

THE DEVELOPMENT OF LISTENING SKILLS IN THE LANGUAGE LEARNING PROCESS

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The article is devoted to the methodological overview of the difficulties concerning listening skills in the language learning process. Listening is an essential part of learning requiring much time and training. Listening is different from hearing as it needs concentration, focus and attention. It is the natural way of studying a foreign language. Speaking is imitation. When you speak your native language, you don't make up your own grammar, vocabulary and pronunciation. You use the same grammar, vocabulary and pronunciation as people around you. Similarly, when trying to speak a foreign language, your goal is to imitate the grammar, vocabulary and pronunciation of native speakers, so that your way of speaking is correct and natural. It becomes obvious that, in order to talk like the native speakers, one has to listen to the things they say and read the things they write. This activity helps to learn new words and grammatical structures that can be useful for expressing thoughts. As a result, it becomes easier and easier to build new sentences in the foreign language.

Key words: communication skills, listening, concentration, focus, regular training, practice.

Introduction

The following idea is said to belong to the famous Greek philosopher Diogenes Laertius: "We have two ears and only one tongue in order that we may hear more and speak less". In other words, listening is the key ability in the communication process, the art of receiving and interpreting messages accurately and precisely. Without developing this skill, language learners will become frustrated and the messages will be misunderstood. Hence the primary task of foreign language teachers is to adjust their students to the speech of native speakers in different fields.

Communication skills comprise receptive skills and productive skills. Listening and reading are receptive skills while speaking and writing are productive ones. Receptive skills are these in which students receive and process the information but do not need to produce a language to do this, while productive skills require the production of a piece of speech (Harmer 2007:246).

The traditional approach to teaching pays more attention to the development of the productive skills such as speaking and writing. But nowadays listening comprehension is of great importance, because it involves the mental processes of concentration, understanding and interpreting. Of particular value is the skill of both hearing the words and understanding the meanings. It is the listener who has the job of making sense of what has been heard by reference to what he or she knows (Swarbrick 2002:62).

Difficulties of Listening Process for Foreign Language Learners

Listening is an important aspect of communication process. It is a core point in the learning process, the ability to get messages, digest and reproduce in the answer. Language learners face a lot of difficulties while developing this skill.

According to Nunan, listening is a six-staged process, consisting of hearing, attending, understanding, remembering, evaluating and responding. These stages appear in sequence and rapid succession. *Hearing* is the first one and deals with the response caused by sound waves stimulating the sensory receptors of the ear; hearing is the perception of sound, not necessarily paying particular attention to it, “you must hear to listen, but you need not listen to hear.” To achieve this, we have *attention*. It needs concentration and refers to a selection that our brain focuses on. The brain screens stimuli and permits only a select few to come into focus (Nunan 2001:23).

The third stage is *understanding*, which consists of analyzing the meaning of what we have heard and understanding the symbols we have seen and heard. We must analyze the stimuli we have perceived. Symbolic stimuli are not only words; they can be sounds like applause or even sights, like a blue uniform that has a symbolic meaning as well. To do this, we have to stay in the right context and understand the aimed meaning. The meaning attached to these symbols is a function of our past associations and of the context in which the symbols occur for successful interpersonal communication: the listener must understand the intended meaning and the context assumed by the sender.

The next stage, *remembering*, is an important listening process because it means that an individual, in addition to receiving and interpreting the message, has also added it to the mind’s storage bank, which means that the information will be remembered in our mind. But just as our attention is selective, so is our memory too, what is remembered may be quite different from what was originally heard or seen.

Evaluating is the process when the listener evaluates the message that has been received. It is at this point when active listeners weigh evidence, sort fact from

opinion and determine the presence or absence of bias or prejudice in a message. The effective listener makes sure that he or she does not begin this activity too soon, as beginning this stage of the process before a message is completed results in no longer hearing and attending to the incoming message and, as a result, the listening process ceases. In the end, we have *responding*, a stage in which, according to the response, the speaker checks if the message has been received properly. This stage requires that the receiver complete the process through verbal or non-verbal feedback, because the speaker has no other way to determine if a message has been received. Therefore, it is sometimes complicated as we do not have the opportunity to go back and check comprehension (Nunan 2001:23).

There are several situations which can confuse language learners and lead to misconception. Native speakers usually connect the words they pronounce, i.e. the whole sentence sounds not like several words combined in a sentence, but like one word which flows into the next word. Naturally, this may cause difficulties for language learners to comprehend each separate word. Let us analyze a few examples of misunderstanding which can occur in the listening process:

1. Native speakers often connect and omit initial sounds of some words. For example in the sentence: “Did he get it?” “h” is dropped and “e” is connected to the first word, so we have “Didi get it?”

