

WOT, no teacher? The informal listening development of international students

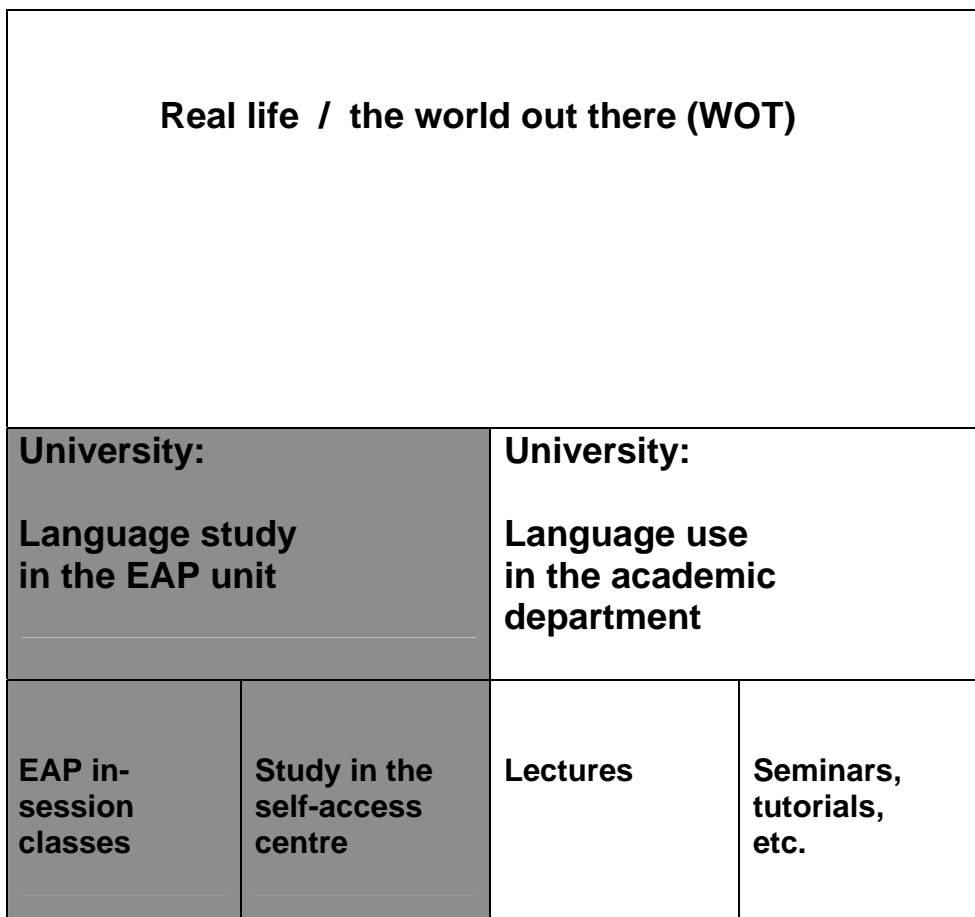


Figure 1. The EAP 'box' and beyond: International students' language study and language use

International students' advice (gathered in 1994)

1 *I noticed that I improved much more when I got a TV but I didn't take any conscious steps to practise listening.*

2 *In lectures they give us lots of notes, especially for the MSc classes. That made it easier and the subject was very familiar to me, so I could use my knowledge to work out what the lecturers were saying. I try to read the handouts again later, to fix the new information.*

3 *Listening to a tape and writing down exactly what you hear is very helpful. To listen very specifically and in detail means you have to pay attention to sounds which you have some problems with yourself. Seeing what the gaps are in your dictation tells you what your listening problems are.*

4 *I listen to the news on television or radio and then try to discuss the topics with friends. This is very useful for me to know whether the news that I have heard is correct and does not give different perspectives than my understanding.*

5 *I improve listening by meeting a lot of friends and talking to them on any topic. The best way is to make them give explanations when I don't understand something and then to tell them what I have understood from those explanations.*

6 *I spend quite a lot of time listening to the radio, such as the news on Radio 4, which is good practice. Especially when some of the news is repeated, that helps me to confirm what I have heard.*

7 *Watching an interesting movie or TV programme such as the Cosby Show will attract my attention to follow the story and hence practise my English by listening.*

8 *I think it's good practice to listen to other foreign speakers talking about your field. You have to get used to their accents, in the same way as you have get used to British people's different accents. In fact, there are bigger differences between British accents than between foreigners, I think. So it's all good practice and helps to find out more about the subject.*

(Anderson and Lynch, 1996: 26)

International students' advice (gathered in 2005)

(areas not mentioned in 1994)

Interacting with others

I make it a rule not to speak my mother tongue, even with Japanese friends.

