

THE IMPORTANCE OF LISTENING IN LANGUAGE LEARNING

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Abstract. The paper deals with the importance of listening in language acquisition, listening process, different stages of the listening process such as receiving, understanding, remembering, evaluating and responding and teaching listening comprehension. Moreover, the paper focuses on the history of listening in language teaching, current and past format of listening lessons.

Keywords: listening, importance of listening, comprehension problems, listening process, listening lesson.

DİL ÖYRƏNMƏ PROSESİNDƏ DİNLƏMƏNİN ƏHƏMİYYƏTİ

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Xülasə. Məqalə dil öyrənmə prosesində dinləmə bacarığının əhəmiyyəti, dinləmə prosesi, qəbul etmə, başa düşmə, xatırlama, qiymətləndirmə və cavab vermə kimi dinləmə prosesinin fərqli mərhələləri və dinləmə bacarığının tədrisi problemləri araşdırılır. Bundan əlavə məqalədə dinləmə bacarığının tədris tarixi, dinləmə dərslərinin keçmiş və hazırkı formatı təhlil edilir.

Açar sözlər: dinləmə, dinləmənin əhəmiyyəti, anlama problemləri, dinləmə prosesi, dinləmə dərsi.

ВАЖНОСТЬ СЛУШАНИЯ В ПРОЦЕССЕ ИЗУЧЕНИЯ ЯЗЫКА

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Резюме. В статье рассматривается важность навыков слушания в процессе изучения языка, о различных этапах процесса слушания, таких как слушание, восприятие, понимание, запоминание, оценка и ответ, а также о преподавании навыков слушания. Кроме того, в статье анализируется история обучения навыкам слушания, прошлый и текущий формат слушания уроков.

Ключевые слова: слушание, важность слушания, проблемы понимания, процесс слушания, урок слушания.

1. Introduction

Listening has a very crucial role in academic contexts as it is very important for people to learn a new language and communicate effectively. Despite the importance of listening in language acquisition, it has not been paid much attention to teaching curriculum for a long time. However, in recent years listening started to gain much attention in the language acquisition process as it is an inseparable part of effective communication. Nowadays although there are different approaches to teaching and learning listening, teaching listening methods are being developed every day. Michael Rost, a lecturer at the University of California explains the importance of listening in language classrooms in his book *Teaching and Researching Listening* as follows:

1. Listening is vital in the language classroom because it provides input for the learner. Without understanding input at the right level, any learning simply cannot begin.

2. Spoken language provides a means of interaction for the learner. Because learners must interact to achieve understanding. Access to speakers of the language is essential. Moreover, learners' failure to understand the language they hear is an impetus, not an obstacle, to interaction and learning.
3. Authentic spoken language presents a challenge for the learner to understand language as native speakers actually use it.
4. Listening exercises provide teachers with a means for drawing learners' attention to new forms (vocabulary, grammar, new interaction patterns) in the language.

To sum up, as Anderson and Lynch (2003) [1] state listening skills are as important as speaking skills because people can not communicate face-to-face unless both types of skills are improved together.

Listening process. Author Joseph DeVito has divided the listening process into five stages in his book *The elements of public speaking (7th ed)*. New York, NY: Longman: receiving, understanding, remembering, evaluating and responding.

Receiving is represented by the ear because it is the primary tool involved with this stage of the listening process. Receiving happens when we filter out sources so that we can isolate the message and avoid the confusing mixture of incoming stimuli. For example in the apolitical rally when a candidate starts speaking the cheering and yelling was so loud that the candidate could not be heard easily despite using a speaker system. In this example, one of the rally participants will definitely have difficulty receiving the message because of the external voice. Thus hearing alone requires sincere effort, but you must hear the message before you can continue the process of listening.

