

ORAL MESSAGE RECEPTION AT THE EARLY SCHOOL AGE. WAYS OF APPROACHING THE LITERARY TEXT

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Abstract

The competence to receive the oral message is the first general competence in the National Curriculum for the mother tongue. The curricula in the fundamental acquisitions cycle require clarifications from a methodical point of view, both in Romania and in Moldova, regarding the contents and learning activities that will ensure the development of this competence. At a young age, the ability to receive the written message is poorly developed. That is why we highlight the role of listening in the development of vocabulary, in learning the communicative functions of the language and in creating the premises for the formation of written skills. Listening activities of the literary text require working strategies based on active listening and comprehension of the listened text.

Keywords: oral message reception, active listening, verbal comprehension, strategies for listening to the literary text, questions for listening comprehension, principles for organizing activities for listening to the literary text.

Oral message reception competence – an important part of the didactics of speaking

The process of learning the mother tongue is indispensably connected, from the first years of life, to oral competences (listening and speaking), as a result of the natural endowing of the human being, and under the influence of early education. They are the basis due to which, the written competences, specific attributes of the educated person, are subsequently developed (reading and writing).

Traditionally, when we talk about oral communication in early grades, we refer, specifically to the development of speech through exercising and enriching the vocabulary, expressing ourselves in different communication situations, acquiring excellence in language grammar structure and exercising expressiveness. In this context, Pamfil ascertains the tendency of crystallization, in Romanian language didactics, of a new subdomain, “the didactics of speaking” [1, p.19], which studies the comprehension and production of the oral discourse. Thereby, re-evaluating the process of oral communication competence development, Pamfil mentions that “oral communication activities require another clarification, namely, the one referring to active listening” [1, p. 104].

At the same time, referring to the methods of oral message reception organization, Crăciun affirms that this “is not sufficiently consolidated in countries with traditions, little known by us and seldom applied” [2, p.156]. Therefore, the researcher refers to the need of using some learning strategies and active listening exercising, which may include activities to discover essential words used in oral discourse, the main ideas, attitudes and affective states.

Analysis of school programmes for grades I-II and their provisions regarding the development of oral message reception competence

Following a pertinent analysis of the national educational policies from the Republic of Moldova and Romania, we ascertain that oral message reception is included in both countries as the first general competence within the National Curriculum for Communication in Romanian language/Romanian language and literature: “*Oral message reception in communication situations, showing a positive attitude, attention and concentration* (Republic of Moldova)/, Oral messages reception in different communication contexts” (Romania).

In both countries, the working school programmes for the fundamental acquisitions cycle represent indicative examples of learning activities through which the academic staff facilitates the development of oral message reception competence in students. The comparative study of subject curricula emphasized several differences as well: in Romania, the examples of learning activities are more numerous, but the contents connected to this competence are not indicated. Within the school programme from the Republic of Moldova, via a table, each competence is associated with contents, so that the oral message reception competence has its own contents, but the suggested learning activities are few and have a too general character, on the other hand. Although the importance of developing oral message reception competence is specified in both countries, the field of this competence contents is inconsistent in the actual school programme, the contents and learning activities suggestions being suitable more for learning a foreign language.

In the work previously cited [1, p.19], Pamfil describes the advantages of the communicative model in organizing the contents of mother tongue school programme and in creating connections with non-mother tongue study, as common parts of the curricular field “Language and communication”. A significant advantage of this model is the possibility to realize connections between different processes, for example, between oral and written expression, both having message production as a common factor.

The relation between the capacity of oral text reception (the auditor role) and the capacity of written text reception (the lector role), justifying this necessity through the possibility of stimulating and developing verbal comprehension, in order to enrich the young schoolchild vocabulary and reading comprehension seems, in this respect, extremely important.

Connected to this aspect, in a referential study on listening and reading as similar processes that have the message as a common component of the language, Sticht, Beck, Hauke, Kleiman, James [3, p.80-84] proved that the performance in understanding the heard language surpasses the understanding of the language through reading during the first school years, up to the development of written message reception competence, after which listening and reading comprehension become equal. The development of correct and conscientious reading skills leads to the reversal of comprehension performances. The understanding of this aspect is extremely important in conceiving the learning experiences in primary school; practically, the access to knowledge, culture, socializing and vocabulary learning happens through exposing the young schoolchild to oral sources. The written sources, the texts used in primary school are adapted, essentialized, and resumed, having the role of developing this intellectual work skill. When reading and writing become skills, that is, conscientious, automatized, independent actions, the written sources acquire the fundamental role in learning.

In most cases, the listening activities based on a literary text are considered suitable for the preschool period. Once with the start of the first grade or even the second, parents also

stop reading fairy tales to children at bedtime, considering that reading can be done independently by the child. The experiences lived as parents or teachers, prove that adult's expressive reading helps the child enormously in understanding and reception of the literary text, compared to the deficiencies of the elementary understanding of the text, many times, in the case of independent reading.

