PRE-LISTENING AND AND PRE-READING STAGES' ACTIVITIES FROM THE SPEAKING SKILLS DEVELOPMENT PROSPECTIVE
(based on Skyeng lesson development practice)

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ABSTRACT

The article focuses on the possibility of usage of Pre-listening and Pre-reading stages not only for traditional purposes of perception facilitation, but for development of students' speaking skills. There have been presented typical exercises which fulfil the traditional aims of these stages together with the new aims. The topicality of the research lies in the attempt to shift the traditional aims of the Pre-reading and Pre-listening stages to those which are aimed at student's speaking for fluency skills. The authors claim that this practice might help design more student-centered lessons and balance the teacher and the student talking time during the lesson. All the practices described in the article are currently used during development of ESL/EFL lessons in Skyeng school which is one of the market leaders in the sphere of online English teaching. There have been justified the reasons why these practices are seen as preferred and important in the process of lesson development. The following research methods have been used: critical analysis of scientific sources and data; experimental studying (through the educational Vimbox platform in Skyeng); direct observation method. The outcomes of the research may be applied both in an online and traditional offline classroom environment to design student-centered ESL/EFL lessons.

KEYWORDS: pre-listening, pre-reading, speaking skills, ESL/EFL lesson, predicting, lesson aims.

Pre-listening and Pre-reading are the stages traditionally used in an ESL/EFL lesson that are aimed at helping the students develop their receptive skills. They are the first stage of the sequence of PRE -, WHILE - and POST - (reading/listening) activities that generally help learners be better listeners and readers in a foreign language.

The traditional view on the Pre-listening and Pre-reading aims includes the following aims:

- to pre-teach and activate the vocabulary;
- to clarify the blocking vocabulary from the further listening or reading tasks;
- to engage the student into the topic through meaningful interaction;
- to encourage predictions of the context and content of the proceeding text, etc.

However, we suppose that in student-centered online classes, especially when designing the lessons for Spoken English courses (as opposed to General English courses) Pre-listening and Pre-reading stages can potentially be used for developing not only receptive, but productive skills as well (speaking skills in particular).

When we develop an online lesson on Spoken English, it is supposed to be a completed topic-based unit within the whole course. In this case our main aim is to provide the student with enough speaking practice during the lesson. Including at least 1 content unit (a text, an interview or a video) into the lesson is essential as it provides the student with:

1) the target vocabulary patterns or functional language patterns we want them to study and make use of;

2) the ideas and the communicative situation they need to respond or react to (instead of simply being asked a set of general questions on the topic).

Since the main activity for the student to do with this content unit is to either read or listen to it, we were looking for the ways to organise activities which would recoup time spent on reading or listening with a student's speaking activities. What we suggest is to shift the aims of the pre-listening and pre-reading tasks to provide the student with the necessity to speak (mostly for developing fluency).

Here are some practical activities which will refocus the pre-listening/pre-reading stage to function as fluency speech triggers (as well as fulfil the main traditional functions listed above).

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1. **Predicting the content from the title/subtitle of the text.**

The instruction in this case may be as follows:

Teacher's instructions:
- *Read the title and the subtitle of the text.*
- *What do you think the article will be about? What made you think so?*
- *What are your ideas on the topic?*

In this case the student will have to speculate and speak about his interpretation of the title and what the text may be about. You may ask some additional questions to encourage MORE speaking like: *Why do you think the author will state this? What keywords make you think so?*

2. **Predicting the content from the pictures.**

The pictures may illustrate the ideas of the text and be placed before it. Also the pictures might be shots from the video or represent the heroes from the listening or reading activity that follows.

Example 1.

The first example is taken from the lesson about DNA testing to identify the ancestry roots. Before watching the DNA experiment, we present 4 pictures of the heroes of the experiment and encourage the student to guess and speculate on the possible outcomes of the experiment. The heroes are captured with different emotions and feelings on their faces.

Teacher's instructions: In the experiment below 67 people from all over the world were asked to take a DNA test. In the end, they learned that they had much more in common with other nationalities than they had thought before. Let's predict the outcomes.
- *Who do you think these people are?*
- *How do they feel? (choose the adjective to describe their feelings)*
- *Why do you think they feel this way? What do you think they might have known after having got the results of their DNA tests?*

Example 2.

The next example is taken from the lesson about charity organisations and how volunteering may make a person happy. Before listening to 2 speakers who will present their charity organisations we organise the pre-listening discussion stage and encourage the student to predict from the pictures. There are 2 pictures illustrating people from 2 charity organisations: an adult and a child and an adult taking a lunch in the canteen for the homeless.

Teacher's instructions:
Look at the pictures and say:
- *What these charity organisations might be dealing with?*
- *Why do you think so?*
- *Would you like to volunteer at the same organisation? Why (not)?*

3. **Speculating on the ideas from the listening/reading task in advance.**

Design such a task in a simple way. You may list the ideas or statements in a form of:

3.1 A"TICK" list (*Examples 1 and 2*). The student reads and chooses the ideas they like or the ideas they apply and have to explain why. To encourage speaking at this stage, don't let the student do the task silently, but ask for explanations:

Example 1.

