
LISTENING COMPREHENSION IS AN INTEGRAL PART OF LANGUAGE LEARNING AND ITS GENERAL PRINCIPLES



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ABSTRACT

The aim of this paper is to show the importance of listening and speaking skills in the classroom in order to get a perfect acquisition of the second language. Although these skills have been explained separately, they are really connected and it is really important to put into practice together and integrate them with the rest of skills.

Keywords: *communicative functions, listening skills, bottom up, top down, strategic competence.*

In recent years teachers of English as a Foreign Language or English as a Second Language have been increasing attention to identifying the needs of the learners, to learners attitudes towards English and their reasons for learning it. This attention to learners' needs can be seen in countries in our country and is largely treated as an academic subjects in education system. English is now used by millions of speakers for a number of communicative functions in Uzbekistan. It has become the preferred language in a number of ambits like international business or institutions. Time and again it is also the language chosen for academic discussion as most scholars face the need to read and publish in English for international diffusion.

It is commonly believed that English is becoming a widely used language, and through it, one can participate in a variety of social activities, because language is more than simply a way of expression, it helps people form relationships and know how to interact in different social contexts depending on sociolinguistic situations. English is one of the most important languages of the world. As stated by Brown, H.D. (1994), it is spoken by more than 380 million people in the United Kingdom, the United States, and the former British Empire. It is the largest of the Western languages. Many people are aware of the value that the English language has in today's world. For that reason, the demands for learning it are increasing every day.

There are different factors which make that language dominant and important; some people see it as their window to the outside world in the sense that they can use it as a medium of communication with others from different countries because it is widely spread. Others believe that through that language they can check recent researches and read books from other countries so it represents for them a source of knowledge. It is widely recognized that the English language is becoming an effective means to communicate, to participate in international business activities, and to obtain information about the events all around the world.

Teaching English to non-native speakers is a challenging experience for teachers. Teaching education as Foreign Language refers to teaching English in formal contexts and English in that case represents a foreign language for learners. Stern defines language teaching as the activities which are intended to bring about language learning. In other words, language teaching is more than instructing a class, it is a process which involves different activities, and it is the responsibility of the teacher to discover when and how to engage learners in the classroom environment. EFL teachers are interested in providing their learners with the knowledge needed to be competent to a certain extent in the target language. According to Anderson, A. & T. Lynch (1988); to be competent is in terms of three dimensions. In other words, they have defined communicative competence as having knowledge of grammatical rules and vocabulary and they named that component the linguistic or grammatical competence. The second competence which is the sociolinguistic one, is concerned with knowledge of socio-cultural rules of the language in order to know how to use the language being taught in an appropriate way. Whereas the third is the strategic competence which is the ability to use certain strategies to compensate for breakdowns in communication. Developing communicatively competent learners is the goal that most EFL teachers wish to accomplish, but of course communicative competence is not sufficient. Learners need other dimensions to succeed, to be accurate and fluent and to achieve that, teachers are supposed to set a number of plans which should be designed with taking into consideration different goals and of course their learners levels and needs. Richards demonstrate that the last three decades witnessed the development of the field of TEFL, which aims at improving the quality of teaching, as well as of learning by focusing on learners' needs, their motivation, the strategies they use to learn and the processes they go through in learning, without neglecting the roles of teachers as course developers, the methods they use to transfer knowledge, and the materials they use to promote understanding.

When teachers become aware of those dimensions, they can easily cope with the problems they face in their teaching career, and can find ways to help their learners cope with their learning problems in order to achieve their educational goals and tasks. Teachers of English as a foreign language are the knowledge providers for learners, they are the ones who are able to make diagnosis for the psychological elements which intervene in the process of learning; when they understand the factors affecting learners' performance they can easily make a change. Teachers are the feedback givers for their learners; when giving them feedback of satisfaction vis-à-vis their performance, learners feel that they are praised. This may encourage them to work and participate in a variety of educational activities. According to Bueno, A.D. Madrid and N. McLaren listening is the ability to identify and understand what others are saying. This process involves understanding a speaker's accent or pronunciation, the speaker's grammar and vocabulary, and comprehension of meaning. An able listener is capable of doing these four things simultaneously.

Jack Richards (1985) describes listening competency as being comprised of a set of "microskills". These are the skills effective listeners employ when trying to make sense of aural input. Let's examine potential correspondence between multi modal processing opportunities for language learners in a multimedia environment and how these can interact to complement listening skills acquisition.

Listening comprehension is regarded as a complex, interactive process in which listeners are involved in a dynamic construction of meaning. Listeners understand the oral input from sound discrimination, prior knowledge of vocabulary, grammatical structures, stress and intonation, as well as other use linguistic, paralinguistic, or even non-linguistic clues in contextual utterance.

According to Morley and Lawrence there are general principles for teaching listening comprehension. They are as follows:

1. Listening comprehension lessons should have definite goals and they should be clearly stated.
2. Listening comprehension lessons should be constructed with careful step by planning. This suggests that listening activities move from the simple to the more complex ones; that the learners know what the activities are and are given directions as to “what to listen for, where to listen, when to listen, and how to listen”
3. Listening comprehension structure should demand active overt student participant. That is, the most overt student participant. Includes his written answer

to listening comprehension material and immediate feedback on performance helps keep learners' interest and motivation.

4. Listening comprehension lessons should provide a communicative necessity for remembering to develop concentration. This necessity should come from the lesson.

