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DEVELOPMENT OF COMMUNICATION SKILLS THROUGH ACTIVE LISTENING IN TEACHING ROMANIAN LANGUAGE AS A SECOND LANGUAGE

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Abstract

This article discusses the development of communication competence through active listening – an indisputable condition in the process of assimilation of a non-native language. Linguistics, psychology, and pedagogy offer theories and strategies for defining communication skills but the problem of developing listening comprehension and the skills' interdependence is insufficiently researched. The author reveals that the identified issue can be solved with the help of an exercise system oriented towards receiving, decoding, and developing the voice message, towards communicative interaction, in order to train an active listener, as well as developing communication skills and successful social integration, at a time when the International Listening Association in the USA has appreciated listening as the competence of the 21st century.

Keywords: active listening, exercises, communication skills, active listener

Introduction

Linguistic education is a pedagogical training process oriented towards the formation of the communication culture of a person capable of communicating and interacting with peers, expressing thoughts, moods, feelings, opinions, etc., to solve specific problems in everyday life. This is considered a model for training students' communication skills and engages a primary place in the educational approach.

On one hand, the model assumes the training/development of the skills of receiving the oral message and oral expression, respectively of receiving the written message and written expression, their harmonious correlation, the communication being the fusion of these skills, but also of linguistic phenomena in the teaching-learning process of Romanian language as a non-native language [1].

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On the other hand, the formation of oral communication competence cannot be solved only from the perspective of the development of oral production activities (speaking), the focus must be placed on oral perception activities (listening). Or, communication competence in the Romanian language does not only involve the ability to be a good communicator but also implies the ability to be a good listener, once *45% of the communication process represents listening compared to the other activities: speaking - 30%, reading - 16% and writing - 9%*, an argument that confirms the necessity and importance of this somehow marginalized phenomenon.

For this reason, within a Convention, the International Listening Association from the USA (supported by C. King, J. Lynch, L. Janusik, etc.) established that today's young people are the "*hearing generation*", and the global problem that the language education is facing at the moment is the problem of training the *active listener* in the educational process [8]. Thus, it is found that listening ensures the efficiency of the socio-professional integration of the youth, being designated as the competence of the 21st century [7].

In other words, the formation of communicative skills of reception and production is of fundamental importance, because they are indispensable for any interactive activity [2].

Methodology

Important elements for the development of communication skills are motivation and increasing understanding by choosing the language used by the teaching staff, so that the material to be studied is accessible to the students, even if they have not acquired the respective terminology, the organization of the message, the usage of references and appropriate examples - because, when they are not directly related to what the content of the message/information implies, they not only do not help but hinder the retention of the message, communication, etc. [3]. Thus, the intention is the driving force in studying the Romanian language as a non-native language, therefore, the motivated pupil/student has the desire to listen, to extract information based on the known linguistic material and to communicate effectively. We believe that with the student's motivation to get involved in the act of active listening, the motivation to learn the Romanian language will increase, in general.

Listening is the basis of communication. The formation of *communication competence* begins with the formation of the competence to receive oral

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messages. Understanding is formed in the process of speaking, speaking - in the process of listening. Listening facilitates the acquisition of speaking, reading and writing. If the student understands the language by hearing, he will easily be able to understand the written language, that is, to decode what he sees, in what he has to utter.

Listening is closely related to *speaking*, because the partners constantly change roles, manifesting themselves in the role of listener or speaker. Initiation of speech begins with some intentions, which have already been formed after listening to new information. Therefore, speaking is impossible without prior listening, because when it is done, only what was received during the hearing can be reproduced. Listening can serve as a basis for speaking, and the quality of the understanding of the heard information is usually checked by answering questions about the heard content or by telling it. In this way, listening prepares speaking, and speaking helps to form hearing acknowledgment.

Between *listening* and *reading*, not only similarities are observed, but also an interaction. The formation of the skills of understanding speech through listening is usually posterior to understanding through reading, therefore the linguistic material is better understood and fixed not while reading, but by using the language itself. In comparison to reading, listening is a more complicated aspect of verbal activity; perceiving information by hearing is more difficult than perceiving a written text. Reading makes listening easier only if the read text is spoken in one's mind with correct pronunciation and a fast tempo.

Listening is also related to *writing*. Writing is the graphic equivalent of listening. Writing is not only related to the movement of the hand, it also includes speaking, listening and reading elements. In writing, thoughts expressed in inner speech (inner voice dictation) are transmitted through graphic signs. In the writing process, the sound composition of the written word needs a specification, which is done by mentally speaking the written words. In this way, writing contributes to the acquisition of the oral language, because it trains and helps the visual and operational memory.

All the same, it is noted that linguistics, psychology, and pedagogy as sciences in educational practice offer a spectrum of theories and strategies for the formation of communication skills; yet, the problem of developing listening comprehension and that of the interdependence between competences is insufficiently researched. A solution to the revealed problems is the training of active listening skills, in order to train an active listener, but

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also to develop communication skills and achieve successful social integration.

