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**TED talks as listening activities
in the ESP classroom**

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TED talks as listening activities in the ESP classroom

ABSTRACT

The paper aims at showing how a well-known website ‘TED talks’ is used for creating listening activities in the ESP classroom in order to achieve the main goal which is to develop active listeners. It is needed when one is talking to another person (interactive listening) or when listening to a talk or a lecture (one-way listening). (Christine C. M. Goh 2012) . Listening tasks discussed in the paper are designed for students of social and political sciences. The syllabus of the faculty includes several disciplines such as Psychology, Politics, International Relations, Human Geography, Mass Communications. The paper presents how ‘TED talks’ might be used for creating listening activities using ‘top-down’ and ‘bottom-up’ strategies (Harlan Mills and Niklaus Wirth developed the top-down approach for software development field). In addition, the paper shows how the activities are conducted and what are the results of the performance. ESP listening might be considered as different from ESL listening since each discipline, listed above, has its own specific technical and specialized terms. However, methods of working on listening skills are similar and consists of stages which give opportunity to accomplish the task easily. Since Students who get ESP training are supposed to have experience in doing ESL course, they have motivation to be involved in the process and high interest in order to enrich skills for their professional development.

Key words: *listening skill, ESP, social and political sciences, TED talks*

Introduction

The perceived differences between ESP and ESL listening is the assumption that learners who require ESP training need to know specific vocabulary of the field of work or study. For example, people working in following areas: psychology, mass media, politics, sociology, international relations and human geography are expected to use and recognize phrases specific to their area of work so that they can communicate effectively with specialists from different countries. However, the listening problems encountered by learners in both general English and ESP contexts are similar and are linked mainly to factors that influence fundamental cognitive processes, for example: accents (Goh, 2012); vocabulary (Johns & Dudley-Evans, 1991).

and the demands of interactive listening that require quick and appropriate responses (Ferris & Tagg, 1996). The paper attempts to show how to use accessible online material for working on listening skill in the ESP classroom.

TED (Technology, Education, and Design conference) is dedicated to researching and sharing knowledge that matters through short talks and presentations. Since the presentations are intended for a wide audience the content and wording are quite understandable for non-specialists but at the same time it might be considered as an excellent source material for listening activities in the ESP classroom. The site is organized so that it enables to choose a presentation on the appropriate topic. The example introduced will feature main stages of a listening task and outline some activities which might be used in the classroom for working on the listening skill.

Choosing audio material

Listening activities create two groups: top-down and bottom-up. (Richards & Rodgers, 1986). Top-down approach focuses on a bigger picture while bottom-up strategy involves listening for details. Both processes are involved in listening comprehension. The paper attempts to show how TED talks presentations might be used to create activities according to top-down and bottom-up processes and which approach to choose at the specific stage. Choosing audio material from diverse talks is the very first step in organizing listening strategy. The teacher can opt for native or non-native speakers from TED platform. It depends on the goal of the lesson. TED has evolved into a global phenomenon, inviting experts in all fields to present what TED calls “Ideas worth spreading”. The presentations are not designed only for scholars in the fields, they are for bigger audience and might be considered as short lectures on different topics. Consequently, acceptable as activities in the ESP classroom. Since the site is well-organized and user-friendly tracking down the talk on the specific area is not difficult. The question is how to transform the talks into activities. ESP listening is similarly dependent on knowledge about language forms and vocabulary that directly facilitates the perception and parsing of spoken input. Vocabulary remains a challenge for ESP listeners since each discipline has its body of technical and specialized terms that have to be additionally acquired. Furthermore, even after a learner has encountered these words and become familiar with their meanings, they may still have problems recognizing the words in a stream of speech (Goh, 2012) How to overcome the problems is mostly dependent on clear and detailed rubric of a listening activity. There are several reasons for offering a listening task such as listen for