5. Listening comprehension lessons should emphasize conscious memory work. One of the objective of the listening is to strengthen the learners' immediate recall to increase their memory spans

6. Listening comprehension lessons should “teach” not “test”. It means that the goal of checking the learners' responses should be viewed only as feedback, as a way of allowing the learners understand how they did and how are they progressing.

According to Brown principles of teaching listening can be classified into following types:

1. Focus on fluency and accuracy in speaking (depending on lesson/activity objective).
2. Provide appropriate feedback and correction.
3. Optimize the natural link between listening and speaking.
4. Give students the opportunity to initiate oral communication.
5. Develop speaking strategies: Using fillers (“Well,” “Um,”); using conversation maintenance cues (“uh-huh,” “right,” “yeah,” “okay”); getting someone's attention (“Excuse me”).

Listening is now taught because they are very important parts of being able to use English to communicate. Listening skills are also crucial to the development of speaking skills. Listening to other speakers helps students to develop their pronunciation and fluency in English. Successful listening skills are acquired over time and with lots of practice. Learners need exposure to spoken English to be able to develop their listening skills. However, some students may not have many opportunities to listen to English outside the classroom. So, teacher can use resources creatively to develop meaningful listening activities in your English classes that involve all pupils

According to Brown, H. D. (2000). “A Listening is an essential aspect of communicative competence and the most frequently used language skill”. A large proportion of second and foreign language research findings indicated that listening is the most important skill for language learning, because it is the most widely used

language skill in normal daily life. Listening is not only the first of the language skills developed, it is also the skill most frequently used in the classroom. In a language classroom, listening ability plays a significant role in the development of other language skills. Because students receive so much important language input aurally, they should work to develop aural proficiency skills and strategies to help them manage the listening comprehension process. The listening skill had been neglected until 1970s; since then, more attention has been paid to listening comprehension, and the status of listening has changed from being incidental and peripheral to a status of utmost importance. On the other hand, over the past 30 years, one of the most important topics in L2 and FL research has been the use and development of language learning strategies.

.Besides, Listening is a complex process due to its double psychological and social nature: Listening is a psychological phenomenon, which takes place on a cognitive level inside people’s heads, and a social phenomenon, which develops interactively between people and the environment surrounding them. It considers listening as a complex process, which needs to be understood in order to teach it, and subsequently, evaluate it before integrating it with phonological aspects and with the skill of speaking. [Bueno, Madrid and McLaren, 2006:282].

Rivers (1966: 196) claimed, “Listening does not of itself constitute communication unless what is said is comprehended by another person. Teaching the comprehension of spoken speech is therefore a primary importance of the communication aim is to be reached”.

However, Morley (1972: 7) notes, “perhaps an assumption that listening is a reflex, a little like reathing - listening seldom receives overt teaching attention in one’s native language – has marked the importance and complexity of listening with understanding in a non-native language”.

Contrary to what everybody thinks about foreign language learning, listening competence is wider than speaking competence. This is the reason why; recently, the language teaching profession has brought into focus on listening comprehension. According to Nunan, (2001: 23) Listening is a six-staged process, consisting of Hearing, Attending, Understanding, Remembering, Evaluating and Responding. These stages occur in sequence and rapid succession.

Despite its obvious importance to language learning, the listening skill was for a long time relegated to a marginal place in foreign language curricula. With the advent of communicative language teaching and the focus on proficiency, the learning and

teaching of listening started to receive more attention. However, listening is not yet fully integrated into the curriculum and needs to be given more "prime time" in class and homework.

Variety must be allied to pace. A slow, boring lesson teaches very little, so it is important to keep everyone moving and challenged with something which is just a little beyond his capacity. No topic or device should be overworked, however good an idea it is or however much preparation it has entailed. It is always better to stop whilst everyone is enjoying it and wants more, rather than pursue it to the bitter end. Then a repetition on another day provokes eager anticipation rather than groans. The class atmosphere is very important, and is greatly helped by a less serious side to class activities. As well as more serious materials and teaching, there should always be room for games, songs and puzzles.

. In order to help students improve their listening ability, language teachers have to understand students' listening difficulties in comprehending spoken texts, and instruct effective listening strategies to help students solve their listening difficulties.

From his most observations and experiences of teaching the EFL listening skills however, the researchers has noticed that most of the students who enroll in have serious deficiencies in listening comprehension. This is especially observable when the students take the listening course entitled “Listening Skills” at first year level. The researcher observed that many students performed poorly in this course. They are unable to comprehend natural spoken English delivered at normal speed because they do not understand the spoken content of the lessons. Frequently such students lose all confidence as foreign language practitioners. They have difficulty in concentration and maintaining concentration for a long time. This problem was noticed even by other instructors who were offering the same course to different groups. The same problem has also been observed in many countries [Buck, 2001 and Hayati, 2010]. The results of these studies have proved that difficulties in listening in a foreign language are typical to listeners from different language background. For example, Underwood (1989) and Flowerdew and Miller (1992) stated that inability to concentrate "is a major problem because even the shortest break in attention can seriously impair comprehension." Goh (2000) reported learners' difficulty in perception: students faced problems on recognition of familiar words. They stated that although they were familiar with some words, they were unable to remember their meaning immediately. They also expressed difficulty in understanding the intended message though they were familiar with literal meaning of words.

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