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Fortress or Bridge? Learners' Perceptions and Practice in Self Access Language Learning

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Abstract

Independent language learning is an essential complement to classroom-based learning if learners are to acquire target competence in a realistic period of time. It follows that language teachers can help promote learning efficiency by making links between teacher-guided learning and learner-initiated activities outside class. In an effort to encourage out of class learning, many institutions in the last ten years have established language resource centres where learners are encouraged to learn independently. This article reports on an investigation of the perceptions and practices of a group of learners enrolled in an intensive English course in relation to their out-of-class language learning. The project sought to answer the following questions:

- 1 How efficient and effective are the self access language learning opportunities currently provided as part of Victoria University's English Proficiency Programme?
- 2 How do learners perceive self access language learning (SALL)?
- 3 What links do learners make between their self access language learning and their classroom learning?

Introduction

Since November 1989, the English Language Institute at Victoria University of Wellington (VUW) has provided a venue, known as the Self Access Centre, and resources for independent language learning for learners enrolled in its English Proficiency Programme (EPP). These facilities have expanded over the last 11 years into a dedicated independent language learning facility called the Language Learning Centre (hereafter referred to as the LLC), which caters for learners of all the languages taught at VUW, as well as others for which the LLC has resources.

The SALL facilities at VUW constitute one of several course elements designed to encourage EPP learners to take more responsibility for their language learning. Publicity and all course materials for the EPP refer to this principle as an explicit aim. The principal elements which contribute to the development of learner independence within the EPP are:

- 1 ongoing learner-teacher dialogue
- 2 the first week study theme on "Learning a Language"
- 3 classroom tasks and materials which replicate real-life situations
- 4 a student record booklet
- 5 self-access centre

(Cotterall, 1995: 220)

Since 1989, the location and organisation of the SALL resources have changed, and the range and volume of materials and facilities have grown dramatically. However, until the summer of 1999-2000, no formal evaluation of either the language resources and facilities, or the use which EPP learners made of them had been undertaken. Therefore when the opportunity arose to conduct an evaluation with the assistance of a graduate student from the Netherlands (the second author of this paper), it was greeted with enthusiasm.

This paper first presents an overview of key concepts in the literature on SALL before describing the subjects and methodology adopted in the study. In the third section, six major trends in the study data are discussed. The paper concludes with a number of recommendations for teachers and Self Access Centre (SAC) managers.

Self Access Language Learning

According to Gremmo and Riley (1995:156) Self Access Centres and, hence, self access learning have been in existence since the late 1960s. However in the last few years, SALL has experienced an explosion of interest, as evidenced by a growing number of conference papers, journal articles and books which seek to enhance understanding of this approach to learning. (See for example Gardner and Miller, 1994; Esch, 1994; Gremmo and Riley, 1995; Cotterall, 1995; Pemberton et.al. 1996; Benson and Voller, 1997; Morrison, 1999; Gardner and Miller, 1999; Bickerton and Gotti, 1999).

In the New Zealand context, a belief in the importance of independent learning has resulted in the creation of SACs in many language-teaching institutions around the country. In 1998, a Special Interest Group for staff working in SACs at tertiary NZ institutions was created by John Jones-Parry of Manukau Institute of Technology and colleagues. The "SACSIG", which has members from all over New Zealand as well as some in Australia, holds regular meetings in Auckland (where the majority of its members reside) and maintains an electronic discussion list, moderated by John Jones-Parry¹.

What then is SALL? Gardner and Miller begin their latest book on Self Access (1999) by defining SALL in relation to the development of learner autonomy. They see SALL as "an approach to learning language" (1999:8), and elsewhere define it as "learning in which students take more responsibility for their learning than in teacher directed settings" (1997:xvii). However, in our experience, it is not necessarily the case that where learners engage in SALL, they assume more responsibility for their learning. For the purposes of the discussion which follows, we would like to propose the following definitions:

A Self Access Centre consists of a number of resources (in the form of materials, activities and support) usually located in one place, and is designed to accommodate learners of different levels, styles, goals and interests. It aims to develop learner autonomy among its users. Self Access Language Learning is the learning that takes place in a Self Access Centre.

