To What Extent Are Listening and Speaking Tasks Through Textbooks Aligned with the Communicative Approach?

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ABSTRACT: *The purpose of this article is to highlight the importance of listening and speaking skills, while most textbooks focus on practising reading and writing skills more. As a result, listening or speaking are met mainly at the end of every lesson as simple objectives and rarely are they considered as the main focus of the lesson. However, given the proper guidance, the teachers can intervene in the textbook tasks and modify them in order to satisfy their students' communicative needs. Thus, this paper includes descriptions of teaching situations, description and evaluation of listening and speaking input based on textbooks, as well as well as a modification of some listening and speaking activities, so as to fulfill students' needs. Moreover, a suggested speaking lesson plan is provided which meets most communicative criteria and can involve students in a real, purposeful interaction. Therefore, every student, even the weaker ones, are given the chance to develop their communicative competence, which is what English as a foreign language aims at.*

KEYWORDS: listening, speaking tasks, textbooks communicative approach

INTRODUCTION

Speaking and listening through textbooks are two skills neglected, since reading and writing have been considered to be the most important skills for a long time. However, the communicative approach has come to restrict the use of more structural and behaviouristic approaches to teaching English and teachers are now familiar with the techniques needed in order to engage students in meaningful interactions. That is to say, students do not have to focus so much on accuracy but on fluency (Richards, J.C. and Rogers, T.S. 2001).

Listening

Description of the teaching situation.
The following teaching situation concerns A senior class at a private English school in Ioannina. There are four girls and three boys and they are all Greeks. The English language is taught as a foreign language and the students' level of proficiency can be described as A1. However, it should be pointed out that not all of them have the same competence so it can be inferred that we are talking about a

mixed-ability class. The lesson lasts 80 minutes and takes place twice a week. The teacher of the class is a non-native speaker with twenty years of experience in public and private schools.

The arrangement of the desks is traditional and the students sit either next to each other or alone. The decoration of the classroom includes posters provided by the publishing houses and kids' paintings. The coursebook used here is *Luke and Myla 1, The Magic Diary* from Burlington Books. The teacher is equipped with a projector, a very useful tool to attract learners' attention. Videos, stories and games are also part of their learning routine and they seem to be enjoying them. Nevertheless, the textbook lacks information about the main aim and the objectives of the activities but it can be pointed out that it tries to follow the "pre-, while- and post-procedure of learning". Moreover, the activities do not promote much pair and group work and it is up to the teacher to involve more communicative tasks (Sifakis, N. 2004/2018).

Description and evaluation of listening input.
The following analysis focuses on the listening input of *Luke and Myla1, The Magic Diary, Unit* 1.
Content: With regard to the criteria of content, it can be said that the listening input from lesson 3 is mostly transactional since the teacher gives Alan information about how to paint the objects in the room. There is nothing to imply a positive or negative attitude. However, the listening input given in lesson 4 can be described as both transactional and interactional. Apart from the information Jim gives to Lara about his robot, Lara seems to be excited by saying "Great!" or "Oh, that's cool!" and Jim expresses his enthusiasm through "Oh, here it comes!"

Authenticity: As regards the criteria of authenticity, it can be inferred that listening inputs in the coursebook are non-authentic. They are fully scripted in advance, they are carried out by actors and the recording quality is really good so as to help learners understand what is said without any distractions (Sifakis, N. 2004/2018).

Genuineness: Dealing with the genuineness of the listening inputs in lessons 3 and 4, it is obvious that they lack "natural speed or pauses, there are no hesitations or false starts and no self-corrections" (Sifakis, N. 2004/2018). However, the listening of lesson 4 seems to use the word "ok" four times as a high-frequency vocabulary, while this does not occur in lesson 3.

Difficulty/Simplification: Concerning the criteria of difficulty/simplification, it is clear that restrictive simplification is used. In lesson 3 some phrases like "Colour that one, please", "What colour?", "Colour the ball under the table blue" are repeated in order to lead students to the correct answer. The same happens in lesson 4: "What about a nose or a mouth?", "It hasn't got a nose and it hasn't got a mouth". Moreover, the syntax is simple and the answers are short. Most textbook listening inputs are simplified in purpose, especially for this level of competence.

