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LISTENING STRATEGIES IN LANGUAGE LEARNING AND THEIR TEACHING PRACTICE IN SERBIA

Listening is one of the basic language skills in language learning. Language learning depends on listening to a great extent, because listening enables students to interact in oral communication. There is a need for understanding the listening strategies at all levels of language acquisition. Students need to grasp the strategies and rely on them in their language learning. Every learner should be given an adequate training and expert guided practice in using listening strategies. Teaching of listening skills is still the weak spot in the language teaching process in our country. Despite students having mastered the elements of English grammar and vocabulary, their listening comprehension is often substantially deficient. The most salient point that has become noticeable is students' insufficient or limited listening comprehension skills.

Key Words: listening comprehension, listening strategies, communication, listening skill

Listening Comprehension Strategies

One of the most widely accepted definitions of learning strategies is the one provided by O'Malley, Chamot, Stewner-Manzanares, Kupper and Russo (1985: 23):

"Learning strategies are any set of operations, steps, plans, routines used by the learner to facilitate the obtaining, storage, retrieval, and use of information".

Moreover, Oxford (1992: 18) improves this definition by stating "strategies are tools for the self-directed involvement necessary for developing communicative ability". Learning strategies have certain characteristics. Some of the most fundamental features, according to Williams and Burden (1997: 72), are the following:

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"They can be used consciously and intentionally on the part of the learner, or totally unconsciously, some of them are observable while others are not, some are cognitive in nature whereas others are social".

During a study carried out by O'Malley et. al, they tried to identifyindividual learning strategies used by both successful and less successful language learners when presented with a listening segment. They used the "think aloud" technique in which students report orally what they are thinking while listening. They found significant differences among more and less successful learners in the type and the way of strategy used. The key strategies more successful learners displayed were as follows:

- 1. Self monitoring (checking one's comprehension while it is taking place through selective and directed attention and focusing on specific information anticipated in the message) was used by both learners, but the more successful students used it more consistently. This is a strategy that can bring success to the learning process. Those who monitor their learning would be more likely to see if they truly understand what they are learning.
- 2. Another strategy found in effective learners was elaboration or prediction, defined as relating new information to prior knowledge or to other ideas in the new information. This is also known as activating schemata. Elaboration can be of three types. The first type is using world knowledge acquired either in an academic or non academic context. Type two is using personal knowledge, which means to relate new information to something meaningful on a personal level. Type three is self-questioning: asking oneself questions about the material, and/or anticipating possible extensions of the information. In the case of ineffective learners, they also used this strategy, but it interfered with their comprehension because they spent a lot of time trying to relate things, so they got lost in the message.
- 3. There is also inferencing, which is using information in a text to guess at the meaning of to complete missing ideas. Effective learners only used this strategy for words or ideas that were necessary for comprehension.
- 4. Some students also reported using translation, though they also reported finding this strategy complex and not particularly successful.
- 5. Other strategies reported among more effective learners, though less commonly used were: contextualization, resourcing (such as the use of dictionaries during dictation), note-taking, and self evaluation.

In the study carried out by O'Malley et.al, the most remarkable differences were found between effective and less effective learners. The former activate schemata more often than the latter. In other words, more successful learners are more likely to rely on whatever they already know about the world, the language, the content of the segment, and any other resource that would help them make sense of what they are listening to. Also, effective learners use both bottom-up (when a person processes the message from sounds into words, into sentences, and then into a message as a whole) and top-down (when the person integrates all his/her prior knowledge of the language and the topic of the message, thus being able to look at the message as a whole, and not at its parts) processing strategies.On the other hand, ineffective learners seem to use only bottom-up processing strategies andrely on grammar more than on anything else. This means that they will be more conscious of the parts that make up what they are listening to and not the utterance as a whole. This is the case of students who understand many of the words, but they cannot make sense of them in the passage or conversation.

Learning strategies are relevant in the second language teaching, and also in the foreign language teaching for a number of reasons. For instance, less successful students could find help in using learning strategies and thus become better learners.Learning strategies are important in second language learning because they help students understand what they are doing in order to learn the language. Moreover, it has been discovered that those students who are taught, and who learn to use learning strategies are more likely to succeed outside the classroom environment because they learn to control their own learning process (Rubin, 1987: 15-29).

