

## UNIT 7: THE ORAL FOREIGN LANGUAGE. THE COMPLEXITY OF GLOBAL COMPREHENSION IN ORAL INTERACTION: FROM AUDITION TO ACTIVE AND SELECTIVE LISTENING. SPEAKING: FROM THE IMITATIVE REPETITION TO AUTONOMOUS PRODUCTION

Using a foreign language effectively requires having a number of different skills. Linguistics have identified four major abilities, which they call linguistic skills. These are: listening, speaking, reading and writing.

Listening and speaking are said to be related to language expressed through the oral medium. Speaking is said to be active or productive skill while listening is said to be passive or receptive skill. It is recommendable to practise the four skills in one lesson. That does not imply that in some lessons one or two of the skills are predominant.

### 1. THE ORAL FOREIGN LANGUAGE

**Speech**, or spoken language, it is the universal material of human language.

**Communication** is the ultimate goal of foreign language learning, so in order to help students to communicate effectively, the teacher must devote time to the development of the oral skills, both receptive and productive.

(TOPIC 1) Following **Breen and Candlin (1980)**,) communication is understood to have the following characteristics:

- a) It is a form of social interaction
- b) It involves a high degree of unpredictability and creativity.
- c) It takes place in discourse and sociocultural contexts.
- d) It is carried out under limiting psychological and other conditions such as memory constraints, fatigue and distractions.
- e) It has always a purpose: To communicate ideas, To express social, regional or cultural identity...

- f) It involves authentic as opposed to textbook-contrived language.
- g) It is judged successful or not on the basis of actual outcomes.

In the initial stages of learning, it is interesting for students to be conscious of their capacity to decode messages, having direct access to the target language as comprehension must be developed before expression.

It is also common argued that oral skills must be developed before written skills. Some reasoning backs up this theory:

- ✓ Writing implies spelling problems
- ✓ This behaviour reflects the way in which children learn their mother tongue.
- ✓ Oral communication is more natural for students than written communication.

### 1.1 Characteristics of oral language<sup>1</sup>

Ancient, Universal among humans, dies without trace, perfection and progressive dination, can be phrnetic and auditive problems, the speaker exercises direct influence on the listener, some of the resources are : articulation of sounds, pause, accent, intonation, rhythm,...

## 2. THE COMPLEXITY OF GLOBAL COMPREHENSION IN ORAL INTERACTIONS: FROM AUDICTION TO ACTIVE AND SELECTIVE LISTENING

Listening skill is a receptive skill . Some previous methods, such as the Direct Method and the Audio-Lingual Method, put emphasis in the oral comprehension, but listening was concentrated on the lower levels. The Communicative Approach postulated the use of realistic and authentic language and learners were trained to match what they heard into a context; the context helped them to understand the meaning

It is a principle that listening should perceive speaking. At first sight, it might seem that listening is a passive skill, and speaking is an active one. However, this is not the case, **since message decoding calls for active participation in the communication between the participants.** The visual and verbal signalling shows

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<sup>1</sup> From Unit 1

the speaker that effective communication is taking place. Therefore, while hearing can be considered as passive condition, listening is always a participative process.

## 2.1 General principles in teaching/learning listening comprehension and expression

1. Listening comprehension lessons must have definite goals, carefully stated.
2. It should be constructed, with a carefully step-by-step planning.
3. It should teach not test  
it should demand active pupil participation.
4. These lessons should stress conscious memory work.

Pupils concentrate more during a listening activity if this activity is purposeful. They must find it useful.

## 2.2 Listening skills

The most important listening skills are:

1. SCANNING or looking for specific details.
2. SKIMMING or to identify the principal ideas.
3. RECONSTRUCTION OF ORAL DISCOURSE: the teacher can make a conceptual map on the blackboard, considering a word or sentence as the listening key.
4. PREDICTION, the teacher must encourage in his or her learners to use of intelligent guesswork.
5. RECOGNIZING INTERNAL STRUCTURES AND CONNECTORS: this strategy gives us clues about the content.
6. GUESSING FROM CONTEXT: is to find out the meaning of unknown words. We can use gestures, pictures...
7. EXTENSIVE and INTENSIVE LISTENING
  - EXTENSIVE LISTENING will be focused on the styles of discourse. This strategy, can be used for the representation of already known material in a new environment and it can also serve the function of introducing new language.
  - INTENSIVE LISTENING is closer to ear training, and it's the most widely used for listening practice in classroom.

## 2.3 Planning considerations

Teachers should make an effort to create activities which have a clear intrinsic purpose for the student.

**Before the lesson there are a number of steps to take (Underwood, 1989).**

- × Choose the listening text.
- × check that the activities are suitable
- × consider if it fit the time available or not
- × think about visual aids and decide if any special equipment will be needed
- × make up our mind about what procedure you will adopt for the listening session
- × if you are planning to present the listening text “live” practice reading it aloud
- × Think about visual aids.
- × Decide what procedure you will adopt for the listening session with a didactic value.
- × ...

## 2.4. Listening activities

They are different techniques :

**A) Pre-listening.** It has as its main aim attract our pupils interest in what they are going to listen to. Pre-listening activities may include:

- Looking at a list of items/thoughts related to the topic.
- Predicting, speculating.
- Preview language, thus revising vocabulary and grammar.