Relevance: Every piece of listening input has a purpose to serve. In lessons 3 and 4 the students are exposed to vocabulary and grammar that have been pre-taught respectively. The listening inputs satisfy the aim of listening for specific information and at the same time students practice grammar and vocabulary they already know.

Description and evaluation of the activities related to the teaching of listening in Unit 1 of this textbook.

In this particular unit, I noticed that listening is not the main focus but one of the four skills students need to develop. More specifically lessons 3 and 4 engage students in practicing speaking, reading, listening and writing skills. In lesson 3, through their listening activities learners are given the chance to exercise more on vocabulary and prepositions that they were exposed to before and in lesson 4 they practice on the parts of the body and the verb 'have got' that were taught in previous activities. This means that the main aim of listening is to ''learn to listen'' (Sifakis, N. 2004/2018).

Listening stages: Lessons 3 and 4 try to comply with the three-stage procedure, that is pre-, while- and post-activities. With regard to the pre-listening activities, learners have been given practice on vocabulary and grammar they are going to be exposed to in the listening activity and therefore raise expectations of what is going to follow. In lesson 3 specifically, the pre-listening activity contains a picture which relates to the transcript, helping students this way to understand the text better. The same pattern occurs in lesson 4 as well, except for the picture. Thus, the level of anxiety is reduced and students feel more confident about their answers. The objective of the while- stage in both lessons is to make students listen for specific information by filling in the gaps or choosing the correct answers. Concerning the post activities, in lesson 3 the students are asked to complete exercise 4c with prepositions of place based on the listening input and in exercise 5 to colour the rest of the listening picture and write three more sentences about it. Hence, they move from speaking to writing by connecting their own experiences to new information. In lesson 4 after the listening task, in exercise 9 learners are asked to draw their own robot and describe it. Again, they combine knowledge with their own ideas.

Explaining task sequencing: With regard to the content of the listening input, it is familiar to students as they like colouring and topics about robots. In a way, this gives them an incentive to perform better at the activities. As for the integration of other skills, before the listening tasks students are given practice reading and speaking and after the listening tasks, they practice their writing skills. Therefore, all four skills are of equal value.

Skills integration: Listening here is not the main aim of the lesson, hence all four skills are included. Teaching or testing?: The role of the teacher in this situation is to teach students how to listen through different procedures and methods with a view to enabling them to ''listen to learn'' (Sifakis, N. 2004/2018) in the future. Consequently, teaching is more dominant in this level of studies.

Teacher monitoring of tasks: The teacher asks the students to complete the exercises and then they check them. The learners provide the answers themselves and when a student cannot come up with the correct answer in the allowed time, the teacher asks another student to do so.

Feedback: With regard to the feedback, it is mostly provided by the teacher or the other learners. They do not only give the correct answers but they also justify their choices.

Aim, function and learning objectives of individual activities.

In lessons 3 and 4 of this textbook the learners are asked to perform listening tasks which lack some information and therefore they practice listening for specific information but not for the gist which is equally important (Sifakis, N. 2004/2018).

Clarity of task rubrics: The rubrics are totally clear as they just ask students to complete the activities. Relation to listening input-task authenticity and relevance: In connection with the listening input of textbooks, it has been mentioned that it is non-authentic and it has been designed in such a way that caters to learners' level and interests.

Cognitive processing during listening practice itself: The kind of listening type employed here is the intensive one, since students have to pay attention to ''lexis, phonology and syntax'' in order to comprehend the input. (Sifakis, N. 2004/2018). Hence the process is bottom-up and the dialogues are short in order to satisfy the demands of short memory.

Making suggestions about improving the activities of the textbook.
Having all the above in mind, textbook listening is a task designed for the average student without taking into consideration any special needs of the learners (Sifakis, N. 2004/2018). That is to say, textbooks cannot always provide listening inputs according to students' tastes or inputs suitable for everyone's competence level. However, textbooks should try to employ activities of both bottom-up and top-down techniques (Sifakis, N. 2004/2018) since it is considered the best way for learners to absorb all the information. Additionally, in order to promote the communicative approach, more group work and simulations should be included in the activities so as to make students more eager to participate (Sifakis, N. 2004/2018).
In relation to lesson 3 of the textbook, the pre-listening activity presents a picture deriving from the listening input which really helps learners guess what is going to follow. As for the while-listening activity, students listen only for specific information but it would have been better to have practised first an activity aiming at listening for the gist. So, I suggest having an activity where learners would have to answer questions like: -Who are the speakers? -What are they talking about? -Where is this place? -What is the boy doing?