details, understand and identify specific information, listen for main ideas, understand and summarize key points in a text, listen for global understanding, listen and predict, understand the gist of the message, listen selectively. The abovementioned goals define what material to choose and how to conduct the task. If the objective is to practice on listening for gist the teacher can introduce non-native speaker or a native speaker who has fast talking pace and ask very few questions on the content of the talk like: what is the speech about? or what do you remember from the speech? This is top-down strategy, which enables students to get more familiar with spoken English. A presentation from TED talks is chosen to feature the stages and processes of a listening activity. The talk is delivered by social psychologist Keith Payne who shows how economic inequality changes the way people see and behave towards one another, Payne helps explain the rise of the political polarization that's slicing up society -- and challenges us to think twice the next time we dismiss someone for the sake of politics. Since we focus on listening activities for students of Social and Political sciences the topic of the talk tends to be appropriate for this audience and might be offered to the students who major in sociology or in political sciences. From the library section of TED talks the teacher can decide on the talk which might be not only suitable for the ESP lesson but interesting for students as well. It is important to pay attention to the length of the presentation on TED platform. This feature might determine not only the objective of the listening task but range of activities offered during the listening. For example, if the talk is too long the main objective would be using top-down strategy, which is asking for general information. While for shorter talks bottom-up strategy would be more suitable and the teacher can offer activities, which are considered to be main features of this approach. All activities, discussed in the paper, are easy to prepare for the teacher because TED talks site offers transcripts of the talks. So, the teacher can use the text as a source for creating activities for the listening task. As we are aware, training the listening skill involves passing three stages pre-listening, listening and post-listening. The paper shows how the teacher can use separate stages in the classroom. The talk, which was chosen, lasts for about twelve minutes. Quite a long time in the classroom where there are lots of other activities to conduct. There might be solutions to this so-called problem. The teacher can divide the talk in two or three parts and thus work on one talk for several lessons following all three stages of a listening activity. Another option is to use only activities associated with top-down strategy and offering the TED talk without division. The paper gives some examples of activities that the teacher can design based on the talk chosen. The activities are organized for pre-listening, while-listening and post-listening stages. Listening means receiving a language through ears. It involves identifying the sounds of speech and processing them into

words and sentences. Students usually find listening the most difficult of four skills. Many people find it difficult to concentrate when listening to their native language. Listening in a foreign language is more complicated and requires even greater focus (Mary Underwood 1989).The formation of listening comprehensive skills includes three stages: I stage – pre-listening stage, during which we help our students prepare to listen ; II stage – during which we help to focus their attention on the listening text; III stage – post-listening stage, during which we help our students integrate what they have learnt from the text into their existing knowledge.

Pre-listening phase

Pre-listening work can consist of activities which encourage students to be involved in carrying out the task.

Example1. The teacher introduces the title of the talk ‘the psychology of inequality and political division’ and asks questions to make students predict and speculate on the content of the talk. The teacher writes four questions on the whiteboard which are arranged in the table.

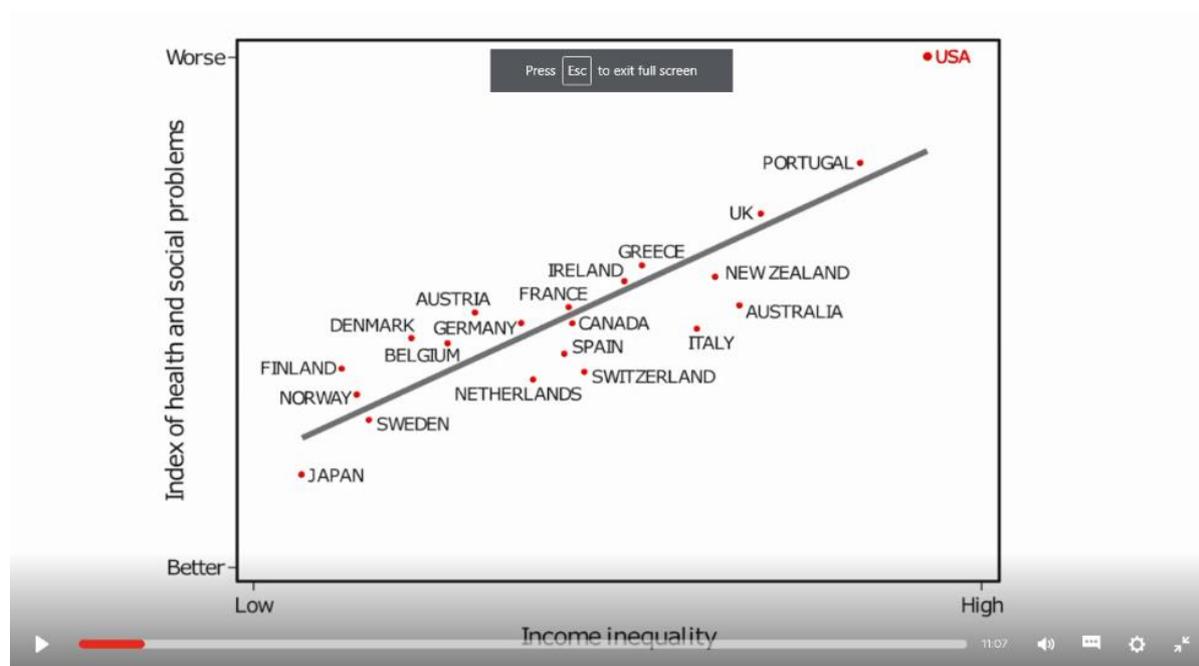
What is meant under inequality?	Which countries tend to face inequality?	What are the reasons of inequality?	What should be done to eliminate inequality?