SALL has the potential to promote learner autonomy in a number of ways. Firstly, it provides facilities which allow learners to pursue their own goals and interests while accommodating

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individual differences in learning style, level and pace of learning; secondly, the resources have the potential to raise learners' awareness of the learning process by highlighting aspects of the management of learning, such as goal setting and monitoring progress; thirdly, SALL can act as a bridge between the teacher-directed learning situation, where the target language is studied and practised, and the "real world", where the target language is used as a means of communication. Finally, SALL can promote the learning autonomy of learners who prefer or are obliged to learn without a teacher, by supporting their learning in the absence of an organised language course. In different contexts, "SALL offers varying degrees of guidance but encourages students to move towards autonomy" (Gardner and Miller, 1997:xvii).

What then should be the relationship between the learning which learners do outside class and classroom-based learning? Crabbe (1993:444) believes that "Autonomous learning needs to become a reference point for *all* classroom procedure". In other words, tasks which are carried out in class need to demonstrate principles about managing learning which can be exploited by learners when they are learning independently. In order to facilitate this, Crabbe claims that there must be a "bridge" between "public domain" learning (that is, learning which is based on shared classroom activities) and "private domain" learning (that is, personal individual learning behaviour). SALL learning could be said to function as just such a bridge, since it belongs to both the public and private domains. Gardner and Miller (1999:22) also discuss the notion of the SAC acting as a "bridge to the outside, unstructured environment" in native speaker environments. Exploration of the relationship between learners' public and private learning was a key focus in our study.

Previous studies of SALL have investigated different types of learner preparation and support (Esch, 1994), materials design and evaluation (Gardner and Miller, 1994), methods of monitoring learner progress (Martyn, 1994), the role of technology (Morrison, 1999), philosophy and practice (Benson and Voller, 1997) and the implications of the role change implicit in SALL (Cotterall, 1998). More recently, concerns have arisen over the need to demonstrate the effectiveness of SALL. In discussing the evaluation of SALL, Gardner (1999:114-115) distinguishes between *efficiency* and *effectiveness*, claiming that the former is principally of administrative concern, and the latter of pedagogic concern. He considers (1999:114) that:

Efficiency measures the relationship between output and cost. In other words, it looks at value for money in terms of countable outputs like hours of access or frequencies of use ... [whereas] ... *effectiveness* ... measures how well pre-set goals are met.

Most of the research on evaluating SALL has focused on matters of efficiency. Studies generally conclude that learner preparation and support are essential, and report mixed results on learners' satisfaction with their linguistic improvement and development of learning independence. Overall, there has been little experimental research on SALL, and little which investigates learning gains, apart from two studies of learners' *perceptions* of their learning gains, one by Gremmo (1988) and a recent study conducted by Richards (1999) at Victoria University. Gardner claims that the lack of published research on the effectiveness of SALL is due to difficulties inherent in evaluating it. These include (Gardner, 1999:112-113):

- 1 the complexity of self-access systems
- 2 the uniqueness of self-access systems
- 3 the difficulty of data collection
- 4 the difficulty of data analysis
- 5 the purposes of evaluation (improving *learning* rather than *teaching*).

In terms of Gardner's definitions, SALL at VUW is *efficient* to the extent that it increases the frequency of use of materials and equipment by learners, or frees up teachers to engage in other useful activities. According to Gardner, SALL at VUW is *effective* to the extent that the institution's "pre-set goals" are met. These include the development both of learners' language skills and their ability to learn independently. The SAC is seen as a potential means to this end, in that it provides opportunities for language practice, information on the target language and input on how to learn a language. A desire to gather evidence of the effectiveness of SALL motivated the design and implementation of our study.

Context of the study

The research was carried out during a 12-week intensive English course at Victoria University of Wellington, which ran from November 15, 1999 to February 11, 2000. The 153 subjects, who came from 25 different countries, included two distinct groups. The first group were motivated by a desire to prepare for tertiary study in New Zealand; the second wished to develop their ability to use English for a range of professional purposes. A total of 15 staff were involved in delivering the course. (See Appendix A for details of the countries of origin of the subjects).

The location for the study was the Language Learning Centre (LLC) located on the ground floor of one of the buildings on the VUW campus. The whole of this floor is taken up with resources for language learning. (See Appendix B for a floor plan of the LLC). The public access sections of the LLC include a room called the Self Access Centre (SAC), a multimedia room, two audio visual classrooms and a seminar room. In the SAC, learners can use dictionaries, grammar books, worksheets, magazines or SAC guides (sheets containing practical information on how to locate or access resources, or advice on learning strategies - see Appendix C). The only resources learners can borrow from this room are simplified reading books. The multimedia room houses 10 Macintosh computers and 2 PCs, 4 television monitors which broadcast satellite TV programmes as well as offering standard video playback facilities, and 10 audio booths with recording facilities. The two audio visual classrooms are equipped with Tandberg IS 10 language laboratories (ie. one master console connected to 20 TSR 5900 student cassette recorders) as well as two fixed video monitors in each. These rooms are used for class teaching in the mornings, but can be used by learners for audio recording and playback in the afternoons. The seminar room can be booked by learners for private language practice, discussion or video viewing. The rest of the LLC is taken up with offices and equipment.