In the post activity, I would include a role-play similar to that of the transcript, where one student would be the teacher who asks another student to colour things in their classroom, connecting this way what they have learnt to new information.

With regard to lesson 4 of the textbook, the activities before the listening task deal with filling in vocabulary and grammar items related to the following input. Just before the listening, task they could be asked to choose one of the two robots presented in the vocabulary exercise and describe them so as to be prepared for what they are going to listen. For the while- listening activity, I would have the students choose among three pictures the correct one according to what is being described. Finally, the post-activity would be more enjoyable for them if they were separated in groups and each group had to design their own robot. Then they would describe it to the other group and the other group would have to design it correctly. In this way, they are given a purpose to fulfill the activity and they increase the practice of ''quality language'' (Sifakis, N. 2004/2018).

Speaking
Description of the teaching situation.
The teaching situation analyzed here takes place in an English school in Ioannina and the class concerned is C senior. There are six boys and four girls and their nationality is Greek. English is taught as a foreign language and the level of the students is A2. Nevertheless, not all students can be equally competent, so we can say that it is a mixed-ability class. Every Tuesday they have a two-hour lesson and every Thursday their lesson lasts one hour and a half. The teacher of this class is a non-native speaker and has been teaching English in private and public schools for twenty years.

The seating arrangement is traditional and the students sit either alone or in pairs. The classroom is decorated with posters and kids' crafts. Also, there is a projector which is very useful to the teacher since games, stories and videos are shown through this and students are excited about it. The coursebook that is provided here is *WORLD WATCHERS 3*, from MM Publications and it follows the ''pre-, while-, post- procedure of learning''. It includes the objectives and aims of each lesson and the speaking activities have learners work in pairs or individually. However, they do not always follow Nation's criteria and Johnson's principles, which have been suggested to have an effective, communicative speaking activity and they are usually found as a post activity of listening or reading. (Sifakis, 2004/2018).

Critical evaluation of a speaking task and on the impact of the textbook's suggested practices on the learners' speaking performance.
The analysis that follows focuses on a speaking activity provided in *WORLD WATCHERS 3* from MM PUBLICATIONS.
Description of the speaking activity.
As regards the activity C of lesson 2, it seems to be quite appropriate for speaking practice. Student A is given an advertisement of the museum of Natural History and Student B has an advertisement of Colours Art Gallery. What they have to is to decide which of the two places is the best to visit. In terms of function, students learn how to refer to general truths, scientific facts, conditions and results. From a structural view they practice zero conditional and conditional type 1 and their lexical practice has to do with vocabulary connected with travelling and sights. Consequently, the activity is ''communicative'' as learners activate their previous knowledge to participate in a conversation. Pair-work has been chosen here but this time the interaction between students has a purpose to serve and students are more willing to fulfill this task (Hill, 2004/2018).

Evaluation of the activity based on Nation's features.
Dealing with this activity, the student's **role** is to convince the other one that his/her option is the best one. In this case they have an **outcome** to expect, that is one of the two has the best option. Also, a **procedure** is followed as each student asks for information and keeps notes to use later. As for the feature of **split information**, it can be inferred that it is included in the activity since each student has information the other does not have and it is needed in order to conclude. In relation to **challenge**, it seems that it is not involved in the activity. In this light, it can be said that the activity is in line with most of Nation's features and students are given a motivation to participate in it and speak for a purpose (Nation, 1989 as cited in Sifakis & Georgountzou, 2004/2018).

Evaluation of the activity based on Johnson's principles.
The **information transfer principle** is applied here since the information from the advertisements is transferred through speaking from person to person. Also, there is an **information gap** as each student conveys details that the other one does not know but they need them in order to reach a conclusion. Concerning the **jigsaw principle**, it is not found here since each one has different information and not "pieces of a puzzle" to complete. Moreover, learners base their arguments on what they have heard, so in a way the **task dependency principle** is applied as well. With regard to the **correction for content principle**, it can be inferred that it is put in practice here as students focus on persuading each other through effective arguments that deal with expression and not presenting arguments that deal with accuracy. As we have seen, most of Johnson's principles are dominant in this activity and this helps learners participate in meaningful activities that will built up their communicative competence (Johnson 1982 as cited in Sifakis & Georgountzou, 2004/2018).

