

ROUTLEDGE



ROUTLEDGE
HANDBOOKS



The Routledge Handbook of Teaching English to Young Learners

Edited by Sue Garton and Fiona Copland

Fostering young learners' listening and speaking skills

Yasemin Kirkgöz

Introduction

In an increasingly globalised world proficiency in English, the world's *lingua franca*, is perceived by many non-English-speaking countries as vital to professional communication, delivering long-term economic development and improving quality of opportunities for young people (Enever 2011). The response to the ever-increasing demand for English has led to pressure on governments 'to ensure there is an English speaking workforce' (Garton et al. 2011, p. 4). Along with this, there has been a growing tendency among many Asian countries to reform language education systems and introduce English at earlier ages in elementary schools (Murphy 2014). Likewise, as noted by Enever (2014), 'substantial attention has been given to the introduction of English from the very start of schooling in many European countries' (p. 231). In other countries, too, such as Turkey, following the introduction of English as a compulsory subject for young learners in primary grades four through eight (age nine) in 1997, the most recent curriculum change, starting with the 2013–2014 teaching year, is that English is now being taught at a much younger age in primary grade two (age six).

As a result of such developments, the field of teaching English to young learners (TEYLs) has expanded. The school curriculum for foreign language learning in primary schools in many countries has now privileged the development of communicative competence with an emphasis on the oral skills of listening and speaking (Enever 2011). Hence, teachers of English as a second/foreign language (ESL/EFL) are expected to make the improvement of children's listening and speaking skills as the main aim of teaching.

This chapter illustrates how young learners' listening and speaking skills can be effectively promoted. After providing definitions of key words, and a theoretical perspective on listening and speaking in general, the characteristics of young learners (YLS) will be related to the nature of listening and speaking. This is followed by a discussion of the critical issues in listening and speaking skills in young learner classrooms. A survey of the research relevant to this area is given, followed by a presentation of the listening and speaking activities that can promote listening and speaking in young learner classrooms. The chapter concludes with suggestions for future directions in this area of research.

What do you know about the national curriculum for Korea (or any other country) in relation to EFL for young learners?

The following three sections provide definitions of the three key terms used in this chapter.

Listening

Listening is the receptive use of language. It is the process of interpreting messages by using context and one's knowledge of language and the world. The development of listening skills has an impact on the development of other skills (Rost 2002; Linse 2005) because listening provides input for other language skills including speaking and writing. Listening is not an easy skill to acquire as it requires listeners to make sense of the meaning from the oral input, produce information in their long term memory and make their own interpretations of the spoken passages (Richards 2008). That is, listeners need to be active processors of information. This is also the case for young learners who must select and interpret information that comes from auditory and visual clues in order to define what the speakers are trying to express with a focus on meaning (Cameron 2001).

Speaking

As a productive language skill, speaking is the active use of language to express meaning. Speaking involves expressing ideas, opinions or a need to do something and establishing and maintaining social relationships and friendships (McDonough and Shaw 2003). For YLs, the spoken language is usually the medium through which a new language is encountered, understood, practised and learnt. While listening is the initial stage in first and second language acquisition, and the skill that children acquire first (Scott and Ytreberg 1990), speaking will often quickly follow and provide evidence to the teacher of learning, whether this is superficial or deep. It goes without saying that listening and speaking, therefore, are closely interrelated, particularly in the young learner classroom.

Young learners

The term young learners covers a range of learners who share commonly accepted characteristics such as having short attention spans and learning holistically, but differs in terms of their physical, psychological, social, emotional, conceptual and cognitive development. Although the age range the term young learners covers may vary according to the educational system of a country, Ellis (2014) suggests labels for the different age groups according to the terms commonly used in the educational systems to which children belong. Accordingly, pre-schooler or pre-primary children cover two to five years and they are commonly known as very young learners or early starters; primary school pupils are within the age range of six to 10/11 years old and they are commonly known as young learners; secondary school pupils are within the age range of 11–14 years, and are also known as young learners or early teens; and those within the age range of 15–17 years are known as young adults. In this chapter, I will focus on the 6–11 age group.

Historical perspectives

This section provides a theoretical overview of listening and speaking in general and the nature of listening and speaking for YLs in particular, taking their developmental characteristics into consideration.

As I suggested in the introduction, English language teaching (ELT) in primary schools is a recent phenomenon. However, English has been a core part of school curricula in many countries for some time. For example, Japanese children have been learning English in junior high schools for over 30 years, while in Turkey children in state primary schools have been learning English for the last 20 years (Kırkgöz 2008b). By this age, children have developed cognitively and academically and these factors have contributed to the approach taken to ELT, in the state system at least, which has focused for the most part on following a coursebook which teaches grammar and vocabulary through reading and writing exercises (Kırkgöz 2011). The fact that these features of English are relatively easy to assess has also played a part in their being prominent in post-primary contexts. However, introducing English in the early years has meant a change in approach. Not only are primary school children less cognitively aware than their secondary school peers, but they are still developing literacy in their first language. This has meant that emphasis has been placed in many countries on listening and speaking rather than reading and writing. Indeed, in Japan, reading and writing are actively discouraged in the guidance prepared on introducing foreign language activities in the primary sector by the Ministry of Education (MEXT) (Gaynor 2014).

In addition to development factors, it is also fair to say that there has been a communicative turn in school-based ELT more generally. Many governments, exasperated by the fact that children leave schools after years of English language tuition barely being able to speak a few words in English, never mind communicate with other English users, have introduced new curricula which highlight communication, often drawing on Communicative Language Teaching (CLT). In China, for example, the curriculum reform labelled 'quality-oriented education' (Wang 2013) was introduced in 2001, which resulted in the introduction of English to primary schools. A further reform in 2011 introduced some communicative approaches (Wang *ibid.*). The result is that listening and speaking are emphasised in many primary classrooms, with coursebooks focusing on enhancing these skills.