The LLC has a permanent staff of five. Two staff work behind the counter issuing cassettes, videos and CD-Roms, as well as advising learners on learning materials and orienting them to the resources and facilities. An on-line catalogue of the LLC resources (as well as a printed version) is available to help learners make choices about the materials they wish to work on. The LLC staff also includes one staff member who is responsible for Computer Assisted Language Learning (CALL) development and training, and a technician who services all the equipment in the Centre. The Centre is managed by an academic staff member and functions as an independent unit within the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences. During the study, the SAC was staffed by the second author of this paper for three hours per day, four days per week. These hours coincided with times when EPP learners visited the SAC.

The LLC is open Monday to Friday from 8.45am to 5.15pm. At the beginning of each language course, one of the staff members gives learners an introductory tour of the LLC, lasting for approximately one hour. This tour normally includes an introduction to the main categories of resources, the computers, the on-line catalogue and procedures for borrowing materials and using the facilities. In some cases, class teachers provide a more detailed introduction to the

resources and the SAC at a later date.

Methodology

Answers to the study's research questions were sought by a number of different means. These included a questionnaire (administered to the learners in Week 9 of the course), interviews with a number of learners, observations of learners using the SAC, a teacher questionnaire, a structured discussion with the teachers and the collection of quantitative data generated by the LLC database. The questionnaire² was designed in order to explore learners' perceptions of the usefulness of the various categories of materials, and to elicit suggestions about ways of improving the resources and facilities provided in the LLC. It also contained a number of questions aimed at exploring learners' beliefs associated with independent learning. Quantitative data about the use of materials were collected by using the LLC database (which records every item borrowed across the counter), by counting the number of users, by counting the number of books borrowed and by analysing responses to selected items included in the questionnaire. Responses to the questionnaire were analysed both to provide descriptive statistics on patterns of learner behaviour and to explore potential correlations between responses, and the potential existence of certain factors underlying learner responses.³

Trends in the Data

In what follows, important trends in the data are reported on. In most cases, both qualitative and quantitative data have contributed to the identification of these trends, as well as an awareness of key issues and concepts in SALL.

1 Use of the LLC and Attitudes to SALL

During the study, approximately 200 learners visited the SAC (one room within the LLC) each week. In other words, on average 40 learners per day made use of the grammar, reading and vocabulary resources. Many more made use of other facilities and resources in the LLC, including the computers, the audio facilities, the satellite television and the videotapes. 71.8% of the respondents reported using the LLC facilities at least once or twice per week, and approximately one third of the total number of course members regularly borrowed books from the SAC. The questionnaire respondents reported that the listening materials were the most useful resources provided in the LLC.

Subjects' attitudes to SALL were predominantly positive. Almost 90% of the learners reported that working in the LLC was either "quite" or "very" important for their learning of English. 88% of the respondents thought that working in the LLC helped them learn English by themselves, and 93% saw "learning to learn English by yourself" as an important course goal. It was also apparent from learners' responses to the questionnaire, that they appreciated having a staff member on hand in the SAC to answer their queries. Correlation analysis revealed that this positive predisposition was found particularly amongst the less proficient course members, who rated their learning in the LLC as more important than did more proficient learners. We then examined the relationship between learners' perceptions of the usefulness of working in the LLC

²2 Readers who are interested in obtaining a copy of the questionnaire can e-mail the second author at <hayo@hayo.nl>

³3 We would like to thank Edith Hodgen of VUW's School of Mathematics and Computing for her help with the statistical analyses used in this report.

and the frequency of their visits there. We expected a correlation between these two responses, and therefore used a one-tailed test. We found a correlation of 0.286 (Kendall's Tau) and 0.319 (Spearman's Rho) significant at the 0.01 level, suggesting that learners who considered learning independently in the LLC to be useful, tended to use it more often.

