



## DEVELOPING LISTENING SKILLS IN LANGUAGE LEARNING

*Nazaraliyeva Naima*

EMAIL: [n.naima@gmail.com](mailto:n.naima@gmail.com)<sup>1</sup>

Student of English language and literature National University of Uzbekistan

**ABSTRACT:** Listening has an important place in learning, as it is one of the four major skills. Although the other skills such as reading, speaking, and writing are equally essential to develop language proficiency, listening contributes primarily for language expertise. Listening awakens awareness of the language as it is the receptive skill that first develops in a human being. Learning to listen to the target language improves language ability. This article highlights the importance of the skill in learning a foreign language and the ways of developing listening skills.

**KEYWORDS:** top-down listening strategies, bottom-up strategies, sound, tone, rhythm, intonation, communicative language teaching, communicative competence, aural input, stress.

### 1. INTRODUCTION

Listening, being the main factor of human development over the years, is unquestionably extremely important skill in language learning. Listening has an important place in learning, as it is one of the four major skills. Although the other skills such as reading, speaking, and writing are equally essential to develop language proficiency, listening contributes primarily for language expertise. Listening awakens awareness of the language as it is the receptive skill that first develops in a human being. Learning to listen to the target language improves language ability. The sound, rhythm, intonation, and stress of the language can only be perfectly adapted through listening. To understand the tones of a particular language, one must be able to listen. As we get to understand spoken language by listening, it is easier to improve the other skills and gain confidence.

Other than being the primary form of communication, listening helps the language learner to understand the beauty of the language. Especially in terms of communicative language teaching it is said that the basis for communicative competence is listening as it provides the aural input and enables learners to interact in spoken communication and hence language learning largely depends on listening.

All of us know that the importance of listening in communicative language teaching. Listening is the most significant part of communication as it is critical in providing a substantial and meaningful response. Especially in learning a language for communicative purpose, listening plays a vital role, as it helps the language learner to get pronunciation, word stress, vocabulary, and syntax and the comprehension of messages conveyed can be based merely on tone of voice, pitch, and accent; and it is only possible when we listen. Without understanding input appropriately, learning simply cannot get any improvement. In addition, without listening skill, no communication can be achieved.

Listening, unlike the other language skills, is felt comparatively much difficult by the learners, as it has all its interrelated sub-skills such as receiving, understanding, remembering, evaluating, and responding. Nevertheless, with the advent of communicative language teaching and the focus on proficiency, the learning and teaching of listening has begun receive more attention.

In spite of the modern methods in language teaching and all the technology in education system, it seems language learners still have difficulty in improving their listening. This is mostly because a lack of communicator in countries where there is no English speaking atmosphere, laziness in improving the vocabulary base, which is the second building foundation of listening, and students focus on grammar rather than other skills. These problems mostly associated with the physical setting and overlook which must be explained or helped teacher os understood by the learners themselves.

## 2. MAIN PART

Listening strategies are techniques or activities that contribute directly to the comprehension and recall of listening input. They can be classified by how the listener processes the input.

□ Top-down strategies are listener based; the listener taps into background knowledge of the topic, the situation or context, the type of text and the language. This background knowledge activates a set of expectations that help the listener interpret what is heard and anticipate what will come next. These strategies include:

- listening for the main idea
- predicting
- drawing inferences
- summarizing

□ Bottom-up strategies are text based; the listener relies on the language in the message, that is, the combination of sounds, words, and grammar that creates meaning:

- listening for specific details
- recognizing cognates
- recognizing word-order patterns<sup>1</sup>

□ Strategic listeners also use metacognitive strategies to plan, monitor, and evaluate their listening. They plan by deciding which listening strategies will serve best in a particular situation. They monitor their comprehension and the effectiveness of the selected strategies. They evaluate by determining whether they have achieved their listening comprehension goals and whether the combination of listening strategies selected was an effective one.

□ In order to understand what is being spoken better, it is recommended to:

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<sup>1</sup> Higgins, J.M.D., 1995, "Facilitating listening in second language classrooms through the manipulation of temporal variables", Unpublished doctoral thesis, University of Kent at Canterbury.

- activate background knowledge of the topic in order to predict or anticipate the content;
- identify appropriate listening strategies;
- attend to the parts of the listening input that are relevant to the identified purpose and ignore the rest;
- Figure out the purpose for listening.
- This selectivity enables listeners to focus on specific items in the input and reduces the amount of information they have to hold in short-term memory in order to recognize it.
- Learners' comprehension improves and their confidence increases when they use top-down and bottom-up strategies simultaneously to construct meaning.
- Good communication skills require a high level of self-awareness. The way to improve our listening skill is to practice "active listening". This is where we make a conscious effort to hear not only the words that the other person is speaking, but the complete message. If it is difficult to concentrate on what someone is saying, repeating their words mentally help us stay focused.
- listening with open body language;
- listening without distraction;
- allowing the other person to finish a thought and then taking the turn; and
- listening with the intent to learn will help us become a good listener.

By becoming a better listener, we will improve our productivity, as well as our ability to influence, persuade and negotiate. What's more, we will avoid conflict and misunderstandings.

□ Learner should also try to respond to the speaker in a way that will both encourage him or her to continue speaking, so that the learner can get the information if need. While nodding and "uh huhing" says learner is interested, an occasional question or comment to recap what has been said communicates that learner understand the message as well.

### 3. Conclusion

To conclude, it is impossible to learn a foreign language without adequate listening as there is no communication where there is no human interaction. There are a lot of strategies as mentioned above to improve the listening ability with the help of experienced teachers.

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