Students have to answer the questions and write short answers below each question. The list of ideas is written and whether the suggestions appear or not in the talk will be checked after listening. While this activity two strategies are used. The first is predicting and speculating, the second one is making list of ideas, suggestions.

Example 2. The teacher divides the group in pairs. Each pair has the transcript of the talk. The students in each pair write out unfamiliar words, try to find out the meaning and if there are still unknown words and phrases, they write new vocabulary on the whiteboard. Each pair does the same work and the teacher monitors the words not to be repeated on the board. At the end of the activity new vocabulary appears on the whiteboard and the teacher starts eliciting meaning by giving synonyms or definitions. When all the words and phrases are explained students can make sentences

using the words on the whiteboard. Reading the text before listening is a type of a pre-listening task where pair work is followed by whole class activity.

Example 3. Keith Payne talk is a PowerPoint presentation so there are some images, diagrams and tables. The teacher can choose one image from the presentation and ask students to write a report on it. The rubric says: write a report on how income inequality is associated with health and social problems.



(https://www.ted.com/talks/keith_payne_the_psychology_of_inequality_and_political_division?referrer=playlist-the_political_mind&language=en#t-53966).

Writing activity can be conducted in groups or pairs (depends on the number of students). Two students might be assigned as jurors and after reading the reports they announce the winner group or pair. The writing task will serve not only as a pre-listening activity but as revision how to write reports as well.

Example 4. TED talks are conducted in front of big audiences. This performance is full of people's reactions to the speaker's emotions. We can see how people enjoy jokes and how people sympathize with predicaments the speaker mentions. Keith Payne's talk has a few laughter interruptions. Understanding jokes is conducive to possessing sense of humor, however, existing cultural differences won't be eliminated before stating that something is funny or not. In order to get acquainted with cultural differences and facilitate understanding jokes the teacher can divide the class into two groups. Both groups have to read the passages from the script where the people laugh.

The first group has to choose the funniest abstract and the second group has to opt for the least funny part from the talk. The following stage of the activity would be sharing the information and introducing the arguments for clarifying the choices.

While-listening phase

While-listening activities can include a wide range of tasks such as marking/checking items in pictures/finding the appropriate pictures etc.; – storyline picture sets/ putting pictures in order/ drawing the pictures; – carrying out actions; – making models/ arranging items in patterns; – following the route; – completing grids/charts/forms/text; doing true/false activities; – multiple-choice questions (Underwood, 1989). The paper accentuates some of them which will be easily designed and carried out.

Example 1. The teacher prepares printed version of the talk, where some words are missing. The teacher can decide on the length of the text and only one part of the talk might be offered. The main aim of the task defines the character of the activity (it is lead-in activity, during a lesson activity or the final activity). The handouts are submitted to students and they have to follow the rubric which says: Listen to the talk and fill in with the missing words. Only one or two words are missing. How many words to remove from the text depends on the group level. If this is B1 level group there might be only few words missing or specific parts of speech like adjectives or nouns. However, for higher level groups the missing words might be different parts of speech. Both versions are introduced below.

Ver 1. Fill in with missing words (The words in bold are missing in the handout)

Did you know that economic**inequality**is associated with shorter **lifespans**, less happiness, more crime and more drug abuse? Those sound like problems of **poverty**, but among**wealthy**....., developed nations those health and social problems are actually more tightly linked to inequality between**incomes**..... than to absolute incomes. And because of that, the United States, the wealthiest and the most unequal of nations, actually fares worse than all other developed countries.

.....**Surveys**..... show that large majorities of Americans, both Democrats and Republicans, believe inequality is too high and want more equal**pay**..... And yet as a society, we don't seem to be able to find the common**ground**....., the consensus, the political**will**..... to do anything about it. Because, as inequality has

risen in recent**decades**....., political polarization has risen along with it. We see those who disagree with us as idiots or as immoral. Nearly half of Democrats and Republicans now think that the other side is not just mistaken but a**threat**..... to the nation. And that animosity prevents us from finding the common ground to change things.

