UDC 378

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ACQUIRING LISTENING COMPREHENSION COMPETENCE BY UNIVERSITY STUDENTS

Listening is the most complicated speech activity. Teaching listening aims at developing learners' auditory capacity which implies aural perception of the phonetic code and linguistic data, and correlating them to the patterns stored in one's memory. Auditory capacity plays an essential role in both fostering the acquisition of foreign language proficiency, and simultaneously, advancing students' listening comprehension competence (LCC) – the ability to listen to authentic texts of various genres and types with different levels of understanding. LCC encompasses the skills of aural perception of foreign discourse, based on the academic material with a definite percentage of unknown vocabulary. It is formed gradually alongside with learners' cognitive competence involving general abilities, revealed in correlation between human actions and problem-solving tasks, which are accomplished through personal attainments. An elaborated comprehensive methodology is conducive to achieving the objective of acquiring a high level of LCC. It integrates three coherent stages – pre-listening, in-while listening and post-listening – directed at reaching definite goals. Passing through the singularized stages students acquire congruous habits, skills and abilities that constitute LCC. The elaborated methodology incorporates the corresponding system of listening-oriented exercises enclasping several subsystems each completing specific tasks. The suggested exercises provide pertinent examples of assignments which facilitate achieving a set target. The propounded methodology has been experimentally proven; consequently, it can be implemented in the educational process in higher educational establishments.

Key words: auditory capacity; listening comprehension competence; cognitive competence; reasonable and comprehensive methodology; stages of acquiring auditory habits; skills and capacities; system of exercises for teaching listening.

Introduction. This article propounds a pedagogical framework of acquiring LCC by University students. Specifically, the study arises out of a need to introduce cognizing subjects to a reasonable methodology of developing auditory skills and capacities that are deemed to be incorporated by an integrated listening ability. To this end, the paper encompasses an issue which questions the conventional wisdom that teaching a foreign language (FL) might be done primarily on the communicative ground (D. Hymes, W. Littlewood, Ye. Passov, S. Savignon et alt.). Respectively, the maintained idea is at variance with the existing assumption that a FL acquisition is aimed mainly at developing communicative competence of students. At this rate the cognitive aspect of learning that involves interrelation of speech and intellection remains either ignored or deficient in support. With this in mind, it seems relevant to identify a current target of teaching listening to University students and to devise a communicatively and cognitively stipulated system of exercises which may facilitate achieving a set target. The system of exercises is an integral part of a well-grounded and experimentally proven methodology applicable for developing learners' LCC – a time bound dynamic and spontaneous perception of the input that implies the automatic processing of the stylistically colored information. That means that the process of developing LCC involves both communicative and cognitive mechanisms which are to be taken into account in the academic course and accordingly reflected in the appropriate exercises.

This paper demonstrates the succession of acquiring LCC by University students and provides a many-faceted methodology which comprises the stages of developing LCC and a relevant system of diversified exercises, devised specifically for this purpose. The study also illustrates how the proposed methodology can be efficaciously employed in the process of learning a FL.

Methods. A constructed pedagogical framework of forming LCC that incorporates a relevant methodology and a correspondent system of specific exercises was validated by a research experiment adapted for University students majoring in linguistic fields. The experiment was meant to expose how the elaborated methodology could foster developing a high level of sought-for

expertise. The positive results of the experiment showed a sufficient progress in acquiring congruous competence and displayed a considerable rise of auditory capacities, habits and skills of learners. The level of students' acquirements increased from 74 to 95 points. The increase in the qualitative index of the acquired competence of trainees in experimental groups on average constituted 21 points. The results were obtained through numerous quizzes taken by students of the experimental groups. The obtained results vindicated the validity of the propounded methodology and the appropriateness of the system of exercises purportedly created for that purpose. The correspondent teaching materials (the syllabus, lectures, the guide-book, assignments for workshops, tests for self-control, etc.) compatible with the devised methodology were successfully implemented at a number of Ukrainian universities [1, p. 46].