Regarding listening comprehension, most research points to three main types of learning strategies used in this skill: self monitoring (both of the text and one's own comprehension), anticipation and inferencing, and use of schemata or elaboration (Murphy, 1985; O'Malley, Chamot, and Kupper, 1989; Myovich and Mahan, 1992).

Once the learning strategies used in listening comprehension are identified, the teacher has to decide which of these can and ought to be taught, and how to teach them. The authors of the present article will mention some of the listening activities that can take place in the second language and foreign language classroom. These activities are mentioned and discussed by a variety of authors, such as O'Malley et al. (1989: 418-437), Ludgate, (1984: 339-342), Rost (1990) and O'Malley and Chamot, (1990).

Native speakers and highly proficient second language learners complete the complex process of speech comprehension smoothly. Second language learners at lower levels of language proficiency, who lack auditory experience, need to rely on listening strategies, which might assist them in comprehending the aural communication (NUIC, Naresuan University 2012).

Many people wrote about language strategies. These strategies have been categorized as learning strategies and communication strategies. Tarone (1983:67) has pointed out "the relationship of learning strategies to communication strategies is somewhat problematic". However, this author goes on to state that ultimately they can be distinguished on the basis of the learner's motivation in employing the strategy. Ellis (1985: 181) has stated "communication strategies are problem-oriented. They are employed by the learner because he lacks or cannot gain access to the linguistic resources required to express an intended meaning".

Research has shown that successful learners are autonomous, reflective, and are actively involved in their learning. These learners are aware of how

learning takes place and the best learning strategies for themselves. With this understanding, the importance of learning strategies was recognized, and teachers were suggested that they train their students in making use of learning strategies for more successful learning experiences (Wenden1985).

Selective Listening Exercises

In this kind of exercises students listen to a passage and to key words that may signal the main idea or a specific detail. Selective listening exercises present very important features, according to Rost (1990: 232). First, they teach students to focus their listening on what is important at that moment. Second, these exercises provide information in a large context that permits listeners to make inferences based on contextual cues. Finally, they assist students in a pre-listening phase in order to predict the shape the information will take.

T-lists

A T-list is a form of note taking in which the learners note the main ideas of the passage on the left side of the page, and details on the right side. At the beginning, the teacher partially completes the lists, and then gradually eliminates more words (O'Malley and Chamot 1990: 173-174). Once again, with this activity students will learn to pay attention to just what they need at that moment and not to everything. Moreover, it will teach students to distinguish between main ideas and specific or supporting details. This strategy is especially useful in settings such as lectures and conferences.

Authentic Recordings with Comprehension Questions

The teacher gives students some comprehension questions before listening to the segment, making sure students know what information they should look for. Students would listen to one section of the segment, answer the corresponding questions, and discuss that part before continuing with the next section. Here, the teacher gives the listening instructions. Students focus on relevant information, and ignore other things on the tape, such as irrelevant information and background noise.

Inferencing What the Next Sections Would Be About

After the students have listened to a subsequent section, they make deductions of what will come in the next segment based on what they have listened to so far. This activity would prepare students to activate their schemata.

Global Listening Activities

This is the kind of activity in which students pay attention not to the segment as a whole. This type of exercise helps students build an overall sense of the text. The rationale of this kind of activities is to:

- a) help in developing the ability to identify transitional points and topics;
- b) build expectations about the text before listening to it;

- c) provide redundant cues in the text so that students have several opportunities to make inferences about the topic, and
- d) evaluate the outcome in terms of acceptable interpretationsstudents make about the text, and not on 'correct' responses (Rost 1990: 232-233).

Information-Gap Activites

Similar to inferencing, in information-gap activities, students are required to predict what will come after what they just heard and to assign different utterances to different people based on their perceptions and schemata (Ludgate 1984: 340-341). The difference between this activity and the one mentioned in inferencingis that here students listen to an utterance, such as a question, in a dialogue, and they answer according to what they understood. Then they listen to the second utterance (question) of the speaker in the tape and answer back and so on. Topics on ordering food in a restaurant, shopping in a department store, and making introductions are suitable for this type of exercise.

Real Life Events

Ludgate (1984: 341-342) recommends listening to real passages such as anecdotes, radio commercials, cooking programs, etc. These activities, being real, train students to predict and to infer, since they are full of repetition and redundancy, and are uttered at a normal pace and with colloquial language. Therefore, students might not be able to understand every single word. This will show them that they do not have to understand every thing to be able to get the idea and answer appropriately.