Despite the positive attitudes to SALL expressed in learners' questionnaires, interviews revealed a somewhat shallow understanding of independent learning, suggesting that many learners equated it with mastery of learning strategies. It may be that learners in our study saw the SALL opportunities on the course more as a chance to extend their class-based learning than as an opportunity to experiment with new resources and facilities while developing their ability to learn by themselves.

2 Level of Proficiency

Responses to the questionnaire indicated that the less proficient learners made more frequent use of the LLC than the more proficient learners. Furthermore, more proficient learners perceived working in the LLC as a less useful way of learning than did less proficient learners. This finding is disturbing if it suggests that the more proficient learners felt the LLC had little to offer them. While they may have been able to access resources elsewhere more easily than the less proficient course members (an assumption supported by our data), it is not necessarily the case that the higher proficiency learners were more skilled at managing their learning. In fact they may have overlooked the SAC's potential as a place to practise important learning to learn skills such as planning, monitoring and evaluating learning.

While the more proficient learners may have underused the LLC resources, it is also possible that some learners depended exclusively on them. We found a significant (at the .01 level) correlation of -.318 (Kendall's Tau) and -.374 (Spearman's Rho) between proficiency and the use of "other" resources such as the university library and the Public Library. In other words, the less proficient the learners, the less use they made of other (unsimplified) resources for their language learning. In fact, 55% of learners reported using resources other than the LLC only "sometimes". Is it possible that a learning centre can become so comfortable for learners that it functions more as a fortress (discouraging them from venturing out) than as a bridge to the outside world?

3 Links with the Classroom

In response to a question focused on how they decided what to work on in the LLC, more than 70% of the respondents claimed that they mostly worked in the LLC on things they wanted to do. This finding can be interpreted in at least two ways. It may reflect self-awareness on the part of learners, indicating that they neither desire nor require teacher guidance in their independent learning activity. Alternatively, it might indicate that teachers made few suggestions to their learners about out-of-class learning activities. Correlation analysis indicates that learners in our study who mostly worked on activities which they chose for themselves, used the LLC more than learners who were told to by their teachers. This may suggest that compulsion is not the best way to encourage learners to increase the amount of time they spend learning independently. In either case, it is clear that links between learning carried out in the "public" and "private" domains could usefully be made.

One interesting reflection on the relationship between classroom-based learning and independent learning arose during an interview. One learner commented that her class work (i.e. that directed by the teacher) "interrupted my learning cycle in the LLC". She went on to explain that the class programme required her to allocate a great deal of time to tasks set by the teacher, thereby reducing the amount of time available for working on her personal objectives.

One suspects that this would not have been the class teacher's intention. Ideally (as Crabbe 1993, suggests), class-based learning should model and support procedures for private domain learning. The two domains should not be competing for learners' attention.

4 Out of class use of English

One of the most surprising and discouraging findings of the study was that learners made very little use of English outside the classroom, despite living in an English-speaking country. 36% of learners admitted to using English only "sometimes" outside VUW, with the less proficient learners using English less outside VUW than the more proficient ones. Analysis also confirmed that the learners who used resources other than those provided in the LLC more, also used English more outside VUW. This finding probably reflects the fact that less proficient learners are likely to have more difficulty using the target language outside the language learning environment.

More positively, analysis uncovered a significant correlation between learners' use of English outside VUW and their beliefs about the importance in a course like the EPP to learn English by themselves. It is therefore probably true that when learners are more able to make use of opportunities outside the classroom, they see the importance of linking this use of the language to ways of learning by themselves. It is interesting to speculate whether a causal relationship exists between the two. If such a relationship could be demonstrated, then teachers could be confident that encouraging their learners to use their English in natural settings would result in their wanting to develop their independent learning skills.

What is the implication of these results for the way in which the learners see the SAC? It seems clear that the SAC provides extra **practice** and **input**, but if the majority of learners do not engage in practice outside VUW, then the SAC is not acting as a bridge to the real world. It is possible that some of our learners may have been discouraged from trying out their English in the "real world" because they found our SAC too comfortable. For others, "the protected world of the SAC may seem less attractive than the real world" (Gardner and Miller, 1999:23). Given that in the current New Zealand context, learners can survive without making use of English outside class, it could be said that one of the key functions of SALL is to prompt learners to engage with the target speaking community.

