

Strategies that increase the level of listening comprehension while listening to oral texts

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Abstract

The present paper examines the effectiveness of strategy instructional program elaborated for 120 intermediate students with different previous learning backgrounds attending language center in Saint Petersburg. The objective of the study is to develop program and improve the level of listening comprehension through focusing on potential problems while doing listening tasks. The study either aims at determining and mastering cognitive, metacognitive, social strategies on the part of the students. The authors hypothesize that learners can gain proficiency in using strategies with practice. Strategies can be easily acquired, they facilitate learning, however, number of them are not always transferred to new tasks and used by students as effectively as before when the activity is over. Therefore, systematic strategy instruction component would be important as learners become aware of the learning process and gain the ability to control their own learning through the use of appropriate learning strategies. The authors of the paper have made an attempt to demonstrate that the number of listening comprehension problems reported by the students could be reduced by applying specially designed comprehension activities that assist learners in evaluation of their efforts and assessment of personal achievements. The pilot groups were asked to complete the questionnaires at the beginning and at the end of the course that allowed monitoring the students' progress throughout the course. At the end of the study, the pilot groups participating in the strategy instructional program were found to be more successful in foreign language comprehension.

Key words: listening comprehension, strategic learning, speech activity, selective attention, self evaluation

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Estratégias que aumentam o nível de compreensão auditiva ao ouvir textos orais

Resumo

O presente artigo examina a eficácia do programa instrucional de estratégia elaborado para 120 estudantes de educação básica com diferentes formações prévias de aprendizagem no centro de idiomas em São Petersburgo. O objetivo do estudo é desenvolver programas e melhorar o nível de compreensão auditiva, concentrando-se em possíveis problemas ao executar tarefas de audição. O estudo quer determinar e dominar estratégias cognitivas, metacognitivas e sociais por parte dos alunos. Os autores levantam a hipótese de que os alunos podem obter proficiência no uso de estratégias com a prática. As estratégias podem ser adquiridas com facilidade, facilitam a aprendizagem; no entanto, muitas delas nem sempre são transferidas para novas tarefas e usadas pelos alunos com a mesma eficácia de antes quando a atividade termina. Portanto, o componente sistemático da instrução estratégica seria importante à medida que os alunos se conscientizassem do processo de aprendizagem e adquirissem a capacidade de controlar seu próprio aprendizado através do uso de estratégias de aprendizado apropriadas. Os autores do artigo tentaram demonstrar que o número de problemas de compreensão auditiva relatados pelos alunos poderia ser reduzido através da aplicação de atividades de compreensão especialmente projetadas que auxiliam os alunos na avaliação de seus esforços e na avaliação de realizações pessoais. Foi solicitado aos grupos-piloto que preenchessem os questionários no início e no final do curso, o que permitia monitorar o progresso dos alunos ao longo do curso. No final do estudo, os grupos pilotos participantes do programa de instrução estratégica tiveram maior sucesso na compreensão de línguas estrangeiras. Palavras-chave: compreensão auditiva, aprendizagem estratégica, atividade da fala, atenção seletiva, auto-avaliação

Estrategias que aumentan el nivel de comprensión auditiva al escuchar textos orales

Resumen

Este artículo examina la efectividad del programa de estrategia educativa diseñado para 120 estudiantes de educación básica con diferentes antecedentes de aprendizaje previo en el centro de idiomas en San Petersburgo. El objetivo del estudio es desarrollar programas y mejorar el nivel de comprensión auditiva al enfocarse en problemas potenciales al realizar tareas de escucha. El estudio quiere determinar y dominar las estrategias cognitivas, metacognitivas y sociales de los estudiantes. Los autores plantean la hipótesis de que los estudiantes pueden adquirir competencia en el uso de estrategias con práctica. Las estrategias se pueden adquirir fácilmente, hazlo fácil el aprendizaje; sin embargo, muchos de ellos no siempre se transfieren a nuevas tareas y los estudiantes los usan con tanta eficacia como antes cuando termina la actividad. Por lo tanto, el componente sistemático de la instrucción estratégica sería importante a medida que los estudiantes tomaran conciencia del proceso de aprendizaje y adquirieran la capacidad de controlar su propio aprendizaje mediante el uso de estrategias de aprendizaje apropiadas. Los autores del artículo intentaron demostrar que el número de problemas de discapacidad auditiva informados por los estudiantes podría reducirse aplicando actividades de comprensión especialmente diseñadas que ayuden a los estudiantes a evaluar sus esfuerzos y sus logros personales. Se pidió a los grupos piloto que completaran los cuestionarios al principio y al final del curso, lo que les permitió controlar el progreso de los estudiantes durante todo el curso. Al final del estudio, los grupos piloto que participaron en el programa de instrucción estratégica tuvieron mayor éxito en la comprensión de idiomas extranjeros.

