Rugarcia, Felder, Woods and Stice, 2000). Furthermore, they may have difficulty reading and understanding task assignments strategically, especially with regards to sophisticated test questions and academic texts. Lastly, students are not always able to meet the basic academic requirements of academic writing assignments. Within the University's Language Centre, the Unit for Afrikaans and English (UfAE), among others, was given the task of designing and presenting a variety of academic literacy courses based on the different language needs of a specific faculty. Currently the Unit presents courses at the Faculties of Engineering, Science, Medicine and Health Sciences, and Economic and Management Sciences. This article will focus on one such intervention in the form of an Afrikaans language development course presented at the Faculty of Engineering, entitled Taalvaardigheid Afrikaans 163/ Language Proficiency Afrikaans 163.

The discussion will focus on the theoretical approach and methodology applied by the course designers, who were also the coordinators and lecturers, with specific reference to strategic listening development and metacognitive awareness of listening development within an academic context. Furthermore, qualitative and quantitative data, obtained in order to determine the possible results of the intervention, will be discussed.

2. Language Model at the Faculty of Engineering

The overarching language plan (Stellenbosch University, 2002b) determines that departments can choose one of four language options in their learning and teaching situations, depending on the language abilities of the lecturers and the composition of the students and programmes. The A specification serves as the default for all undergraduate modules, which means that no motivation is necessary for the exercising of this option. The T-specification is applicable to bilingual classes where student

language competency necessitates the greater use of English; programmes are unique to SU; multilingualism is important in the context of a specific profession and lecturers are not yet sufficiently proficient in Afrikaans. The E specification (principally English as teaching medium) is used in exceptional cases for programmes unique to South Africa; programmes where students do not have sufficient academic language competency (foreign or English-speaking students); modules where lecturers are not proficient in Afrikaans; regional cooperation and where strategic objectives necessitate the use of English; and programmes in faculties where special agreements have been concluded with clients (e.g. Military Science). Lastly, the A&E specification (separate streams in Afrikaans and English) is used in highly exceptional cases requiring academic and financial accountability and feasibility for modules with a large number of students; regional cooperation and strategic objectives; and programmes presented through satellite technology or distance teaching (Stellenbosch University, 2002c).

The Faculty of Engineering has offered courses in language support since 2005, when it opted for the A language specification from the third year onwards, which is still the case in most departments. The reason for this choice is based on the importance the faculty attaches to the development of multilingualism as a generic, lifelong and developmental skill considered necessary to equip an engineer professionally. The focus is therefore not only on institutional multilingualism, but on individual multilingualism whereby the student develops more than one language, on different proficiency levels, within the academic discourse in order to be more fluent not only in his/her first language, but also second or even third language. Furthermore, as stated in the language policy, SU is committed to the use and sustained development of Afrikaans as an academic language within a multilingual context. Employers rank multilingualism among the most important skills for graduates to possess. (Du Preez and Fossey, 2012).

Multilingualism is therefore one of the graduate attributes of SU. At the faculty's request, a language model was developed by the UfAE that specifically focuses on first-year students who are non-mother tongue or second language users of Afrikaans with insufficient, or no, social communication or academic listening skills. A greater focus was purposefully placed on listening development so that students from their third academic year onwards, would be better equipped for Afrikaans listening situations.

A number of key mechanisms were used to identify students who are at risk of not achieving academic success because they lack academic listening skills in Afrikaans. These instruments vary and include an Academic Literacy Test, an Academic Listening Test and an informal oral assessment. The academic literacy test (Toets van Akademiese Geletterdheidsvlakke/Test of Academic Literacy levels) is a reliable and valid mechanism used to determine students' academic language and reading ability, so as to place them in appropriate language support programmes. The results of these tests are also constantly evaluated. The Academic Listening Test, which was designed by staff at the UfAE, has not yet formally been analysed with regards to validity and reliability, but has been used for pre-test and post-test purposes for the last 15 years and has yielded consistent results with regards to students' language levels. A study to determine the validity and reliability of this test is currently underway. Lastly, the informal

oral assessment is used as the last phase of determining students' language levels with regards to their speaking and listening skills in Afrikaans.