Considering the efficacious application of the proposed methodology of developing alien LCC in FL classrooms of modern universities it seems reasonable to specify the constructed framework more circumstantially.

Discussion. Oral comprehension is one of the most crucial aspects of FL acquisition. It is viewed as the ability of one individual perceiving another individual via sense, aural organs, assigning a meaning to the message and comprehending it [2, p. 54]. In a modern educational process substantial attention is paid to a cognitive side of FL acquisition with a special emphasis on developing auditory comprehension of students, which is surmised to comprise cognitive competence (CC) as its constituent. For one thing, CC involves critical and creative thinking (that refers to reasoning and making inferences, evaluating multiple ideas and alternatives, generating novel and practical thoughts) [3, p. 402]; for another thing, CC implies general abilities, revealed in correlation between human actions and problem-solving tasks which are accomplished through personal attainments [4, p. 139].

On balance, it may be expected that CC embraces three interrelated components: cognitive structures, cognitive processes, and overt behaviors. It is plausible to assume, therefore, that among those components the most essential and relevant for developing LCC are: metacognition, cognitive styles, cognitive skills, reasoning, and information processing. Those processes can affect subsequent "behaviors" – mental performance, problem solving, and decision making. In its turn, the efficiency of "behaviors" to a great extent depends on "cognitive structures" – self-schemata and goal orientation. However, the results of these operations may vary, since people differ in their cognitive development and the capability to manipulate mental processes utilizing cognitive styles and applying congruent thinking skills [5, p. 297]. Such cognitive abilities are likely to get exposed in the course of learning a FL, and acquiring LCC respectively.

In order to acquire a high level of LCC students are supposed to go through a definite procedure. Commonly, this procedure encompasses three coherent stages [4, p. 203]: 1) pre-listening: listening with a purpose, brain storming, and preparing for further activities; 2) in-while listening: the actual process of listening; 3) post-listening: checking the understanding of the received information and preparing for speaking. Before describing the specificity of each stage it is pertinent to emphasize that the instructor should first assess the level of students' auditory skills and then provide them with appropriate assignments. To measure these skills after listening to the text the suggested tasks might be congruous: *Name the key points you remember from the text. Summarize the main ideas of the heard information. Formulate the thesis of the received message. Brief the gist of the information you have heard.*

Now it would be logical to go on to specify in a cursory way the stages of acquiring LCC. The first – ***pre-listening*** – stage implies equipping students with preliminary instructions as to the text perception, identifying the subject matter of the text, overcoming difficulties that students may encounter while receiving the incoming information (e.g. *checking the understanding of sentences containing polysemantic words, idioms, and tricky phrases; explaining unknown grammatical structures; listening to and translating the isolated fragments of the text*, etc.). The importance of the introductory pre-listening instructions cannot be overestimated since they are aimed at providing students with a motivational and organizational set for a certain activity. C. Paulston (2004) maintains that motivation before listening is of primary significance [6, p. 67]. Among others, the

instructions that motivate students may include complete or partial understanding of the received information, listening to and memorizing certain chunks of the text, inferring the meanings of the words and phrases from the context, et alt. The most typical assignments for the pre-listening stage may encompass: *introducing new vocabulary with its further explanation and illustrative exemplification; practicing unknown or complicated grammatical structures employed in the text; the thematic and structural grouping of the lexical stuff contained in the text (root-words, derivatives, compounds, etc.); elucidating the content of the text by the title, key words or pictures.*

Before listening to the text students are to be informed about the ways their answers will be checked and assessed. These ways may incorporate: multiple choice and cloze-tests, making up the plan of the text, outlining each paragraph of the text, providing key words to the text, etc. In either case, the variety of pre-listening assignments and tasks to monitor the understanding of the received message is rather ample. Consequently, their choice depends to a great extent on the purpose of listening.

