

Decisive Factors of the Didactic Listening Process in Romanian as a Non-Native Language Classes

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Abstract

The article discusses the decisive factors in the process of training students' listening skills in foreign language classes, in our case Romanian as a non-native language. Intercepting and understanding the sound message is a very complicated mental activity. And, listening represents the most complex aspect of the speaking activity, seeking to be developed as a priority. The reception of speech by hearing is directed by auditory, motor, and visual sensations, its quality being, therefore, determined by clarity. In the current research, it is concluded that the effectiveness of listening depends on several factors, such as: the knowledge/application of the principles that are the basis of the process of training the listening competence, within the teaching-learning of the Romanian language, related to the degree of development of psychological mechanisms of the audience. Moreover, when the mechanisms of listening do not work, arise difficulties related to the particularities of the act of listening to the natives, to the particularities of the language being studied. The mechanisms can be developed if students are taught to listen effectively and complying with these factors favours the formation of an active listener in the educational process, creating premises for improving communication skills, in general.

Keywords: listening competence, psychological mechanisms, mental processes, effective listening, active listening.

Introduction

The process of learning a non-native language involves not only the formation of linguistic skills but also changes in mental structure, and adaptations to the way of thinking about reality reflected in the target language being learned. In other words, we do not simply teach the learner to speak another language, but we also teach him to think in that language.

In the process of learning Romanian as a non-native language, listening is the most complex aspect of the speaking activity, and it should be developed as a priority. Concerning this aspect, researchers Sandra Hybels and Richard L. Weaver [6, p.47] state that listening covers 53%, reading - 17%, speaking - 16% and writing - 14%. Moreover, today's young people are considered the "*listening generation*", and listening ensures the effectiveness of their socio-professional integration and is considered a 21st-century skill [2].

American psychologist Kory Floyd defines listening as an active process and not an automatic one [5, p.24]; being an acquired skill that includes more than just hearing, it refers not only to hearing or receiving the message, "*but also to inferring meaning from what you hear*" [ibid].

In the work "*Communication and Education*" [4], researcher L. Şoitu draws our attention to the fact that hearing is the simple perception of sounds which implies the reception of information, but not its understanding; listening means making a conscious effort, hearing

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something and putting it together in a rational and understanding way. Hearing becomes listening only when we pay attention to the speaker and follow the message carefully.

Methodology

Listening is a conscious act of receiving information involving: hearing (the automatic act of receiving sound waves generated by the transmitter and transmitting them into the receiver's brain); understanding (identifying and recognising sounds according to a code); decoding it into meaning (by involving the receiver's memory and experience); assigning meaning to the processed information; evaluating (making judgements about the validity/objectivity/usefulness of the decoded information).

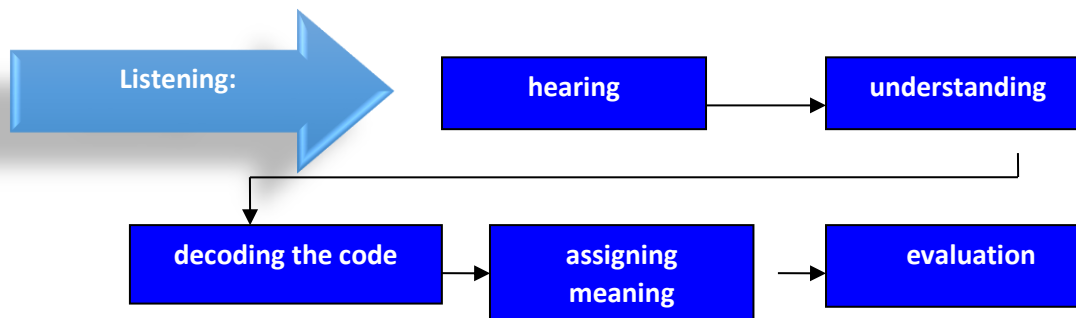


Fig. 1. Constituents of listening

Receiving and understanding a sound message are very complicated mental activities. In the process of developing listening skills, the reception of auditory speech is guided by auditory, motor and visual sensations, the quality of which successively is determined by clarity. When the listening mechanisms do not work, difficulties arise due to the peculiarities of the listener's listening act; the peculiarities of the native speaker's speech, and the language being studied. In his studies, the Russian neuropsychologist A. Luria [7, p.] mentions that the internal mechanism of listening is based on several mental processes: *attention, auditory perception and recognition, anticipation or forecasting, semanticization (deduction from context), division into logical-grammatical segments, informative analysis based on segmented units of the information content, final synthesis* involving different types of interpretation of the perceived message. The same researcher identifies the following mechanisms of listening:

Mechanisms of speech perception. Perception is improved due to the increase of the "operational unity of perception". The success of listening depends on increasing this unity: the better the speech is received (complex blocks of sounds), the more efficiently the information is processed. At the initial stage of learning, perception takes place in chunks (words), then - as a whole (sentence), but to achieve the desired level of perception, special training is needed.

Internal pronunciation mechanisms are needed to analyse speech, comprehension and memorization. The extent of internal pronunciation depends on the complexity of the content, the level of the learner's knowledge of the spoken language, and the conditions of reception of the text.

Mechanisms of operational memory (we relate what we hear now, to what has been heard); the better developed the memory, the greater the unity of perception; long-term memory (stored benchmark), unlike other speech mechanisms, is not formed by special exercises, but is based on all previous experience.

Mechanisms of comprehension: distinguishing significant guide marks for understanding the text, establishing communicative links between primary and secondary information. Here it is necessary to distinguish the levels of understanding of the text: from words, and sentences - to understanding the text as a whole. It highlights understanding of content (factual information), as well as understanding of meaning; deep and superficial understanding, accurate and complete understanding. Complete understanding depends on the accuracy of reception.