In the **understanding** stage, we try to get the meaning of the message delivered, which is sometimes difficult. It happens when a speaker does not enunciate clearly. Even when we understand the meaning we sometimes make the mistake of attaching our own meaning to the words of the others. For example, say you have made plans with your friends to meet a certain movie theatre, but you arrived and the others didn't. Then you find out that your friends are at a different theatre all the way across the town where the same movie is planing. Everyone else understood that the meeting place was the "west side" location, but you wrongly understood it as the "east side" location, therefore, missed out on part of the fun. So the way we understand others is influenced by our own perceptions and experiences. Therefore at the understanding stage of listening, we should on the lookout for places where our perceptions might differ from those of speaker.

Remembering starts with listening; if you can not remember something that was said, you might not have been listening effectively. Even when you are listening effectively, some messages are more difficult than others to understand and remember. It also happens when something distracts your attention for a moment so that you could miss out on information. One of the best ways to improve your memory and the words you heard is associating the

with something in your own life. “Ahmad” you might say, “reminds me of Ahmad I new in the secondary school”. Finally, if understanding is inaccurate, the recollection of the message will be inaccurate too.

Evaluation is somewhat judging the value of the message. We might be thinking, “This makes sense” or, conversely, “This is very odd.” People are more likely to evaluate a message positively if the speaker speaks clearly, presents ideas logically.

In the **responding** stage, you indicate your involvement. Almost anything you do at this stage can be interpreted as feedback. For example, you are giving positive feedback to your instructor if at the end of the class you stay behind to finish a sentence in your notes or approach the instructor to ask for clarification.

2. Teaching listening comprehension

Although it is a challenge to teach listening to many foreign language learners, there have been many improvements in teaching listening over the years. According to Rubin (1994) [5], when teacher and researchers understand the significance of the listening skills, they start to pay more attention to teaching this skill in language classrooms.

The current format of the listening lesson is as follows:

Pre-listening

Establish context

Create motivation for listening

Pre-teach only critical vocabulary

Extensive listening

General questions on the context and attitude of speakers

Intensive listening

Pre-set questions

Intensive listening

Checking answers to questions

Post-listening

Functional language in the listening passage

Learners infer the meaning of unknown words from the sentences

Final play: learners look at the transcript

As we mentioned above there are three parts in the usual listening lesson: *pre-listening*, *listening* and *post-listening*. Pre-listening part, which involves tasks such as activating previous knowledge of the learners and teaching vocabulary, prepares students for the tasks they are going to do while listening. When the current format of a listening lesson is compared with the early format of a listening lesson, teaching unknown vocabulary items shows the difference. Field (2008) presents several reasons for not teaching all unknown words. Firstly, it is time-consuming to teach unknown words. Field argues that the time spent on teaching unknown vocabulary can be used for listening to the text again. Secondly, it is not

like real-life listening since students will encounter different words and try to understand them at the time of speaking. To sum up, by teaching all the words in a text without considering their importance in the text, teachers divert students' attention to form rather than meaning and that is why Field suggests teaching only critical words which are highly important for students in order to understand the listening text.

During listening part of the lesson, learners do activities such as listening for gist, and sequencing that helps them to understand the text. Although there are no changes in the extensive listening, as it is mentioned above the structure of the activities has been changed by making the more guided in order to help students follow the texts.

The last part of the listening is post-listening, which can be used for practising the previously learned grammar items. There are many examples of the expressions and language functions in the dialogues that people use in their life such as offering, refusing, apologizing. Since it is difficult to teach these expressions separate from a context, listening passages can be used to draw students' attention to those features during the post-listening part. Also, the post-listening part gives students a chance to state their opinions about a topic.

American linguist Morley J. lists four main instructional models of listening and the learner goals related to those models as follows:

Model 1: Listening and repeating

- Learner goals: to pattern-match; to listen and imitate; to memorize

Model 2: Listening and answering comprehension questions

- Learner goals: to process discrete-point information; to listen and answer comprehension questions

Model 3: Task listening

- Learner goals: to process spoken discourse for the for functional purposes; to listen and do something with the information

Model 4: Interactive listening

- Learner goals: to develop aural/oral skills in semiformal interactive academic communication; to develop critical listening, critical thinking, and effective speaking abilities.

Although there are different perspectives to teaching listening, the success of each perspective somewhat depends on addressing and minimizing the listening comprehension problems experienced by language learners.

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