Adaptation of the textbook speaking activity.
Activity 2c employs linguistic competence by having students revise vocabulary they have been taught, semantic competence where they have to use appropriate phrases and collocations while exchanging information about different places to visit, strategic competence since fillers or paraphrasing are used to avoid misunderstandings and sociolinguistic competence, since what each other says affects the other one in relation to the decision they have to make. What could be added to this activity is give them a challenge like a time limit in order to make them more eager to complete their task without wasting time. This activity is effective for every class, since pair work and speaking for a purpose motivate all types of students, especially the weaker ones. Thus, they do not feel ashamed of their choice or their vocabulary as the decision they have to take is a result of two people who have cooperated (Hill, 2004/2018).

Teaching framework and feedback.
The framework used in *WORLD WATCHERS 3* follows the "pre-, while-, post- reading/listening" sequence, where speaking practice is carried out as an activity of the "pre-listening/reading" or "post-listening/reading" stage. Thus, speaking is not the main focus of the lesson but only an objective of the lesson. As we have seen, reading, writing or listening are practised more extensively as more traditional methods of the past imposed such an attitude towards learning (Hill, 2004/2018).

With regard to the feedback, it is advisable to be provided delayed, that is the teacher corrects mistakes at the end of the activity so as not to discourage students from completing the activity. Also, learner feedback is important, where learners can be trained to correct their mistakes by themselves and thus feel more autonomous. Communicative feedback is of vital importance as well, since through "repetition or clarifications" students focus on fluency and not accuracy, which is the goal of real communication. Focused feedback on specific aspects of language should be used too, since this way learners will not feel disappointed by making too many mistakes. Finally, positive feedback should always be employed in order to praise students' effort and give them a motivation to continue their work in a friendly environment (Hill, 2004/2018).

Recommended lesson plan for a speaking task.
LESSON PLAN
COURSEBOOK: WORLD WATCHERS 3
CLASS: C
Topic: Cinema/Movies
Educational Materials Used: Task Sheets, Photocopies, Pen and Paper   **S**=student,
T=teacher

STAGES	PROCEDURES	OBJECTIVES	INTERACTION	TIME
Pre-Stage	The teacher will give each pair of students 2 pictures related to the cinema and they have to spot 6 differences without looking at each other's picture. The teacher gives them 8 minutes.	Communicative Competence - Linguistic: The students are expected to use vocabulary they have been taught related to the cinema and thus activate previous schemata and at the same time practice present continuous. - Strategic: The students are expected to paraphrase or use fillers. - Semantic: The students are expected to use correct word order and collocations. - Sociolinguistic: The students are expected to express themselves in a clear and appropriate way.	T to S S to S	8 minutes
While-stage	1.The teacher divides students in 2 groups of 5 students each and gives their spokespeople 2 different task sheets with 2 film options and 4 more task sheets for students A,B,C,D. Each	Communicative Competence - Linguistic: The students are expected to use familiar vocabulary and paralinguistic features like eye-contact or gestures while exchanging information. - Strategic: The students are expected to ask for help when they do not understand something or paraphrase. - Semantic:	T to S S to S	15 minutes

International Journal of English Language Teaching

Vol.12, No.1, pp.90-102, 2024

Print ISSN: 2055-0820(Print)

Online ISSN: 2055-0839(Online

Website: https://www.eajournals.org/

Publication of the European Centre for Research Training and Development-UK

	group has to reach a consensus on which film they will watch.	The students are expected to use correct word order and collocations and get engaged in a conversation. - Sociolinguistic: The students are expected to be polite to each other, follow their roles and respect each other's different opinion.		
	2.After that, the spokesperson of each group will be engaged in a debate with the spokesperson of the other group, in order to decide on which of the two films they will watch as a class.		S to S	15 minutes
	3.Finally, the two spokespeople prepare and present their choice to the teacher by using two arguments each. The teacher gives them 40 minutes in total.		S to S S to T	10 minutes
Post-stage	The teacher asks students in pairs to keep notes and act out a dialogue. One student wants to book a ticket and the other one is	The students are expected to show if they have comprehended vocabulary and expressions from the previous activity as well as ways to express themselves	T to S S to S	10 minutes

the employee at the ticket office. The teacher gives them 10 minutes. The teacher assigns students homework to write a letter to a friend and describe their last visit to the cinema.	when they exchange information. The students are expected to practise more writing focusing on accuracy and structure. The teacher makes sure the learners have understood what they have to do.	T to S	2 minutes

Description and evaluation of the lesson plan speaking activities.