Mechanisms of anticipation operate at the level of linguistic form and content. Prior to reception, with the proposed listening task, the articulatory organs already produce minimal activity. Because of this, certain patterns emerge in the listener's consciousness, making it possible to anticipate what is to be heard. It is therefore necessary to pay particular attention to the formulation of the pre-listening task. The understanding of the text is influenced by its semantic organisation. The text should be composed in such a way that the main idea is easily discernible. If the main idea is expressed at the beginning of the message, it is understood 100%, at the end of the message - up to 70%, while its formulation in the middle of the text ensures only 40% understanding.

Comparison/recognition mechanisms are continuously active, comparing the received signals with the guide marks, which are stored in our long-term memory. Comparison is closely linked to the person's past experience, feelings and emotions. The listener's experience means the auditory and speech sensations that underlie auditory perception and speech understanding.

In the specialised literature, S. Mironova [8, p.132] highlights four basic mechanisms of listening: verbal hearing, memory, prognosis and articulatory mechanism. In the researcher's view, verbal hearing is one of the most important mechanisms. It ensures the reception of oral speech, its segmentation into semantic blocks, word combinations, and words. Thanks to this mechanism, the recognition of known patterns in the flow of speech takes place.

To understand oral speech, the recognised unit must be remembered, compared with the standard, and then memorised for further operations. Therefore, *memory* is another important mechanism/factor of listening. Working memory is a short-term memory, which has the capacity to retain information for more than 10 seconds. Knowledge of a particular context can significantly facilitate the process of perception when listening, the presence of linguistic discourse ensures better memorisation of information.

Foresight is the anticipation of events. Two types of forecasting are highlighted in the literature: *linguistic* and *semantic*. Words are not in an isolated form in the memory, they are embedded in a complex system of lexical-semantic relations. It is these relations that determine the character of the prognosis. Semantic forecasting is determined according to knowledge of the context and possible situations, which involve the use of structures, clichés, and formulas.

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Linguistic prediction is determined by the fact that each word has a certain spectrum of compatibility. The occurrence of each new word significantly limits the possibility of using other words. The greater the volume of the semantic field, the more resistant the lexical and grammatical skills, the more the learner knows typical speech situations and masters speech patterns, the easier it will be to recognise them after hearing. Linguistic prediction builds on semantic prediction and vice versa. The noise and lack of attention condition prediction.

The articulatory mechanism is the articulate expression of inner speech. The clearer the pronunciation, the higher the level of auditory perception of the message.

All these mechanisms can be developed if pupils are taught *to listen effectively*. According to the researcher Ion-Ovidiu Pânișoară [1, p.145], effective listening is based on the shift of emphasis in communication from the sender to the receiver and on the relationship of interaction, and the determining factors that favour understanding are: the intelligence of the receiver, the volume of vocabulary, the ability to interfere, to spot key ideas, to grasp the structure of the discourse, to demonstrate listening experience, the attractiveness and/or prestige of the speaker, contextual and circumstantial factors.

Just as we are taught to speak, we must be taught to listen. This is one of the reasons why effective listening is such a valuable skill since motivation is a prerequisite in this process in which the learner mobilises his or her mental capacity: verbal hearing is sharpened, attention is focused and thought processes are intensified.

In our view [3], the factors that determine the effectiveness of listening depend on:

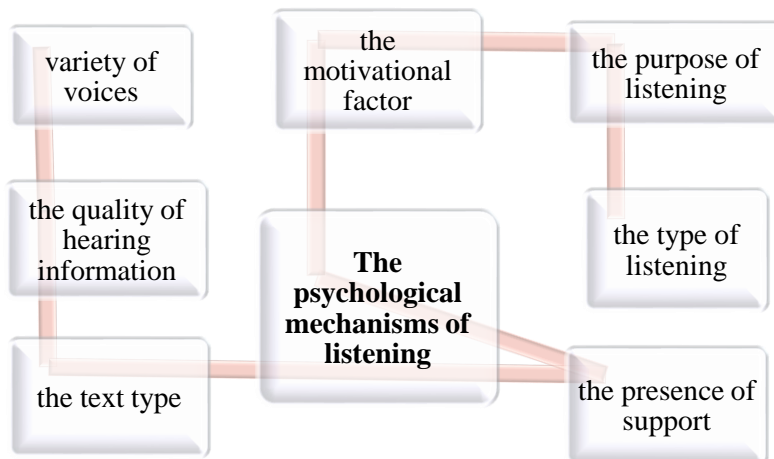


Fig. 2. Determinants of the listening process

Conclusions

In this context, we conclude that in the process of didactic listening, in the lessons of Romanian as a non-native language, the teacher must foresee the following aspects:

- training the mechanisms of verbal hearing, memory, articulation, and potential prognosis;
- presentation of authentic texts in Romanian with a normal speech tempo;
- training skills to identify the main information based on keywords;
- learning verbal clichés and common word combinations;
- making extensive use of visual cues;
- understanding oral speech in most typical communication situations;
- determining the meaning of words in context;
- learning to work with the material heard in new communicative situations;
- rendering the content of what is heard.

The listening competence in the process of being exposed to actual language is acquired through education. It is a product of learning, formed through complex exercises, and focuses the learner on motivation, mobilisation and learning. In organising listening activities, we take into account the purpose; the message and volume of the text; the speed of utterance; the number of new lexical units designed for learning; the resources and teaching aids needed, etc. Teaching activities which anticipate the listening process should be active and interactive. They should aim at developing phonemic hearing, attention, memory, etc. Compliance with these factors leads to effective listening and promotes active listening in the educational process.

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