

# Communicative English Language Skills II

## Lecture 5

Listening & Speaking: Real-life Themes

Biniam Atnafe Beyene

[biniwaatnafe@gmail.com](mailto:biniwaatnafe@gmail.com)

# Lecture 5: Listening & Speaking: Real-life Themes

Hello everyone, nice to see you again in Lecture 5

Lecture 4 Recap: Relationship between verb action & participants (subject and object)

Key Uses: formal/academic writing; unknown doer

Structure: Object + be + past participle (+ by agent)

Lecture 5: Listening & Speaking – Real-Life Themes (Life-Skills)

Transition: From grammar mechanics to practical communication

Core Skills: Active listening; clear speaking; handling everyday scenarios

Themes: Job interviews, meetings, negotiations, social interactions

Goal: Apply skills confidently in professional & personal life

# Lesson Objectives

By the end of this lecture, you will be able to:

- Define and categorize essential "Life Skills."
- Utilize listening strategies to identify social and personal problems.
- Engage in spoken interaction to propose solutions and make decisions.
- Reflect on the role of empathy and self-awareness in communication.

# What are Real-Life Themes?

Communication is not passive—it's active engagement with the world!

Beyond the Classroom:

English connects to streets, workplace, & social circles

Lecture Design:

- Use listening to diagnose problems
- Use speaking to negotiate solutions
- Focus: Empathy & self-awareness as cornerstones of interaction

Real-Life Themes (Our Daily "Content"):

**Key Themes Today:**

- Social Connectivity & Interaction
- Personal Well-being & Self-Care
- Environmental & Global Awareness
- Professional & Academic Ethics

# The Link between Language and Life

Language does not exist in a vacuum. It is intertwined with how we think, feel, and function as human beings.

What “Competent English” really Means: Communicative competence = Life competence; Not just grammar, it's the ability to: Navigate social situations; Express complex emotions; and resolve disagreements

**Today's Focus:** Bridge linguistic theory → lived experience

- ❖ **Listening for nuances:** you understand the real message, not just the surface meaning.
- ❖ **Speaking for impact:** Conveying the intended message clearly

# Defining "Life Skills"

"Abilities for adaptive and positive behavior that enable individuals to deal effectively with the demands and challenges of everyday life." — WHO.

"Adaptive" means being flexible when things change, and "positive" means finding a way forward even in difficult times. I find this definition particularly relevant to our course because "dealing effectively" almost always requires high-level communication.

- Adaptive behavior
- Positive behavior
- Everyday challenges

# The Three Pillars of Life Skills

1. Cognitive Skills: Thinking and analyzing: how we think and process information.
2. Personal Skills: Managing oneself: how we manage our own emotions and stress.
3. Interpersonal Skills: Interacting with others: how we interact with others.

I believe that listening and speaking are the threads that sew these three pillars together. Without communication, these skills remain locked inside our heads.

# Why Life Skills in a Language Course?

- English as a Global Lingua Franca.
- Negotiating meaning in diverse contexts.
- Developing the "Whole Person."

English is the global lingua franca. When we are using English to negotiate a business deal or settle a dispute in a foreign country, we are using our life skills just as much as our vocabulary. We are committed to developing the "whole person" here, not just the "linguistic person."

# Adaptability in a Changing World...cont'd

- The volatility of the modern era.
- Listening for change (Trends, needs).
- Speaking for adaptation (New ideas, flexibility).

Our world today is in constant change. I believe that adaptability is the most critical life skill for the 21st century. Through our listening exercises, I want us to learn how to identify shifts in our environment. Through speaking, I want us to practice expressing our flexibility. I find that those who can articulate their willingness to adapt are the ones who thrive.

# Life Skills vs. Academic Skills

Academic Skills	Life Skills
Rote memorization	Problem solving
Subject knowledge	Interpersonal interaction
Individual testing	Collaboration/Empathy

*I want to draw a distinction here. Academic skills get us through exams, but life skills get us through life. I am not saying one is better than the other, but I am suggesting that in this lecture, I am prioritizing the right-hand column. I want us to move from memorizing definitions to practicing empathy and collaboration in our spoken English.*

# The Role of Language in Life Skills

Remember language is the primary tool for exercising life skills. If we cannot express our needs clearly, our problem-solving skills are hampered. If we cannot clarify our intent, our interpersonal relationships suffer. Language can be considered as the "software" that runs the "hardware" of our life skills.