The purpose of the particular speaking task is to involve learners in meaningful speaking activities and boost their conversational skills in a more autonomous way.

The learning sequence followed here is the ''pre-, while- and post-''and speaking is the main focus of the lesson. The pre-stage starts with a communicative activity where the teacher gives students two pictures in connection with the cinema and asks them in pairs to spot 6 differences in 8 minutes. This activity helps students activate their previous knowledge and combine it with new information. That is to say, linguistic and semantic competence is practiced as students are asked to use cinema terminology and practise present continuous as well. This is expected to be done by using correct word order and collocations otherwise their partner will not be able to find the differences. Moreover, strategic competence is employed, since students will have to paraphrase or use fillers to make sure they have understood their partner's description. As regards sociolinguistic competence, the students will have to address each politely and patiently in order to find the differences as quickly as they can. Such activities seem to make students more relaxed and feel as if they play a game and by including a time limit the teacher makes the activity more ''pedagogically valuable'' (Hill, 2004/2018).

The while-stage follows with a communicative activity which consists of 3 phases. First, the teacher divides the class into 2 groups of 5 students each. The groups have their spokespeople to whom the teacher gives two different task sheets with two film options and four task sheets are distributed to students A, B, C, D in each group. Students A, B, C and D have different information, that will determine the final decision. Every group has to reach a consensus on which film they will see according to the information they have been given. After that, the spokespeople of the two groups will be engaged in a debate without looking at each other's notes, in order to decide on which of the two films they will watch as a class. Having decided on the best option, the 2 spokespeople share the information needed and prepare and present their choice to their teacher by using two arguments each. The teacher gives them from the beginning 40 minutes to complete the 3 phases. (Hill, 2004/2018).

Dealing with linguistic competence, it can be inferred that students are encouraged to practise vocabulary related to films and cinema along with paralinguistic features like eye contact or gestures while exchanging information. Furthermore, semantic competence is employed as learners have to use the correct syntax and vocabulary in order to be engaged in a successful conversation. Strategic competence is also important here, as students are expected to ask for help or paraphrase when they need to, since everybody in the group has different information to share. With regard to the sociolinguistic competence, they have to perform their roles and reach an agreement without judging anybody by their options, otherwise they will not finish their task on time. (Hill, 2004/2018).

As we have seen, group work has been chosen for the ''while-stage'', since it is considered one of the best ways to engage students in meaningful context where everybody has to express their opinion in order to take a decision. Fluency is of vital importance and not accuracy. Shy or weaker students feel more secure as a part of a team, they are not afraid of making mistakes and they are more motivated to participate in a friendly environment without the teacher's constant presence around (Papadopoulos, 2020; Papadopoulos, 2021; Papadopoulos & Shin, 2021; Papadopoulos, 2022). Thus, the learners have the maximum interaction they can have and the teacher is only a facilitator of the process. (Hill, 2004/2018; Long & Porter, 1985).

For the post-stage the teacher asks students to keep notes and act out a dialogue where one student is the ticket employee and the other one wants to book a ticket at the cinema. Their interaction is purposeful again, in line with communicative competence but in a different genre this time. Students are expected to practice what they have learnt through group work and the teacher notes possible mistakes to be corrected afterwards. Finally, in order to give students some practice on accuracy and structure, the teacher assigns students homework to write a letter to a friend and describe their last visit to the cinema.