3. Student profile for the language courses

The overall language support model at the Faculty of Engineering has undergone many changes since 2005 in order to support the students in the best way possible. Currently, students who are enrolled for the Afrikaans language development modules are placed in one of three levels: beginner, elementary or intermediate. The student profile for the three language levels are briefly illustrated in Table 1 below:

Table 1: Definition of language levels

Beginner	Elementary	Intermediate
Students with no informal or formal background of Afrikaans. Students who did not take Afrikaans as an additional language at school.	Students with little informal or formal background of Afrikaans. Students who took Afrikaans as an additional language at school for 1-4 years.	Students with substantial informal or formal background in Afrikaans. Students who took Afrikaans as an additional language at school for 5-8 years.
Students who fall into the high risk category (percentages differ each year) in terms of their results for the Afrikaans Academic Literacy Test.	Students who fall into the high risk category (percentages differ each year) in terms of their results for the Afrikaans Academic Literacy Test.	Students who fall into the medium to high risk category (percentages differ each year) in terms of their results for the Afrikaans Academic Literacy Test.
Students who achieved between 0-20% for the Academic Listening Test.	Students who achieved between 21-39% for the Academic Listening Test.	Students who achieved between 40-65% for the Academic Listening Test.

All three levels are structured as separate, year-long courses comprising three periods of fifty minutes each per week. Students, who successfully complete the beginner level, continue to the elementary level in their second year. Since students at intermediate level would have had Afrikaans as a school subject for five to eight years, they normally have an average-to-good understanding of Afrikaans and therefore only complete a one-year course in their first year of study.

The purpose of this study is to give feedback, specifically on the course Taalvaardigheid Afrikaans 163, which is designed for students at intermediate level, for the period 2006-2009. Despite substantial exposure to the language at school, many students are not confident enough to communicate in Afrikaans, but an even larger percentage does not have the necessary vocabulary to have a meaningful conversation or understand basic instructions in Afrikaans. From our experience, as well as anecdotal feedback from students, it thus seems that many students might still be underprepared for study in

Afrikaans, in terms of their academic language proficiency in Afrikaans.

Within the university context students must be able to listen effectively to the gist and detail of conversations, informative texts and lectures. In addition to this, they must be able to employ strategic listening techniques, for example, taking notes, asking (critical) questions, recognising familiar words and linking concepts. The main aim was therefore to improve students' listening and speaking skills to enable them to be successful in their studies. Although the development of academic listening skills was the main focus, speaking, reading and writing were integrated throughout the syllabus in the form of either revision or consolidation so that optimum language development could take place.

4. Theoretical approach

4.1 Active and strategic listening development

In general, active listening is a challenging research domain because it is a less explicit skill than writing, reading and speaking, however, listening comprehension is as important as verbal and other forms of communication. When listeners receive coded messages, they go through the process of decoding or interpreting it to understand the full meaning of the message. Effective communication therefore takes place when a listener interprets and understands a speaker's (sender) message more or less successfully.

Even though listening comprehension has held an important place in language teaching ever since the days of Audio-Lingualism, most second-language research into comprehension has been concerned with reading (Flowerdew, 1994:9; Lund, 1991:196). Over the past two decades, however, listening has emerged as an important independent component of language teaching and learning with its own traits in the process of second-language acquisition (Feyten, 1991:73-174). Listening is also now recognised and defined as an active and complex process of interpretation (Vandergrift, 2004:3) in which listeners match what they hear with what they already know. The nature of active listener participation, which formed the backbone of our language development module, is emphasized by O'Malley, Chamot and Küpper (1989:420): "Listening comprehension is an active and conscious process in which the listener constructs meaning by using cues from contextual information and existing knowledge, while relying upon multiple strategic resources to fulfill the task requirement." Listening is therefore an interactive skill where the listener actively and with the necessary metacognitive strategies, engages in the process of comprehension (Vandergrift, 2002:1). In a study by Vandergrift (2004:9) on the effect of a strategies-based approach on student awareness of the process of listening, he found that students could benefit from strategies such as prediction, monitoring, problem solving and evaluation. Active listening implies using mostly metacognitive thinking strategies as it can lead to higher learning and better performance (Goh 2008; Anderson 1991; Yang 2009; Coşkun 2010). For this reason, it was imperative to embed the listening activities in a metacognitive listening lesson plan which will be discussed later in this paper.