The next – ***in-while listening*** – stage is the actual process of listening to the alien audio message. Here either the whole text or separate blocks of it are listened to. The number of deliveries may vary, but in order to maintain students' interest in the message, it deems pertinent to implement diversified exercises. The assignments to them may comprise: *listening to the text and completing the sentences; listening to the text and singling out word combinations used in it; listening to the audio and providing equivalents for some words or phrases; entitling the heard parts of the text; reconstructing the text with the help of key words or phrases; paraphrasing the received information; following the given instructions (e.g. to add the details; to pinpoint the direction on the map; to complete the chart or scheme; to specify the key points in the text); completing/reproducing/amplifying the statements.*

According to K. McCaughey (2015), a special emphasis should be placed on active listening, which definitely will increase the effectiveness of aural comprehension. This type of listening may encompass: *correlating ideas, events, people, and places; paying attention to the equivocal and ambiguous words, and vague ideas; making anticipations and confirming or dismissing them; listening "between the lines" and making conclusions concerning the implied information; elucidating the input; forming personal judgments as to the received message etc* [2, p. 10].

Similarly, T. Lynch (2004) postulates the idea of developing students' note-taking skills during the listening process. Naturally, note-taking strategies are not universal since they depend on the individual psycho-physiologic features of learners. Still, three key rules of note-taking can be singled out: a) to select the core information; b) to make short notes using the common acronyms, abbreviations and symbols; c) to define the relations between the events, their main actors and objects [7, p. 90].

The final – ***post-listening*** – stage is aimed at examining the adequate understanding of the text. The exercises to check the comprehension of the received information may incorporate three groups of assignments according to the level of their specification. These assignments are oriented at: 1) evaluating the depth of comprehension of the audio message; 2) the creative processing of the text; 3) employing the perceived input in various kinds of communicative activities. In its turn, the exercises designed for monitoring students' understanding of the audio text may comprise such tasks as: *to accomplish true/false assignments; to complete a multiple-choice test; to do an alternative test (Yes/No); to answer the questions; to divide the text into the semantic parts; to reproduce the heard text in brief; to provide one's own opinion as for the problem raised in the text; to continue, expand or amplify the text.*

After the work with the audio text it is advisable to switch to other activities like speaking, reading and writing. It seems equally essential that the monitoring of text comprehension should enclasp every student of the group. It may start from simple forms and gradually proceed to more complicated ones which require personal judgments, for instance: *Characterize…; Explain why…; Account for…; Suggest your rationale as for…; Speak PRO and CONTRA… .*

Pursuant to J. Wilson (2008), no language skill should be taught in isolation. That is why LC activities have to be related to the material being studied as oral practice or reading; it can also give an impetus for writing activities [8, p. 148]. Hence, the devised system of listening comprehension (LC) exercises is to provide: the correspondence between psychological and linguistic difficulties of LC; the possibility to combine listening with other kinds of activities (specifically, with speaking); managing and monitoring the levels of developing students' auditory skills; the successful fulfillment of the practical goal. Anyway, before a teacher can elaborate a sequence of activities which will train students in LC, he must penetrate into the nature of the developed skills. Listening to an alien message may be viewed as involving two levels of activity, both of which must be taught gradually and sequentially [9, p. 142]. These levels require some specification.

The first – *recognition* – level, involves identifying: words and phrases in their structural interrelationships; time sequences; logical and modifying terms; redundant phrases. Subsequently, it is only after the recognition of these general features has become automatic that students can be expected to reproduce or respond to what they have heard in a long sequence [10, p. 143].

At the second – *selection* – level, the listener is drawing out from communication the elements which seem to express the purposes of the speaker or those which suit his own goals. To be able to eventually listen with ease to a FL in natural situations, the student needs thorough training at the recognition level and much practice in selecting from a stream of sounds specific details of the message [10, p. 144]. It will be plausible to presume that such practice may involve completing specially designed exercises.