One anticipated problem that may come up is that the students tend to use their mother tongue while speaking. Nevertheless, this problem can be overcome and as Littlewood says, the teachers are ''facilitators of learning'' and have specific roles according to which they choose and adapt materials, they select the appropriate pair and group work to be performed through carefully designed activities. Moreover, they give advice and encourage students and finally they note what kind of feedback they want to provide students with afterwards and decide if they are going to provide it themselves or ask learners to do so. (Hill, 2004/2018). Thus, the teacher is silent but intervenes when it is necessary and only to make sure that learners follow the steps of the activity.

Evaluation of the lesson plan activities based on the Nation's features.
With regard to the pre-stage activity, there are no **roles** but there is an **outcome** since students are looking for 6 differences. **Procedures** are also followed when students ask each other questions about some information and check the pictures they have. Thus, each learner participates in the activity as much as possible. As for the **split information**, every student seems to have information the other does not have but they need it to reach an outcome. Finally, the **challenge** they have is to finish the activity in 8 minutes (Nation 1989 as cited in Sifakis & Georgountzou, 2004/2018).

In connection with the while-stage, all Nation's features are applied since every student has a **role** (spokesperson, student A, student B, student C, student D) which has different information to give. Furthermore, there is an **outcome** as they have to choose one film and present it to the teacher and **procedures** are used since each learner has to participate in speaking otherwise an outcome will not be reached. Everybody has information the other members of the group do not have but they need it to complete the activity, so **split information** is used as well. A **challenge** they have to face is time limit and if they do not finish on time, the task will be left incomplete (Nation 1989 as cited in Sifakis & Georgountzou, 2004/2018).

The post-activity, has students work in pairs and practice two different **roles**: the customer and the employee of the cinema. The **outcome** is to book a ticket by exchanging information related to time, day and available seats. **Procedures** are also employed here, as students have to follow some steps while exchanging information and each partner has to participate equally in this. Every participant has information the other needs to book a ticket, so **split information** is used here as well. Moreover, the feature of **challenges** is practised and the activity has to be finished in 10 minutes (Nation 1989 as cited in Sifakis & Georgountzou, 2004/2018).

Evaluation of the lesson plan activities based on Johnson's principles.
As regards the pre-stage activity, the **information transfer** principle is used, since students have to transfer information from a picture and get engaged in a meaningful conversation. **Information gap** is applied as well and students share different information from their task sheets with each other. Nevertheless, the activity is not in line with the **jigsaw principle** as students do not have part of the necessary information to complete a "puzzle". The **task dependency principle** is employed, as students form their opinions based on what has been said before. The **correction for content principle** is also practiced, since students focus more on what they have to say in an effective way rather than on accuracy (Johnson 1982 as cited in Sifakis & Georgountzou, 2004/2018).

With regard to the while-stage, **information transfer principle** is practised as students use written information they have in task sheets and transfer it to each other by getting engaged in a conversation. Moreover, information is given from one person to another who does not have it but they need it, so the **information gap principle** is used too. **Jigsaw principle** is also applied, as every participant has information in their task sheets that the others do not have and only if they convey all the information everybody has, will they be able to watch a film. Every decision they take is based on what every student has said in previous phases, so the **task dependency principle** is employed too. Finally, **correction for content** is mostly used, since students focus on what information they give in order to decide on which film they will watch, rather than on how to say it. So, what matters is fluency and not accuracy (Johnson 1982 as cited in Sifakis & Georgountzou, 2004/2018).

In connection with the post-stage activity, the **information transfer principle** is applied as students use what they have written in order to perform a dialogue. Furthermore, information is transferred from the customer to the employee and vice versa, thus **information gap principle** is practised here. Nevertheless, the **jigsaw principle** is not used here as students do not have parts of a "puzzle" to solve. **Task dependency principle** is also used, since what has been said affects both the customer and the employee on what they are going to say next. As regards the **correction for content principle**,

the participants try to produce language based on fluency, which will help the customer book the best possible ticket concerning the cost, day, time and seat and the employee provides this information based on what the customer asks for. Thus, this principle is also applied. (Johnson 1982 as cited in Sifakis & Georgountzou, 2004/2018).

CONCLUSION

The communicative approach has emphasized the importance of engaging students in activities that focus on fluency and not accuracy, as communication is an indispensable part of foreign language teaching.

Even if textbook activities cannot always cater for students' communicative needs, educators are the ones who can intervene in the learning process and suggest modifications that will engage students in meaningful interactions.

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