Ver 2. Fill in with missing words. (The words in bold are missing in the handout)

Did you know that economic inequality is associated with**shorter**..... lifespans, less happiness, more crime and more**drug abuse**.....? Those sound like problems of poverty, but among**wealthy**....., developed nations those health and social problems are actually more**tightly**..... linked to inequality between incomes than to**absolute incomes**..... And because of that, the United States, the wealthiest and the most unequal of nations, actually**fares**..... worse than all other developed countries.

Surveys show that large majorities of Americans, both Democrats and Republicans, believe inequality is too high and want more**equal pay**..... And yet as a society, we don't seem to be able to find the common ground,**the consensus**....., the political will to do anything about it. Because, as inequality has risen in**recent decades**....., political polarization has risen along with it. We see those who disagree with us as idiots or as**immoral**..... Nearly half of Democrats and Republicans now think that the other side is not just**mistaken**..... but a threat to t-he nation. And that**animosity**..... prevents us from finding the common ground to change things.

Students read the gapped text and then listen to the talk once or twice. While-listening activities are also called during-listening activities. Well-designed during-listening activities can help students to: identify what's important in a passage, perceive the text structure, keep themselves concentrated throughout the passage, show their understanding or non-understanding of the passage.

Example 2. The teacher works on the typescript in advance and creates some sentences based on the talk. The teacher writes sentences on the whiteboard and allows students to listen to the talk. The students have to decide whether the sentences are true or false. Example sentences on the whiteboard with correct answers.

Decision-making task was conducted in order to earn some money-false
 The better-than-average group consider themselves as very skillful and qualified -true
 Filling incompetent motivates people-false
 When everything's going your way, all you notice is yourself and our own amazing talents- true
 Disagreeing makes people think that they are better than others-true

Example 3. The teacher divides the text of the talk into several paragraphs. The scrambled paragraphs are given to students and they have to put the paragraphs into the correct order while listening to the talk. The final result looks like this:

1	I'm a social psychology professor at the University of North Carolina, and I study the effects of inequality on people's thinking and behavior. I'm going to argue that it's not just an unfortunate coincidence that inequality and political division have risen together. There are good psychological reasons that inequality drives wedges in our politics. That means there are good psychological paths to improve both at once.
2	The better-than-average group said that they were more competent than the below-average group. The better-than-average group said that their success was a fair outcome of a meritocracy. The below-average group thought the system was rigged, and in this case, of course, they were right.
3	For decades, social scientists looked for evidence that feeling deprived compared to other people would motivate political action. They thought it would mobilize protests, strikes, maybe even revolutions. But again, and again what they found was that it paralyzed people, because the truth is, feeling less than other people brings shame. It makes people turn away, disgusted with the system. Feeling better than other people, though -- now that is motivating. It motivates us to protect that position, and it has important consequences for our politics.
4	Every successful person I know can think of times when they worked hard and struggled to succeed. They can also think of times when they benefited from good luck or a helping hand but that part is harder. Psychologists Shai Davidai and Tom Gilovich call it the "headwind-tailwind asymmetry." When you're struggling against headwinds, those

	obstacles are all you can see. It's what you notice and remember. But when the winds at your back and everything's going your way, all you notice is yourself and our own amazing talents. So we have to stop and think for a minute to recognize those tailwinds helping us along.
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5	The next time you're tempted to dismiss someone who disagrees with you as an idiot, think about the tailwinds that helped you get where you are. What lucky breaks did you get that might have turned out differently? What helping hands are you grateful for? Recognizing those tailwinds gives us the humility we need to see that disagreeing with us doesn't make people idiots. The real hard work is in finding common ground, because it's the well-off who have the power and the responsibility to change things.
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Three examples given are only part of those activities which are considered to be while-listening activities. However, the paper focuses only on those which are not as time-consuming to prepare as for example multiple choice exercise or missing sentences / paragraphs.

Post-listening phase

A post-listening activity represents a follow up to the listening activity and aims to utilize the knowledge gained from listening for the development of other skills such as speaking or writing.

Post-listening activities can be used after listening to the audio to help students analyze concepts for a deeper understanding of ideas. In this stage, students have done a pre-listening activity, participated in a few while-listening tasks, and they are ready to move on to something else.