Palabra clave: Comprensión auditiva; Aprendizaje estratégico; Actividad del habla; Atención selectiva; Autoevaluación.

Introduction

Nowadays there is a tendency to determine the main objective of the language learning process by definite speech activities which are targeted at more specific aims. With regard to the English language teaching, strategic learning interprets the learning process as the special range of academic activities that help to master the speech activity. Speech activity consists of the following basic types: speaking, listening, reading and writing with their special characteristics. It is evident that for comprehensive communication in foreign language it is important not only to be able to speak, but also to understand the interlocutor (Rost, 1990). In other words, the person should be able to perceive spoken foreign language speech. The development of this skill at the initial stage of language learning contributes to the development of speaking skills and later covers the speaker's communicative competence in general (Park, 2004). Thus, the process of forming the skills of perception and understanding of foreign speech is the basis for full-fledged communication in foreign language (Polat, 2000). Being a kind of model of the language environment, listening practice allows the involvement of foreign language learners in speech activities.

Much of the listening takes place in conversations, as most interlocutors are engaged in countless conversations on the regular basis. Listening is defined as a complex receptive, thought-imaginary activity related to the perception, understanding and processing of the information contained in the oral speech message (Galskova, 2012). In a typical day people spend a great deal of time listening to environmental sounds, background sounds, informational sounds, and conversational sounds. "We seem to be listening all the time. We do not actually listen for understanding much of the time; we are simply filtering sounds to find what is worth attending to" (Ur, 1996, p.8). Considering conversational patterns the researchers distinguish between contact and distant listening (Graham D. et.al., 2012). Contact or active listening takes place in oral interactive communication, distant occurs in mediated listening (radio and television broadcasts, phonorecords, films). Both distant and contact listening are used in the classes for the development and improvement of listening skills, where students are taught to listen and perceive speech in a foreign language. Active listening is specially identified as an important communication skill during initial interactions (Royce, 2005).

The most of the real life, active listening activities are characterized by the following features: purposeful listening with certain expectations; immediate response to what is heard; visualization the speaker we are listening to; employment of visual or environmental clues; introduction of stretches of heard discourse in short chunks; spontaneous discourse that differs from the formal spoken prose in the amount of redundancy, noise and colloquialism, and in its auditory character. It is indicated that the native listeners normally encounter spoken language in a context situation (Rost, 1990). Listeners encounter the context with a set of stereotypical knowledge that aids in establishing and maintaining positive relationships (Cahn, 1990), which they have been building up from the time they first acquired language as infants in the culture. That means, actors are predisposed to construct expectations on the basis of this stereotypical knowledge (in terms of speaker, listener, place, time, genre, topic and co-text).



The notion of listening is often paralleled to reading that provides texts to the readers to interact with. In turn, spoken texts contain features such as variations in pronunciation of the same phonemes by the same speaker in different linguistic context along with the dialects variations between speakers, irregular pauses, false starts, hesitations, self-revisions and backtracking. Nunan (1989) shared the view that “Listeners have access to the composer’s on line planning and editing processes and must make sense of the appearance of planning and editing signals in the discourse”(Nunan, 1989,p.14). Listeners strategies for making sense of speech include techniques of recognizing unit boundaries, pause boundaries, rhythmic grouping, intonation rises and falls. The auditory recognition skills are different from the visual recognition skills needed for reading. Rost (1990) spotted that “trained readers of English are attuned to left to right visual orientations and word divisions as well as to sentence and paragraph punctuation...” (Rost, 1990,p. 10). Harner (2008) pointed out that, in both reading and listening, processing has to take place sequentially, i.e. people sample one word at a time. Nevertheless, in order to comprehend the message successfully, they have to analyze whole segments of the input, such as phrases, sentences, and paragraphs. Cole and Jakimik (1980) found that word mispronunciations are spotted more quickly in continuous speech when they occur in contextually appropriate words.

