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THE IMPORTANCE OF THE INTERACTIVE LISTENING IN COMMUNICATIVE LANGUAGE TEACHING

We tried to outline some reasons for teaching listening comprehension in a foreign language. It is now widely accepted that oral communication plays a vital role in second language teaching for it provides an exposure to language, which is a fundamental requirement for the learner. Improving listening skills guarantees a basis for the development of other language skills. Listening is a significant component of teaching foreign language speech and from is closely connected.

Keywords Teaching listening, interactive listening, communicative language teaching, listening skills, authentic texts, listening comprehension, communicative situation, basic language skills

Պրոֆեսոր Դորատեյա Պետրոսյան
Հոգեկոմ, Անգլերեն լեզվի ամբիոն, ԱրՊՀ

ԻՆՏԵՐԱԿՏԻՎ ԼՍՈՒՄՆԵՐԻ ԿԱՐԵՎՈՐՈՒԹՅՈՒՆԸ ՀԱՂՈՐԴԱԿՑԱԿԱՆ ԼԵԶՎԻ ՈՒՍՈՒՑՄԱՆ ՄԵՁ

Հոդվածում ներկայացվում է օտար լեզվի ուսուցման ժամանակ ունկնդրման կարևորությունը: Հայտնի է, որ բանավոր հաղորդակցումը կարևոր պայման է երկրորդ լեզվի ուսուցման համար, քանի որ այն հնարավորություն է տալիս բացահայտելու տվյալ լեզվի առանձնահատկությունները և բավարարում ուսուցման գործընթացին ներկայացվող պահանջները: Ունկնդրման հմտությունների զարգացումը նպաստում է նաև լեզվական այլ հմտությունների ձևավորմանը:

Հաղորդակցվողների ունկնդրելու կարողությունները կարևոր դեր են կատարում բանավոր հաղորդակցման գործընթացում:

Բանալի բառեր՝ հաղորդակցական մեթոդ, ունկնդրման ուսուցում, ինտերակտիվ ունկնդրում, ունկնդրման կարողություններ և հմտություններ, բնագրաբնույթ տեքստեր, լսողական ընկալում, հաղորդակցական իրավիճակ, հմտությունների զարգացում, վարժություններ ունկնդրման զարգացման համար

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ВАЖНОСТЬ ИНТЕРАКТИВНОГО ПРОСЛУШИВАНИЯ В ОБУЧЕНИИ КОММУНИКАТИВНОГО ЯЗЫКА

В данной статье мы попытались представить в общих чертах важность обучения навыкам аудирования в процессе изучения иностранного языка. Известно, что устная коммуникация играет большую роль в преподавании второго языка, поскольку она раскрывает особенности обучаемого иностранного языка, что является неотъемлемым требованием для изучающего. Аудирование является важным компонентом обучения иноязычной речи и слушание неразрывно связано с говорением.

Ключевые слова: Обучение аудированию, интерактивное аудирование, коммуникативное обучение (метод), навыки восприятия на слух, аутентичные тексты, восприятие на слух, коммуникативная ситуация, развивать умения, упражнения на аудирование, основные языковые умения

Listening, the very basic language skill is consistently interrelated and intervened with the other language skills - speaking, reading and writing. The challenges towards teaching listening are now better understood because of the new strategies contributing to effective listening and moreover the widespread availability of technology supports the language learners in enhancing their listening skills. Still, the assessment of their listening skills remains far behind the current views of listening.

Listening, unlike the other language skills, is felt comparatively much more difficult by the learners, as it has all its interrelated sub skills such as receiving, understanding, remembering, evaluating, and responding. But with the advent of communicative language-teaching and the focus on proficiency, the learning and teaching of listening started to receive more attention. Current views of listening emphasize the role of the listener, who is seen as an active participant in listening, employing strategies to facilitate, monitor, and evaluate his or her listening.