4.2 Communicative language teaching

Regarding our holistic approach to language learning, we selected the best practices of different approaches to constructivism, social learning and communicative language teaching in order to develop students' higher order language and thinking skills. In terms of a constructivist approach, students were encouraged to use active techniques to create and acquire knowledge and to reflect on their own learning experience. The main reason for this approach was to transform the student from a passive recipient of information to an active participant in the learning process. We incorporated many techniques into the teaching process, for example to prompt students to formulate their own questions, allow multiple interpretations and expressions of learning and encourage group work and the use of peers as resources.

The focus on group work linked directly with social learning theory. As explained by Mahar and Harford (2004:8), the American philosopher and social psychologist, George Herbert Mead (1863-1931), saw learning as a social function which takes place when we share and communicate with others. Both the constructivist and social learning theories are encapsulated within the framework of the communicative language teaching approach. According to Richards (2006:20), communicative language teaching should be understood as a set of principles about "the goals of language teaching, how learners learn a language, the kinds of classroom activities that best facilitate learning, and the roles of the teachers and learners in the classroom." Language learning should be seen as a gradual process that involves creative and strategic use of language; as the ultimate goal of learning to be able to use the target language both accurately and fluently. Furthermore the communicative and proficiency-oriented approaches to language teaching shifted focus to the importance of listening comprehension as language acquisition is based on what we hear and understand (Feyten, 1991:175). This holistic and communicative approach thus created the space for accelerated learning since it allowed for creativity as well as interactive participation by the student and lecturer. Lastly the course was designed to merge elements of the engineering context with the language curriculum. Generic engineering terminology as well as general engineering-related topics were thus selected as themes and served as a basis for most of the activities and texts. This theoretical framework served as a vehicle for the development and refinement of students' academic listening skills.

4.3 Academic listening

Because the first-year engineering cohort would be confronted with lectures in Afrikaans, certain distinctive features of academic listening, according to Richards (1983:229), formed part of the course. He indicated that listeners should develop an ability to identify the purpose and scope of lectures, lecture topics and the relationship between main ideas and supporting details. In addition, he includes other academic listening skills, such as the ability to recognise instructional tasks as opposed to lecture content, the ability to understand long stretches of speech using certain strategies such as asking for repetition and/or clarification, as well as negotiating and deciphering meaning. Limited vocabulary necessitates that a second language speaker of Afrikaans must rely on

negotiating and deciphering information received during a lecture if he/she is to keep from getting completely lost. We are therefore of the opinion that the strategies of negotiating and deciphering can be seen as the cornerstone of any listening process, and they also emphasise the importance of students being actively involved in the learning process.

4.4 Listening types

The content of the course was developed in such a way as to expose students to authentic, and which we hoped to be challenging, listening material from the outset, for optimal preparation for Afrikaans lectures. The tasks were divided into extensive and intensive listening tasks to reflect the specific outcomes of the course. These tasks required both top-down and bottom-up processing to function continuously in a reciprocal fashion (Vandergift, 2004:3).

4.4.1 Extensive listening

Extensive listening, of which the top-down approach forms part, refers to the type of listening that implies a global understanding of language. The focus of an extensive listening activity is to listen for the main idea and make inferences about the topic (Ferrato, 2004:20-21). This includes the use of prior knowledge about the topic to understand the meaning of a message. Through the listener's background knowledge, a set of expectations is activated which helps him/her to interpret what is heard and anticipate what will come next. Students are encouraged to listen to longer listening texts without the expectation of understanding all the detail.

4.4.2 Intensive listening

The intensive listening tasks, on the other hand, focused on strategies that students had to develop to listen effectively to the detail included in the text. Intensive listening involves recalling an auditory pattern that was formed mentally the first time a particular word or structure was recognised (Davies, 1980). Gilakjani and Ahmadi (2011:983) add that intensive listening requires students to understand the context. This aspect is, of course, very important when listening to lectures. The same authors also argue that the purpose of intensive listening is to build basic listening skills by either listening to a text several times, or by dividing the text into paragraphs and sentences to understand each one; or by doing dictation word for word.

5. Methodology: The metacognitive listening lesson plan

The framework of the lesson plan, specifically for listening activities, was grounded in the metacognitive listening models of Vandergrift (1997) and Anderson (2002) and the strategy-based approach of Mendelsohn (1995). A typical lesson was divided into four stages: access, process, production and evaluation. It was, however, communicated to the students that listening metacognitively is not a linear process, but that all the stages interact continuously with one another. To facilitate comprehension during and after

listening, students had to apply four listening strategies: prediction (in the access stage of the lesson), monitoring (in the process stage), problem solving (in the production stage) and evaluation (in the evaluation stage).