Listening skills are as important as speaking skills, the success of the face to face communication is determined when two types of skill are developed in tandem (Brown and Yale, 1989). What is more, listening is a reciprocal skill, it means that listening cannot be practiced in the same way as speaking is rehearsed, because in majority of cases the patterns that we will have to listen to are enormous challenge. In addition, listening is not something that is mastered once and for always. In this way listening skills may continue to develop over a much longer period (Richards, Jack, 2008). Even for native listeners, explicit practice to improve listening skills would be advisable and beneficial. The need for integrating listening and speaking practice is discussed in detail by Bygate (1987). The author points that learners need to be given opportunities to practice both sets of skills and to integrate them in conversation (Bygate, 1987).

Second language acquisition research puts forward the important role of spoken input understanding and the function of listener initiated interaction in language development. Approaches to the research fall into several categories of orientation of researches; sociolinguistic orientation, psycholinguistic orientation, neurological orientation and classroom orientation. The significance of the research centers around the problem areas like cognitive, linguistic, cross-linguistic Ellis (1989), Kellerman and Sharwood-Smith (1986), Chaudron (1988), van Lier (1988), Larsen-Freeman and Long (1990).

The accurate definition of listening comprehension is predetermined by the answer to the questions concerning the component skills in listening and the procedure of activation of the perceptual system of the brain. The cognition process is divided into the following stages: discriminating between sounds; recognizing words; identifying grammatical groupings of words; identifying pragmatic units – expressing and sets of utterances which function as whole units to create meaning; connecting linguistic cues to paralinguistic cues and to non linguistic cues in order to construct meaning; using background knowledge and context to predict and then confirm meaning; recalling impor-



tant words and ideas (Rost,1990). Accordingly, successful listening involves an integration of those component skills. In this sense, listening is coordination of the component skills, not the individual skills themselves. Rost (1990) emphasized “This integrating of these perception skills, analysis skills, and synthesis skills is what we will call a person’s listening ability.” (Rost ,1990, p.10)

Consideration of the question of language perception mechanisms led to a claim that learners segmented the stream of speech into its consistent sounds, linked these together to form words, chained the words together to form clusters and so on. This view is known as the bottom up approach to listening (Nunan, 1989), (Rost, 1990), (Brown, 1986).

Brown and Yule (1983), Richards (2008) distinguished between two basic language functions, the transactional function and the interactional function. The transactional function is primarily concerned with the transfer of information, and the getting of goods and services, while the primary purpose of interactional language is to maintain social relationships.

Widdowson (1983) summarized the relationship between two principle sources of information that actors consult in the process of comprehension and refer to as systematic or linguistic knowledge. The term schematic comes from the concept of the schema, associated with the work of the cognitive psychologist (Barnett, 1988). Scheme is defined as a mental structure, consisting of relevant individual knowledge, memory, and experience, which allows us to incorporate what is learnt into what is known. Experimental evidence suggests that listeners may not distinguish between these information sources in any clear or conscious way. Otherwise, it is often difficult to discriminate between what has actually been said and what have been constructed by integrating the spoken words with the personal knowledge and experience. In order to construct an adequate mental model of the intended message, Anderson and Lynch (1987) resorted to the following sources of information: general factual knowledge, local factual knowledge, socio-cultural knowledge, knowledge of context.

In order to listen successfully it is required to construct personal coherent interpretation of any spoken message. The message needs to be coherent both with what the listeners believe has just been said and with what is already known about the speaker, the context, and the world in general. Moreover, interpretation of the spoken message in the sense that it is the personal perceptual version of what the speaker meant. The mental model refers to the listener’s coherent interpretation, and is the result of the new information combination of what the listeners have just heard with the previous knowledge and experience (Krashen, 2008). The role of the background knowledge is central to the way the language is understood. The term covers a range of types of knowledge, any of which the listeners may need to draw on in order to reach an adequate comprehension of what someone has said.

Thus, listening is a vital mental capacity, one of the principle means by which interlocutors understand and take part in the surrounding world. Listening is a skill that underlies all verbal communication. In order to fully exploit the power of oral language, individuals must be able to speak and to listen. Listening involves both social and cognitive process, that is our relationships with people and the way we structure our internal



knowledge. In order to discuss listening, there is a need to take both of these aspects of listening into account.

The present study is aimed at detailed consideration of the process of listening comprehension along with the strategy instruction approach, in order to determine the potential problems in listening process on behalf of the listeners. The authors of the study have designed and implemented a special strategy instructional program that helps learners become more active in developing listening skills. The authors have explored the process of learning to listen and considered how listening skills are changing, improving and are utilized inside and outside the classroom for. The authors of the paper assume that students' awareness of the strategic learning can assist their language development. The study is either aimed at developing listening ability through focusing on potential problems in listening, at strategies that are helpful for comprehension. This knowledge in its turn may reduce number of problems through specially designed comprehension activities that encourage learners in evaluating their efforts and assessing what they have achieved.