Courses in listening and hence speaking skills have a prominent place in language programs around the world today. Even-growing needs for fluency in English around the world because of the role of English as the world's international language have given priority to finding more effective ways to teach English. It is therefore scholars and methodologists review what current assumptions and practices are concerning the teaching of these crucial language skills. The teaching of listening has attracted a greater level of

interest in recent years than it did in the past. Now, university entrance exams, exit exams, and other examinations often include a listening component, acknowledging that listening skills are a core component of second-language proficiency.

The understanding of the nature of listening and speaking has undergone considerable changes in recent years. Listening came to be seen as interpretive and interactive process.

In this article we want to consider some of those changes and their implications for classroom teaching and material design and to explore some of the many ways to help the students acquire the confidence to use their skills for self-expression in language situations.

The definition of “interactive listening” is formulated as follows: interactive listening takes place in a communicative situation, in which the listener, taking an active role (as a participant or an addressee), listens and gives responses such as signaling comprehension, requesting clarifications, negotiating meanings, etc. In so doing, the listener, in collaboration with the speaker, solves communication problems, shapes the discourse, and accomplishes certain goals of interaction. This definition (as some researchers consider) is certainly subject to various kinds of modifications. Nevertheless, it provides a basis for establishing the construct of interactive listening.¹

According to Bachman and Palmer, language use involves two types of interactions: (1) those among the attributes of the individual language users, including their language ability, personal attributes, topical knowledge, affective schemata, and cognitive strategies; (2) those between the language users and the characteristics of the language use situation, which include the language they are processing, the physical characteristics of the situation, and in many cases, other language users. Apparently, in the case of interactive listening, both types of interaction exist. In order to achieve a good understanding of this complex interaction, it is necessary to conduct a close examination of interactive listening performance, investigating the two-way process between the listener and the speaker with focuses on what happens on the part of the listener.²

According to Brown and Yule, spoken language may have a primarily interactional function or a primarily transactional function.³ When the interactional function is at work, the speaker aims at maintenance of social relationships. It is primarily listener-oriented. When a transactional function is what matters, the speaker aims at the transference of information. It is primarily message-oriented. Listening comprehension in interactive situations, thus, means not only understanding the verbal message but understanding it in the context in which it occurs. This interactional/transactional division has been adopted by quite a few researchers in discussing listening purposes. Galvin was among the first to use the term “interactional listening”.⁴

Vandergrift has taken a particular interest in interactional listening. More researchers tend to agree with Vandergrift and consider “two-way communication” or “involving interaction with a speaker” as the major distinctive feature of interactional listening, no matter whether the listening purpose is to get the message or to satisfy the social needs of the participants.⁵

A review of the listening assessment literature reveals that majority of studies focus on provision of communicative purpose and in their efforts to define or explain what interactive listening is, mainly touch upon a communicative situation. Listener behavior is apparently the most distinctive feature of interactive listening. Listener behavior refers to the types of responses that the listener gives during the listening process or after listening.

Implicit in the various types of the listener’s responses is the idea that the listener is playing an active role. It is true that listening has long been properly taken as an active process, just as Mendelsohn comments, “Gone are the days of Dickensian notions of listening, in which our ears are receivers into which information is poured, and all the listener has to do is to passively accept the message.” However, listening as an active process is often interpreted as, for example, “listeners select and interpret information which comes from auditory and visual clues in order to define what is going on and what the speakers are trying to express”. Interactive listening assigns new meaning to the “active role” the listener plays by giving the types of responses mentioned above during the listening process and/or afterwards.⁶

A number of researchers (Anderson and Lynch) have discussed the listener’s roles in term of the degree of active participation in the discourse. Lynch, for example, described the range of possible listener involvement in a discourse as a “continuum of collaborative discourse”.⁷ His model uses the terms participant, addressee, auditor (audience member), overhearer, and judge to refer to the various points on that continuum, from the most collaborative to the least collaborative. Anderson and Lynch mainly address the differences between listeners as eavesdroppers and participants, while Rost identifies three main listener roles: the addressee, the participant, and the non-participant (i.e., the overhearer).⁸ The terms proposed vary and their definitions differ to some extent. For convenience of reference, we will distinguish three listener roles: the participant, the addressee, and the overhearer, and define them (following Rost) as follows:

- Participant: A person who is being spoken to directly and who has speaking rights equal to those of others involved in the discourse.
- Addressee: A person in a discourse who is being spoken to directly and who has limited rights to respond.

