



Evaluation of Suitability of a Listening Textbook for First Year English-Major Students at University

Phan Gia Thinh

Faculty of Foreign Languages, University of Phan Thiet, Binh Thuan Province, Vietnam.

ABSTRACT: Textbook is essential materials for both learning and teaching. Thus, an evaluation must be carried out to decide which book is the most suitable for a particular group of learners. Through the evaluation, the strengths and weaknesses of the book were revealed. Cunningsworth's checklists were adopted to evaluate the general aims, design, language development, and language content of the Pathways: listening, speaking, and critical think 1 (2nd edition). Each unit of the book had an impressive design along with specific aims. There were a variety of topics, text types and listening activities in the book, which were factors of learning English motivation and English-skill development. From the findings, it can be concluded that the book is one of the best choices to be a listening textbook.

Keyword: evaluation, listening textbook, first year English-major students

I. INTRODUCTION

The success of an English-skill course at University not only depends on the pedagogical ability of a lecturer but also the uses of textbooks. The importance of materials in ESL classroom is undeniable. According to Grave (2000), textbooks play a role as a standard source of information for formal study of a subject. They are also instruments for teaching and learning. Because of these crucial roles, textbook evaluation is necessary to have a general view of a textbook as well as a prediction of its effectiveness based on various criteria. Moreover, helps or hinders in a textbook for learners can be revealed through evaluation process. This is really helpful and essential for both learners and teachers.

The textbook which was evaluated is Pathways: listening, speaking, and critical think 1 (2nd edition). This book is one of potential choices for the listening and speaking course at a university. It can be used for both listening and speaking skills courses. Although there are two skills in the same book, only listening sections in the book were evaluated.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

Textbook Evaluation

Ebel (1980, p.554) defines that "an evaluation is a judgment of merit, sometimes based solely on measurements such as those provided by test scores but more frequently involving the synthesis of various measurements, critical incidents subjective impression, and other kinds of evidence". From this point of view, it can be said that evaluation is carried out by a variety of processes. Lynch (1996) defines evaluation simpler that evaluation is "the systematic attempt to gather information in order to make judgments or decisions".

There are different reasons for materials analysis which depend on the goal of the evaluator. Selection of an appropriate textbook is one of the reasons that is proposed by Sheldon (1988). This process is really

essential when new textbook is being sought to adapt the change of the curriculum or the need of innovative materials. On the other hand, Hrehovčík (2002) states that prediction of the newly textbook's effectiveness is the main purpose of textbook evaluations. In this manner, helps and hinders of a textbook can be conveyed before it is used by learners.

Objects of a textbook evaluation is another aspect that should be consideration before evaluating the book. Designation, range of application, theoretical roots, and design of a book are objects that may be considerable concerns (Hrehovčík, 2002).

Listening activities

It can be said that listening activities are the core of a listening course book. Listening skills and sub skills are taught through these activities. Therefore, their effects can mainly decide the success of a whole course. An effective activity becomes a big help for lecturers when teaching listening skills. Students' involvements also depend on it. They commit to the lecture enthusiastically when they find the activities useful and interesting. Otherwise, they easily refuse to take part in activities, which leads to the failure of a lecture. On the other hand, the diversity of listening activities in a course book is really helpful. It makes every listening lecture innovative and stimulates students' expectation of the next lectures.

Listening activities can be divided into different groups according to types of listening or listening skills. Rost (1991) and White (1998) proposed two division of listening activities.

Table 1. Rost's (1991) listening activities, adapted from Tomlinsong (2013)

Listening types	Activities
Attentive listening	the learners have to give short verbal and non-verbal responses to the speaker in a real-time interaction.
Intensive listening	the learners are focused on particular aspects of the language system to raise awareness of how they affect meaning.
Interactive listening	learners are helped to become active listeners by working in pairs or small groups with information gap, problem-solving type activities.
Selective listening	the learners concentrate on specific pieces of information, learning to attend selectively to what they hear

Table 2. White's (1998) listening activities, adapted from Tomlinsong (2013)

Listening skills	Activities
Dealing with information	understanding gist meaning, inferring information which is not specifically stated
Interactive with a speaker	coping with speaker variations such as speed and accent, recognizing speaker intention, identifying
Language skills	identifying individual words and groups and building up meanings for them.
Perception skills	recognizing individual sounds, identifying reduced forms, recognizing intonation patterns
Using knowledge of the world	connecting words to non-linguistic features to get clues to meaning, using knowledge of topic

III. EVALUATION METHOD

This was a pre-use evaluation to determine future or potential performance of the textbook. Cunningsworth's (1995) checklist for listening was adopted in order to evaluate the suitability of the book with the curriculum of the university. The check list covers criteria consisting of *general aims, design, language development, and language content*.