From our point of view, the training/development of skills through active listening must be carried out on the following principles [4]:

- *The motivational principle of perceiving the auditory message;*
- *The principle of active listening;*
- *The principle of mutual connection between listening and other speaking activities;*
- *The principle of listening based on references/aids, speech patterns;*
- *The principle of accessibility of the material intended for listening;*
- *The principle of correlation between the mother tongue and the studied language.*

The exercises developed by us [5] are based on the principles named above, and, at the same time, on the works of such researchers as B. Loginova, Yu. Nikitina [9, 10]. They carry a communicative character, contain elements of creativity and are oriented *towards receiving, decoding, developing the sound message, towards communicative interaction*. That being said, the below listed listening activities motivate students to interact and develop their communication skills:

- Imitation of models, instructive phrases;
- Synchronous repetition of what is heard, which develops all hearing mechanisms: verbal hearing, memory, articulation, forecasting;
- Listening on visual bases;
- Oriented listening (identification of a language or verbal phenomenon);
- Listening and oral translation after hearing;
- Prepared listening (students read a text independently and then listen to it in another version. They must say which statements correspond to the text and which do not);
- Listening to certain situations and reacting to them;
- Listening with completions (students listen to the beginning of the phrase and complete it independently);
- Listening with answers to questions based on what was heard;
- Hearing with the determination of the number of sentences in the text;
- Listening and synchronous reading of a text;
- Listening and synchronous (selective) writing of some syllables, words, names, sentences, etc.

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- Listening to a text with the description and selecting from the proposed images the described character;
- Listening with the grouping of words from the text in certain semantic blocks: (colors, actions, school supplies, etc.);
- Listening with memorization;
- Dynamic listening (students listen to certain tasks of the teacher and fulfill them);
- Selective listening (listen to a text, then, from the proposed block of cards, select the heard sentence in the text).

In order to fill the gaps in receiving information by hearing, but also to overcome the emotional barrier of students to listening, it is very important to offer students a variety of voices, with different timbres and characteristics, using both the teacher's voice and voices from other sources.

The formation of the competence to receive oral messages begins during the initial stage of learning the Romanian language, with listening being dominant over other speaking activities, therefore it occurs more frequently at the initial stage. At this stage, the exercises will be oriented towards the development of intonation hearing (the ability to receive the intonation structure of the phrase and its correct reporting), and phonemic hearing (the ability to distinguish speech sounds and identify them with the respective phonemes), in order to apply the memorized standards during the recognition of new messages, attention, memory, forecasting and articulatory mechanisms.

It is important to be taken in consideration that, students at this age do not have enough confidence in their abilities to process what they hear and, therefore, teachers must realize which of the strategies used by students are useful in receiving the message and which are ineffective.

That said, researchers in the field recommend during the oral study of the Romanian language, lessons dedicated to listening, precisely so that teachers teach listening, not test it, so the focus will be more on the listening process and not on the results of listening [6].

The development of the ability to receive oral messages continues with students learning to highlight the orientation meaning (intonation, rhythm, pauses and logical emphasis), but also to use the expressive function of the language. Thus, exercises are proposed to direct students' attention to the content of the message, starting from the ability to relate the meaning of the word to the context. This develops the students' skills to understand and

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reproduce the information, to analyze and interpret what they heard, and to express their own opinion in relation to the content of the heard information.

The *gradual* development of the competence to receive oral messages aims at the formation/development of an active listener in the Romanian language, who will focus his attention on decoding different types of messages sent by the speaker. In this way, an environment of speech development is created in which the student has the role of the subject of the learning process, showing an active attitude towards the received message, understanding its value for interactive activities. *Listening* develops the students' ability to anticipate the meaning of the expressed content. In this way, a culture of listening is educated not only to acquire a language but also to study other subjects.

Conclusions

The development of communication skills through active listening is imperative in the context of scientific truth having an axiom value, as an indisputable condition in the process of assimilating a non-native language.

In the organization of active listening activities, the following is taken into account: the pursued aim; the message and volume of the text; speed of speech; the number of new lexical units, designed for learning; the necessary teaching resources and means, etc. It is also necessary to allocate time to each of the three stages of the listening process and not exclude any of them. Some recommendations for teachers [5]:

- Use of learning-through-action techniques, characteristic to the level of understanding of the students;
- Didactic activities that anticipate the listening process to be active and interactive, to follow the development of phonemic hearing, attention, memory, etc.;
- The text selected for listening should convey a message; be interesting enough for students; to present new language elements; can be understood by all students (has visual aids); the rhythm of the text to be adapted to the listening speed of the audience;
- Make sure all students are listening, not just hearing what is being taught;
- Reception of the oral message fails when the students' attention is directed elsewhere; existence of background noise; they do not know/understand some words or the speaking speed is fast;

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- In order to fill in the gaps in receiving information by hearing, but also to overcome the emotional barrier of students to listening, it is very important to offer students a variety of voices, with different timbres and characteristics, using both the teacher's voice and voices from other sources;
- Determine the way to evaluate the understanding of the text, the use of control methods: verbal or written.

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