O.P. Kazakova (Polotsk)

HOW TO TEACH EFFECTIVE LISTENING?

Second language (L2) listening comprehension is a complex process, crucial in the development of second language competence. Listening is an invisible mental process, making it difficult to describe. L2 listeners must discriminate between sounds, understand vocabulary and grammatical structures, interpret stress and intonation, retain and interpret this within the immediate as well as the larger socio-cultural context of the utterance. M. Rost defines listening, in its broadest sense, as a process of receiving what the speaker actually says (receptive orientation); constructing and representing meaning (constructive orientation); negotiating meaning with the speaker and responding (collaborative orientation); and, creating meaning through involvement, imagination and empathy (transformative orientation) [1].

Research from cognitive psychology has shown that listening comprehension is more than extracting meaning from incoming speech. It is a process of matching speech with what listeners already know about the topic. Therefore, when listeners know the context of a text or an utterance, the process is facilitated considerably because listeners can activate prior knowledge and make the appropriate inferences essential to comprehending the message [2]. Therefore, teachers need to help students organize their thoughts, to activate appropriate background knowledge for understanding and to make predictions, to prepare for listening. This significantly reduces the burden of comprehension for the listener.

Teachers can help students develop sound strategies for comprehension through a process approach to teaching L2 listening. It's important in teaching listening to make the students aware of how to choose and practice the strategies that help to achieve good results.

Listeners do not pay attention to everything; they listen selectively, according to the purpose of the task. This, in turn, determines the type of listening required and the way in which listeners will approach a task. J. C. Richards differentiates between an interactional and a transactional purpose for communication. Interactional use of language is socially oriented, existing largely to satisfy the social needs of the participants: e.g., small talk and casual conversations. Therefore, interactional listening is highly contextualized and two-way, involving interaction with a speaker. A transactional use of language, on the other hand, is more message-oriented and is used primarily to communicate information: e.g., interviews, news broadcasts, lectures, etc. In contrast with interactional listening, transactional listening requires accurate comprehension of a message with no opportunity for clarification with a speaker (one-way listening) [3]. Knowing the communicative purpose of a text or utterance will help the listener determine what to listen for and, therefore, which processes to activate. As with the advantages of knowing the context, knowing the purpose for listening also greatly reduces the burden of comprehension since listeners know that they need to listen for something very specific, instead of trying to understand every word.

Evelyn Pitre distinguishes between three types of listening: content listening, critical listening and emphatic listening. According to the author, the skills involved in content listening are threefold: identifying the key points, asking clarification questions and verifying content. For critical listening one needs to be able to listen for and test the content, evaluate the logic of the argument, the strength of the evidence, the validity of the conclusions, the implication of the message, the agenda of the speaker, etc. emphatic listening involves the following skills: ability to ask open questions, keep the speaker going, reflect on the content [4].

Listeners use metacognitive, cognitive and socio-affective strategies to facilitate comprehension and to make their learning more effective. Metacognitive strategies (e.g. planning, note-taking, transfer, resourcing, self-monitoring, evaluation, selective attention, directed attention and parsing) are important because they oversee, regulate or direct the language learning process. Cognitive strategies (e.g. elaboration, inferencing, imagery, summarization, contextualization, grouping, repetition, problem identification, hypothesis testing, translation and prediction) manipulate the material to be learned or apply a specific technique to a listening task. Socio-

affective strategies (e.g. reprise, feedback, uptaking, clarifying, affective control) describe the techniques listeners use to collaborate with others, to verify understanding or to lower anxiety. Research shows that skilled listeners use more metacognitive strategies than their less-skilled counterparts [5].When listeners know how to analyse the requirements of a listening task, how to activate the appropriate listening processes required, how to make appropriate predictions, how to monitor their comprehension and how to evaluate the success of their approach, they are using metacognitive knowledge for successful listening comprehension. This is critical to the development of self-regulated learning [6].

Pre-listening activities help students make decisions about what to listen for and, subsequently, to focus attention on meaning while listening. During this critical phase of the listening process, teachers prepare students for what they will hear and what they are expected to do. First, students need to bring to consciousness their knowledge of the topic, their knowledge of how information is organized in different texts and any relevant cultural information. Second, a purpose for listening must be established so that students know the specific information they need to listen for and/or the degree of detail required. Using all the available information, students can make predictions to anticipate what they might hear.