Example1. The teacher puts students into pairs, asks them to take turns recalling one bit of information from the listening without repeating anything. The teacher challenges students to continue as long as possible. Teachers can check understanding by asking students to summarize the information they heard, this can be done orally or in writing. Students can make pairs and then they can talk during a minute to another student, once the minute is over, they change partner.

Example2. One of the post-listening activities that a teacher can do is asking students to have a short discussion about the topic. The topic for the discussion must be taken from the listening

task that they previously did and should be interesting enough to inspire comments and debates. On the example of Keith Payne's talk there might be several subjects of the discussion such as how inequality affects social behavior or why is it important for a society to have more than one political party?

Example 3. Another post-listening activity that students can do is identifying vocabulary and then finding synonyms and antonyms for some words in the transcript. When they have done that, they can pair up and share their finding with other. The teacher provides student with copies of a typescript. It might be only one or two passages from the talk. The teacher writes some words from the script on the whiteboard and students have to find these words, understand the meaning from the context and try to give synonyms and antonyms. The handout looks like this:

I think our best bet starts with those of us who have benefited the most from inequality's rise, those of us who have done better than average. If you've been successful, it's natural to chalk up your success to your own hard work. But, like the studies I showed you, everybody does that, whether or not it really was the hard work that mattered most. Every successful person I know can think of times when they worked hard and struggled to succeed. They can also think of times when they benefited from good luck or a helping hand but that part is harder. Psychologists Shai Davidai and Tom Gilovich call it the "headwind-tailwind asymmetry." When you're struggling against headwinds, those obstacles are all you can see. It's what you notice and remember. But when the wind's at your back and everything's going your way, all you notice is yourself and our own amazing talents. So we have to stop and think for a minute to recognize those tailwinds helping us along. The next time you're tempted to dismiss someone who disagrees with you as an idiot, think about the tailwinds that helped you get where you are. What lucky breaks did you get that might have turned out differently? What helping hands are you grateful for? Recognizing those tailwinds gives us the humility we need to see that disagreeing with us doesn't make people idiots. The real hard work is in finding common ground, because it's the well-off who have the power and the responsibility to change things.

The words on the whiteboard:

	synonyms	antonyms
chalk up headwinds		
tailwinds humility		

Example 4. Play the audio once, and then tell the students that you want them to write some questions about it. They will ask other students these questions. This could be done in pairs or small groups. Finally, swap the questions around and play the audio again so that the students can answer each other's questions.

Conclusion

The lack of coursebooks in ESP for social and political sciences creates some problems for the teacher. The internet offers variety of sites where you can find the material which might be appropriate to the ESP learners. However, there are questions how to use those materials. The paper introduces how TED talk site, which is full of presentations on different topics, might be used for listening activities in the ESP classroom. Two distinct kinds of processes are involved in listening comprehension, which are sometimes referred to as “bottom-up” and “top-down” processing. Bottom-up processing refers to the use of incoming data as a source of information about the meaning of a message (Richards, 2006). From this perspective, the process of comprehension begins with the message received, which is analyzed at successive levels of organization – sounds, words, clauses, and sentences – until the intended meaning is arrived (Richards, 1990). Top-down strategies focus on the ‘big’ picture and general meaning of a listening text. Often the starting point is to discuss the topic and then to use a ‘gist’ or ‘extensive’ task to listen for the overall meaning. Top-down strategies rely on students knowing something about the topic. (Chaudron, Loschky & Cook, 2012). How The teacher uses both strategies while creating listening activities for students depends on subjective and objective circumstances. The teacher should take into account the group level, the number of students, time limit for the activities. All these elements help to define the goal of the listening activity. If it is less proficient group the teacher can offer top-down activities such as putting the paragraphs in the correct order (while- listening activity) or after listening the audio asking student what they remember(post-listening). To be more specific, it is not always necessary to conduct listening activities according to the established sequence: pre-listening, while-listening and post-listening phases. The teacher can decide on the listening task which is appropriate for a specific stage of the lesson. This might be a lead-in activity, an activity for the middle of the lesson or an activity for the last stage of the lesson. The listening samples in the paper might serve as examples how to create and organize listening tasks without spending a lot of time and yet training students how to become comfortable with listening not only to a native speaker talking on professional topics, but listening to their peers in group work or pair work tasks. According to Jack C. Richards the role of the teacher is to facilitate and monitor rather than be the only model for correct speech.

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