- Expression of Needs.
- Clarification of Intent.
- Conflict Resolution.
- Building Rapport.

# Interaction as the Medium

Interaction is a loop, and I want us to visualize it as such. We listen to understand, we process that information using our cognitive life skills, and then we speak to respond. We are also very mindful of non-verbal cues. In our speaking practice today, I want us to be aware of how our body language and tone of voice contribute to the interaction.

- ❖ The Loop: Listening -> Processing -> Speaking.
- ❖ Feedback mechanisms.
- ❖ Non-verbal cues in interaction.

# Core Skill 1: Decision-making

The first core skill I want to explore is decision-making. I see this as the ability to weigh options and choose a path. In a communicative sense, it's not just about making the choice; it's about being able to explain "why" I made that choice. I find that when I can articulate my reasoning in English, others are much more likely to support my decisions.

- The process of making choices.
- Identifying alternatives.
- Predicting consequences.
- Communicating the "Why."

# Listening for Better Decisions

I believe that good decisions start with good listening. I am constantly listening for data, but I am also listening to differentiate between someone's opinion and a hard fact. When I listen actively, I can uncover the "hidden" stakes of a situation: things that aren't being said directly but are crucial for the decision I need to make.

- Active listening to gather data.
- Sifting through opinions vs. facts.
- Identifying the "hidden" stakes.

# Speaking with Decisiveness

When it comes to speaking, I want us to practice decisiveness. I notice a big difference when I say "I have decided to" compared to "Maybe we should." One shows leadership and clarity, the other shows hesitation. I am focusing today on how we use English to project confidence in our choices while still being open to feedback.

- Using assertive language.
- "I have decided to..." vs. "Maybe we should..."
- Providing clear justifications.

# Core Skill 2: Problem-solving

Problem-solving is perhaps the most "interactive" of all life skills. I view it as a multi-step process. First, I must use my listening skills to find the root cause. Then, I use my speaking skills to brainstorm with others. I am very interested in how we use language to evaluate if a solution is actually feasible or just a "quick fix."

- Identifying the root cause.
- Brainstorming creative solutions.
- Evaluating feasibility.
- Implementing and communicating the fix.

# Critical Thinking in Problem-solving...cont'd

I cannot talk about problem-solving without mentioning critical thinking. I want us to be the kind of speakers who question assumptions. When someone says, "This is the only way," I want my English skills to allow me to say, "I see that perspective, but have we considered this other option?" This is where language becomes a tool for deeper analysis.

- Questioning assumptions.
- Analyzing different perspectives.
- Avoiding logical fallacies in speech.

# Creative Thinking: Thinking Outside the Box...cont'd

Sometimes, logic isn't enough. I find that creative thinking is essential for complex real-life problems. In our speaking exercises, I will be encouraging the use of "What if?" scenarios. I want us to use English to stretch our imaginations and find solutions that aren't immediately obvious. I believe that a rich vocabulary allows for richer, more creative solutions.

- Using metaphors and analogies.
- Expressing "What if?" scenarios.
- Encouraging divergent thinking through dialogue.

# Core Skill 3: Self-awareness

Now I turn to a more internal skill: self-awareness. I believe that to be a great communicator, I must first understand myself. I need to know my strengths, my triggers, and my values. When I am self-aware, I can monitor my own communication style. I can ask myself, "Am I being too aggressive?" or "Am I listening as much as I am speaking?"

- Recognizing strengths and weaknesses.
- Understanding personal values.
- Monitoring one's own communication style.

# Self-awareness and Emotional Intelligence

Self-awareness is the foundation of Emotional Intelligence (EQ). I want us to practice the "pause" that brief moment where I recognize my emotion before I let it dictate my speech. In my own life, this has saved me from many regrettable interactions. I am teaching you the English for "I feel frustrated because..." rather than just reacting with frustration.

