PROBLEMS OF TEACHING LISTENING SKILLS

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Abstract. in this research paper I have covered my findings in time of research made on the issue of teaching listening. Here I have given several examples for each of my opinions and I tried to prove them with scholars' points of view. This research paper would come in handy for whom are carrying out the research work in the field of teaching English skills to young learners. The instruments of this research are observation, interview and questionnaire. In short, the results of this research showed that teacher's difficulties divided into two factors, those are internal and external factors. Internal factors which came from the respondent himself such as; he feels the difficulties in teaching, preparing listening materials, choosing method, technique, and strategy. External factors are: sound from environment activities like woodcutter machine, module, media problem as cable injector of sound system to laptop, English laboratory, electric off.

Keywords: comprehension, listening tasks, language teaching, bottom-up, top-down, input, parsing, audio-lingual approach, communicative approach, methods, technologies, sound, accents.

Introduction

Acquiring good listening and speaking skills in English is the main concern of many second and foreign language learners, and today's English teacher needs to be well versed in current approaches to the teaching of the aural/oral skills. Second language listening, relatively ignored for many years within applied linguistics, has today come into its own. Although still somewhat neglected in second language acquisition research, listening now plays a more central role in language teaching. University entrance exams, school leaving tests, and other examinations have begun to include a listening component, an acknowledgment that listening ability is an important aspect of second language proficiency. The nature of listening comprehension is also now better understood. Earlier views of listening saw it as the mastery of discrete skills or micro skills, which formed the focus of teaching and testing. A skills approach focused on such things as discriminating sounds in words (especially phonemic contrasts), deducing the meaning of unfamiliar words, predicting content, differentiating between fact and opinion, and noting contradictions, inadequate information, and ambiguities. The changed status of listening in recent years was partly prompted by Krashen's emphasis on the role of comprehension and comprehensible input in triggering language development. In the 1980s and 1990s, applied   linguists also began to borrow new theoretical models of comprehension from the field of cognitive psychology. It was from this source that the distinction between bottom-up processing and top-down processing was derived – a distinction that led to an awareness of the importance of background knowledge and schema in comprehension. Listeners were viewed as actively involved in constructing meaning based on expectations, inferences, intentions, prior knowledge, and selective processing of the input. Listening came to be viewed as an interpretive process. At the same time, the fields of conversation analysis and discourse analysis were revealing a great deal about the organization of spoken discourse, leading to a realization that written texts read aloud could not provide a suitable basis for developing the abilities needed to process real-time authentic discourse [4]. As we can see, acquiring language skills requires a lot of practice and mostly input. Teaching listening has several drawbacks and advantages, as well. The reason why I have chosen this topic to convey my research is that I have witnessed my students made a lot of mistakes in listening tasks and some of them are repeated. I have looked through numerous examples and works of scholars all around the world. They have given their own examples with proved details.

Methods

In language teaching there are several methods and approaches that have been used effectively. Very old language teaching approaches could not cover all four skills in language. That is why for teaching listening and tackling the problems that occurred while teaching it, one must consider why and how that approach first

was used. For instance, grammar translation approach had nothing to do with listening or speaking skills. When it comes to the Direct approach that the direct-method approach truly focused on teaching listening skills first and other language skills later. However, in any review of early monolingual teaching methods, it seems that although the target language was used for all purposes in the classroom, there was no systematic attempt at teaching listening or at developing listening strategies in the learners. The teacher assumed that the students could hear what was being said and that comprehension would follow later – what Mendelson (1994) refers to as developing listening through "osmosis."

The audio-lingual approach to listening emphasizes first listening to pronunciation and grammatical forms and then imitating those forms by way of drills and exercises. In describing the audio-lingual approach, Richards and Rogers (2001:58) say that "the teaching of listening comprehension, pronunciation, grammar and vocabulary are all related to development of aural fluency." Dialogues and drills are the basis of classroom practice with this approach. Students are encouraged to listen carefully either to a taped recording of, or a teacher reading out, a dialogue or drill. Then they record their own version or respond to cues from the teacher to repeat parts of the dialogue or drill. The idea behind such a technique is that it helps the learner to create good habits. It is based on the idea of contrastive analysis, in which the material writer attempts to minimize interference from the students' L1. Lado and Fries (1954) prepared a pronunciation textbook based on this approach (see Activity 2). The audio-lingual approach became a popular teaching method in the 1960s and early 1970s, when language laboratories were in fashion. The approach can still be found, in different guises, in many current classroom textbooks.

The last and more complex and universal method to teach English has become Communicative approach as it allowed to practice all four skills at once.