Luckily, our understanding of listening and speaking skills has increased significantly over the last twenty years. We now know, for example, that to comprehend a listening text, learners employ two types of processing: **top-down and bottom-up**. Top-down processing requires the listener to activate his or her schema (Brown 2001), that is, knowledge of the world, to understanding the general meaning of a listening text. For a young learner, this might mean knowing that a listening activity that begins with 'once upon a time' is going to be a fairy tale (see, too, Bland, this volume). Bottom-up listening, in contrast, requires a listener to make sense of individual sounds, words or phrases. For example, a young learner needs to distinguish between the sounds /i/ and /i:/ to know that ship is a sailing vessel and sheep is an animal. In real-life listening, both processes are usually combined, giving more emphasis to one or the other depending on the reason for listening (Oh and Lee 2014).

In terms of speaking, understanding has also moved on, as summarised in Butler (2005). Drawing on research conducted in three Asian countries, Butler identified three factors that need to be considered in developing the oral activities in English. First, it is important to provide a theoretically consistent and operationalised definition of communicative competence for YLs, namely, what constitutes 'teaching for communicative purposes' needs to be clear. In addition, socially and cognitively meaningful motives and goals for the activities need to be specified so that the introduction of communicative activities into classrooms will lead to children learning. Based on children's developmental stages, effective mediational support also needs to be identified and given to YLs. These principles suggest that teachers need to consider carefully the focus and purpose of speaking activities so that they meet both the English language and developmental needs of learners.

The nature of listening and speaking for YLs

Listening and speaking for YLs needs to be considered relative to the characteristics that differentiate this group of learners from more mature ones. The first differentiating trait is that YLs learn indirectly and holistically rather than directly (Cameron 2001). Pinter (2017, p. 167) clarifies:

learners are not yet able to analyse and manipulate language in an abstract way. They are learning by understanding meaningful messages. For example, in a song children will not understand every word but they will have an idea about what they are singing.

Accordingly, YLs need to be provided with extensive and continuous exposure to language contextualised in meaningful and enjoyable ways (Cameron 2001; Pinter 2011). They also need to be encouraged to communicate through purposeful, real here-and-now experiences. Arnold (2016) has suggested in this regard that listening can be made more comprehensible by using exaggerated intonation to hold the child's attention, emphasising key words, presenting the topics that are familiar to the child, repeating and paraphrasing frequently, and keeping sentences short and grammatically simple.

Secondly, YLs have short attention spans (Cameron 2001; Brewster et al. 2002; Slattery and Willis 2001), and they are not capable of focusing on one task for long periods of time. Therefore, they need variety in listening and speaking tasks. It is essential that such tasks be short, varied, motivating and interesting, and that, in line with Butler (2005), teachers mediate and offer concrete support.

In addition, YLs are active and they need physical movement in the classroom due to their high levels of energy (Brewster et al. 2002). As they enjoy learning through playing, acting, making and doing (Slattery and Willis 2001), these characteristics of YLs can be exploited through Asher's **TPR** method (Asher 2009). TPR is based on the theory that people learn best when they are actively involved and understand the language they hear, which is especially true of children whose physical and cognitive development can be supported by relating meaning to movement. TPR involves students listening and actively carrying out movements related to what they hear. Incorporating TPR and miming are considered to be effective ways to reinforce meaning while young learners listen. For example, the teacher shows picture cards of key words such as 'plane', 'car' and 'teddy', and introduces the words one at a time to the whole class. Then, the teacher contextualises each word within a sentence and does the action such as 'fly your plane', 'drive your car' and 'hug your teddy' with the children imitating the actions. Later, the teacher asks children to do the action according to the command given. A useful link to a class where children are doing this TPR activity is: www.youtube.com/watch?v=1Mk6RRf4kKs. Overall, this approach involves multisensory processing and it appeals to auditory, visual and kinesthetic learners. It also allows active children to expend some energy and enjoy the fun of uninhibited movement and mimicry.

Another characteristic of YLs is their ability to learn through repetition and to imitate the sounds of the target language (Slattery and Willis 2001). Listening to stories, songs and rhymes is specifically recommended for children to become aware of the rhythm, intonation and pronunciation of language (Brewster et al. 2002). Teachers can use such listening materials as a source of input to develop a speaking activity. For example, children can take the roles of characters in the songs and stories or they can recreate the activity in an activity corner (see Mourão 2014).

A final characteristic that YLs display is that they learn through the here-and-now principle (Nunan 2011), which implies that they need to be supported to communicate through purposeful, real, here-and-now experiences. Accordingly, YLs need to be provided with a language environment where 'they have the opportunity to listen to and respond to a great variety of meaningful target language input' (Pinter 2014, p168), with each listening and speaking task having purpose and intention (as recommended, too, by Butler 2005).

Critical issues and topics

With the recent introduction of English into the young learner primary ELT curricula in many countries around the world, development of children's oral-aural skills has been highlighted, and the learning and teaching of listening and speaking has started to receive more attention. However, teaching listening and speaking skills to YLs is found to be highly challenging by teachers. Consequently, a number of critical issues and topics have arisen. The first critical issue concerns teachers' low proficiency level in English (or their lack of confidence in their English ability), which is almost universally identified as a problem (Baker 2008; Kuchah 2009; Littlewood 2007; Nunan 2003). It is generally accepted that to teach using the communicative approach, teachers need to have good levels of English or at least confidence in their ability to use English. This is partly because communicative approaches have traditionally encouraged a target-language-only classroom, which means teachers must use English as much as possible. In this regard, Kuchah (2009) found that teaching in the target language caused anxiety for teachers in Cameroon and caused them to question their own speaking and listening skills.

