



FIRST LANGUAGE INFLUENCE ON SECOND LANGUAGE LISTENING

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ABSTRACT

Listening to second language has been regarded as the most widely used long skill in normal daily life. It involves a complex process that allows us to understand and interpret spoken messages in real time by making use of a variety of sources such as phonetic, phonological, lexical, syntactic, semantic etc. Given the complexity that underlines this process of listening has been considered most difficult skill to learn out of the four skills.

INTRODUCTION

Areas that influence L2 listening instructions:

There are four key areas in which research has provided insides into the teaching of L2 listening.

1. Accessibility of input.
2. Top down processing.
3. Bottom up processing.
4. Learner status.

1. Accessibility of input:

Listening opportunities provide the linguistic environment or set the stage for acquisition, it's a range of new knowledge like phonological system of the L2, novel grammatical rules, a

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lexical system that is linked to the semantic system of the first language. But acquisition is not automatically brought about mere exposure to the input. Learner must come to understand input in personally meaningful ways, engage in interactions and task based on that input. Significant development in an L2 requiring a great quantity of listening.

Factors that Affect Quality of Input

a. Relevance

For L2 development learner needs to find ‘the right stuff’-listening input- the more relevant the listening opportunities, the more motivated the learner is likely to be continue input.

b. Difficulty

Text difficulty is a reflection of the cognitive processes required for an adequate understanding of a text and is known to include several variables involving length, speed, familiarity, information density and text organization.

c. Authenticity

Sometimes mere exposure to genuine texts (i.e. listening texts used by native speakers in an authentic context) are helpful for learning to listen. However claims that genuine texts (except when used at advanced levels) hamper learning by confronting the learner with large amounts of unfamiliar language (new vocabulary, complex sentences, novel collocations) without compensatory devices to facilitate comprehension. As an alternative to listening to genuine texts, it's often assumed that controlling difficulty through means of text simplification is an aid to both comprehensions an eventual development of listening ability.

2. Top down processing

This process refers to expectations to infer what the speaker intended to say. It comes from pre-packaged pattern of background knowledge that we have stored in memory from prior experiences. By our adulthood, we have stored over a million schemata in memory, these schemata obviously help us process spoken communication quickly. In order to remain operational as comprehension devices; new schemata are created every day and existing ones are updated constantly.

Lexical Access



Top down processing is made possible through lexical access.

Activation of background knowledge-content schemata- needed for comprehension of speech is linked by word recognition. Most kinds of texts, lexical access are the primary predictor of proficient listening. Occurrences of 'out of vocabulary' words in a spoken text create attentional problems that seriously interfere with comprehension.

3. Bottom Up Processing

This refers to two-pass listening process: the first is to identify the overall phonological shape of the material unit and the second is the segmental decoding. There are two complementary phonological processes that assist the listener: Feature detection and Metrical segmentation.

Feature Detection

We have a wide range of phonetic features detectors in our auditory cortex which enables us to decode speech into linguistic units. These networks respond to specific frequencies of sounds.

Metrical Segmentation

This refers to the use of stress and timing rules to segment incoming speech in words, which are then used for lexical processing and meaning construction.

4. Listener Status

View of listening roles enables explicit development of attitudes. Perceptions and responses that promote more systematical participation which listeners choose to become involved in various discourse situations. It's now known that higher effective involvement promotes enhanced understanding through better connection with the speaker and through construction of more tangible references for remembering the discourse, while lower effective involvement typically result in less connection, repair any misunderstandings that arise.

What should the learners be listening to?

The material that the learners should be spoken English. Learners are exposed to in their listening classes are written English such materials fails to demonstrate many of the features that characterize the spoken language. Moreover complex with much more subordination than is normally encountered in spoken language.



Materials

- a. Authentic or non-authentic materials

The only way that a second language learner will learn to comprehend spoken English is by exposing them to authentic, spoken language. This should take the form of 'training exercises', in which a particular dimension of the listening task is first, taught and then very deliberately practiced and practiced more than is possible with authentic material. This is an essential part of the process of teaching 'how to'.

Other criteria for materials selection

Needs Analysis

There are other factors that should be borne in mind when selecting what the learners will be listening to. The material needs to be relevant to the needs of the learners in question. This can only be determined by carrying out a careful 'needs analysis'. An additional problem in many second language classes in particular of the students in one class vary greatly, making it very difficult to accommodate everyone's needs in the same course.

Motivation

There is also the problem of boring the students. In a course in which the needs of the learners are relatively homogeneous, an appropriate needs analysis has been carried out, and materials have been selected accordingly, care must be taken not to overdo the 'needs specific' material. To avoid boring the students, the highly relevant material needs to be prepared with other different types of material in order to break the same time to expose the students to other types of language.

Level of Difficulty

A final factor that needs to be taken into account in material selection is the level of difficulty of the material in relation to the proficiency level of the students. Sometimes, we become so involved with issues of authenticity and relevance of the material, that we lose sight of the dimensions of level of language difficulty.