5 Obstacles to SALL

The study identified two major obstacles to use of the LLC. 60% of respondents found it "fairly", "quite" or "very difficult" to find the right materials, despite the initial orientation to the Centre and the presence of staff throughout opening hours. Furthermore, most of the materials in the SAC were on display (as opposed to being menu-driven), and almost all could also be accessed by means of the on-line and printed catalogues provided. Correlation analysis showed that the more useful learners found the orientation to the LLC, the less difficulty they had in finding the right materials. This is a powerful argument for ensuring that every learner receives a good orientation to the materials and facilities. Not surprisingly, less proficient learners found it more difficult to find the right materials, suggesting that lack of proficiency compounds other problems.

The other principal difficulty encountered by learners in accessing the SALL opportunities was lack of time. This raises the question of how learners allocated their time. A frequent complaint from learners on EPP courses is that they have too much homework to do. If indeed teacher-directed activities are taking up most of learners' independent learning time, this suggests the need to re-evaluate the goals of those activities in relation to learners' personal objectives.

6 Preferred LLC Activities

Of the resources provided in the LLC, the listening materials proved the most popular. 80% of the respondents rated the listening resources as “quite” or “very” useful, and 73% rated the CALL programmes as “quite” or “very” useful. These findings are neither controversial nor surprising. In contrast, the SAC guides (described above and illustrated in Appendix C) proved unpopular with learners. Given the dual role these guides were intended to play - (a) orienting learners to English language learning resources in the wider community, and (b) providing practical advice on strategies for solving learning problems - this is a disappointing finding. Future research is needed to determine the explanation for learners’ responses.

Implications for SALL Managers and Language Teachers

What strategies does this study suggest for enhancing the efficiency and effectiveness of SALL? Space constraints oblige us to limit our comments to the following broad recommendations:

1 Explore learners’ beliefs about SALL

It is essential to find out what learners think about SALL, and how willing they are to adopt such an approach to their language learning before attempting to introduce it. See, for example, Gardner and Miller (1999), and Cotterall (1999). In the present study, learners’ difficulty in identifying examples of autonomous learning behaviour, suggests that the reasons for promoting SALL may not have been fully grasped. It is also possible that some higher proficiency learners saw the SAC as nothing more than a collection of resources, without considering the usefulness of working there. Such beliefs warrant investigation and challenge.

2 Design good initial orientation (s) to SALL

Effective SALL depends on a sound understanding of how to learn independently, as well as an appreciation of the rationale behind this approach - what Holec (1980:27) calls “psychological preparation” for self-directed learning. This preparation might include practice with needs analysis, goal setting, matching materials and tasks to goals, self-assessment, record keeping and self-evaluation. The study findings suggest the need for further training in this area.

3 Provide ongoing support

SALL should never result in isolation for learners. Learners need access to support (in the form of staff, documentation, training, feedback etc) at all times. SAC staff play a crucial role in promoting successful SALL. Feedback in interviews suggested that enthusiasm, approachability, interest in learners’ problems and “willingness to be interrupted” rated highly as desirable characteristics in SALL staff. Learners’ documented difficulties in locating appropriate materials suggest the need to allocate time to designing more user-friendly signage, catalogues and displays.

4 Enhance the links between SALL and class activity

Learners need to perceive the links between public and private domain learning. Teachers can help by using class tasks to model procedures for solving language problems in private learning. One way of doing this might involve designing individualised projects which incorporate both public and private elements. SAC managers could help too by promoting “real world” opportunities for language practice, for example by publicising events which offer opportunities for authentic language practice.

Conclusion

The study reported on here suggested that the effectiveness of the SALL opportunities currently provided at Victoria University could be enhanced by providing better training for learners in

“learning to learn”. Gremmo and Riley claim (1995: 157):

The major lesson which has been learnt from resource centres is that if they are to be successful, they must provide some sort of learner training.

Data from our study suggest that the kind of learner training currently provided on the EPP falls somewhat short of the ideal. While learners reported that they found SALL very useful, interviews suggested that these claims may have been based on a shallow awareness of what independent learning involves. The study also highlighted the crucial role played by learners’ initial orientation to the SAC and the ongoing support provided. Results also suggested that learners’ independent learning may at times have been inhibited by teacher-directed activities or a lack of knowledge of how to learn independently. If stronger ties were forged between class-based learning and independent learning, learners’ awareness of the potential of SALL might increase and a different kind of learning might occur there. Finally, while the study found that learners were generally well disposed to the concept of learning independently, they lacked a sound understanding of the rationale behind this approach to learning, and of what it involves in practice. In short, there is plenty of work still to be done in enhancing learners’ understanding and experience of self access language learning.