Furthermore, communicative approaches focus on learners' communicating their own meanings, rather than answering questions based on written texts or completing grammar or vocabulary exercises; the language skills required for the first exceed those required for the second. A primary way of helping children participate as listeners and speakers in conversations is for teachers to model good listening and speaking techniques themselves, for which they need an advanced level of fluency (Enever 2019).

A further critical issue is that teachers find teaching speaking skills particularly difficult. In a global study of the experiences of young learner teachers of English reported in Copland et al. (2014), teachers overwhelmingly and across countries and contexts stated that teaching speaking was the greatest challenge they faced. Problems included getting children to speak it, teaching pronunciation and setting up and managing speaking activities. Studies have also revealed that children are not prepared for spontaneous communication (Butler 2005; Enever 2019). In the same global survey, Copland et al. (2014) found that not only are children reluctant, but they also lack adequate language to produce the meanings they want. These findings have been confirmed by several other studies conducted in Turkey (Kırkgöz 2008b) and elsewhere (Baker 2008; c.f. Kuchah 2009; Littlewood 2007).

Another critical issue concerns how L2 listening input is delivered to children (and the role of the teacher during this process). Studies have found that listening to CDs is one of the most frequent activities in the young learner classroom (Butler 2005; Copland et al. 2014). Although video and digital recordings are becoming more accessible (see Bland, this volume, on digital books) CDs remain the dominant medium through which listening activities are delivered. By their nature, these recordings lack visual input and so can be challenging for learners, particularly when texts are relatively long and require learners to listen intensively. Copland et al. (2014) suggest that teachers' reliance on the CD player as the main source of listening input may be due to concerns about their own levels of English

or their lack of confidence in their spoken English. Teachers may also worry that they do not provide a good model for students as they do not sound like ‘native speakers’. Recent discussions of World Englishes (e.g., Galloway and Rose 2015) have tried to dispel the myth that the native speaker is a model to aspire to (see, too, Copland 2011). Nonetheless, it is not uncommon for teachers to hold these beliefs which contribute to their lacking confidence in their own spoken English.

An important characteristic of YLs with regard to listening and speaking is their ability to imitate the new sounds of the target language (Brewster et al. 2002; Slattery and Willis 2001). It is also acknowledged that successful listening and speaking skills are acquired over time and with ample practice. It is therefore important that children are exposed to ample opportunities to listen to English from a variety of sources where the speakers use English in a variety of contexts. Unfortunately, it has been found in some contexts that students receive little dedicated listening and speaking practice in their classes, and in some cases they get almost none (for example, see Kırkgöz 2008a).

Another concern relates to how many hours of input children receive in schools and what happens in the lessons. Nunan (2003) suggests that at least 200 hours per year of instruction are needed for measurable progress to be seen in L2. However, Ho (2003) found that in many countries in East Asia, the hours in primary schools varied, from between one and two hours in South Korea to between four and six hours in Malaysia or Singapore. Currently, in Turkish state primary education, students in primary Grades 2 and 3 receive an average of 76 hours of instruction per year, which is far below the minimum number of hours needed for significant progress in English.

Differentiation has also been found challenging in terms of listening and speaking. Differentiation is the reality that children in class have different needs, levels, ways of learning and motivations. Nunan (2003) argues that by the very nature of their job as a teacher of young learner, teachers must be aware of children’s basic physical and psychological needs. So that they can provide the best instruction possible, they need to adjust educational experiences to meet the developmental stages of the individual child. A particular issue in terms of differentiation for state school teachers of English to young learners is that some young learners go to after-school English classes while others do not. As many of these classes focus on developing communication skills, the teacher has to deal with supporting children with different listening and speaking levels. Other learners may be exposed to English in other ways, through family members or friends or from other out-of-school activities (see Sayer and Ban 2014 for a description of how children in Mexico access English out of class). As noted by Djigunovic and Krajnovic (2015), as a result of different exposure to English, learners bring into the classroom various linguistic skills, learning strategies and sensibilities that the teachers and teaching materials should aim to accommodate.

Another potential problem relates to the curriculum materials for listening and speaking in state education in particular, which may not always be appropriate. In the global survey reported by Copland et al. (2014), it was found that in some countries such as South Korea and Malaysia, one prescribed textbook for each grade is used. In other countries, a range of government-approved textbooks for teachers are available to choose from. In yet other countries, such as Italy, schools can choose their own textbooks from those available on the market. Perhaps most bizarrely, in Mexico, children in the same classroom can be issued coursebooks produced by different publishers (Copland, personal communication). With a view to examining the listening input children receive in Turkey, Kırkgöz (2011) evaluated four locally published English textbooks used in state primary schools. Her findings show that some textbooks lacked a listening component, which suggests that the centrality

of listening to developing young learner English is not well understood in Turkey at least. Where textbooks are inadequate, teachers could be trained to create their own materials. They could also have a number of useful items such as CDs with songs and stories, flashcards, puppets and a collection of realia to allow them to improvise listening activities. In such circumstances the teacher can use his or her voice as the audio source. However, several studies have shown that teachers often lack the time and expertise to develop appropriate materials (Ghatage 2009; Ho 2003).

To conclude, the picture that emerges concerning the current issues in listening and speaking to YLs can be summarised under two headings: teacher-related issues and curriculum-related issues. Teacher-related issues focus on teachers' low proficiency level in English or their lack of confidence in their English ability; the challenges they face around teaching speaking and differentiating for learning. Curriculum-related issues focus on insufficient time allocated to listening and speaking in school curricula and problems related to teaching materials for listening and speaking, particularly in state education.