When confronted with new listening material, students were exposed to various pre-listening activities such as acquiring new vocabulary, brainstorming about the new topic or predicting the theme or the vocabulary that they would be listening to. In addition, students were encouraged in the access stage of the lesson, to think critically about which listening strategy would be best in the predicted listening situation. The underlying rationale was to emphasize the importance of the effect of conscious decision-making on the learning process. While listening to the new material (of which examples will be discussed in sections 5.1 and 5.2) the listeners had to monitor their listening comprehension and the effectiveness of the selected listening strategy. Their listening comprehension ability assisted them in the next stage of the lesson where they had to solve a problem regarding the new listening content.

During the last stage of the lesson, students were expected to evaluate the listening strategy used and also to reflect on the effectiveness of this strategy. Special emphasis was placed on the importance of the last stage as strategy-based teaching helps students bring listening to a conscious level (Wang, 2011:360). Elaboration on the evaluative stage of the lesson follows at the end of the next section.

5.1 Listen effectively for the main idea or gist of a text

5.1.1 Mind map of main ideas

Since top-down processing refers to prior knowledge and content schema of a specific topic, most of the activities that focused on listening for the main idea or on the global understanding of a text were preceded by predicting information, identifying key words or brainstorming ideas regarding the topic.

In this course, brainstorming about the topic was used as a pre-listening task to activate students' background knowledge on the matter. Important key words were written on the board for students to refer to during the activity. Students then received an incomplete mind map which was a summary of an extensive listening text about the topic. The information on the mind map was used on the one hand to activate the students' background knowledge, but on the other hand it also provided students with clues on how the main ideas of the listening text might be organised. Being aware of the structure of the listening text would assist them in identifying the main ideas more effectively. After the pre-listening task, the students had to turn the mind map over and were instructed to listen to the text with the specific aim of listening for the main ideas. As a strategy of active listening, the students were encouraged to take notes to distinguish between the main ideas and the supporting detail of the text. Then the students had to compare their notes with each other and give feedback on what they thought was the important information. By making the stages of the listening process explicit, students had the opportunity to discuss what they had heard as well as what they had understood.

Students could also compare their prior knowledge of the topic with the specific information given in the text and evaluate how their content schema had helped them to understand the text. The exercise was concluded with the students completing the mind map and also evaluating the listening process by answering questions in the format of a class discussion, such as how much information they had recognised, how much they had understood, and what general feedback they would give on the topic.

5.2 Listen effectively for the detail of a text

5.2.1 Dictogloss

Vasiljevic (2010:1) describes the dictogloss as "a classroom activity where learners listen to a passage, note down key words and then work together to create a reconstructed version of the text". The dictogloss can be described as a multiple skills activity: learners practise listening, writing and speaking (by working and negotiating in groups) and use vocabulary, grammar and discourse in order to complete the task. Students were exposed to the dictogloss at the end of the course at a stage where their listening skills as well as their top-down skills (specifically inferencing skills) and vocabulary had improved and become more sophisticated.

Before conducting the exercise itself, the topic was introduced by means of a discussion in English. Students also had to predict and acquire certain relevant thematic vocabulary in Afrikaans that they would be using in the dictogloss, through dictionary or other vocabulary exercises. In groups of four, students listened to the text being read, without taking notes, followed by group discussions focused on thematic vocabulary. The text was then read a second time with students taking notes on the content. In pairs, students compared notes in order to monitor listening comprehension.

In the production stage, students made use of their notes to compile a cohesive text which reflected the theme of the passage. An exact copy was not required, but each of their sentences had to correspond thematically with the original text. During the last stage, students received the original version in print which they had to compare sentence by sentence with their version. Feedback was given continuously throughout this process.

As was mentioned in the outline of the metacognitive lesson plan, students were expected to evaluate every completed task and also to think reflectively about the way in which they had applied their listening skills in a particular activity. Reflective thinking was used to motivate students to formulate an effective listening strategy which they could use with ease in an Afrikaans lecture situation.