¹ Rubin J. *A Guide for the Teaching of Second Language Listening*, 1995, p.25

² Bachman L. F. and Palmer A. S. *Language Assessment in Practice: Developing Language Assessments and Justifying their Use in the Real World*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010, p.34

³ Brown G. and Yule G. *Teaching the Spoken English*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983, p.138

⁴ Galvin M. *Developing Effective Listening Skills*, National textbook Company, 1985, p.122

⁵ Vandergrift L. *Facilitating Second Language Listening Comprehension: Acquiring Successful Strategies*. *ELT Journal*, 1999, p.212

⁶ Mendelson D. *Teaching Listening*, *Annual Review of Applied Linguistics*, 1998, p. 26

⁷ Anderson, A. and Lynch T. *Listening*, New York: Oxford University Press, 1988, p. 155

⁸ Rost M. *Teaching and Researching Listening*, London, UK: Longman, 2002, 424 p.

- Overhearer: A person who is not being addressed, but who is within earshot of the speaker, who has no rights or expectations to respond.

Accordingly, in interactional listening situations, the listener mostly plays the role of a participant or an addressee who gives verbal responses, whereas in transactional listening situations, the listener mainly takes the role of an overhearer or an addressee who does not give verbal responses. In both types of situations the listener may be an “active listener”, but the roles he or she plays differ with respect to the degree of interaction with the speaker.

Thus, in different situations the number of participants involved may vary from two (e.g., in a one-to-one conversation), a few (e.g., in a group discussion), to a great many (e.g., in a seminar). The manner of listener-speaker interaction may differ accordingly. The basic process of interaction, however, remains the same.

As Anderson and Lynch comment, traditional listening tasks encourage a passive view of listening skills, leading learners to see listening as a purely receptive activity in which listeners merely receive and record what they hear, rather than actively attempting to integrate the incoming information and seek clarification when the interpretation-building process meets an obstacle. Test tasks that engage learners in communicative situations where they can interact with speakers freely to gain successful comprehension will surely exert positive influence on classroom teaching and learning.¹

In terms of communicative language teaching it is said that the basis for communicative competence is listening as it provides the aural input and enables learners to interact in spoken communication and hence language learning largely depends on listening. Thus listening forms the concrete basis for the complete language proficiency. As Brown puts it, a significant proportion of real world listening performance is interactive. With the exception of media input, speeches, and eavesdropping, many of our listening efforts are directed towards a two-way process of speaking and listening in face-to-face conversations.²

The first thing to realize about interactive teaching is that it is not something new or mysterious. If the teacher asks questions during the class, assign and check the homework, or hold a class or group discussions, then the teacher already teaches interactively.

Several decades of research and practice in teaching listening comprehension have yielded some practical principles for designing techniques that include aural comprehension.

Techniques that specifically develop listening comprehension competencies are important. If the curriculum is strongly content-based, or otherwise dedicated to the integration of skills, it should be remembered that each of the separate skills deserves special focus.

Techniques should be intrinsically motivating and appealing to listener’s personal interests and goals. Since background information (schemata) is an important factor in listening, it should be taken into full account the experiences, goals and abilities of the students when lessons are designed. The cultural background of the students can be both facilitating and interfering in the process of listening. Then, once a technique is launched, the teacher should try to construct it in such a way that the students get caught up in the activity and feel self-propelled toward its final objective.