Biemiller mentions that the language of a first-third grader develops through the interaction with a listened-to text, which implicitly introduces vocabulary, some new concepts and linguistic structures, due to the fact that the reading experiences are limited [4, p.32]. The training and development of oral message reception competence will ensure the development of reading competence and subsequently school success. The author focuses on the fact that the school practices within grades I-III, the tasks which follow the development of writing-reading, with a reduced effect on language development prevail. Stagnation in oral language development and vocabulary deficit create bigger and bigger problems, subsequently affecting the understanding of the read text.

K. Cain, analyzing the way of developing the reading ability, emphasizes the relation between reading comprehension and speech: "in order to understand the texts we read and those who are read for us, we mostly use the same abilities and processes. Before starting to learn reading, the comprehension abilities can be stimulated when the children are listening to a text" [5, p.60].

Certainly, comprehension is not the only aspect which differentiates reading and listening at early school age. Another problem that we identify in school practice is connected to the presence of punctuation marks in the text suggested for reading, their role in understanding the written message's meaning and the level to which they are studied. If the dialogue line, the dot and the question mark are known since grade I, the exclamation mark and the comma are studied in grade II. The notions of punctuation are enriched progressively, being accumulated as a snowball. Knowing the punctuation marks, the role they have, and expressive reading are lasting processes which need exercising. Listening is easier because it contains more indexes connected to the meaning: rising and lowering the tone, longer or shorter pauses, the rhythm, the volume, and face expression.

It is interesting, through a comparative study, to observe how this connection between oral text and written text reception capacities is realized in English as a mother tongue curriculum. The school programme for English language provides for grades I-II "listening to and discussion of a wide range of poems, fairy-tales and non-fiction at a higher level than they can independently read" [6, p.21-22]. Here, there are also many recommendations according to which, students need to have an extended experience of listening to, sharing and widely discussing with the teacher, but also with other adults a range of high-quality books, in order to develop the love of reading, at the same time learning to read independently. These experiences will lead to the development of vocabulary, grammar structures awareness and will enhance the students' chance of understanding better when they read by themselves. The tendency, common in many parts of the world, noticed also in the Curriculum for Spanish as mother tongue, is to use authentic literature, in its original form in listening. These school programmes emphasize listening to literary texts during the first school years. The students discover ideas, enrich their vocabulary and learn to use the language, accessing previous knowledge and building new knowledge quicker.

3. Results of literary text listening and comprehension strategies

We need to give importance to the fact that students know the surrounding world and understand it, learn the communicative functions of the language, have access to complex ideas they cannot read about yet, get in touch with literature, develop their vocabulary, imagination, creativity through listening. Listening is a cognitive activity through which the child intentionally selects, processes and actively uses the received information. That is why, the role of listening and the methods of its development, in primary school, need to be exhaustively described.

We consider that, nowadays, there are several premises that could improve the educational practice referring to the development of oral message reception competence:

- the transition to online education emphasized the role listening has in learning, the oral message reception competence being revalued;
- the creation of open educational resources, due to the development of digital tools and of some free computer programmes through which one can easily record and render voice, as well as of some educational platforms, channels or blogs which can store recordings free of charge, allowing students easy access to them;
- the appearance and spread of audiobooks, the extension of audio-libraries networks (such as bna.ro, echo.ro) and the youth's passion for podcasts need the educators' intervention in the development of that competence which will facilitate their understanding of the listened content, keeping the essential information, orientation through the heard text, critical interpretation or creation of the heard text as a method of creativity development, of enriching the vocabulary and of verbal expressiveness exercising;
- the involvement of some actors and teachers in literary texts recording, correctly and expressively read, and free distribution of the recordings via different media channels, within various educational projects;
- the creation of audio mini-libraries in schools.

Increasing the time that the children are spending listening and their interest in listening facilitate the successful introduction of such activities in class, leading to the development of some listening and comprehension strategies. Taking into account these considerations connected to the importance of oral message reception competence development at early school age, the teacher will deliver active listening activities subsequently formulating a set of tasks that will conduct the students to the heard literary text comprehension.

The conducted active listening activity of a literary text, as a literary strategy, goes through three stages:

Pre-listening activities: Before listening to the literary text, we will suggest our students, ideas which will help them understand what they are going to listen to. The title of the text might be an opportunity to anticipate what they will listen to and to make foresight. The main ideas of the text may be introduced through a directed dialogue, so that the students could share what they already know about the topic, a graphic organizer or a semantic chart can be built. A significant picture can anticipate the topic as well. At this stage, we can also introduce some words encountered in the text, letting the students anticipate, based on them, what they are going to listen to. These words can also be an occasion to practise vocabulary. At early school age, a problem that can affect understanding is the vocabulary, that is why, some words have to be analysed in the context they are encountered, using pictures or game-exercises.

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While listening activities: if the listened-to text is longer, it can be divided into several sequences. Before each part, students are introduced to a task: Listen to find out when and where the action is happening, then get acquainted with the characters. / Listen further in order to find out what problems the characters have. / Listen now and find out how the characters solved this situation. After listening to each sequence, check if the students have discovered the responses to the communicated tasks. These tasks or others, such as jotting down some information or asking questions keep students attention and activate them.