6. Data and findings

The findings for this study is based on the interpretation of quantitative and qualitative

data collected from an academic listening test, the University's official feedback forms as well as the lecturers' critical response to the students' development.

6.1 Quantitative data

6.1.1 Academic listening test

The quantitative data used for this article, was collected from the results of an academic listening test which is used by UfAE as a placement instrument to determine students' proficiency levels. At the end of the course the same test is again administered in order to measure students' progress in terms of their listening skills.

The one-hour listening test consists of two sections. In the first section, students listen to a lecture on a general, but sophisticated topic, after which they respond to questions aimed at testing their extensive listening skills. Students have to rely on their notes, which aid them in matching relevant concepts and eliminating irrelevant thematic information. The second section of the test focuses on the students' ability to listen for detail. They listen to the lecture again, but only parts of it, after which they have to answer questions regarding particular details. Students must identify information as true or false, make logical deductions from the information given in the lecture, complete a text using the details mentioned in the lecture and indicate their level of certainty regarding the content of the lecture. The test construct therefore reflects the type of listening skills the students will be developing throughout the language module and which will be necessary in a lecture situation. Figure 1 illustrates the rate of improvement between the pre-test and the post-test.

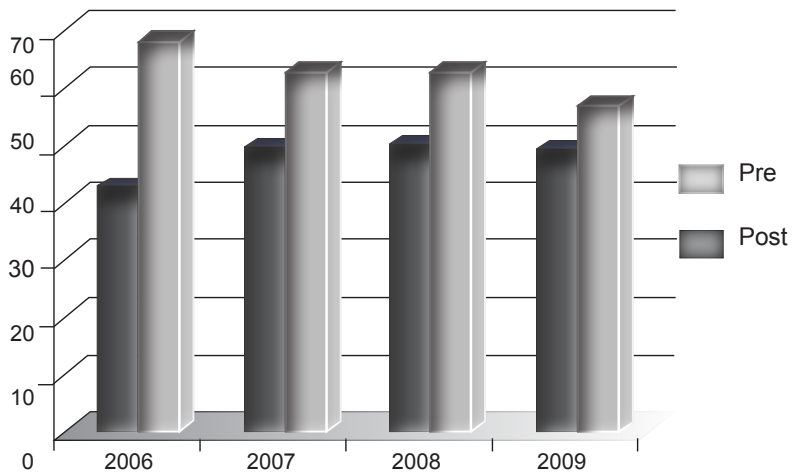

Figure 1: Results of pretest and posttest

6.1.2 Interpretation of data

Although the rate of improvement was different for each year, there was a significant

improvement between the pre-test and the post-test in all four years. It is interesting to observe that the 2006 group showed the biggest improvement and also had the highest post-test average. One can only speculate about the possible reasons for the drop in the improvement rate from 2007 to 2009.

In 2006, the language model of the faculty was such that the language-support courses consisted of only one semester module, which accommodated a combination of students at an elementary as well as an intermediate level in the same class. The students were therefore not all on the same level with regards to their Afrikaans language ability and the class had a more heterogeneous profile. In 2007 and 2008, the faculty adapted their language model to accommodate two semester modules which consisted of a beginner level and an intermediate level. The change to two modules, made it possible to place students in a group that provided language support at their specific level and the groups had a more homogeneous profile. In 2009, the language model was again changed and offered three semester modules on three levels (beginner, elementary and intermediate). The students in the intermediate group showed the most similarity in their Afrikaans language ability when compared with previous years' intermediate groups. Since the proficiency profile could be determined more precisely, the competency level of the intermediate groups increased every year. One could therefore speculate that the more homogeneous profile of the intermediate group influenced the overall improvement rate with regards to the listening test results. As the students in the 2007, 2008 and 2009 intermediate groups entered the module on a higher and more comparative proficiency level than the 2006 group, it might be a reason why their overall improvement rate was not as high.

6.2 Qualitative data

6.2.1 Student feedback

While quantitative data can indicate measurable changes in students' performance, qualitative feedback from students can shed light on their experience in a learning environment. Students' feedback is meaningful in that it communicates to the lecturer how the students view their own learning, and whether "a qualitative change in a person's way of seeing, experiencing, understanding and conceptualizing something in the real world" (Ramsden, 1988:271) has indeed taken place. For qualitative data we used both the University's formal evaluation form, which all students have to complete after a course, as well as a questionnaire which was sent to all the students who completed the module successfully. Although effort was made to acquire a large response group, only ten students responded informally via email.