Or “I want him to call me” becomes “Iwanim to call me”

2. The second type of misconception by language learners is when the pronunciation of a particular consonant differs from its writing. For instance,

In the sentence “*Which country did you visit last time?*” the word “*country*” is pronounced [cun-chry].

Thus, foreign language learners face the difficulty of pace, they need time to separate words in their mind and understand them. It is clear for most language learners and teachers that a slower speech speed would facilitate the beginners listening comprehension.

Effective listening requires a lot of listening. It may sound too obvious to say that in order to become effective listeners, learners must do a lot of listening. Yet language learning carried out in many classrooms apparently dedicates very little time to the development of listening skill. (Graham 2015:10)

Students need help to become experienced listeners, they should reveal the enormous capacity of their abilities to get and digest the information in foreign language. Moreover, they need training on how to develop effective listening strategies. An Associate professor of Arabic in the Department of Middle Eastern Studies at the University of Texas, Mahmoud Al-Batal suggests several directions to improve listening skills (<https://coerll.utexas.edu/methods/modules/listening/05/>):

- Allocate much time for listening activities the same way you do for speaking or grammar practice.
- Engage students in discussions of the strategies they use and allow them to learn from each other.
- Make listening a “regular” part of homework.

Focusing on listening is one of the best investments you can make as a language teacher as it will help your students develop more confidence in their language ability. Listening is a challenging skill, yet, with constant practice, support, and encouragement, your students will develop both strategies and confidence.

Speaking about the facilities which will help in this process, it is noteworthy to mention that each class should be equipped with the appropriate technical devices: TV, audio recorder, computer, Internet, overhead projector etc. But unfortunately it is far from our reality. Particularly it is important:

- to read any kind of information in English,
- to listen to English songs and translate them,
- to watch news and other programs in English,
- to listen to audiobooks and so on.

Steps to Improve Listening Comprehension

Stacia Levy, an instructor of writing, listening and reading skills at the University of the Pacific in Stockton, California, suggests the following principles of listening comprehension improvement:

1. *Concentration during listening.* This barrier is difficult even for native speakers, who find it difficult to overcome. It is important to focus on the speaker. Facial expressions and body language can communicate as much as language. For instance, the listener will be more involved in the conversation due to eye contact and hand gestures.

2. *Practicing active listening.* In this case the speaker should speak slowly or repeat when the students don't understand. To avoid disagreements between the listener and the speaker, some phrases must be clarified. This clarification may be done through repetition, by asking students to repeat the pronounced sentence. For example:

Teacher: *“I would like you to open page 95, read the topic and discuss it in class. Who can repeat the task?”*

Student: *“We have to open page 95, read the topic and discuss it in class”*

Teacher: *“Very good!”*

3. *Structuring the listening material.* The discourse should be organized well in order to be clear for comprehension. In a formal lecture or speech, the speaker

usually lets the listener know ahead of time the organization of the discourse. For example:

“Today we are going to discuss the reasons of deterioration of relations between Russia and the USA. The first one is.... The second one is....”

4. *Highlighting key words.* The speaker generally underlines the main points. For example: *“Now put down the THEME of the essay for tomorrow”*. The stressed word *“theme”* shows that the task is essay, as does the marker *“Now put down ...”* There are certain words signaling importance by themselves, such as *“issues, points, factors, reasons, opinions”*, etc.

5. *Highlighting key phrases or markers.* Before saying something important, the speakers usually mark the main points with key phrases. For instance:

“The main idea is...”

“The main point is...”

“It is noteworthy to mention that...”

“Let us view other points...”

6. *Clarification of unknown words.* Students may be given the list of new words before listening practice in order to be familiar with the vocabulary and understand the meaning easier. Then, after listening practice they can summarize their thoughts in several sentences and represent it to the class. Therefore it will help to consolidate the knowledge and improve note-taking skills (<<http://busyteacher.org/14411-how-to-teach-listening-skills-best-practices.html>>).