Current contributions and research

Research in listening and speaking with YLs focuses on two areas: pedagogy and second language acquisition (SLA). In terms of pedagogy, there is a good deal of interest in how songs, chants and stories can enhance listening and speaking skills. For example, YL researchers (e.g. Coyle and Gracia 2014; Graham 2006; Lechel 2010) have found that teaching song-based activities provides memorable and enjoyable language practice, especially in fostering listening skills, understanding of basic nouns, aiding pronunciation, and learning and retention of vocabulary and structures over a shorter time period.

In relation to teaching speaking, researchers have investigated the effect of games, puppets, stories, drama and role play on enhancing YL speaking. For games and plays Linse (2005) posits that they are a 'vital and important aspect of a child's development and language is a part of that play' (p. 47). English-speaking puppets, animated by the teacher, have an effect on influencing children to use more English during speaking activities and make children more relaxed and motivated. During storytelling, using visuals, non-linguistic support and limited use of the mother tongue was found to facilitate comprehension of a story (Haven 2000). Investigating the use of narratives in the young learner classroom, Bland (2015a) focused on oral storytelling and sharing of a picture book whereby particularly the pictures 'can focus the children's attention through their continuous and repeated presence' (p. 186). She highlights the educational value of stories for empathy and intercultural understanding. In another study, Bland (2015b) highlights using drama for oracy development in the young learner classroom. She stresses the cognitive, sociological, affective and psychological dimensions of holistic learning offered by using the potential of drama noting that 'children are extremely involved in learning through imitation and playful experimentation' (p. 221). Integrating technology in the young-learner classroom is another area of pedagogic research. Schmid and Whyte (2015) used technology-enhanced tasks through video conferencing to allow learners to negotiate meaning and repair communication breakdown. Computer-mediated communication has been found to offer considerable opportunities as well as challenges. Verdugo and Belmonte (2007) used animated stories in language instruction. The study demonstrated that YLs' listening comprehension was improved with the infusion of digital stories. The visual, interactive and reiterative character of digital stories had a crucial effect on this result. Using a multimedia storytelling website, Tsou, Wang, Tzeng (2006) found that the retention of words, phrases and

sentences from the storyline and the general story recall of the participants had increased. The researchers indicated that the extra visual and audio stimuli received through the multimedia storytelling website may have facilitated story recalls and the children's' creativity in recreating stories.

In the field of second language acquisition (SLA), research undertaken with children remains limited. However, as reviewed by Oliver and Azkarai (2017), recently there has been a growing body of research on child second language (L2) learners with a pedagogical focus. One aspect of SLA research is situated on child interaction. Guilfoylea and Mistryb (2013) investigated how role play supports the development of speaking and listening skills. Observations of case study children over a period of one month demonstrated effectiveness of role play in language development for children and improvement in a range of language learning strategies (LLS), including experimenting with language, repeating key language items and memorising and internalising new vocabulary. Also, the use of metacognitive strategies increased, suggesting that the pupils were able to organise and evaluate their own language development through self-speech.

Another line of research investigated the provision and use of feedback. Mackey et al. (2003) provided empirical support for the use of pairwork in classrooms by demonstrating that child learners are able to provide the type of feedback that leads to improved language production. A similar study by Pinter (2006) found that children used various strategies to complete different tasks and suggested that the children's interactions facilitated L2 acquisition as they contained opportunities for comprehensible input and feedback. Other SLA research is concerned with the role of L1 in L2 development. Azkarai and García Mayo (2017) explored the use and functions of L1 in Spanish EFL learners' (9–10 years old) repetition in a spot-the-differences task. They found that the children used their L1 in their interactions for various purposes (clarification requests, confirmation checks), to indicate lack of knowledge and to appeal for help.

Recommendations for practice

This section offers recommendations based on issues previously discussed in the chapter and provides suggestions for useful techniques and activities for enhancing listening and speaking skills for YLs.

Although listening is a receptive skill, children should be actively engaged while listening. In any listening activity, it is important to orient students towards what they are going to listen to before beginning the activity. Language acquisition takes place most effectively when the input is meaningful and interesting to the learner. Teachers should, therefore, ensure that the materials used for listening and speaking are comprehensible to YLs and appropriate developmentally and culturally for them to maximise the potential for language acquisition. Teachers should also relate the topics to what children already know by establishing a meaningful context to promote effective language acquisition (Slattery and Willis 2001).

Illustration of listening tasks

A variety of listening comprehension tasks illustrated below can be conducted in class to promote YLs' listening skills. The same activity can easily be adjusted to various topics and levels by varying content and language.

Listen and do

TPR focusing on the use of physical activity is a useful approach for YLs, who listen to their teacher's instructions generally in the form of commands and then follow those instructions by moving their bodies, drawing, writing or gap-filling. As noted by Ur (1984) a good listening task is one with 'active responses occurring during, or between parts of, the listening passage, rather than at the end' (p. 4). The following YouTube clip gives an example of a 'listen and do' activity in which the teacher performs a TPR activity by engaging the children through commands on the topic 'shapes': www.youtube.com/watch?v=3ZNLBonSXpA

Listen and repeat

Listen-and-repeat activities give the learners a chance to practise parts of the language – the sounds, stress, rhyme and the intonation – to promote effective pronunciation. When performed in combination with movements, objects or pictures, chants, songs and story refrains, they help learners to establish a link between words and meaning (Scott and Ytreberg 1990). An example of a story refrain 'Were-Going-On-A-Bear-Hunt' can be accessed from the following YouTube clip: www.youtube.com/watch?v=kL36gMrHJaI

Listen and Draw

This task can be done in any age group to help learners practise listening and language in context, e.g., prepositions. For example, the teacher describes three objects (e.g., a present, a clock and a box) without saying any of these words in his or her description. The descriptions should be about size, shape and details, not naming the object or saying what it does. Learners listen carefully and draw their own version of the picture. To illustrate, the teacher gives a description of a monster, and children draw it after the instructions, as in the given example:

Let's draw a monster!
 The monster has one eye.
 The monster has three arms.
 The monster has four legs.