Since 2006, students have given the course an average percentage of 70% and more, in the University's formal student feedback. Although the value of a module average

is not measured with a scale by which the percentage can be ranked as below average, average or above average, an overall average of 70% compares well with the faculty's results in relation to the rest of the SU. Positive feedback recorded on all the evaluation forms between the periods of 2006-2009, could be categorised and reduced to six general statements: the course motivates students to improve their academic Afrikaans; improves student confidence to communicate in Afrikaans; helps students to communicate effectively regardless of their limited communication skills; provides an insight into understanding Afrikaans much better in an academic environment and helps students to listen strategically to information given in Afrikaans.

The questionnaire consisted of three perceptual questions. The aim of the questions was, on the one hand, to determine if the students thought if they could successfully apply the speaking and listening skills and strategies they had developed during the language course. On the other hand, we wanted to determine if the course had added any value to the students' academic success or if the students thought they would have been able to cope without such an intervention. The following are relevant and thematic responses:

(1) Did the Afrikaans course contribute in any way to your understanding of your Afrikaans lectures? Please motivate clearly.

From the students' response it seems that most of them realised the importance of the connection between speaking and listening. One could possibly conclude that it is the focus on both these skills that made the necessary impact. The lack of sufficient knowledge of subject terminology in Afrikaans, however, still appears to be an obstacle for some students, but this is not the focus of the module and it is not specifically taught.

(2) Do you think you would have managed successfully without this course? Please motivate clearly.

Most students responded that they probably would have managed without the course, but they also indicated that the intervention indeed had a positive impact as it allowed them to manage the Afrikaans lecture situation more successfully.

(3) What aspects of the course were helpful and which do you still use? How do you use these aspects during a lecture?

From the response, the students seemed to draw value from the focus on note-taking as a listening strategy, as well as the ability to differentiate between the main ideas and detailed information presented in a lecture. It thus seems that the decision to incorporate extensive and intensive listening was validated since the particular tasks that focused on these two listening types did indeed contribute to the way students handled the Afrikaans lectures.

6.2.2 Lecturer impressions

Overall, we found that because metacognitive instruction was embedded in the listening curriculum, students were made aware of how they listen and not merely listening to survive in Afrikaans lectures. Furthermore, throughout the course, we emphasised the relevance and usefulness of the metacognitive activities to all their other modules.

The true success of strategic listening culminated in the end of the year project, when students were expected to explicitly demonstrate the metacognitive nature of listening development and the listening skills that they had acquired through this approach.

6.2.2.1 Planning

For the final project, students were asked to give a formal, professional presentation in Afrikaans on a sophisticated topic. Apart from serving as a means to assess listening skills, presentation skills in general are also crucial outside the academic environment, and are a key skill that employers are looking for in university graduates. Students had to analyse the topic by identifying a problem and presenting a possible solution, giving specific recommendations. The lecturer acted as facilitator by assisting with language and grammar enquiries rather than just supplying the students with a set of words or phrases needed to complete the project.

The lecturers were impressed with the students' progress since the beginning of the module. The majority of the participants delivered a well-planned and well-structured, logical and informed presentation. Most of the presenters conveyed a clear message by keeping to a logical order of main ideas assisted by appropriate visual aids. This differed from most of the students' earlier presentations as part of the course, which were short and lacking in substance. This can probably be ascribed to a limited vocabulary, not having a clear understanding of how to monitor their listening ability and lacking the self-esteem necessary to operate in Afrikaans at that time. In the final presentation, some students demonstrated a strong interest in and understanding of the topic they were presenting.

Students were allowed to use notes with key words in their presentations, but were not allowed to rely completely on a script. Some students did, however, read their work, probably due to insufficient preparation or a lack of confidence.

6.2.2.2 Monitoring

The student as presenter, answering the audience's questions, and as a member of the audience, posing questions to the presenter, had to focus on his/her listening ability. This focus had to be maintained by constantly checking for the correct comprehension by drawing on contextual, factual and linguistic clues. When presenting, it was thus important for the student to signal the main ideas by using correct discourse markers, using certain thematically relevant phrases or by repeating important words. As a member of the audience and to pose efficient questions, the listener had to process the correct details and consequently identify the main ideas of what was being said by listening for these clues. A negative score was given for predictable and obvious questions- those to

which the answers had already been given by the presenter. This process could not be effective without the use of notes. The importance of note taking throughout the process was emphasised in the course. Students had to make decisions about what information they considered important and needed to write down.