It would be easier for the students to follow the record if they have some idea what the topic being discussed, know something about that topic, know the typical sequence of exchanges that is used in the record, can predict issues likely to be raised, are quickly able to get an overview of the general direction of the conversation, know any general rules or guidelines for what can/cannot be said in conversations of this type, understand the attitudes of the participants, know some words/phrases that are commonly used in conversations of this type.

Thus, such kind of “pre-listening activities” help the students make decisions about what to listen for and, subsequently, to focus attention on meaning while listening. During this critical phase of the listening process, teachers prepare students for what they will hear and what they are expected to do. Pre-listening activities can consist of a whole range of tasks including the teacher giving background information, the students reading something relevant to listening, the students looking at the pictures and inferring from them, the students discussing a topic situation, answering questions, writing what they know about the topic of listening, considering what language they might need to understand the oral text, getting full understanding of how they will perform the listening task.

Students can be prepared for or oriented towards the text in various ways. This gives them an opportunity to express their own views, feelings and experiences both before and after listening to the record to expand on the topic or on the language of the heard text or conversation.

The students could propose a title for a text, create new texts, prepare questions and answers based on their interpretation of what was said, describe their relations, discuss the attitude of the speakers using clues from what they said, mood, attitude, voice, gestures, appearance.

It is important that only short passages are played in the early stages and that both the linguistic and cognitive content is appropriate to the learners’ level. It is helpful in these stages if speech is clear and not too fast, if the number of speakers is limited, and if the students do not have to cope with too many new words and structures or with a variety of accents.

The use of audio clips in language classrooms may be fun when teachers choose the correct materials. Listening gets boring when a majority of the clips are staged and stilted. Even if it’s just a simple line like “Excuse me, could you tell me the way to the nearby library?” the way they are done in staged or stilted clips are very different from those that are taken from real context. When authentic listening clips are used, students are given the advantage of getting to listen to expressions used in real-life situations. Instead of boring materials, teachers can choose from any authentic listening-viewing materials like news clips, radio ads, documentaries, TV commercials and even cartoons. Authentic listening clips are sources of idioms, contractions, and pronunciation practice that can help students grasp ideas on how to cope with actual speech with native speakers when the need arises.

To learn a foreign language effectively, one must be exposed to the culture where the target language is spoken. Since not many students have the chance to live or experience life in a country where the target language is used, *movies* can bridge this gap. When teaching language through movies, students are given the chance to listen closely to what words the native speakers utter, and how to

¹ Anderson, A. and Lynch T. *Listening*, New York: Oxford University Press, 1988, p.15

² Brown G. and Yule G. *Teaching the Spoken English*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983, p. 32

say them. Though many would consider film showing a language teaching peripheral, experts agree that utilizing this medium of communication develops aural skills.

Songs can also be utilized but must be chosen based on student levels. In class, songs in the language being learned are played and students are asked to listen. During the activity, they may be required to listen out for words. This will help the teacher know how many words the student has identified. After the sound clip, teachers may ask students to draw conclusions on the meaning or intention of the song based on the words they have listed. This is learning vocabulary and inference through listening.

Introducing a small text of listening in each class, working with variety of activities, even through entertaining ones that facilitate the students' understanding are some of the improvements that can be made to develop listening skills. Out of great variety of activities suggested by different methodologists an English teacher can determine the most appropriate exercises with adaptations that best suit to his or her educational purpose and facilities available.

With all the technological advancements in the field of education the learners also need to take responsibility and spend more time to improve their listening skills. Also, activities need to be supported by additional material which should be recommended by the teacher for individual work.

Without listening skills, language learning is impossible. This is because there is no communication where there is no human interaction. Learning to listen to the target language improves language ability. The sound, rhythm, intonation, and stress of the language can only be perfectly adapted through listening. We practice using our second language by reading, writing, speaking, and listening. Other than being the primary form of communication, listening opens the opportunity to understand the elegance of a language which is not obviously present in grammar or reading.

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