Games

The teacher can also make use of some games that help students improve their listening skills. These activities are challenging and entertaining for students. They help them lower the tension they might feel when listening in the second or foreign language. Galvin (1988) recommends games such as association and chunking. In association games or activities students will learn to associate what they are listening to with another idea. For example, while listening to an introduction, the student would try to associate the person's name, occupation, or place of residence to a sound, a picture, or any other thing that would help him/her understand and remember the information. Chunking involves classifying pieces of information into lager sections for easy remembrance. Galvin, for instance, uses the example in which a parent gives his son a list of things he has to do during the parent's absence. The parent mentions the following duties, such as to buy a new TV antenna, call Mr. Anderson the plumber to fix the water pump, feed the dog every day, check the mail, call Grandma to let her know everything is O.K., buy milk, etc. Then, the son would make his own list based on categories, for example:

People: Grandma, Mr. Anderson, etc. House chores: dog, mail Shopping: antenna, milk Both types of games would work as mnemonic aids. One notable thing here is to remember that these are just games to help students improve their memory, but that they should not be overused because students must understand listening is not memorizing, but comprehending.

According to Sheerin (1987: 126-131), teachers should remember that the use of learning strategies in listening comprehension are not testing activities, but teaching activities. Though some of the activities mentioned could be adapted to test listening, the nature of testing is to evaluate students and let them know where and what problems they have. On the other hand, the use of these activities to teach strategies, wants to promote success and motivation on the students part and to make them better listeners. Thus, when using these activities, the teacher must prepare students for what they will face, provide positive feedback and analyze errors. Besides the activities that will activate prediction and schemata, Sheerin recommends the use of supporting materials during the task being performed. Some of these materials can be visual support in the form of pictures, graphs, diagrams, and so on. These materials are "vitally important in a listening course based on audiotapes where learners are deprived of the visual element normally present in any spoken interaction" (Sheerin 1987: 127). Another solution to this situation is to use video segments. In this case, the instructor must make sure the activities used enable students to apply the listening strategies which they learnt in classes.

Research has shown that successful learners are autonomous, reflective, and are actively involved in their learning. These learners are aware of how learning takes place and the best learning strategies for themselves. With this understanding, the importance of learning strategies was recognized, and teachers were suggested that they train their students in making use of learning strategies for more successful experiences.

Mendelsohn (1994) believes that an awareness of the strategies for listening comprehension will form the basis for better listening course. Similarly, Wenden (1983: 117) underlines the need for strategy training and helping learners become aware of their own language learning experience. He says:

"There is a need for curricular strategies, techniques, and materials to provide training that would not only expand learners' repertoires of efficient strategies but also make them aware of various aspects of their language learning and critically reflective of what they are aware-in effect, to refine the reflective phases of their language learning".

Here, we can pose an important question concerning successful realization of listening strategies:does the learner focus his attention mainly on the subject matter of a text, or does he or she also consider how to listen? A focus on how to listen raises the issues of listening strategies.There are many activities, which listeners actively employ in the process of listening. Buck (2001: 104) identifies two kinds of listening strategies:

Cognitive strategies: these activities relate to comprehending and storing input in working memory or long-term memory for later retrieval;

- Comprehension processes: associated with the processing of linguistic and non-linguistic input;
- Storing and memory processes: associated with the storing of linguistic and non-linguistic input in working memory or long-term memory
- Using and retrieval processes: associated with accessing memory and to be ready for output.

Metacognitive strategies: those conscious or unconscious mental activities that perform an executive function in the management of cognitive strategies;

- Assessing the situation: taking stock of conditions surrounding a language task by assessing one's own knowledge, one's available internal and external resources and the constraints of the situation before engaging in a task
- Monitoring: determining the effectiveness of one's own or another's performance while engaged in a task;
- Self-evaluating: determining the effectiveness of one's own or another's performance after engaging in the activity;
- Self-testing: testing oneself to determine the effectiveness of one's own language use or the lack thereof.