Results and discussion

I carried out my research work on topic of problems of teaching listening with my own students. I have been teaching them since September and my research period lasted till March. My research materials were aimed to cover 15 students and all of them actively participated in the process. In the beginning of the research work I have carried an online survey (questionnaire) among language teachers and one-on-one open-ended questions interview with language learners. I have attached 4 types of graphic illustrations to show the results of them. It was very efficient to choose my 7th and 8th grade students since they all were eager to attend. In September I have taken listening test from my students and the results were not much satisfactory. At that time mean was 73%, mode was 80%, median was 72% and range was 26. In 6 months', span of teaching, I tried several approaches and methods to enhance my students' listening skills and ease some difficulties for them. I have conveyed surveys and interviews to find out the optimal versions of teaching listening. According to the survey outcomes 7th class students seemed more productive learners than 8th and 9th classes as they could portray noticeable progress at the end of the research period. On the other hand, I have discovered what kind of materials would be preferable for language teachers. When one look closer to the online questionnaire statistics, handouts made by Internet resources would be handier for teachers among textbooks and authentic materials. Anyways, no one can deny the importance of authentic materials including movies, songs or podcasts in teaching and improving listening skills as they are just 8% lower than handouts usage. Finally, next graph of my research work illustrated how much listening skills of students improved when used Communicative and Audio-lingual approaches in teaching. It is obvious from this graph that, applying Communicative approach in lessons seems more advantageous and proper for most learners.

During conveying the research questions and analyzing main ideas and summarizing problems of the topic I have come across some terms of listening itself such as top down and bottom-up techniques and parsing.

Access to words

At one level, in order to comprehend a sentence, you have to work out what the words mean. The mind has to relate the words that are heard to the information that is stored about them in the mind. For example, a native speaker can answer the question, 'Is the word "blint" English?' almost instantaneously, somehow working through many thousands of words in a few moments. Such feats show the human mind is extraordinarily efficient at organizing the storage of words and their interconnections. The context automatically makes particular meanings of words available to us. To a person reading a research article, the

word 'table' means a layout of figures. To someone reading about antiques, it means a piece of furniture. To someone reading a surveyor's report, it means the depth at which water appears in the ground, and so on. Somehow the context limits the amount of mental space that has to be searched to get the right meaning. Take the sentence, 'The dog was hit by a bus.' As people listen to it, they are retrieving information about the words. They know that 'the' is an article used with certain meanings, here probably indicating the dog is already relevant to the conversation or known to the listener. Next, 'dog' summons up the meanings of 'dog' important to this context, its relationships to other words such as 'bark', and the probable other words that contrast with it or come in the same context, such as 'cat'. The word 'hit' connects in our mental word-store with the verb 'hit', with its range of meanings and its irregular past form, and to expectations that it is going to be followed by a noun phrase object, here made more complicated by being in the passive voice. In addition, there are links between the L1 vocabulary and the L2 vocabulary.

Parsing

Parsing refers to how the mind works out the grammatical structure and meaning of the sentences it hears, that is to say, the term is only loosely connected to its meaning in traditional grammar. Take a sentence such as 'The man ate breakfast.' To understand the sentence fully means being able to tell who is carrying out the action and what is affected by the action, and to realize that 'ate breakfast' goes together as a phrase, while 'man ate' does not. Even if our minds are not consciously aware of the grammatical technicalities, they are automatically working out the structure of the sentence. Grammar is not just in the back of our minds, but is active all the time we are listening [5].

In addition to that, I have tried to use ICT tools more as nowadays students are highly likely to grasp whatever we are teaching when it is digital. Because listening process involves listening to authentic or study aimed materials via certain technologies and our Z generation youngsters are super talented at making themselves comfortable with any new digitalization.

It is important to introduce listening activities throughout an ELL's language development journey. Listening activities are especially beneficial during the early phase of language development. At the preproduction stage of language learning, an ELL's language skills are at the receptive level, during which (s)he enters a "silent period" of listening. ELLs at this stage are able to comprehend more English than they can produce. One of the more fundamental strategies to facilitate second language learning, and specifically listening ability, for ELLs is the use of a wide range of authentic language sources. Authentic materials are those designed for and by native speakers of the language. These materials expose students to real language used in context and to cultural information. In addition, these authentic materials motivate students and keep them on task (Peacock, 1997). Research has shown that learners who listen to authentic oral materials exhibit greater overall listening comprehension (Vandergrift, 2006) [6].

As I have applied different methods and approaches in my lessons to improve my students' listening skills, I have accomplished the final satisfactory results though they could not rise rapidly. In March I have taken structurally similar listening test from the same group of students. Here are the results- all in increase: mean got 78%, mode got 85%, median became 80% and the range changed to 20 which is perfectly suitable for my expectation.

Conclusion

I personally as a student and a teacher could learn from this research work. Listening skill of second language is not derived naturally; it needs some processes of learning. The processes of listening in the classroom involve active interaction between teachers and students. In listening classroom, teacher can be the source of the listening itself or becoming the instructor and the manager when they use other listening courses. A lot of listening materials are derived from recorded extract, for instance on CD, tape record, video and others. All in all, the problems students face while they do listen tasks are because of environment, their backgrounds of vocabulary, pronunciation and variety of accents. The solutions for these problems are mentioned above.

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