General aims

1. Are specific communicative aims or objectives indicated in connection with individual units?
2. Does it have communicative activities, are they good?
3. Do realistic activities promote the learning of communicative skills and strategies which are transferable to real-life communication?
4. To what extent do the learning activities mirror real-life situations, example through task-based?
5. Does the course book use authentic material at an appropriate level?
6. If semi-authentic material is used, is it representative of authentic discourse?
7. If non-authentic material is used, is it nevertheless a good model for learners to follow?

Language development

8. Is listening material well recorded, as authentic as possible, accompanied by background information, questions and activities which help comprehension?
9. What kind of listening material is contained in the course? Does listening form part of dialogue conversation work? are there specific listening passages?
10. If there are specific listening passages, what kind of activities are based on them comprehension questions, extracting specific information, etc.?
11. Is the listening material set in a meaningful context?
12. Are there pre-listening tasks, questions, etc.?
13. What is the recorded material on audio-cassette like in terms of sound quality, speed of delivery, accent, authenticity?
14. Is there any video material for listening?
15. If so, is good use made of the visual medium to provide a meaningful context and show facial expression, gesture, etc.?

Language content

16. Are real topics included in the unit?
17. Do they relate to and engage the learners' knowledge system, i.e. the knowledge of the world that they bring with them?
18. Is there sufficient material of genuine interest to learners?
19. Are they suitable for the age group?

IV. ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION**General Design of the Book**

The course book's name was *Pathways 2nd: Listening, Speaking, and Critical thinking 1* which was published in 2018. It can be seen that from Table 1, the book contains 10 units with topics of different fields. Each unit has two sections of listening and one section of video. These sections correspond with various subskills of listening such as *identifying main ideas, understanding the speaker's purpose, listening for example, listening for definitions, listening for reasons, using context clues, making inferences, listening for cause and effect, identifying opinions, listening for repeated words*; and strategies of note taking including *taking notes on key words and phrases, using a split page to take notes, using abbreviation, using a t-chart, using an outline, making note of numbers, using a mind map, using arrows to show cause and effect, reviewing and restating, using a chart*.

Inside every unit, there is a particular aim for each listening section. Communicative activities as well as realistic activities are imbedded after listening. With these activities, learners can discuss and reflect on what they have listened to. Between two listening sections, there is a video section which easily promote learning listening and attract learners' high attention. This results from the visual, auditory, especially authenticity of the video.

Table 1. The content of Pathways 2nd: Listening, Speaking, and Critical thinking 1

Unit	Listening & Video	Listening & Note taking
1. LIVING FOR WORK	Lesson A. An Interview with Annie Griffiths Video. Becoming a Butler Lesson B. A Conversation about Dr. Sylvia Earle	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Identifying main ideas Taking notes on key words and phrases
2. GOOD TIMES, GOOD FEELINGS	Lesson A. A Lecture about Laughter Video. Laughter Yoga Lesson B. A Talk about City Parks	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Understanding the speaker's purpose Using a split page to take notes
3. THE MARKETING MACHINE	Lesson A. A Newscast about Marketing Video. Mascots: Fun for Everyone! Lesson B. An Interview with a Graphic Designer	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Listening for example Using abbreviation
4. WILD WEATHER	Lesson A. A Podcast about Strange Weather Video. Tornado Chase Lesson B. A Conversation about Greenland	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Listening for definitions Using a T-chart
5. FOCUS ON FOOD	Lesson A. A Radio Show about Ugly Food Video. Food-Waste Rebel Lesson B. A Lecture about Feeding the World	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Listening for reasons Using an outline
6. HOUSING FOR THE FUTURE	Lesson A. A Lecture about Housing Solutions Video. Livable Spaces of Steel Lesson B. A Conversation about Building Homes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Using Context Clues Making Note of Numbers
7. EXPLORING SPACE	Lesson A. A Class Presentation about Space Travel Video. How to Choose a Mars Landing Site Lesson B. A Talk by a Tour Guide	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Making Inferences Using a Mind Map
8. CREATIVE ARTS	Lesson A. A Lecture about Temporary Art Video. Making Art from Recycled Glass Lesson B. A Radio Program about Music	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Listening for Cause and Effect Using Arrows to Show Cause and Effect
9. OUR RELATIONSHIP WITH NATURE	Lesson A. A Lecture about Ethics Video. Our History with Horses Lesson B. A Conversation about a Town in Zimbabwe	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Identifying Opinions Reviewing and Restating
10. HOW WE COMMUNICATE	Lesson A. A Report about Communication Software Video. Elephants Communicate while at Play Lesson B. A Lecture about Gestures	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Listening for Repeated Words Using a Chart