Post-listening activities: students can be provoked to formulate questions and answers which will support the understanding and building up of the meaning, to orally retell a heard extract, role-play or dramatize the story, represent a scene through a drawing, to find similarities and differences. The capitalization of the educative message of the text ensures the transfer of the information heard in real life.

The text's audition awakens the curiosity and develops taste for reading, arousing children's desire to read about what they have listened to. We can teach written message reception in an integrated way, by introducing reading of an extract after a listening moment.

Returning to the study made by K. Cain, he affirms that: „The abilities involved in meaning extraction from the spoken text are also common to reading comprehension. Before starting learning reading, the key comprehension abilities can be stimulated when the children are listening to a text or even when they are watching cartoons.” [5, p.160]

The ability of understanding a heard text is built on repeated exercises to formulate questions and answers. Multi-process inquiry, based on a listened-to text, is substantiated by Bloom's objectives taxonomy with its seven stages: knowledge, understanding, application, analysis, synthesis, and evaluation. The academic staff will ask questions that will claim for students' working memory or their attention, but also superior questions which will require integration, interpretation, analysis and evaluation of the heard information. “Even if learning is considered as a behaviour change, and formulating responses to questions that presuppose analysis and memory do no substantially contribute to this process, we highlight that the analytic level constitutes the fundamentals of knowledge without which we cannot climb the superior steps” [7, p.59]. The questions addressed to students after listening to a literary text are used to track the following:

- The extraction of the information explicitly formulated (knowing some details: the place and the time the action happens, the encountered characters, recognizing and listing some elements, enumeration of the presented facts, selecting some information according to a criterion);
- Operating with the main ideas of the listened-to text (indicating the correct order of the events, associating an action/remark with the character, summarizing);
- Formulating some direct conclusions (motivating some actions of the characters using the information presented in the text, identifying cause-effect relations presented in the text);
- Interpreting ideas and information (comparing some information, classifying some information according to a criterion, reasoning, discovering cause-effect relations);
- Integrating or applying ideas and information (solving a problem situation, making up an action plan, realising a product, anticipating an activity);
- Evaluating ideas from the listened-to text (evaluating opposed attitudes, identifying values, formulating some valuable judgments).

The students will be used to asking questions. This exercise stimulates attentive listening, but also understanding, clarification, analysis, text interpretation. Due to the fact that this is an activity that assesses their capacity of asking questions and of training their curiosity,

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students' questions will be marked, reformulated, classified, ordered according to some criteria (Is the question important, necessary, interesting, helpful? etc.) In order to give support in this process, we can use the interactive method "star explosion", based on making up group questions of "Who?", "What?", "Where?", "When?", "Why" type, referring to the heard content. The groups can get all the question types, or, more effectively, one single type of questions. A group of children will collaborate while asking as many questions of the kind as possible. (e.g. Who wrote....? Who are we talking about? Who does he..... with?)

Listening to a literary text has to fulfill qualitative and quantitative requirements:

- selecting a text that is not known by the students, but is adapted to their age peculiarities, their intellectual development level, and their interests;
 - correct, expressive reading of the text, in a moderated rhythm which will allow ideas understanding;
 - adjusting the volume of the sound and the quality of the recording will offer a pleasant listening experience;
 - correlating the duration of the audition with the listening experience: it can be easily noticed that the young schoolchild can listen to a text for 4-5 minutes; if the time is longer, for example, 10 minutes, one should intervene, in order to avoid monotony, with different tasks, knowing the fact that not all the children can concentrate for a longer period of time;
- Some principles that need to be respected in organising listening activities are:
- The length of the listened-to text will surpass the length and the complexity of the text read independently at the early school age, this is because the level of understanding from listening is superior to understanding from reading;
 - the literary text listened to will trace the development of linguistic competences, learning communicative functions according to the *Common European Framework of Reference for Languages*: social conventions (addressing formulas), information exchange, attitudes, states and feelings expression, actions influencing, reparatory acts.
 - The accessibility level is an important factor for text understanding. There is *children's literature* written or translated in Romanian, based on which, one can design listening comprehension activities. There is also literature on *children* or *childhood* which cannot be taught to primary school students because the vocabulary and the socio-cultural references are not suitable for the age and specific preoccupations.
 - The new notions connected to vocabulary or cultural references do not need to be introduced at the initial stage of listening, in order to avoid hindering understanding, whose meaning is built gradually.

4 Conclusions

The elements that make up the didactics of the oral, in the area of listening are poorly represented in specialized literature. The efforts to enhance the oral reception competence in the mother tongue need to be directed to selecting content and creating audio materials which will cover a wide range of topics, but also to developing some specific didactic strategies. Attention needs to be paid to the aspects referring to the role of instruction context for listening (friendly atmosphere for active listening, students' motivation through the learning tasks used, the selection of the literary text that will generate an effective context for competences development, the use of modern learning means and techniques).

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