Listen and arrange

Learners are given scrambled pictures of a story or a text, and they can be asked to put the pictures in the correct order while listening. The following sample activity is designed for six- to eight-year-old children. In this activity, the teacher reads the text and, meanwhile, children listen and sequence the pictures:

I am ready to go to school. First, I put on my green shirt and blue trousers. Then I grab my backpack which is red. Next, I put my books in my backpack. And then, I put my lunch in my backpack. Finally, I go outside and wait for the bus. At school, I meet my friend <Sally>.

Figure 11.1. shows scrambled pictures of the story.

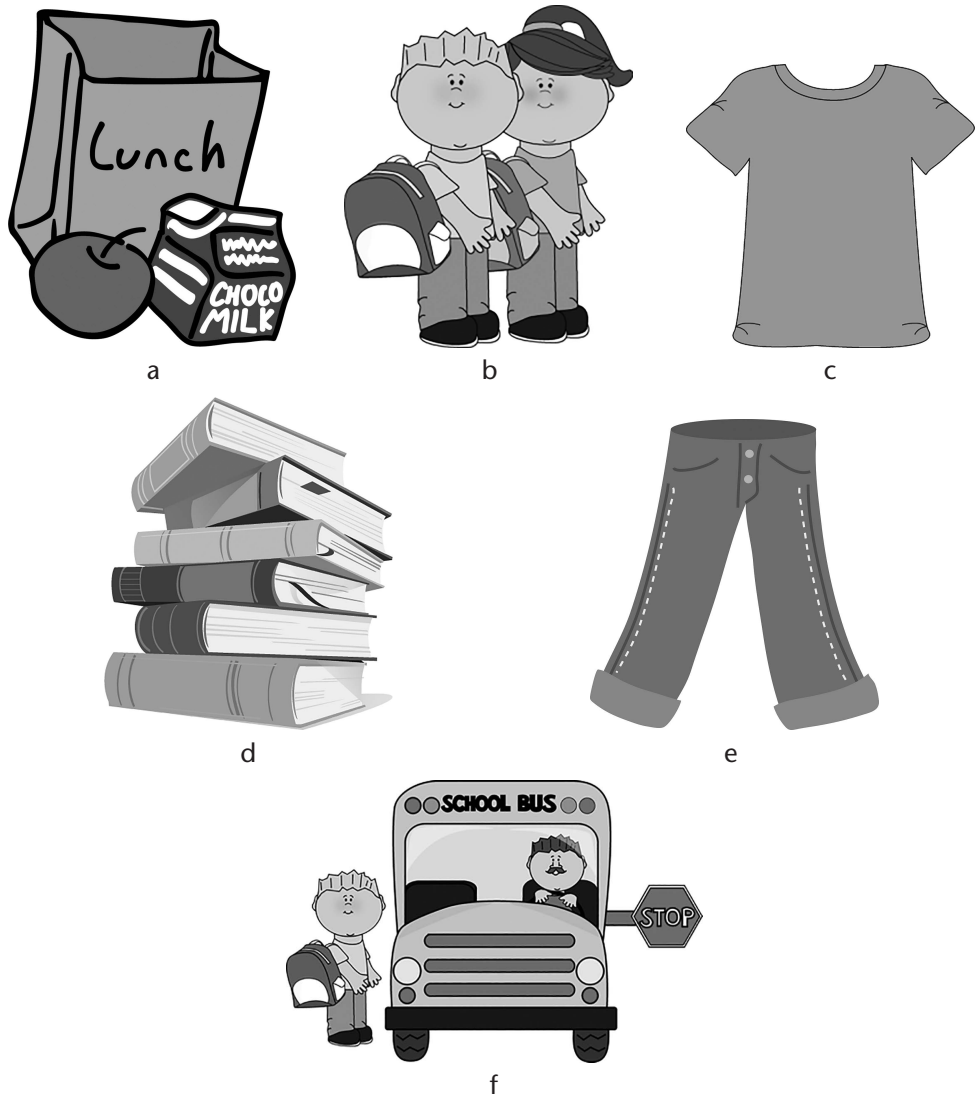


Figure 11.1 A sample listening activity

Sources: Image a: 'Pictures Of Lunch Ladies #2062389'. Images For Lunch Lady Clip Art – Clip Art Library, clipart-library.com/clipart/pc78g8aoi.htm.; Image b: Free Clipart For Kids #14950, mzayat.com/single/14950.html.; Image c: 'T-Shirt Shirt Clipart Clipartfest'. ClipartBarn, clipartbarn.com/t-shirt-clipart_17884/.; Image d: '66 Awesome Library Book Clip Art Images'. Weclipart, weclipart.com/library+book+clip+art.; Image e: 'Mens Pants Cliparts #2489978'. Pic Of Jeans – Clip Art Library, clipart-library.com/clipart/1739340.htm.; Image f: 'Daily Routine Work – Lessons – Tes Teach'. Tes Teach with Blendspace, www.tes.com/lessons/NsAaJUSLnhhyKg/daily-routine-work

Listen and colour

Since children love colouring, in such tasks, instead of letting children simply colour the picture, teachers can make it into a language activity, as illustrated in the following sample story, which can be used with eight- to 10-year-old learners. The teacher passes out

colouring sheets, on which there is a picture of what she or he will describe to YLs, and tells the purpose of the activity. The teacher reads the instructions below one at a time. When the activity is finished, she or he checks the pages together with the students. Figure 11.2 below shows the picture of the shopping trip.