Learning Strategies for Listening

Learning strategies are techniques, approaches that students take in order to facilitate the learning and recall of both linguistic content area information.

Most commonly, learning strategies are classified into three main types: Metacognitive, cognitive and social strategies.

Chamot explains that, “the classification system that.....best capture based on the distinction in cognitive psychology between metacognitive strategies, cognitive strategies and social strategies. Metacognitive strategies deal with monitoring of learning and assessing learning, cognitive strategies include the activation of schema, classifying, inferring and note-taking, social strategies include asking for classification, positive self talking and confidence building.

Chamot further explains the concept of listening as a cognitive process in terms of stages where information, in the form of sound reaches the listener’s auditory and visual receptors, and is then filtered through the listener’s short-term memory, working memory and long term memory. The listener therefore selects and interprets information in order to understand it.

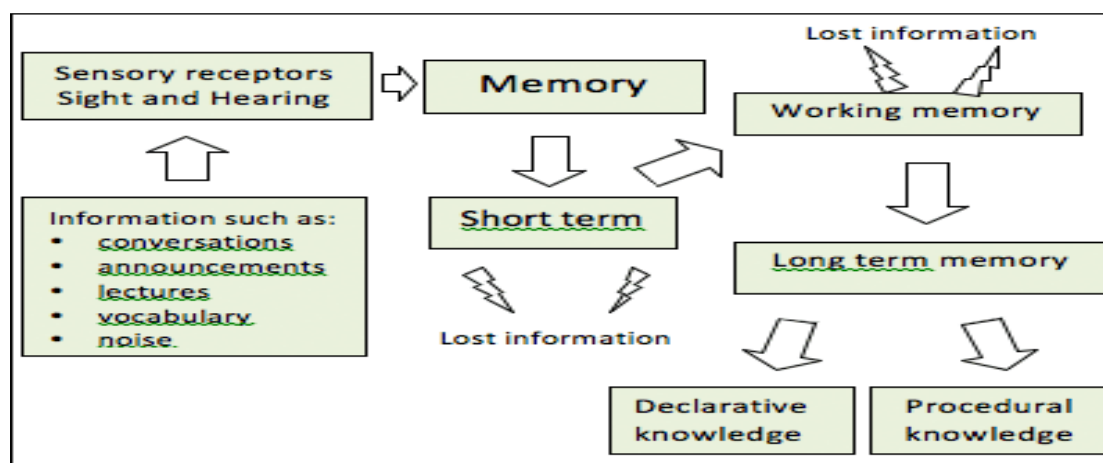


Fig. 1. Anderson’s comprehension model based on cognitive learning theory

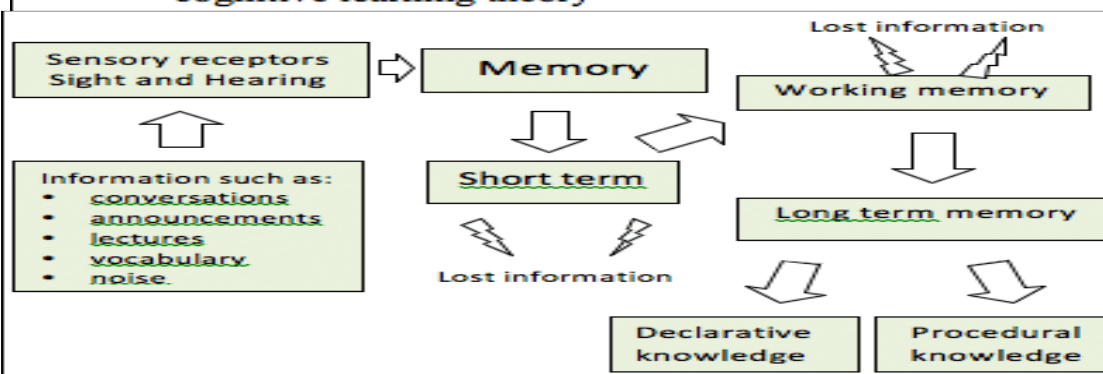


Fig. 1. Anderson’s comprehension model based on cognitive learning theory



Development of a Strategy-based Course

The course would always begin with a needs analysis and some diagnostic testing. Having determined what the learner's needs and their proficiency level are, it would be desirable to begin with a unit teaching the essential features that make up the 'linguistic proficiency' that needs to underlie all listening comprehension. A strategy-based approach organizes the course around, the teaching of different strategies that will assist the learners to comprehend. So the main units of the course will not be listening in different situations, but rather they will be 'learning to' use same strategy. In this the students' listening will be greatly helped by using the strategies they have just been practicing.

SIMT Units: For learners to be able to determine the content of the discourse they are listening to, they need to make use of different linguistic, paralinguistic and extra linguistic signals that will help them. Probably the most important linguistic signal to determine the context of the discourse they are listening to, they need to make use of different linguistic and extra linguistic signals that will help them.