- Identifying emotions in oneself and others.
- Regulating responses in high-pressure interactions.
- The "Pause": Thinking before speaking.

# Coping with Stress and Emotions

We all face stress. I've found that one of the best life skills is the ability to verbalize that stress. By saying, "I am feeling overwhelmed by this workload," I am not complaining; I am communicating a reality that needs a solution. I want us to use English to build support systems, not just to complete tasks.

- Verbalizing stress as a management tool.
- Seeking support through communication.
- Maintaining professional decorum.

# Empathy: The Bridge to Others

If self-awareness is looking inward, empathy is looking outward. I see empathy as the bridge that connects us. In our listening practice, I am not just asking you to hear words; I am asking you to hear the "feelings" behind them. When I speak, I want to use phrases like "I can see why that would be difficult for you" to validate the other person's experience.

- Walking in someone else's shoes.
- Validating others' feelings in conversation.
- Listening for the "unspoken" emotion.

# Empathy vs. Sympathy in Speech

I want to make a subtle but important distinction. Sympathy can sometimes create a distance between people. Empathy, however, creates connection. I am focusing on language that says "I am with you in this." This is a vital life skill for leadership, friendship, and family life.

- Sympathy: "I feel sorry for you."
- Empathy: "I feel with you."
- Language that fosters connection.

# The Synergy of the "Big Three"

These three skills: Decision-making, Problem-solving, and Self-awareness are a powerful triad. When I am self-aware, I make better decisions. When I solve problems, I use my decision-making skills. I want us to think of these not as separate boxes, but as an integrated system that we express through our English communication.

- Decision-making + Problem-solving + Self-awareness = Effective Action
- How they overlap in real-life.
- Case study: A workplace conflict.

# Applying Core Skills: Active Listening Exercise

I am going to introduce a scenario here. Imagine a friend is struggling with a major life choice. In my approach, the first step isn't to give advice. It's to listen. I want to identify the core problem and the emotions. This is where our listening skills meet our empathy. I believe that often, the best "speaking" we can do is to ask the right questions after listening deeply.

- Scenario: A friend is struggling with a life choice.
- Goal: Listen without interrupting.
- Goal: Identify the core problem and the emotions involved.

# Applying Core Skills: Negotiated Speaking

Now, let's look at a group project disagreement. I've seen these go south many times because of a lack of life skills. I want us to use our self-awareness to keep our tone professional. Then, I want us to use English to facilitate a problem-solving dialogue. I am looking for phrases that suggest collaboration, like "How can we combine our ideas?"

- Scenario: Group project disagreement.
- Goal: Use self-awareness to stay calm.
- Goal: Use problem-solving to find a middle ground.

# Reflection: Which skill is my strongest?

I want us to take a moment for internal reflection. Which of these skills do I feel most confident in? Is it my ability to make decisions, or perhaps my empathy? By identifying my strengths, I can also see where I need more "linguistic tools" to express myself better. I believe that being honest with ourselves is the first step toward mastery.

- Personal assessment.
- Identifying areas for linguistic and personal growth.
- Setting a goal for the next interaction.

# Interpersonal Skills: The Art of Interaction

I am now moving into the heart of our module: Interpersonal Skills. To me, this is the "art" of interaction. It's about how we build bridges between ourselves and others. I always remind myself that interaction is a two-way street. If I am the only one talking, I am not interacting; I am performing. I want us to focus on the "give and take" of real conversation.

- Building and maintaining relationships.
- Effective Communication: More than just words.
- Interaction as a two-way street.

# Effective Communication Strategies

In my view, effective communication in English requires three things: clarity, the use of feedback loops, and an appropriate tone. I am often surprised by how much a simple "Does that make sense?" can improve an interaction. It shows that I care about the listener's understanding. Today, I want us to practice adjusting our tone depending on who we are speaking to.

- Clarity and Conciseness.
- Feedback Loops (Asking for clarification).
- Appropriate Tone and Register.