Results. With this in mind, it deems appropriate to suggest ***the system of LC oriented exercises*** that may be employed at both of the above mentioned levels. In this system two subsystems can be singularized. ***The first subsystem*** encompasses preparatory exercises for receiving and identifying sound and word combinations, intonation patterns of phrases, grammatical structures, etc. These exercises are triple targeted, since they are meant to shape phonetic, lexical and grammatical LC habits. The preparatory subsystem enclasps non-communicative and semi-communicative exercises, among them the following are to be distinguished, clarified and instantiated [4, p. 208–212]:

1. Exercises aimed at differentiating the sound or word forms. Commonly, such tasks train students in careful listening to the text. Of great use here are the words which have a similar pronunciation, e.g.: *week – weak; meet – meat; hear – here; hair – hare; prey – pray; road – rode; plain – plane; pail – pale; herd – heard; no – know; write – right;* or where the pronunciation differs only in one sound e.g.: *write – ride; code – coat; now – no; wrote – road; leather – lather; hare – hear; coach – couch*; *must – mast*; *rid – read*; *Tim – team; glass – grass; bird – beard*. The assignments to the exercises may be as follows: *Listen to the pairs of words. When you hear the slightest difference in their pronunciation, raise up your hand.*

2. Exercises focused on differentiating the meaning of a phrase/sentence in accordance with the logical stress. The teacher reads aloud the same phrase several times, each time with a different logical stress; the students have to continue the phrase, adding a relevant element. Exercises of this kind train students to foresee the speech flow employing the prosodic means, for instance:

– *Teacher: He didn't lose his new `**hat**. Students: He lost his gloves.*
– *Teacher: He didn't lose his `**new** hat. Students: He lost his old hat.*
– *Teacher: He didn't `**lose** his new hat. Students: He gave it to his father.*
– *Teacher: He didn't lose `**his** new hat. Students: He lost his father's new hat.*

3. Exercises oriented at discriminating the communicative types of sentences: *Listen to the sentences and raise your hand when you hear an interrogative / imperative / negative sentence. Listen to the sentences and say how many interrogative, imperative and negative sentences you have heard.*

4. Exercises for differentiating paronyms. In such exercises paronymous pairs of words are to be selected, e.g.: *economical – economic; historical – historic; sensitive – sensible; envious – enviable; credible – credulous; judicial – judicious; genial – genius*. The tasks can be of the

following type: *Listen to the sentences and fill in the gaps in them with the appropriate words in the box. Listen to the words and differentiate between homonyms and paronyms.*

5. Exercises for determine the meanings of the derived and complex words. The assignments to these exercises may incorporate the following: *Guess the positive or negative differences in meanings of the words by their morphological elements. Translate the given words. Fill in the empty spaces in the sentences using the most appropriate words: 1) understand – misunderstand – understandable; mistake – mistaken – unmistaken; satisfaction – satisfactory – unsatisfactory; comprehend – comprehension – comprehensible – incomprehensible – incomprehensibility; sympathy – sympathetic – sympathetically – unsympathetic; 2) Disneyland; daydream; babysitter; honeymoon; cowboy; spaceship; eye-brow; handicraft; tradesman; mother-of-pearl; pickpocket; mind-reader; spoon-feed; second-guess.*

6. Exercises for elucidating the meanings of the unfamiliar lexical units. The possible tasks to be used here may be as follows: *listen to the homonyms in the sentences and infer their meaning; listen to the synonyms in the sentences and elicit their meaning; listen to the sentences with polysemantic words and define the shades of their meanings; listen to the sentences and indentify those which differ only in one word in the same position.*

7. Exercises for understanding the phrases with the unknown polysemantic lexical units: *Listen to the sentences and translate them paying attention to the difference in the meanings of the word "break": Break in the weather surprised everyone. We didn't know we were breaking the law. I hate to break my promise. Mary broke into laughter. The FBI broke his alibi. She was once best friend to Mary, but broke with her last year. This winter broke the record for snowfall.*