Goh (1997: 361-369) shows how the metacognitive activities of planning, monitoring, and evaluating can be applied to the teaching of listening:

Metacognitive strategies for self-regulation in learner listening

1 Planning:	This is a strategy for determining learning objectives and deciding the means by which the objectives can be achieved.
General listening develops development	ment:Identify learning objectives for listening
	Determine ways to achieve these objectives Set realistic short-term and long-term goals Seek opportunities for listening practice
Specific listening task:	Preview main ideas before listening Rehearse language (e.g. pronunciation) neces- sary for the task Decide in advance which aspects of the text to concentrate on

2. Monitoring : General listening developm termined criteria	This is a strategy for checking on the progress in the course of learning or carrying out a learning task nent:Consider progress against a set of pre-de-
	Determine how close it is to achieving short- term or long-term goals Check and see if the same mistakes are still being made
Specific listening task:	Check understanding during listening Check the appropriateness and the accuracy of what is understood and compare it with new information Identify the source of difficulty
3. Evaluating:	This is a strategy for determining the success of the outcome of an attempt to learn or com- plete a learning task.

General listening development:Assess listening progress against a set of pre-determined criteria

Assess the effectiveness of learning and practice strategies Assess the appropriateness of learning goals and objectives set

Specific listening task;Check the appropriateness and the accuracy of what has been

understood. Determine the effectiveness of strategies used the task.

Steps in guided metacognitive sequence in a listening lesson from Goh and Yusnita (2006: 222-232):

STEP	ACTIVITY
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Step 1 Pre-listening activity

In pairs, students predict the possible words and phrases that they might hear.

They write down their predictions. They may write some words in their first language.

Step 2	First listen
	As they are listening to the text, students un- derline or circle those words or phrases (in- cluding first language equivalents) that they have predicted correctly.
	They also write down new information they hear.
Step 3	Pair process-based discussion
	In pairs, students compare what they have un- derstood so far and explain how they arrive at the understanding.
	They identify the parts that cause confusion and disagreement and make a note of theparts of the text that require special attention in the second listen.
Step 4	Second listen
	Students listen to those parts that have caused confusion or disagreement areas and make notes of any new information they hear.
Step 5	Whole-class process-based discussion
	The teacher leads a discussion to confirm comprehenehension before discussing with students the strategies that they reported us- ing.

Richards (2012: 16) is advocating a two part strategy in classroom teaching and instructional materials, namely:

Phase 1:Listening as comprehension

Use of the materials as discussed above

Phase 2:Listening as acquisition

The listening texts are now used as the basis for speaking activities, makingactivities and restructuring activities. By linking listening tasks to speaking tasks in the way described above, opportunities can be provided for students to notice how language is used in different communicative contexts, and then practice using some of the language that occurred in the listening texts.

Understanding the learning strategies that more successful students use while listening will permit teachers to provide more and better opportunities for students to listen to and practice with different listening segments while making use of different learning strategies (Richards, J. 2012: 16).

Current Problems in English Teaching Practice in Serbia

Serbia is opening its borders and to the globalized world, and demand for English speaking proficiency has become significantly high. In recent years, however, the communicative approach has become more and more widely applied in Serbian higher education.

However, careful analyses of English teaching practice at all levels of education, and especially at University level, have found that the teaching of listening skills is still the weak spot in the language teaching process. Although students have mastered the elements of English grammar and vocabulary, their listening comprehension is often substantially deficient. The most salient point that has become noticeable is students' insufficient or limited listening comprehension skills.

Since the inception of English teaching in Serbia, reading, writing, grammar and translation drills have widely been practiced. "As far as language skills and their place in English language teaching as a foreign language in Serbia are concerned, listening is considered the most neglected of all the language skills. A general analysis of the practical language teaching in the classroom shows that a grammar-translation teaching method and an audio-lingual method are widely used in which listening and speaking have their adequate place for all forms of classroom communication" (Đolić 2012: 11). Traditionally, teachers of English focused on passing on theoretical knowledge; their attention was on the examination tests and scores and they paid much less attention to improving students' listening and speaking skills. Although Serbian students have often learned significant amounts of grammar and vocabulary, they have commonly been unable to apply their knowledge to real-life situations.

At the beginning of their studying English at University, the problem of listening comprehension is not particularly evident since language teaching at this level tends to focus on theoretical issues. Teachers pronounce a great majority of lectures in Serbian language. However, on embarking upon higher levels of learning when listening content increases, some students feel they comprehend the spoken content, but very often they find difficulties to understand it. While listening, they are trying exceptionally hard to grasp every single word and the meaning of every sentence. When the listening task is complete, they are disappointed and disheartened to find they have been unable to understand the spoken text or the recording. The stressful situation frequently results in the students forgetting what they heard at the beginning, and this caused them to forget the sequence of events in listening comprehension.