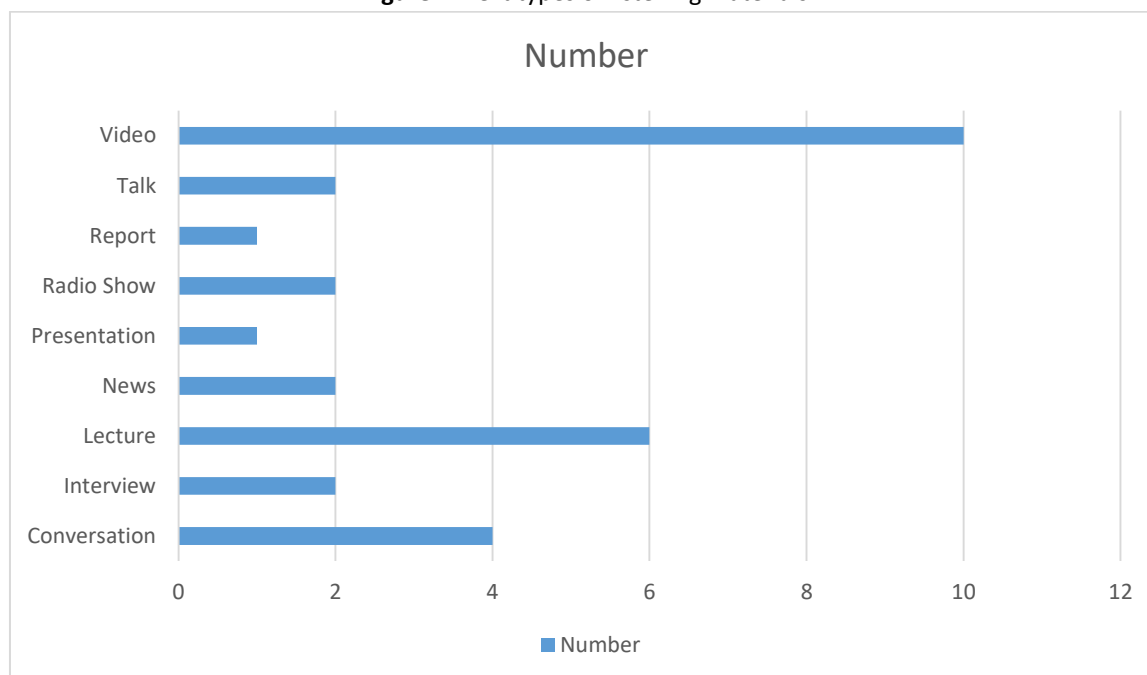
Text types of listening materials

As it can be observed, the most text type is video. This is a significant point compared to other textbooks. Moreover, students can be motivated more by watching videos than listening to a recording. Texts of lectures are also mainly used in this book. This is absolutely appropriate to students at universities especial English-majored ones. The next text type in preference is conversations. This text type frequently appears not only in the everyday life but also in the class room situations between students and teachers or among students. The other text types only contribute in one or two units of the book consisting of talks, radio shows, news, interviews, report, and presentation. In general, there is a variety of text types used in this book which can helps to improve students' motivation, prepare their listening skills in different situations from classroom to real life.