[4657 words]

Notes

- 2 Readers who are interested in obtaining a copy of the questionnaire can e-mail the second author at <hayo@hayo.nl>
- 3 We would like to thank Edith Hodgen of VUW's School of Mathematics and Computing for her help with the statistical analyses used in this report.

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Appx A**Countries of Origin of Learners on ELIN 933**

Cambodia	19	Mongolia	8
China	23	Myanmar	3
Colombia	1	Norway	1
Costa Rica	1	Russia	3
Finland	1	Somalia	1
France	1	Slovak Republic	1
Indonesia	3	Sri Lanka	3
Japan	12	Taiwan	3
Jordan	1	Thailand	8
Kiribati	1	Tuvalu	1
Korea	13	Vanuatu	2
Laos	15	Vietnam	26
Malaysia	2		

LISTENING STRATEGIES

Listening is a very important skill since we spend almost 60% of our time listening. However, it is not always easy to understand spoken English so it is important to practise your listening skills. Here you will find some strategies that you can use to improve your listening skills. But first you need to understand the difference between *interactive* and *noninteractive* listening.

Interactive and Noninteractive listening

Interactive listening happens when you are having a conversation. Sometimes you listen and sometimes you speak. *Noninteractive listening* happens when you watch the news, listen to the radio or go to lectures (although these can also be interactive). If you want to improve your listening ability, it is important to understand the difference between these two types of listening.

It is probably a good idea to try to improve your *noninteractive listening* skills first. You will find a lot of materials in the Language Learning Centre that you can work with to improve your noninteractive listening skills. There are videotapes, cassettes, graded readers with cassettes, satellite TV and CD-Roms covering many different topics and levels. *Interactive listening*, on the other hand, is difficult to practise by yourself. The best advice is to speak English as much as you can with native speakers. You will find some specific tips on how to make your listening practice easier below.

Noninteractive listening - watching TV and movies:

Watching TV and movies are fun ways of learning to listen. Sometimes, they can be quite difficult though. Here are a few tips. They all relate to prediction, i.e. trying to prepare yourself to understand what is said by using knowledge you already have.

- ☞ use visual clues: try to get as much information as you can from people's facial expressions, their gestures, and from the situation. Are people angry, happy, afraid?
- ☞ use background knowledge: ask yourself what you know about the topic. What do you think they will talk about?
- ☞ focus on what is relevant: not all information is relevant. If you are listening to an interview, concentrate on questions like *who, what, where*.
- ☞ listen to familiar elements: concentrate on what you know, rather than on what you don't know. If you hear words, or names that you know, use these to guess what the words and names that you don't know will mean.
- ☞ listen for familiar sounding words: many words sound alike in different languages. Maybe you can understand them even if you don't know them.
- ☞ numbers: try to learn numbers and proper names (names of cities, important people) as soon as you can, because they are used very often.

Interactive listening - listening to and speaking with people

When you speak to people it is sometimes difficult to understand what they are saying. Here are several things you can do to help you understand better:

- ☞ let the speaker know you're having trouble: don't be afraid to tell your conversation partner that you're having problems understanding him or her.
- ☞ ask for repetition: ask the speaker to repeat what (s)he said.
- ☞ ask the speaker to slow down: native speakers do not always realise that they speak fast, so ask them to speak more slowly.
- ☞ seek clarification: if you are not sure what the speaker means, just ask him or her to explain. For example, you can say "What does the word "X" mean?"
- ☞ rephrase : if you are not sure what the speaker means, tell them what you think they said. For example, you can say 'Do you mean that..'
- ☞ repeat: if you are not sure what the speaker means, repeat the sentence word for word in a questioning tone.
- ☞ pay attention to intonation and tone of voice: these may help you work out the meaning of what is being said and tell you if it's a statement or a question
- ☞ focus on question words: question words are very important because they tell you that the speaker wants you to give him or her information, and also tell you what kind of information (s)he wants. There are only a few question words in English. Remember them and focus on them while you are listening.
- ☞ assume that the 'here and now' are important: mostly when you speak to someone, the conversation will be about something related to where you are and what you are doing. This helps you predict what is being said.

Finally: don't stop listening!

- ☞ concentrate on familiar elements: try to focus on what you know, rather than on what you don't know.
- ☞ concentrate on important elements: you don't need to understand everything in order to understand what is being said. The context will help you understand. Don't panic if you miss a word.
- ☞ Just keep listening! Good luck!