8. Exercises for comprehending the phrases with the multifunctional grammatical structures: *Listen to the sentences and differentiate in which cases the verbs "would" and "have" are notional, modal or auxiliary: The boy promised he would come on time. I would not come if I were you. Peter asked his friend about his plans for the future but he wouldn't answer. 'You have to have an idea of what you are going to do, but it should be a vague idea' (Pablo Picasso). He had his watch repaired. Usually we have tea at 5 p.m.*

9. Exercises for identifying the communicative nucleus of a sentence: *Listen to the sentences and identify the subject and the predicate in them: We expected Peter to come over for dinner tonight. Everybody enjoyed Baryshnikov's dancing. Have you ever been to the USA? But I am sure your father will believe that you were at school. We are having a party tomorrow night. She was giddy with a mixture of excitement and fear. Then we'll call you up for the recitation. Why didn't I escape when I could?*

10. Exercises for identifying the parts of a sentence: *Listen to the sentences and identify the border between the principal and subordinate clauses: After dripping mustard all over his chest, Charles who was wearing a red shirt wished that he had instead chosen ketchup for his hotdog. Mr. Brown looked as if he had not slept for many nights. The company did pay Mark's travel expenses, although he turned down the job. Because her teeth were chattering in fear Lynda clenched her jaw muscle while waiting for her turn to audition.*

11. Exercises for denoting the meanings of the elements in a syntagma: *to ……. the piano (play); to ……… some guests (expect); to …… for a bus (wait); to …… the morning reading a newspaper (spend); to ……… at one's watch (glance); to ……… into the real world (go out); to ………. one's money on trifles (waste).*

12. Exercises for developing speech mechanisms of LC. These may comprise several groups:

A. <u>To elaborate on auditory hearing</u>: *listen to the sentences, pronounced fluently and define whether they correspond to those written on the cards; listen to the sentences and mark those which do not correspond to the contents of the text; listen to the sentences, pronounced fluently, put them down into your notebooks, then listen to the same sentences, pronounced slowly, and check up whether you have written them correctly; listen to several coherent sentences: in the list of words tick off those which you will hear in the word combinations of these sentences; listen to the group of*

sentences and mark personal names you will hear; listen to the sentences and imitate the actions mentioned in them.

B. To exercise aural memory and attention: *listen to the dates and telephone numbers, and reproduce them from memory; listen to the words and word combinations, and reproduce them in their original order; listen to the broken parts of a sentence, connect them to make a coherent whole, and reproduce this sentence; listen to two phrases and identify what is missing/new in the second phrase; listen to the announcement and fill in the gaps in the script of it; listen to a set of words and name those, which are related to the given topic; compare the sentences written on the card to those pronounced by the speaker, and identify lexical and grammatical differences in them.*

C. To develop the ability of anticipation: *listen to the beginnings of the words and finish them; match the attributes with the given nouns; make up possible word combinations using given nouns and adjectives, verbs and adverbs; listen to the words from the text you are going to hear and try to elicit its title/theme; listen to the beginnings of the word combinations and finish them; listen to the riddle and try to solve it; listen to the description of a person and define his/her occupation; listen to the title and infer what the text is about; listen to the beginning of the story and elicit what it is about; listen to the phrases and suggest the situations they might be employed.*

D. To cultivate the ability to perform the information analysis: *listen to the sentence and identify the key words in it; listen to the phrases and define how they are related to each other; listen to the passage and identify the key sentence in it; listen to the passage and define whether it was the beginning or the end of the text.*

It should be emphasized that the information analysis plays a significant role in developing LCC, since students are able to anticipate the speaker's line of thought. Consequently, it is expedient to acquaint them with the most frequently employed phrases in a targeted FL. Similarly essential is the ability to differentiate between literal and indirect meanings of the message, hence, exercises of such kind should be included in the devised system as well [11, p. 167; 12].