**B) Listening.**

**C) Post-listening.** Pupils will be asked to extract concrete information about a text. These activities may include: Storyline pictures sets, True-false, Matching pictures with is heard, Putting pictures in order, Carrying out actions.

There are other simple ways of training pupils to listen effectively such as the teaching of numbers and letters with dictations, or visuals aids.

## 2.4 Listening materials

The most useful ones are the songs, the video recordings, the tapes and the teacher.

- **Songs** are an important source of motivation. They are very useful to review and learn vocabulary, pronunciation, grammatical structures and patterns.
- **Video recordings:** When using the video it is essential to choose the right technique depending on the purpose: recognition, production or a combination of both. With this material the pupils' imagination is fostered.
- **CDs :** We can use tapes adjusting the level to the pupils' needs.
- **The teacher:** can also provide input.

## 2.6 The role of the teacher

It requires patience, imagination and skill to create an interesting environment for young learners to develop confidence in listening. The teacher's role in this respect is fourfold: Plan for listening , Choose appropriate texts and tasks, Provide support , Vary the learning context.

## 3. SPEAKING: FROM IMITATIVE PRODUCTION TO AUTONOMOUS PRODUCTION

Speaking has received more attention in the last twenty years.

When a child is learning a FL, he usually makes mistakes. The teacher will guide oral practice to avoid the SS' mistakes. Then, when children realise that they can speak without mistakes, they'll be motivated to go on speaking properly. The main goal of speaking will be fluency

The initial motivation to speak English is strong in children, as they want immediate results It is therefore useful to begin an English programme by teaching children vocabulary for basic concepts. It is always interesting to find out about pupils' previous language learning experience and attitudes to English. Finally, speaking is the only skill which is different. The other three can be done alone but people do not usually speak alone.

### 3.1 Speaking practice

#### 3.1.1 General principles in the speaking skill:

1. The beginning of oral expression will start when the pupil can understand the meaning of language's first elements.

2. we will use short dialogues and its will attract their attention,
3. In relation with the first syntactic structures (which we can present in first or second cycle), they are principally GESTALTS or PREFABRICATED LANGUAGE,
4. Before preparing our activities we have to consider several aspects as competence level, if the use of a book, age ...

In the early stages of learning, not much spontaneous speech can be expected from pupils. Much of the English they will learn to produce will be “**formulaic language**” –routines or patterns which children memorise and which enable them to communicate with a minimum of linguistic competence. Examples of formulaic language are: **Simple greetings:** Hello! How are you? /Fine, and you?, **Social English:** Have a nice weekend!, **Asking permission:** Can I go to the toilet? Can I clean the blackboard?,...

### 3.2 Stages when teaching speaking

1. The **warm-up** may take the form of an informal chat. It may also involve several questions to consolidate earlier lesson work.
2. The **presentation stage** the new language has to be presented in a meaningful context, some imitation and repetition can be carried out after that. This can be achieved through different activities such as: Reading aloud, Guessing drills, ...
3. At the **production stage** our pupils will use the language in freer, more creative ways. The most common activities include: Games, role play and discussions.

### 3.3 Developing aural understanding

Our pupils will become more proficient in listening English if: they apply the strategies they use naturally in Spanish listening, increase their knowledge of the cultural context and they accept the partial interpretation of what they hear is often sufficient for understanding. Therefore, we must provide systematic opportunities for our pupils to learn how to: Determine what an utterance or a conversation is about, establish who is talking to whom and recognise the speaker’s mood and attitude.

## 3. 4 Stages when learning to speak

### 3.4.1 Imitative reproduction (years 1 to 4):

We can use above songs, chants, and poems to encourage pupils to mimic the model they hear on the cassette, CD or from the teacher.

**Procedures and tasks:** Begin by singing slowly. Show a flashcard to match each colour. Choose individual students who are mastering the song to show the correct flashcards. Give each student a flash card. Each student must stand up when the class sings of the colour of his/her card.

Place all the flashcards on the board. Ask various students to touch each colour in the order the class sing them. Ask the students to touch another student wearing the colour being sung. The students make colour flashcards.

### 3.4.2 Autonomous production (years 5 and 6) :

Games and pair work activities. As games will be treated explicitly in topic eighteen, we will concentrate here on an example of pair work. Pair work should always be based on a given model to encourage the pupils to begin to manipulate the language within a fairly controlled situation.

At the end of YEAR 5-6 students should be capable of expressing their ideas. However, they usually encounter problems when asking questions. Our example focuses on the question form; helping students improve their speaking skill.

Task: intensive review of auxiliaries followed by gap-question exercises.

Procedures: makes a number of statements in tenses the students are familiar with. She/he asks the students to identify the auxiliary verb in each case. The students are split up into pairs. Worksheets are distributed and the students have to ask an appropriate question for the given answer.

The teacher hands out the second exercise (one student A, the other for student B) and ask students to complete the gaps by asking their partner for the missing information.

## 3.5 Speaking problems

Speaking is one of the most problematical skills since successful oral communication involves many things: know some grammar and vocabulary, the ability to make the foreign sounds correctly, master the suprasegmental features, Fluency and also some listening skills.

### CONCLUSION

We as teacher should encourage our students to learn meaningfully and not learn by heart. And it is essential not to be too strict when students commit a mistake because frustration can appear and it must always be replaced by motivation.