I talk to my friendship family a lot to improve my listening, because I feel more easy to beg their pardon, and then I can learn the differences between their pronunciation and others.

I find it useful to improve my listening to have a coffee with my classmates after each class.

I try to spend time as much as I can with someone I don't understand their accent, and get used to it. During this time I ask them something that I can expect long answer.

New media

I watch movies on DVD [with subtitles in English] and try to repeat the actor's lines.

I listen to the BBC Radio on the Internet, in particular those programmes which have a script (Weekender, for example), so I am able first to write what I hear – the whole text – and then to check my writing with the programme transcription. After that I can listen to the text again and again (like children do that), repeat the text after the reporter, and try to remember some useful phrases. This way I have many advantages: I improve not only my listening skills, but also improve my vocabulary, writing and speaking skills, pronunciation and, I believe, even sense of language in general... Later I can very easy catch the phrases (which I remembered) in spite of very fast speech of some native speakers.

I practise by downloading broadcasts from the BBC website in .mp3 format and listen to these programmes on the bus, or at home in parallel with completing some regular routine tasks (e.g. cooking, cleaning)

English as an 'incidental' activity

I am a member of the Greek Dance Society, so I go to their meetings once a week and spend about 2 hours per week talking English to other students there.

I work in a café and there I concentrate a lot.

I learn French at IALS. During French class, I hear mostly French with appropriate supplemental comments in English. Such an environment makes me naturally feel that to be able to listen to English is a matter of course. As a result, increased awareness seems to promote improving my listening skills.

I sometimes visit an old lady and talk with her. We talk for about two hours.

I am a volunteer in a charity shop. It is a great chance for me to do something meaningful and talk to other people

Students' Informal Listening Inputs (SILI) study: findings**Table 1. Self-evaluation of listening improvement**

<i>Listening groups</i>	<i>I have made...</i>	<i>Number</i>
A	<i>... less progress than I had expected</i>	26
B	<i>... as much progress as I had expected</i>	30
C	<i>... more progress than I had expected</i>	2

Table 2. Informal listening inputs: type and time spent

<i>Source</i>	<i>number (n=58)</i>	<i>mean</i>	<i>minimum</i>	<i>maximum</i>
Listening				
- radio	33	42 mins	10 mins	6 hours
- TV	35	34 mins	10 mins	2 hours
- internet	27	27 mins	1 min	2 hours
- music/songs	43	39 mins	5 mins	4 hours
Talking				
- other students	54	42 mins		
- flatmates	41	39 mins		
- landlord / host family	7	46 mins		
- partner	6	50 mins		

Advice on listening (SILI interviews)**Student A**

I never made any proper course, but I think you really need a course - I mean very basic. And then reading - very important. And the music, of course. And talk – talk in the bank, talk in shops, talk everywhere.

Student B

Try to be involved, don't isolate yourself. When I arrived here I felt quite rejected because my English was not very clear as I would like it to be. But that's wrong, I changed my mind immediately. The best way to improve your English is to speak freely with people even if your English is not very good. People here are sensitive when they realise you are not a native. They help you. They don't correct you but they pay attention and they make an effort to understand you, and they answer your questions in the best way they can. The other thing is to use the facilities - the Institute, on-line facilities and try to avoid speaking Spanish.

Student C

I'm not typical Chinese. I'm older... My problem is I've got a bad memory... Sometimes I can understand but I can't remember. I noticed that my problem is not for English... so just thought this side and out this side. It is a real problem. A friend told me it is a kind of sick.

Student D

Talk with Scottish people. Find some Scottish friends and spend time with them – not with, for sure, not with other Taiwanese and not with foreign people, just with Scottish people.

Student E

I think I would suggest they come here earlier and they connect to the BBC website. In our home country it's sort of passive learning, and you have to have a very high self-control, self-discipline, but once you come here the whole environment is English, so it's more active learning and more interaction with local people.

Student F

Use record[ings of lectures] and listen five, ten times. This help understand lecturers.

Student G

The more you listen, the better you understand. It's very good to listen to different accents here, like Australian English. If you come here, you can make friends with different nations, that's very important. I have Italian and French friends and their English always simple and easy to understand... with European students their English is a lot better than me.

Student H

In China is a famous philosophy 'Speak loudly, speak clearly and speak quickly'. So just learn by heart all the papers. If you have good oral English, listening is a not a problem. If I recite all the papers in New Concept English, so it's no problem listening.

Table 3. Progress evaluation and time spent daily on listening inputs

Listening groups	Number	Listening (mean)	Talking (mean)	Overall
A	26	89 mins	60 mins	149 mins
B	30	95 mins	89 mins	184 mins
C	2	56 mins	125 mins	181 mins

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