The second subsystem of exercises encompasses solely communicative assignments, which [4, p. 213]: 1) provide listening practice based on integrated overcoming auditory difficulties; 2) imply the comprehension of the input in conditions that are similar to those of natural communication; 3) are aimed at perfecting sense perception and achieving a definite level of comprehension of the received message. The second subsystem ensures developing listening skills. It embodies semi-communicative and communicative receptive exercises. Semi-communicative exercises suggest listening to the messages like directions, weather forecasts, advertisements, questions, airport information, commercials, sport news fragments, current news, etc. on the super-phrasal level, whereas communicative exercises function on the text level. In its turn, communicative exercises facilitate students' abilities to foresee the content of the message, specify the core information, find the secondary details, establish cause-consequence relations, focus on characters, their actions and specific features, follow the logical sequence of the events, and stick to it when reproducing the text. Another essential point here is the correlation of auditory comprehension with speaking (as they both are the types of aural speech) and LC with reading (for they are two types of receptive activity).

Among the group of communicative exercises the following may be discriminated [4, p. 214]:

1. Exercises for identifying the logical sequence of the events in the message: *listen to the text and dispose the actions of the main character in the logical fashion; listen to the story and report the gist of it in 4–5 sentences; listen to the story and make an outline of it; listen to the story and arrange the points of the given outline in the logical sequence.*

2. Exercises for anticipating the content of the text and boosting students' imagination: *listen to the beginning of the story and think up your continuation of it; listen to the middle of the story and elicit its beginning and continuation, then listen again and check whether your surmises were right; listen to the end of the story and come up with the beginning of it.*

3. Exercises for elucidating the main idea of the text or precise understanding of the text: *listen to the text and locate the notional parts in it; listen to the story and entitle it; listen to the story and say whether the statements are true or false; listen to the story and answer the questions to it; listen to two similar stories and specify what is different in them.*

Conclusion. Summing up, the suggested methodology may be effectively implemented in the process of teaching a FL. This paper though far from being conclusive nonetheless offers several insights into understanding how the process of FL acquisition may be efficaciously conducted with an emphasis on developing LCC. The stages of teaching listening and the correspondent system of exercises provide acquiring both listening and cognitive skills and capacities since they are overlapping. The study has been undertaken to bring to the forefront the cognitive and communicative aspects of forming LCC. However, the apperception of the received material will be incomplete without constructing the relevant model. Consequently, this facet of developing LCC in the course of learning a FL by University students should be thoroughly explored and actualized which outlines perspectives for further research.

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ФОРМУВАННЯ КОМПЕТЕНЦІЇ ОСМИСЛЕННЯ СЛУХАННЯ У СТУДЕНТІВ УНІВЕРСИТЕТІВ

Анотація: *Слухання є найбільш складною мовної активністю. Навчання слухання спрямовано на розвиток слухових здібностей студентів, що передбачає ауральне сприйняття фонетичного коду і мовних даних та співставлення їх із шаблонами, що зберігаються у пам'яті. Аудиторіальна спроможність відіграє важливу роль як у поглибленому вивченні іноземної мови, так і у поглибленні компетенції осмислення слухання студентів (ОСС) – вміння слухати автентичні тексти різних жанрів та типів з різним рівнем розуміння. ОСС охоплює навички звукового сприйняття іноземного дискурсу на основі академічного матеріалу з певним відсотком невідомого словника. Воно формується поступово разом з пізнавальною компетенцією студентів, яка стосується загальних здібностей, виявляється у співвідношенні між діями людини та завданнями з вирішення завдань, які виконуються через особисті досягнення. Розроблена всеосяжна методологія сприяє досягненню мети здобуття високого рівня ОСС. Вона об'єднує три послідовні етапи – попереднє слухання, реальне слухання та пост-слухання –*

спрямоване на досягнення певних цілей. Проходячи спеціальні етапи, студенти набувають послідовних звичок, навичок та здібностей, які складають основу ОСС. Розроблена методологія включає в себе відповідну систему навчально-орієнтованих вправ, що охоплюють декілька підсистем, кожна з яких має на меті виконання певних завдань. Ця методологія пройшла експериментальну перевірку і, отже, вона може бути реалізована у навчальному процесі вищих навчальних закладів.