The shopping trip

It was getting close to Christmas. Mrs Wilson went Christmas shopping. Colour Mrs Wilson's jacket green and her skirt red. Colour Mrs Wilson's shoes black. Colour Mrs. Wilson's hair purple and her purse yellow. She left the house and the dog decided to go shopping too.



Figure 11.2 The shopping trip

The dog's name is Blue. Colour the dog blue. Colour the dog collar orange. A cat followed them. The cat's name is Grey. Colour the cat grey. Mrs Wilson has four packages. Colour the package that the cat is standing on: one side orange, and the other side red. Colour the package that is above the striped package yellow. Colour the other two boxes with your favourite colour. Mrs Wilson has tubes of paper for her daughters. Colour the tubes of paper: one red, one blue and one green.

Speaking task

Speaking tasks with children should provide plenty of support in terms of structure to enable them to use language confidently and effectively. In the following game, children describe cartoon characters in short oral texts that are scaffolded through stem sentences. First, the teacher prepares cards with cartoon characters and their features, and calls on a student to pick up one card and describe it to the class.

Using the gapped text below, learners describe the cartoon for classmates to guess.

My name is

I am a (white duck).

I have (yellow-orange feet and legs).

I wear (a sailor shirt and cap).

Techniques to promote listening and speaking skills

Becker and Roos (2016) state that 'in order to become truly communicatively competent, learners should be provided with manifold opportunities through activities that support their natural desire to interact with peers and allow them to make use of their rich resources of imagination, creativity, curiosity, and playfulness' (p. 23).

There are many techniques that can be used to enhance children's oral language. Bland (this volume) covers a key area – children's literature and storytelling. Here I present three other approaches that are popular in young learner classrooms.

Songs

Songs can make an important contribution to YLs' listening skills, pronunciation, vocabulary, sentence structures and repetition that might otherwise be tedious (Cameron 2001). Songs help children gradually to internalise the structures and patterns of the foreign language and to learn specific vocabulary items. The length of a phrase in a typical children's song is short and often uses simple conversational language, which can allow learners to process the language easily (Murphy 2014). The 'hide and seek' song from super simple song teaches not only how to count from 1 to 10, but also the children can learn to play hide and seek in English. It is also fun because they can do an actual hide and seek game while singing (see www.youtube.com/watch?v=Tt_S9qoupAk)

Animation

The art of animation involves giving life and soul to lifeless materials. Presenting language to YLs through a puppet, having conversations with it and presenting dialogues are some

of the most effective ways to teach English. For example, a puppet 'bear' can be created as a personality to support childrens' listening and speaking, helping them to communicate much more spontaneously. Bear can be included in songs, chants, rhymes, games, dialogues and stories by the teacher. Similarly, children can use puppets for retelling what they have learned (Slattery 2008). The following YouTube link illustrates how a YL teacher can use puppets to get children talking in English: www.youtube.com/watch?v=f-P7CFSps0U.

Dialogues and role play

Dialogues and role play based on real-life conversations are oral activities that can be used to bridge the gap between guided and free tasks. Learners can find them entertaining and motivating as they take on the role of an imaginary character. The use of puppets, physical movements and realia can make a dialogue come alive for YLs, giving them a communicative purpose (Brezigar 2010). Several examples of role play activities can be found in the following YouTube link: www.youtube.com/watch?v=AA5hOCxIRaI&list=PLii5rkhsE0Ld3xCgxG6j5fw7RIG2S5czO

Future directions

I would like to suggest some areas for future investigation, specifically relating to listening and speaking emerging from the discussion thus far.

Educational research continually reminds us that the teacher is the most important factor in any child's education (Hu 2007; Kirkgöz 2008a; Garton et al. 2011). Research findings bring to attention the need to support the provision of quality language teacher preparation at the level of pre-service and in-service teacher education programmes to address the listening and speaking problems identified. As noted by Enever (2014), attention should turn to ensuring that teachers of English to young learners are trained effectively and have opportunities for continuing professional development.

In pre-service primary courses, prospective teachers need to have the appropriate skills for teaching listening and speaking and expertise relevant to the age group. Effective teacher education programmes for YLs therefore need to educate prospective teachers to have:

- Age-appropriate pedagogies for teaching listening and speaking skills.
- Fluency and confidence particularly in their English speaking to provide both a good language model and a plausible model for children to aspire to.
- Basic classroom management skills in establishing, monitoring and giving feedback on communicative listening and speaking tasks.
- The ability to differentiate teaching to meet the learning needs of young learners who may have different levels, learning styles and motivations.

In-service teacher development programmes could champion collaborative action research teacher development projects (e.g., Kirkgöz 2016), in which university teacher educators collaborate with English language teachers to support teachers' ongoing professional development in areas identified by the teachers as challenging. As highlighted by Curtain and Dahlberg (2010), 'it should be the goal of the language teachers to support the learning of every student, appealing to a variety of learning styles, and to nurture all the forms of intelligence represented in each of our classes' (p. 10).

Given the similarities in the concerns of young learner teachers globally, there is a need for greater opportunities for sharing ideas and experiences amongst primary school teachers of English both nationally and internationally. This could be achieved in a number of ways, including: teacher development groups; trainer training opportunities for young learner teachers who can then support other teachers in their local schools; websites for teachers where teachers can exchange ideas, experiences and activities; and online conferences and seminars for young learner teachers, with contributions mainly from young learner teachers themselves (Copland et al. 2014).

There is no doubt that many teachers are already effectively teaching listening and speaking skills in English to young learners. Nonetheless, there are few studies which effectively investigate appropriate approaches by level and age and which provide useful support for teachers. Moving forward, we must work to better understand how children can learn languages effectively and efficiently in school contexts so that language learning can be celebrated as a successful addition to the primary curriculum.