Teaching listening strategies to the students is very helpful. But it is not enough unless the teachers develop the students' knowledge of vocabulary, grammar, and phonology. Vandergrift claims “Strategy development is important for listening training because strategies are conscious means by which learners can guide and evaluate their own comprehension and responses.” Strategy may change due to the level of learner. Students' language level is the basic reason that affects the choice of method. “If we expect children to become good listeners, we will need to do more than worry, complain or demand. We need to teach them become active listeners” (Vandergrift 2003:176). He points out the cognitive, metacognitive and socio-affective strategies in listening comprehension:

Cognitive strategy. This is a strategy that is used to understand linguistic input and obtain data. Learners sometimes do not know the meaning of the words and they try to guess the meaning from the context. This is an example of cognitive strategy. The cognitive strategies are connected to comprehending and accumulating input in short-term memory or long-term memory for later access. Comprehension starts with the received data that is analyzed as successive levels of organization-sounds, words, as a process of decoding. Cognitive strategy is a

problem-solving technique that learners use to deal with the learning task and make the acquisition of knowledge easier. Examples of cognitive strategies include repeating to memorize and summarizing together details.

Metacognitive strategy. In this strategy learners are conscious when listening to the text cautiously. This method deals with learning how to plan, monitor and assess the gathered information from the listening part the same as pre listening activities. Vandergrift found that advanced listeners used twice as many metacognitive strategies as elementary listeners do. Metacognition can be defined as “thinking about one’s own thinking.” Students who can recognize suitable learning methods in the proper situation. For instance, a student may understand he has difficulty in finding the connection between important concepts within a story. If he/she is taught to use a graphic organizer, such as a concept map, to identify the main concepts and connect them together using lines, similar to a spider web, then that student has used metacognition to complete the task.

Socio-affective strategy. This strategy ensures and promotes positive emotional reactions and perspective of language learning. Vandergrift defined socio-affective strategies as the techniques listeners employ to collaborate with others, to verify understanding, or to lower anxiety. Socio-affective strategies are concerned with the learners’ interaction with other speakers and their attitude towards learning. For example, they may choose to rehearse a telephone conversation in L2 with another student in order to develop confidence, or reward themselves with a doughnut when they successfully complete some task in the target language (Vandergrift 2003:181).

Conclusion

To conclude, it is necessary to realize that listening skill needs total concentration and should be developed constantly. Training listening enables the students to get knowledge in the foreign language and to develop a strategy for focusing on key concepts in everyday life and other situations. EFL teachers should provide students with more opportunities to make listening an integral part of their overall process of learning a foreign language. Teachers should encourage the students to practice as much as possible, because this is the only way to succeed and improve this uneasy skill. Teachers should teach the students appropriate listening strategies. There is no ideal method that fits all kinds of classes. But we should find our students’ limit, diagnose their capacity, and find out the factors that may influence their listening comprehension.

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Լսողական հմտությունների զարգացումը օտար լեզվի ուսուցման ընթացքում

Լսողական հմտության բարելավումը լեզվի ուսուցման կարևորագույն մեխանիզմ է: Հաղորդակցման ընթացքում լսելու և ընկալելու կարողությունը թույլ է տալիս ճիշտ ընկալել տեղեկությունը և խուսափել թյուրիմացությունից: Լսողական հմտության ոչ բավարար զարգացման դեպքում հնարավոր են ուսուցման ընթացքի բարդություններ: Դրանք հաղթահարելու համար անհրաժեշտ է կանոնավոր լսել լեզվակիրների ձայնագրությունները, դիտել լուրեր և այլ ծրագրեր օտար լեզվով: Դասերի ընթացքում դասախոսները պետք է քաջալերեն ուսանողներին՝ զարգացնելու տվյալ հմտությունը՝ օգտագործելով տարբեր մեթոդներ: Լսողական վարժությունները պետք է կանոնավոր կերպով կատարվեն և զբաղեցնեն ուսուցման գործընթացի զգալի մասը: Այս կարևորագույն հմտության պարբերական և տևական վարժեցման շնորհիվ ուսանողները հաղորդակցման մեջ առավելագույն հաջողության կհասնեն:

Развитие слуховых навыков в процессе обучения иностранному языку

Улучшение слуховых навыков – важный этап процесса обучения иностранному языку. В коммуникации эти навыки позволяют лучше усваивать и интерпретировать материал или информацию. Цель работы в процессе преподавания – развивать не только лексику, грамматику, фонетику, но и научить воспринимать на слух изучаемый язык. Это позволит студентам выйти на новый уровень в общении с носителями языка и значительно продвинет их возможности в самостоятельном изучении предмета. Со стороны преподавателя тренировка данного навыка считается весьма ценной и незаменимой, так как она облегчает учебный процесс и позволяет получить знания из первоисточников. Развитие слуховых навыков требует больших усилий и трудолюбия и способствует достижению желаемых результатов в аудитории.