The lesson is devoted to the topic of gastro tourism. Before listening to the interview with a gastro tourist whose hobby is to taste strange dishes around the world, the student has to choose the dishes they would like to try. Ask not only to tick, but to explain their choice as well as to explain the options they haven't chosen.

Teacher's instructions:
Which of these traditional dishes you would like to try? Why (not)?
- *potatoes with mud sauce*
- *snake meat*
- *fried scorpions*
- *bugs sandwich*

Now let's listen to a traveller who has made tasting strange dishes a hobby.

Example 2.

The lesson is about emotional intelligence. The student has to choose the skills they believe will be necessary for successful employment in future. To provide more speaking practice, encourage them not only to choose but to explain their opinion or illustrate it with some examples.

Teacher's instructions.

Tick those employment skills which you believe will be the most important in the near future.

Soon people will need to develop the following skills:

- *Flexibility*
- *Creativity*
- *Processing data*
- *Making decisions*
- *Managing stress*
- *Emotional intelligence*

Listen to a reporter and compare your answers.

3.2 "AGREE/DISAGREE" statements (*Example 3*). We include different statements from the following listening or reading task together with some distractors (the statements which are not mentioned in the task) and ask the student to express their opinion on them.

Example 3.

The lesson is on the topic of body positivity and most of the activities are built on the video about the experiment on people's attitude to changing their bodies. The pre-listening discussion contains the statements on body positivity in general and the ideas that the student will hear when watching the video.

Teacher's instructions:

Agree or disagree with the statements and comment on them.

- *Almost all adults want to change something about their appearance. Agree/Disagree*
- *Adults may want to change their appearance because they were made fun of for their imperfections in childhood.   Agree/Disagree*
- *Children are more positive about their looks, and they rarely want to change themselves.   Agree/Disagree*
- *Most children would dream about gaining some superpowers for their bodies.*

Agree/Disagree

On our interactive platform we give the student interactive instruments to choose if they agree or disagree - they may select the necessary option.

3.3 "TRUE/FALSE for me" (*Example 4*). Make up a list of ideas from the listening/reading text which would be student-personalised. You may also include the vocabulary from the text into this task to pre-teach or activate background knowledge or passive vocabulary.

Example 4.

Before watching the video about some popular online marketing manipulations, the student has to speak on their online shopping habits: they choose what is true and what is false for them and explain why. The highlighted collocations are taken from the following listening task to facilitate understanding and activate the passive vocabulary or clarify the blocking vocabulary.

Teacher's instructions:

Decide which of these statements are true for you and explain why.

- *I'm completely **addicted to** shopping online.   Yes/No*
- *I've bought useful things, but I've also been buying useless things.   Yes/No*
- *I've been buying too many things online.   Yes/No*
- *These days everything has become so cheap that I feel like I'm **getting a bargain** even if I'm ordering things I don't need.   Yes/No*
- *I may **get into debt** because of all the small bits of shopping I've done.   Yes/No*

3.4 "Quizzes" (*Example 5*) Make up a quiz on the topic you will read about or listen to to check the student's general knowledge or make them guess the answers and explain why they think so. This type of

activity is very popular among Skyeng students as it doesn't only make them speak but stimulates their creative thinking processes.

Example 5.

Before watching the BBC video about sustainable farming in the Arctic city the student has to do the typeform quiz on what they know about life in the Arctic city. The quiz is done in a humorous way and the most important task is not only to choose a true/false option but to explain why they think so.

Teacher's instructions:

Guess the answers to these questions and explain why this might be true or false.

- *What are the average winter and summer temperatures in the town?*
- *What are cats banned in the town?*
- *What is it required to carry a rifle every time you leave the settlement?*
- *Why do you think the Svalbard archipelago has turned into a rubbish dump?*
- *Is it possible to grow vegetables in such harsh conditions?*

Using such activities doesn't only stimulate your student's interest in the topic under discussion through personalised tasks but does encourage them to speak, thus developing their speaking for fluency skills. They are effectively used now during online Skyeng lessons on General English and Spoken English courses. The feedback from the students and measuring the balance of teacher talking time and student talking time have proved their effectiveness on developing the speaking for fluency skills of the students. But what we want to highlight is that these practices can be used for offline lessons in the same way as we are currently using them for online English lessons.

To summarize our Skyeng practices for both online and offline ESL/EFL lessons we recommend:

1. Using pre-listening and pre-reading with the focus on developing students' speaking skills (when designing spoken or general English lessons).

2. Formulating the pre-listening and pre-reading tasks in such a way as to encourage the student to speak (predicting the content from the titles and the pictures, guessing, commenting on the ideas from the proceeding listening/reading tasks based on the student's general knowledge, experiences and preferences).

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