Further reading

- 1 Bland, J. (2015a). Oral storytelling in the primary English classroom. In Bland, J. (ed.) *Teaching English to young learners critical issues in language teaching with 3–12 year olds*. London: Bloomsbury, 183–198.

This chapter illustrates the centrality of storytelling in the young learner classroom followed by the use of a picture book whereby pictures focus the children's attention through their repeated presence.

- 2 Cameron, Y. (2004). *Teaching languages to young learners*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 37–70.

The chapter focuses on the development of children's spoken language built around the principles that meaning comes first and children need to participate in discourse and build up knowledge and skills to develop oral proficiency illustrated with an analysis of a task in action.

- 3 Hugo, A. J., and Horn, J. A. (2013). Using music activities to enhance the listening skills and language skills of grade 1. *English First Additional Language Learners Per Linguam*, 29(1), 63–74.

This article describes how music activities can be used to develop and enhance young learners' listening abilities. A six-month experimental research study was applied to test whether or not daily music activities had an effect on young learners' listening abilities. The findings reveal that using daily musical activities improved children's listening skills in English.

- 4 Pinter, A. (2006). *Teaching young language learners*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 45–64.

This chapter focuses on key issues in children's language learning with reference to listening and speaking. It specifically covers activities and discusses what can realistically be achieved in young learner classroom in terms of listening and speaking.

Related topics

Curriculum, teacher education, reading and writing, classroom management

References

- Arnold, W. (2016). Listening for young learners. www.teachingenglish.org.uk/article/listening-young-learners [Accessed 12 December 2017].
- Asher, J. J. (2009). *Learning Another Language through Actions*, 7th ed. Los Gatos, CA: Sky Oak Productions.

- Azkarai, A., and García Mayo, M. P. (2017). Task repetition effects on L1 use in EFL child task-based interaction. *Language Teaching Research*, 21(4), 480–495.
- Baker, W. (2008). A critical examination of ELT in Thailand: The role of cultural awareness. *RELC Journal*, 39(1), 131–146.
- Becker, C., and Roos, J. (2016). An approach to creative speaking activities in the young learners' classroom. *Education Inquiry*, 7(1), 9–26.
- Bland, J. (2015a). Oral story telling in the primary English classroom. In Bland, J. (ed.), *Teaching English to Young Learners Critical Issues in Language Teaching with 3–12 Year Olds*. London, Bloomsbury, 183–198.
- Bland, J. (2015b). Drama with young learners. In Bland, J. (ed.) *Teaching English to Young Learners Critical Issues in Language Teaching with 3–12 Year Olds*. London: Bloomsbury, 219–238.
- Brezigar, B. (2010). How does the introduction of an English speaking puppet influence the use of English in group speaking activities? Teaching English to young learners third international TEYL research seminar 2005–2006. Papers Edited by Annie Hughes and Nicole Taylor, 6–13.
- Brewster, J., Ellis, G., and Girard, D. (2002). *The Primary English Teacher's Guide*, New ed. England: Pearson Education Limited.
- Brown, H. D. (2001). *Teaching by Principles: An interactive approach to language pedagogy*. Beijing: Foreign Language Teaching and Research Press.
- Butler, Y. G. (2005). Comparative perspectives towards communicative activities among elementary school teachers in South Korea, Japan and Taiwan. *Language Teaching Research*, 9, 423–446.
- Cameron, L. (2001). *Teaching Languages to Young Learners*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Copland, F. (2011). Teaching young learners in a global context. *The Language Teacher*, 35(4).
- Copland, F., Garton, S., and Burns, A. (December 2014). Challenges in teaching English to young learners: Global perspectives and local realities. *TESOL Quarterly*, 48(4), 738–762.
- Coyle, Y., and Gracia, R. G. (July 2014). Using songs to enhance L2 vocabulary acquisition in preschool children. *ELT Journal*, 68(3), 276–285.
- Curtain, H. I., and Dahlberg, C. A. A. (2010). *Languages and Children: Making the match, new languages for young learners*, 4th ed. London: Pearson.
- Djigunovic, J. M., and Krajnovic, M. M. (Eds.). (2015). *Early Learning and Teaching of English New Dynamics of Primary English*. Bristol: Multilingual Matters.
- Ellis, G. (2014). “Young learners”: Clarifying our terms. *ELT Journal*, 68(1), 75–78.
- Ellis, G., and Brewster, J. (2002). *Tell it Again! The new storytelling handbook for primary teachers*. England: Pearson Education Limited.
- Enever, J. (2011). Policy. In Enever, J. (ed.) *ELLiE – Early language learning in Europe*. London: British Council, 23–43. www.teachingenglish.org.uk/publications/early-language-learning-europe.
- Enever, J. (July 2014). Primary English teacher education in Europe. *ELT Journal*, 68(3), 231–242.
- Enever, J. (2019). Current policy issues in early foreign language learning. *CEPS Journal*, 2(3), 9–26.
- Garton, S., Copland, F., and Burns, A. (2011). *Investigating Global Practices in Teaching English to Young Learners: ELT research papers 11–01*. London: The British Council.
- Galloway, N., and Rose, H. (2015). *Introducing Global Englishes*. London: Routledge.
- Gaynor, B. (2014). From language policy to pedagogic practice: Elementary school English in Japan. In Rich, S. (ed.) *International Perspectives on Teaching English to Young Learners*. Houndmills: Palgrave Macmillian, 66–86.
- Ghatage, M. M. (2009). Introduction of English from Grade 1 in Maharashtra, India. In Enever, J. Moon, J., and Raman, U. (eds.) *Young Learner English Language Policy and Implementation: International perspectives*. Reading: Garnet Education, 45–51.
- Graham, C. (2006). *Creating Chants and Songs. Resource books for teachers*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Guilfoylea, N., and Mistryb, M. (2013). How effective is role play in supporting speaking and listening for pupils with English as an additional language in the Foundation Stage. *Education 3–13*, 41(1), 63–70