Initially, it was observed through the specific listening and speaking activities that students found it difficult to listen to someone speaking in Afrikaans, to make notes at the same time and to use these notes as a basis for their questions. When presenting, students spoke mainly in English and used only occasional Afrikaans words or phrases, or simply read their work. They also could not understand all the questions posed to them and frequently asked for them to be repeated in English.

However, by monitoring the students' listening comprehension throughout the year, some improvement was definitely in evidence. The students as audience members, were able to use the clues in a strategic way to enable them to understand the final message, and as presenters, they were able to select answers that were contextually appropriate. Student participation in the presentations was much more active than in their earlier presentations and everyone asked questions without needing prompting from the lecturer. There is evidence that the students' confidence in their ability to listen to authentic Afrikaans had improved significantly. The clearest indication was the fact that students felt confident enough to address each other in Afrikaans and was able to sustain a conversation by using compensation strategies. Some of the students said that when they misunderstood certain information, they could use the clues strategically, and became aware of their own misunderstanding and could immediately rectify it – the essence of metacognitive awareness.

6.2.2.3 Evaluation

The listening exercises always concluded with an evaluation of the selected listening strategies. In addition, as the year progressed and students started gaining self confidence in Afrikaans, their feedback became more substantial, and they really started thinking about listening as a process. From the self-evaluation of their final presentation, it became evident that the majority of the students had clear ideas about three aspects of listening: their own role and performance as second language listeners, the demands and procedures of (second language) listening, and strategies for listening. Comments from the students regarding the strategies they used while working on the last listening task, showed that they learned to manage their approach to listening through the use of metacognitive strategies. For instance, they could judge the success of their own listening capability and listening comprehension. More importantly, they showed signs of developing an effective plan to enhance their own listening abilities for successful academic survival and practice.

Our perception is that students would not have valued the exercises if their listening skills

had not been so well developed. Students' appreciation was indeed reflected in their evaluation. Many stated that the listening activities helped them develop listening skills, vocabulary and comprehension. In particular, students felt that the exercises equipped them for Afrikaans lectures by encouraging them to take notes in another language and at the same time paying attention to important words in the text while simplifying (and sometimes translating) what they heard in order for it to make sense.. The listening activities even improved their social confidence: they were more comfortable using the target language as they had improved their overall Afrikaans vocabulary.

7. Conclusion

This article has argued that the listening ability of non-mother tongue students, learning Afrikaans at an intermediate level, benefited from an academic support intervention that provided them with the necessary skills or that improved their existing skills. Deductions made from quantitative and qualitative findings were cross-validated in order to draw conclusions about the possible influence of a listening intervention on the students' academic listening abilities. It appeared that students' academic listening skills improved and students indicated that they found the intervention valuable because the course provided them with the strategies and self-confidence to survive within an Afrikaans academic environment. One could, thus, conclude that the intervention had a positive influence on the development of the students' academic listening skills.

However, there are many variables which can play a role and the authors acknowledge that the students' academic listening skills also improved throughout the year as a result of being exposed to the use of Afrikaans, especially at a social level. Furthermore, the authors realize that even if the intervention had any positive influence, there is no guarantee that the new skills would have a long-term effect and would be transferred to students' other subjects. A longitudinal study would have to confirm this. Making use of the responses of only ten students for the questionnaire data detracts from the generalizability of the data to the larger group of students. The results of the project would also have had a more significant impact if students' listening ability could have been assessed in their other subjects. It would further not have done any harm to expose the students to writing the TAG again as a post-test in order to provide evidence for claims students made as to the improvement of their general language skills.

As lecturers, however, we feel optimistic about the growth and development in the students' skills. Their positive comments indicate that they appreciated the value of such an intervention. For us, as reflective practitioners, the data and findings of this study are therefore vital for the continuous redesign of the syllabus and course content. Nonetheless, we can also deduce from this study that our approach to teaching and learning, the course outcomes as well as the content, all contributed to the success of the intervention.

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