The problems of listening teaching in Serbia may have their origins at lower levels of education (elementary and secondary education) where not many students have been the recipients of listening methods. Students find it difficulties to adapt to university English teaching. It often happens that these students are unable to understand completely what is taught in listening classes. They do not understand the spoken content of the lessons. Frequently such students lose confidence and show disinterestedness as foreign learners of English. Nowadays, teachers have recognized that the listening levels of learners are different, particularly because English listening is affected by a multitude of factors. There is a necessity to emphasize to teachers and students the importance of listening, and to encourage the study of listening teaching theory.

Lecture comprehension is linguistically a very demanding and challenging process. Salehzadeh (2009: 2) made a list of some unique challenges of lecture listening.

- Multiple sources of input audio and visual must be simultaneously attended to, filtered, and written down in real time.
- The spoken text disappears after you hear it, unlike a written text.
- Great variety exists across disciplines, courses, lecturers, and even subject matter.
- Opportunities to get more explanation or react may need to be delayed.
- References to cultural elements outside the non-native English speaker's background are plentiful.
- Lecturers invite input from students who may be harder to understand.
- Lecturer opinions may not be stated in an obvious manner.
- Listeners need to guess a speaker's purpose and intentions when they are not directly stated.
- Lecturers may change topics without clear signaling.
- A whole set of new abbreviations for note taking may need to be developed for each course.
- Lecturers may speak with an accent with which you are unfamiliar.
- Terms will be introduced that you don't know how to spell.

Cultivating students' listening skills is one of the most difficult tasks for any EFL teacher. This is because successful listening skills are acquired over time and with a great amount of practice. The demands of the task are often frustrating for students because there are no precise rules, as in grammar teaching. Speaking and writing also have very specific exercises that can lead to improvement. However, there are quite specific ways of improving listening skills, but these are difficult to quantify.

Improving Serbian students' ability to speak fluent English is a demanding process and there are still many factors, subjective and objective that need to be considered and analyzed. There are many barriers to effective acquisition of listening comprehension strategies. Effective listening strategies enhance the quality of listening comprehension. It is important to know what strategies proficient listeners use and which strategies affect the quality of listening comprehension adversely and lead to problems with this language skill.

Conclusion

Listening is particularly important in language learning. Teachers should have a crucial role in helping their students to surmount various difficulties and hindrances in understanding lectures. This help on the side of the teachers can take the form of developing the students' listening comprehension strategies in many ways.

Teachers should expose their students to a combination of shorter and longer spoken texts to help them develop their listening skills.Students using longer texts will be exposed to some of the features of real lectures. They will also develop strategies that will help them be better prepared for academic listening.

Listening for longer periods to complex concepts affects comprehension. Lectures should be segmented into shorter parts through longer pauses for reflection lecturer's questions, use of various audio or video aids, etc.

Listening strategies are indispensable at all levels of English language proficiency. Students need to learn the strategies and rely on them in their language learning. Every learner should be given an adequate training and actual guided practice in using listening strategies.

Listening skills are crucial for learning a language since they enable learners to acquire insights and information. Finally, they enable them to communicate effectively with others.

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Софија Мићић Зоран Чајка СТРАТЕГИЈЕ СЛУШАЊА У УЧЕЊУ ЈЕЗИКА И ПРАКСА ЊИХОВОГ КОРИШЋЕЊА У СРБИЈИ

Резиме

У раду се теоријски разматрају стратегије слушања које налазе примену у учењу енглеског језика. Рад такође говори и о искуству и пракси у примени стратегија у учењу енглеског језика, посебно у високошколском образовању у нашој земљи.

Слушање представља једну од основних језичких вештина у учењу језика. Учење језика зависи од слушања у великој мери, зато што слушање омогућава студенту да оствари интеракцију у говорној комуникацији. Постоји потреба за схватањем стратегија слушања на свим нивоима у учењу језика. Студенти треба да овладају овим стратегијама и да се ослоне на њих у учењу језика. Сваки студент мора имати одговарајући тренинг који ће му омогућити да савлада и користи стратегије слушања.

У нашој земљи слушање још увек представља слабу тачку у процесу учења језика. Упркос томе што су наши студенти савладали елементе енглеске граматике и вокабулара, њихово разумевање говорног текста је често недовољно.

Кључне речи: слушање, стратегије слушања, комуникација, вештине у слушању

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