Teachers should provide their students with language scaffolding. Repetition, rephrasing, use of synonyms and antonyms, questions, elicitation and oral feedback are some examples of oral language support. They shouldn't underestimate visual scaffolding: pictures, maps, charts, tables and other graphic organizers that help the listener to structure the information that one is listening to and pay attention to the key content. For advanced learners, who are listening to interviews or lectures, the listening material can be scaffolded by more complex forms of visuals, such as schemes, T-lists, Venn Diagram, etc. the use and complexity of visuals depends on the age, level of language proficiency of the learner and the complexity of the text.

Among the basic principles of effective listening, emphasized by Kelly Congdon, we could mention the importance of active attention. Listening involves mental activity, including cognitive and affective processing of received information. Consequently, teachers enhance listening competence through diligent focus on the mental processes and skills involved in listening, such as memory, sense making, and evaluation [7].

Thus, effective listening is a complex, active process of interpretation in which listeners match what they hear with what they already know.This kind of engaged listening is a skill that's critical for learning to understand a foreign language.

This will help students learn how to listen and develop the metacognitive knowledge and strategies crucial to success in listening comprehension.

During the listening activity itself, students monitor their comprehension and make decisions about strategy use. Students need to evaluate continually what they are comprehending and check: 1) consistency with their predictions, and 2) internal consistency, i.e. the ongoing interpretation of the oral text or interaction. Teacher intervention during this phase is virtually impossible because of the ephemeral nature of listening, but periodic practice in decision-making skills and strategy use can sharpen inferencing skills and help students to monitor more effectively.

Students need to evaluate the results of decisions made during a listening task. The teacher can encourage self-evaluation and reflection by asking students to assess the effectiveness of strategies used. Group or class discussions on the approach taken by different students can also stimulate reflection and worthwhile evaluation. Students are encouraged to share individual routes leading to success, e.g. how someone guessed the meaning of a certain word or how someone modified a particular strategy.

In order to help students consciously focus on planning, monitoring and evaluation before and after the completion of listening tasks, teachers can develop performance checklists [4]. Instruments such as these help students prepare for a listening task and evaluate their performance.

In conclusion it should be said that L2 listening competence is a complex skill that needs to be developed consciously. It can best be developed with practice when students reflect on the process of listening without the threat of evaluation. The role of the teacher is very important, as the

teacher not only guides students through the process of listening, but also motivates them and puts them in control of their learning. If students learn about the processes of listening they are likely to become more autonomous in their attitude and behaviour when presented with listening material. It is also likely that they will seek listening opportunities more readily outside the classroom, as they will view listening as a process as opposed to a product. Using listening activities to only test comprehension leads to anxiety which debilitates the development of metacognitve strategies. Strategy use positively impacts self-concept, attitudes, about learning and attributional beliefs about personal control . Guiding students through the process of listening not only provides them with the knowledge by which they can successfully complete a listening task; it also motivates them and puts them in control of their learning.

REFERENCES

1. *Rost, M*. Teaching and Researching Listening / M. Rost. - London, UK: Longman, 2002. – 234 p.
2. *Byrnes, H.* (). The Role of Listening Comprehension: A Theoretical Base / H. Byrnes // Foreign Language Annals. – 1984. – Vol. 17. – P. 317-29.
3. *Richards, J. C.* The Language Teaching Matrix / J.C. Richards. - New York: Cambridge University Press, 1990. – 157 p.
4. *Vandergrift, L.* 'It was nice to see that our predictions were right': Developing Metacognition in L2 Listening Comprehension / L. Vandergrift // Canadian Modern Language Review. – 2002. – Vol. 58. – P. 555-75.
5. *Vandergrift, L.* The Strategies of Second Language (French) Listeners: A Descriptive Study / L. Vandergrift // Foreign Language Annals. – 1997. – Vol. 30. – P.387-409.
6. *Wenden, A.* Metacognitive knowledge and language learning / A. Wenden // Applied Linguistics. – 1998. – Vol. 19. – P. 515-537.
7. *Congdon, K*. Introducing Listening / K. Congdon [Electronic resource]
Mode of access: http://teachingfsem08.umwblogs.org/2008/05/introducinglistening.doc. - Date of access: 24.11.2012.