- Haven, K. F. (2000). *Super Simple Storytelling: A can-do guide for every classroom, every day*. Englewood, CO: Teacher Ideas Press.
- Ho, W. K. (2003). English language teaching in Asia today: An overview. In Ho, W. K., and Wong, R. Y. L. (eds.) *English Language Teaching in East Asia Today: Changing policies and practices*. Singapore: Eastern Universities Press, 1–32.
- Hu, Y. (2007). China's foreign language policy on primary English education: What's behind it? *Language Policy*, 6, 359–376.
- Kirkgöz, Y. (2008a). A case study of teachers' implementation of curriculum innovation in English language teaching in Turkish primary education. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, 24, 1859–1875.
- Kirkgöz, Y. (2008b). Curriculum innovation in Turkish primary education. *Asia-Pacific Journal of Teacher Education*, 36(4), 309–322.
- Kirkgöz, Y. (2011). An evaluation of English textbooks in Turkish primary education: Students' and teachers' perceptions. *Egitim Arastirmaları- Eurasian Journal of Educational Research*, 44, 188–206.
- Kirkgöz, Y. (2016). Improving teaching practices through a university-school collaboration in young learner classrooms. In Dikilitaş, K., Wyatt, M., Hanks, J., and Bullock, D. (eds.) *Teachers Engaging in Research*. Kent: IATEFL, 89–99.
- Krashen, S. D. (1991). The input hypothesis: An update. In Alatis, J. E. (ed.), *Georgetown University Round Table on Languages and Linguistics*. Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press, 409–431.
- Kuchah, K. (2009). Early bilingualism in Cameroon: Where politics and education meet. In Enever, J., Moon, J., and Raman, U. (eds.) *Young Learner English Language Policy and Implementation: International perspectives*. Reading, England: Garnet Education, 87–94.
- Lechel, F. (2010). What is the effect of using children's songs on young learners' understanding of basic nouns? Third International TEYL Research Seminar 2005–2006 Papers Edited by Annie Hughes and Nicole Taylor, 58–67.
- Linse, C. T. (2005). *Practical English Language Teaching: Young learners*. New York: McGraw-Hill.
- Littlewood, W. (2007). Communicative and task based language teaching in East Asian classrooms. *Language Teaching*, 40, 243–249.
- Mackey, A., Oliver, R., and Leeman, J. (2003). Interactional input and the incorporation of feedback: An exploration of NS-NNS and NNS-NNS adult and child dyads. *Language Learning*, 53, 35–66.
- McDonough, J., and Shaw, C. (2003). *Materials and Method in ELT*, 2nd ed. United Kingdom: Blackwell.
- Mourão, S. (2014). Taking play seriously in the pre-primary English classroom. *ELT Journal*, 68(3), 254–264.
- Murphy, V. (2014). *Second Language Learning in the Early School Years: Trends and contexts*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Nunan, D. (2003). The impact of English as a global language on educational policies and practices in the Asia-Pacific region. *TESOL Quarterly*, 37(4), 589–613.
- Nunan, D. (2011). *Teaching English to Young Learners*. Anaheim, CA: Anaheim University Press.
- Oh, E., and Lee, C. (2014). The role of linguistic knowledge and listening strategies in bottom-up and top-down processing of L2 listening. *English Teaching*, 69, 149–173.
- Oliver, R., and Azkarai, A. (2017). Review of child second language acquisition (SLA): Examining theories and research. *Annual Review of Applied Linguistics*, 37, 62–76.
- Pinter, A. (2006). Verbal evidence of task related strategies: Child versus adult interactions. *System*, 34, 615–630.
- Pinter, A. (2011). *Children Learning Second Languages*. London: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Pinter, A. (2014). Child participant roles in applied linguistics research. *Applied Linguistics*, 35(2), 168–183.
- Pinter, A. (2017). *Teaching Young Language Learners*, 2nd ed. Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press.
- Richards, J. (2008). *Teaching Listening and Speaking*. New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Rost, M. (2002). *Teaching and Researching Listening*. London: Longman.
- Sayer, P., and Ban, R. (2014). Young EFL students' engagements with English outside the classroom. *ELT Journal*, 68(3), 321–329.

- Schmid, E. C., and Whyte, S. (2015). Teaching young learners with technology. In Bland, J. (ed.) *Teaching English to Young Learners Critical Issues in Language Teaching with 3–12 Year Olds*. London: Bloomsbury, 239–260.
- Scott, W. A., and Ytreberg, L. H. (1990). *Teaching English to Children*. London: Longman.
- Slattery, M. (2008). *Teaching with Bear: Using puppets in the language classroom with young learners*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Slattery, M., and Willis, J. (2001). *English for Primary Teachers*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Tsou, W., Wang, W., and Tzeng, Y. (2006). Applying a multimedia storytelling website in foreign language learning. *Computers and Education*, 47(1), 17–28.
- Ur, P. (1984). *Teaching Listening Comprehension*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Verdugo, D. R., and Belmonte, I. A. (2007). Using digital stories to improve listening comprehension with Spanish young learners of English. *Language Learning and Technology*, 11(1), 87–101.
- Wang, B. (2013). Ten years review of basic education new curriculum implementation in southwest rural area in China: Present situation, experience, problems and strategies. In Hao, W. (ed.) *West China education report 2013 [Xibu jiaoyu baogao 2013]* (Vol. 3, pp. 161–190). Beijing, China: Educational Science Publishing House. [in Chinese]