# The Power of Assertiveness

I find that many students struggle with assertiveness. They are either too passive (not saying what they need) or too aggressive (disregarding others). I am teaching the "middle way"—assertiveness. I want us to use "I" statements, like "I feel that my contribution isn't being recognized," which is much more effective than saying "You are ignoring me."

- Assertive vs. Aggressive vs. Passive.
- Standing up for one's rights while respecting others.
- Using "I" statements.

# Interpersonal Relationships in a Digital Age

I cannot ignore that much of our interaction is now digital. I find that "listening" to the tone of an email is a modern life skill. When we speak on video calls, our non-verbal cues are limited, so our verbal clarity becomes even more important. I want us to consider how we maintain empathy and connection through a screen.

- Listening through text and email.
- Speaking through video calls.
- Maintaining the "human touch" online.

# Conflict Resolution through Dialogue

Conflict is inevitable; I believe it can be productive if handled well. I am focusing on de-escalation. My goal is to use English to move a conversation from "Who is right?" to "What is the solution?" I am a big believer in the "win-win" mindset, where I use my communication skills to ensure everyone feels heard and respected.

- De-escalation techniques.
- Finding common ground.
- The "Win-Win" mindset.

# Active Listening: Beyond the Surface

I want to deepen our understanding of active listening. I often paraphrase what someone said by saying, "So, if I understand you correctly, you're saying..." This simple act prevents so many misunderstandings. I also encourage us to ask open-ended questions—the "how" and "why" questions—that allow the other person to share more deeply.

- Paraphrasing to show understanding.
- Asking open-ended questions.
- Providing supportive non-verbal feedback.

# Interaction Styles: Cultural Nuances

As we use English globally, I am very aware of cultural nuances. Some cultures are very direct; others value indirectness. I believe that being a "global citizen" means being able to listen for these nuances and adjust my own speaking style to be respectful. I am not just teaching you English; I am teaching you how to be culturally sensitive through English.

- High-context vs. Low-context communication.
- Directness vs. Indirectness.
- Respecting cultural boundaries in English.

# Building Rapport and Trust

I often see "small talk" dismissed as unimportant. But I view it as the foundation of rapport. It's how we build the trust necessary for deeper conversations later. I also believe that being slightly vulnerable—admitting when I don't know something—actually builds trust. I want us to use our speaking skills to show our authentic selves.

- Small talk as a foundation.
- Consistency in communication.
- The role of vulnerability.

# Feedback: Giving and Receiving

Giving and receiving feedback is a high-level life skill. In summary, we've explored how: interaction is the medium through which we live our lives. We've looked at assertiveness, the importance of cultural context, and the art of feedback. I am now ready to take all these theories and apply them to the specific real-life scenarios found in our module.

- Constructive criticism.
- Receiving feedback with grace.
- The "Sandwich Method" (Positive-Correction-Positive).

# Scenario 1: The Misunderstood Instruction

Let's dive into some scenarios. I've seen this happen a hundred times: a misunderstood instruction. In this scenario, I want us to analyze where the listening failed. Was it the speaker's lack of clarity or the listener's lack of attention? I will be using my English to practice how to apologize and ask for better clarification next time.

- Context: Workplace/Classroom.
- The Problem: A task was done incorrectly due to poor listening.
- The Solution: Clarification and accountability.

# Scenario 2: Dealing with Social Issues

I want to look at a broader social issue. Imagine we are at a community meeting discussing local pollution. I am interested in how we use our speaking skills to persuade others to take action. This isn't just about grammar; it's about using our "Life Skills" to impact our environment. I will be focusing on how to structure a persuasive argument in English.

- Context: Community meeting.
- The Problem: Addressing local pollution or waste management.
- The Skill: Persuasive speaking and collaborative problem-solving.

# Scenario 3: Navigating Personal Health Choices

Personal health is a critical real-life theme. In this scenario, I am imagining a consultation with a doctor. I need to use my listening skills to understand complex information and my speaking skills to ask the right questions about my treatment. I find that being able to communicate clearly about one's health is a life skill that can literally save lives.