Probably the most important linguistic signal to determine any or all the components of SIMT is the lexical signal-students need to be trained to listen for any word they might recognize and then guess beyond it. As was stated above, the other extremely useful strategy for determining topic is using the lexical signals. Even if a student can understand only one word, this single word will enable them to make a hypothesis based on their prior knowledge.
Forming a Hypothesis

A strategy based approach requires that the information derived from SIMT be used to form a hypothesis as early as possible. This hypothesis formation requires the use of one or both of two additional guessing strategies predicting and making an inference. Very important points to be remembered and to be emphasized with students is that forming a wrong hypothesis does not matter and that we do it all the time in our first language and take it in our stride.

Predicting here is defined as guessing the whole based on part. An example of a predicting activity would be sentence completion like: "On the one hand she was very happy with the news, but on the other hand..." For advanced level students, activities should develop to encourage predicting when the prediction is much more open-ended. Example- students could be asked to complete utterances like:

Speaker A: How do you like my new furniture?

Speaker B: It's certainly different.



Students would then be asked to predict what speaker A is likely to say next. The class could also discuss what different people felt and why 'I knew you wouldn't approve' is a more likely next response than 'thank you'.

Making Inferences

This is a different type of guessing. It relates to a higher level of competence than just understanding the words because it also involves understanding what is not said, listening between lines.

Pedagogical Applications

Mendelsohn calls for a strategic based approach to teaching listening and advises teachers to focus on teaching language listeners How to develop 'metastategies awareness' in order to help students become autonomous learners Mendelsohn's view of strategy training captures a very concise and explicit L2listening pedagogy paradigm because his technique focuses on process instead of product. Thus the focus of language listening in the class room should not be testing: it should be on practicing listening comprehension through a variety of sources that takes into consideration the proficiency level of each listener, and offers ample opportunities for learning, learning listening, therefore requires the interactive' orchestration' between metacognitive and socioaffective strategies to facilitate comprehension more effective.

For teachers of L2 listening, it is important to keep in mind specific metastrategic facts, such as the following six suggestions as per Mendelsohn's strategy based approach to second language teachers.

1. Find out what strategy students are using. Ask and record responses.

At the beginning and mid-way in the term, teachers can ask students to complete a strategy analysis. At the beginning these types of questionnaires are useful because it raises students' awareness as to the type of strategies they used.

2. Select one or two strategies found to be missing and identify them by name. Then explicitly explain to students why and when these strategies could be used during the listening process.

This suggestion has to take into consideration the type of listening skill students are practicing: perception, utilization. If it is related to perception, for example not recognizing



the words they hear, the problem might be related to lack of prosodic identification. If this is the case then the listening teacher would need to plan for authentic listening activities require students to hear words in chunks instead of trying to identify one word at a time.

3. Model how to use each strategy by incorporating ‘think aloud’

Modeling is a technique that allows teachers to explicitly show students how a behavior or activity should be completed. This does not mean students are given the answers, but instead it opens opportunities for teachers to formulate, for example pre-listening activities that “facilitate the perception and parsing phases of comprehension”. Hence, during a listening activity, the teachers may play an audio-tape and ‘think aloud’ the type of information that facilitates comprehension. Mendelsohn outlines set of six questions that facilitates comprehension. These questions are meant help L2 learners identify the SIMT: setting interpersonal relationships between speakers, mood and topic of a particular listening task.

4. Ask students to describe what they heard

What L2 students hear and understand might depend on whether the type of utterances was accompanied by specific linguistic, paralinguistic or extra linguistic signals. Linguistic signals might include descriptors such as syntax, lexis, morphology, phonology used in speech.

5. Give opportunities for students to practice their listening strategies and ask them to assess how will they used them by engaging them in discussion.

Practice is important in strategy based approach to teaching listening: therefore teachers cannot rely on only one type of listening task. These activities incorporate one-way and two-way listening activity, for example might be for learners to listen to a story while ordering pictures to create a story board while a two-way activity may require students to listen to a newscast and answer questions in group related the story they just heard. These activities however are of no value if teachers do not engage students in discussion since strategy awareness needs to be a continuous process.

6. Encourage students to practice their strategies on a variety of tasks on a continuous basis.

Ultimately, students need to be able to become autonomous learners. Therefore teachers do not need to motivate students to use the strategies they have learned, and to recognize the once that work from the work. Strategies to determine the main meaning of an utterance, on



the other hand, are useful for both one-way listening tasks. Hence, understanding discourse markers, the stress/unstressed system of English and strategies to activate schemata are needed to understand all types of utterances.

CONCLUSION:

Studies in L2 listening focuses on the areas that are influenced, which strategies to be used and how, suggestions for L2 listening as a skill are essential to understanding the process of listening. Language teachers, therefore need to understand that they cannot take a lesser fair stand, hoping students will somehow pick up this skill by 'osmosis'- anymore than any other L2 skill. With planning and continuous practice, language teachers can help their students acquire strategic skill that enhance listening comprehension and develop autonomy.

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