

Listening-into-Speaking Seminars

Background

Over the last 2 years at the ELTC, we have been redesigning our summer pre-sessional EAP course, moving away from a model using a high stakes end of course exam and in its place developing bespoke assessments better integrated into the course. A new development for 2016 was a listening-into-speaking seminar for which students attended a live lecture and then participated in a student-led seminar the following day.

Literature

"Language learning is essentially an abstract psycholinguistic process, but one that always takes place in concrete social contexts. The contexts, rather than the listening process, provide learners with definable goals, standards, and expectations." (Rost, 2011, p146)

When designing listening assessments, the context is as important as the process and should not be neglected in favour of a desire to produce "reliable" scores.

"Rather than seeking washback as a sign of test validity, seek validity by design as a likely basis for washback... the touchstone is an assessment that adequately represents the focal construct." (Messick, 1996, p252)

By designing assessments that mimic target language and skills use, we can improve validity and create positive washback.

Design

In 2015 we developed a reading-into-speaking seminar task, which worked well.

In 2016 this was changed to a listening-into-speaking seminar, using the existing live lecture programme, given by a University of Sheffield academic on Wednesday afternoon.

On Thursday afternoon there was a weekly post-lecture class, with a set pattern:

1. Discussion of notes and reflection on lecture listening experience
2. Listen again activities including dictogloss and close listening tasks
3. Practice seminar
4. Feedback

Full mock seminar, with teacher feedback, in week 6.

Peer assessment task in week 7.

Final seminar assessment in week 8.

Scoring

- Students in groups of 4 (or 3)
- Teacher observes 1 group at a time
- Generally does not participate
- Teacher marks scores on paper:
- Auto-generated named mark sheets
- 9 criteria at 4 levels
- Scores inputted to a Google Form
- This populates a Google Sheet
- Pass mark was set at 5/9 passes
- Pass mark to rise in 2017



Students attend a live lecture on Wednesday afternoon.

They prepare questions of their own to ask their group mates.

On Thursday they participate in a seminar on the content of the lecture.

They discuss both prepared and unseen questions.

The seminar is 30 minutes for a group of 4 students.



Problem	Solution
Large groups are difficult to assess	Groups of 4 students make it manageable.
New assessment types can be difficult for students. How can they prepare?	Students had weekly practice activities in class and a mock seminar before the final.
If students have roles e.g. Group Leader, they may have an advantage or disadvantage.	Each student takes turns to be leader for 5 minutes, asking prepared questions to the group.
If students can prepare, they can rehearse or even memorise their parts.	10 minutes given to answering unseen questions – requires spontaneous answers and discussion.
The assessment of listening is indirect. How do we know if the students' contributions are based on having listened to the lecture?	The unseen questions include conceptual ones that require spontaneous discussion of the content of the lecture.
The task would be very difficult if it were 30 minutes of recall of factual content.	The unseen questions include more general discussion questions related to the topic.
Different levels of students could produce uneven groups with students either dominating or not keeping up.	Teachers assign groups of similar ability, e.g. the strongest 4 work together while the weakest students are together in a group.
During the seminar, a student may still dominate or not participate.	The teacher can intervene and nominate a student to speak.
The students may not keep time well so the last student may not have time to lead their section.	There is some flexibility with timings and the teacher can intervene to move them to the next stage.
Lecturers vary, meaning the listening text is variable.	For the mock and final assessment, an EAP tutor delivered the lecture.

Feedback

Teachers generally liked the task. Negative feedback included the variability of the lecture content / difficulty and some vagueness in the instructions for the task.

In end of course student feedback, seminars were rated highly for usefulness, behind the extended writing task (508 respondents).

In later follow-up feedback, conducted after 1 semester of university, seminars were rated the highest for usefulness, slightly ahead of extended writing (135 respondents).

Overall positive feedback means the listening-into-speaking seminar will continue.

We aim to improve the lecture programme, assessment administration / instructions and preparatory course content.

PS Seminar Marking Form

Your email address (elc@sheffield.ac.uk) will be recorded when you submit this form. Not you? [Sign out](#)

Marks

Please record the marks for each of the criteria.

Task *	Distinction	Merit	Pass	Fail
Preparation	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Understanding	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Stance	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Interaction *

	Distinction	Merit	Pass	Fail
Relating	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Turn-taking	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Engagement	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Language *

	Distinction	Merit	Pass	Fail
Grammar	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Lexis	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Pronunciation	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Confirmation

When you click 'Submit', your marks will be recorded. If you want to double-check any information from the previous page, click the 'BACK' button below. This will not delete any of the information on this page. Do not use the back button on your browser.

Seminar Marking Criteria

Class:	Distinction	Merit	Pass	Fail	
Task	Preparation	Has prepared well for the task and has appropriate questions.	Has prepared adequately for the task, although may be superficial or questions may be slightly inappropriate.	Has not prepared adequately for the task.	
	Understanding	Has an excellent understanding of the main ideas of the lecture and the relationships of the supporting points.	Has an adequate understanding of the lecture, but this may be limited to the main ideas, or may focus too much on some minor details.	Does not appear to understand the lecture adequately.	
	Stance	Adopts a stance which is evaluative, analytical and critical.	Adopts a stance which is generally evaluative, analytical or critical, although may rely on repetition at times.	Adopts a stance which is at best evaluative, analytical or critical but there may be an over-reliance on repetition.	Relies on repeating information from the lecture.
Interaction	Relating	Relates own contributions to those of others.	Relates own contributions to those of others, with only minor inappropriacies.	Own contributions are generally not related to other contributions.	
	Turn-taking	Turn-taking is generally appropriate, effective and sensitive.	Turn-taking is generally appropriate, although there may be some contributions which are inappropriate or insensitive.	There are noticeable problems with turn-taking.	
	Engagement	Fully engaged in the discussion at all times.	Appropriately engaged in the discussion, although with minor lapses.	Sufficiently engaged in the discussion.	Not adequately engaged in the discussion.
Language	Grammar	High level of grammatical range and accuracy, errors are rare.	Good level of grammatical range and accuracy, errors occur but do not significantly affect comprehension.	Adequate level of grammatical range and accuracy, errors occur and these lead to some problems of comprehension.	Grammar is too limited or too inaccurate for comprehension to be maintained.
	Lexis	Lexis is varied, appropriate and precise, some slips, but these do not affect meaning.	Lexis is usually varied and appropriate, although occasional errors occur but do not significantly affect meaning.	Lexis is varied and appropriate enough to complete the task adequately, although occasional errors/deficiencies may occur.	Lexis is too limited to complete the task.
	Pronunciation	Pronunciation is clear and comprehensible at all times.	Pronunciation is clear and comprehensible, occasional problems that do not significantly affect meaning.	Pronunciation is usually comprehensible, some problems which lead to misunderstanding.	Pronunciation is too poor to maintain comprehension.

References

- Messick, S., 1996. Validity and washback in language testing. *Language Testing*, 13(3), pp.241-256.
- Rost, M., 2011. *Teaching and Researching Listening (2nd edition)*. Routledge.

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