- Context: Consulting a healthcare professional.
- The Problem: Understanding a diagnosis and making a treatment decision.
- The Skill: Information gathering and critical thinking.

# Scenario 4: Resolving a Peer Conflict

Peer conflict is something I know we all experience. If a rumor is hurting someone, how do I use my English to address it? I want to avoid being accusatory. Instead, I want to use my empathy and assertiveness to clear the air. I will be practicing phrases like, "I heard something that concerned me, and I wanted to talk to you directly about it."

- Context: Friendship/Peer group.
- The Problem: A rumor or a perceived slight.
- The Skill: Empathy and assertive communication.

# Scenario 5: Financial Decision-making

Money is often a source of stress. In this scenario, I am looking at a group of friends planning a trip with a tight budget. I want us to use our negotiation skills. How do I say "We can't afford that" without ruining the mood? I am looking for ways to use English to suggest creative alternatives that keep everyone happy.

- Context: Planning a group trip or budget.
- The Problem: Limited resources vs. high expectations.
- The Skill: Negotiation and realistic problem-solving.

# Analyzing Scenario Outcomes

After looking at these scenarios, I want us to analyze the outcomes. I am not just looking for "correct" English; I am looking for "effective" English. Did the speaker achieve their goal? Did they maintain the relationship? I find that analyzing our "misses" is often more educational than only looking at our "hits."

- What worked in the communication?
- Where did the interaction break down?
- How did life skills influence the result?

# Role-play: Putting it into Practice

I am now moving us into a more active phase. I will be selecting scenarios and asking us to think through the interaction in real-time. I want us to focus on the integration of skills. I am listening to how you listen, and I am listening to how you speak. I believe that this "practice in a safe space" is how we build the confidence to use these skills in the real world.

- Integrating Listening and Speaking in Real-time:
- Scenario selection.
- Identifying the necessary life skills.
- Performing the interaction.

# Belonging: A Fundamental Human Need

I want to conclude our main content by discussing "Belonging." I believe this is a fundamental human need. We all want to feel like we belong to a community, a family, or a profession. I see communication as the primary tool we use to "claim" our place in these groups. When I speak the language of a group, I am signaling that I am one of them.

- Defining Belonging.
- The role of communication in creating a sense of "Home."
- Connectivity in a globalized world.

# Social Connectivity and Life Skills

I view social connectivity as the "glue" that holds our society together. Through our life skills, we build networks of support. I am particularly concerned with how communication can help us overcome isolation. I believe that by speaking out and reaching out, we use our English skills to build a better, more connected life for ourselves and others.

- Interaction as a "Glue" for society.
- Building networks of support.
- Overcoming isolation through speaking out.

# Contribution: Belonging through Action

I believe we feel like we belong when we contribute. When I share a good idea in a meeting, I feel part of the team. When I use my English to advocate for someone who can't speak for themselves, I am strengthening my community. I want us to see our language skills as a way to "give back" to the groups we belong to.

- Sharing ideas in a group.
- Volunteering and community service.
- Using language to advocate for others.

# Summary and Closing

Life skills lead to better interactions; Better interactions lead to stronger relationships; Stronger relationships lead to a sense of belonging. Life skills are lived, not just learned

❖ Listening = Foundation

❖ Speaking = Action

❖ Interaction = Goal

For any question, please reach out to me:

- Email: [biniwaatnafe@gmail.com](mailto:biniwaatnafe@gmail.com)
- Office Hours: Mon, Wed, Fri mornings

# References

Azar, B. S. (2003). *Fundamentals of English grammar*. Longman.

Eggenschwiler, J., & Biggs, E. D. (2001). *Writing: Grammar, usage, and style*. Hungry Minds.

Lucy, J. A., & Lucy, L. A. (Eds.). (1993). *Reflexive language: Reported speech and metapragmatics*. Cambridge University Press.

Murphy, R. (2012). *English grammar in use*. Ernst Klett Sprachen.

Naylor, H., & Murphy, R. (2007). *Essential grammar in use: Supplementary exercises with answers*. Ernst Klett Sprachen.