On the other side, the listening materials were well recorded and captured. They absolutely matched the background knowledge of the lessons. The speakers' voices and accents were clear and pure enough for

learners to follow and comprehend. Furthermore, the speed of delivery was appropriate to the level of the learners. In addition, the authenticity was easily founded in the videos. The accents and speed of delivery of the speakers were significantly different from the speakers in listening sections. It can be a little challenge for the learners. However, this type of text is what learners should be exposed more when learning English.

Figure 1. Text types of listening materials



Types of listening activities

The listening activities were quite diverse in terms of types and performers. There were 22 types of listening activities which were observed in this book. These activities can be classified into three groups including pre-listening (activities 1 and 2), while-listening (activities 3 to 12), after-listening (activities 13 to 22). Apart from these activities directly related to listening, there were other pre-listening activities involving in vocabulary or prior knowledge of students.

It can be clearly seen that there were five activities that are mostly repeated in every unit including listening for main idea, listening for details, understanding main idea, understanding details, and reflecting. This emphasis was similar to previous textbooks. However, students' reflecting after listening was a distinctive activity. Students can relate the listening content to their own experience or knowledge through this activity.

With pre-listening activities, learners were frequently asked to work in pairs. It was given learners a chance to review and activate the information related to the activities as well as the topic of the lesson. Learners mostly do while-listening activities individually. The autonomy of learners can be enhanced by doing these activities by themselves. Finally, after listening, group-work was encouraged to help learners build collaboration. It is also the time for learners to negotiate what they have listened, do cross-checks or have further discussions.

Table 2. Types of listening activities

		U1	U2	U3	U4	U5	U6	U7	U8	U9	U10	Total
1.	Understanding visuals								1		1	2
2.	Predicting						1					1
3.	Listening for main idea	2	1			1		1	1	2	1	9
4.	Listening for details	1	2	2	2	2		1	2	1	2	15

5.	Listening for example			1								1
6.	Listening for numbers						1					1
7.	Listening for focus words						1					1
8.	Identifying opinions									1		1
9.	Using context clues						1					1
10.	Note-taking	1	1		1							3
11.	understanding main ideas	1	1	1	1	1		1	1	1		8
12.	understanding details	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	10
13.	Making inferences	1						1			1	3
14.	Reflecting	1	1		1	1	2	4	1			11
15.	Evaluating	1				2		1			1	5
16.	personalizing	1										1
17.	Ranking		1									1
18.	Analyzing			1	2							3
19.	Synthesizing			1			1		2			4
20.	Applying			1								1
21.	Drawing conclusion										1	1
22.	Interpreting a timeline											1
The number of activities												84

V. CONCLUSION

From the findings and discussion, it can be concluded that this textbook is a great choice for first year English-major students for several reasons. Firstly, the book has professional and appealing design. Effects of these visuals must attract learners' attention and their curiosity of the lesson. Secondly, learners can experience a variety of activities as well as text types. This makes every lesson innovative for learners to explore and expect. Finally, the level of vocabulary is appropriate to first-year English-major students. Although there were some new words may be slightly beyond students' competence, it is not difficult for them to understand the content of lessons. These new words not only relatively challenge learners but also improve their vocabulary knowledge. In brief, there are many positive points of this book from a very early sight, but there should be while-use and after-use evaluations to have a full and precise view of this book.

VI. REFERENCES

1. Cunningsworth, A. (1995). *Choosing Your Coursebook*. Oxford: Heinemann Publishers Ltd.
2. Ebel, R. L. (1980). *Essentials of Educational Measurement (3rd ed.)*. Prentice Hall.
3. Graves, K. (2000). *Designing Language Course, A Guide for Teachers*. Boston. Heinle. Cengage Learning.
4. Hrehovčík, T. (2002). Foreign language textbook evaluation: methodological considerations. *Zeszyty Naukowe*, 6(1), 217-230.
5. Lynch, B. K. (1996). *Language program evaluation: Theory and practice*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
6. Rost, M. (1991). *Listening in Action*. Hemel Hempstead: Prentice-Hall International.
7. Sheldon, L. (1988). Evaluating ELT textbooks and materials. *ELT Journal*, 42(4), 237-246.
8. Tomlison, B. (2013). *Developing Materials for Language Teaching*. Bloomsbury.
9. White, G. (1998). *Listening*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.