The main hypothesis of the study is that integration of the real life listening strategies into second language listening activities can improve and develop listening comprehension skills. Specially designed activities, adopted to particular students' needs in the context of strategy instructional program, and could firstly compensate for insufficient attention paid by various course book materials to strategy training. Secondly, the program could increase the value of the selected range of activities that fail to reduce number of listening problems.

Discussion

Potential problems in learning to listen to oral texts

The ability to understand the spoken form of the foreign language is not acquired naturally. Brown (1996) claimed that learning to listen in the first language requires considerable cognitive development and constant attention to social and linguistic input over a period of several years. "Learning to listen in a second language seems to be even more difficult. While it may not require more time to develop, second language listening is confounded by number of difficulties." (Brown, 1996,p.16).

There are number of different ways in which the listener can process or fail to process coming speech. The various problems are not experiences by all students, moreover, they are not experienced to the same degree by students with different background knowledge. Thus, it becomes significant to recognize features of the spoken language and to understand how they affect language learners. Anderson and Lynch (1987) noted that second language listening is confronted by number of difficulties and identifies four main difficulties listeners encounter:

1. The listener may not hear adequately what has been said due to competing background noise, unfamiliarity with the speaker's accent.
2. Speech may contain words and phrases that the listener can hear adequately but is unable to understand because of serious problems with the syntax or semantics of the foreign language.

3. There are times when the listener is perfectly able to hear and understand the speaker, but may have switched off consciously or unconsciously.
4. There are those messages which the listener attends to fully and from which he tries to construct a coherent interpretation. The latter situation is an example of maximally cooperative listening, in the sense that the listener is both able and willing to play his part in the reciprocal activity of communication.

Sometimes teachers treat comprehension as a 100 per cent notion. Nevertheless, when interlocutors speak in real life situation they do not realize to what extent they understand thoroughly what is said. If the speakers say a lot, the listeners may fail to understand a great deal of what has been said. Brown (1977) wrote that “What native listeners operate with are partial, reasonable, interpretations of what they are listening to, and it is impossible to require of non native listeners that they do more” (Brown, 1977, p. 15). In other words while performing listening tasks students are often asked to listen carefully for very long to the spoken language, then interpret the passage in order to answer comprehension questions.

Brown Yule (1983: 57) explained “Teachers should not train their students to expect that they ought to be achieving 100 per cent correct comprehension and that they are failing if they fail to achieve 100 per cent correct comprehension. Our common experience must surely be that a speaker exposes some of his intentions in uttering language and achieves understanding by his listeners of only some of those intentions.” Students trained in such expectations constantly experience panic as they practice listening. Consequently they stop attempts to understand as soon as they fail to recognize a word or expression. Language learners are not helped in their panic even if the teacher introduces difficult vocabulary items before listening to the tape. More than that, they are not helped by being required to listen and try to guess the meaning of particular vocabulary items. Likewise, they are not helped by being required to resolve anaphoric reference and to determine which male or female character, previously mentioned, a particular expression, he/she, refers to. In addition, they are not helped by being introduced question types which demand abilities on the students’ part to work out not only what is directly asserted in the passage, but what is implied. Finally, they are not helped by having an opportunity to demonstrate their understanding of the listening passage with the help of multi choice questions by matching chunks of the passage to questions which contain part of the passage.

The aim of listening comprehension exercise should be for the student to arrive successfully at a reasonable interpretation, avoid processing every word, not to try to work out all that is involved in the literal meaning of the utterance, since that is, in principle as impossible task. Nunan (1989: 6) argued that “Learner need skills in segmenting the stream of speech into meaningful words and phrases; the ability to recognize words, phrases and word classes; ways of relating the incoming message to one’s own background knowledge, and identifying the rhetorical and functional intent of an utterance or parts of an aural text; skills in interpreting rhythm, stress and intonation to identify information focus and emotional/attitudinal tone; the ability to extract the gist/essential information from longer aural texts without necessarily understanding every word.”



Many definitions are offered to establish the notion of listening comprehension. Aiming at simplifying listening comprehension tasks Gillian Brown (1990) described the functions of rhythm, intonation and sets very clearly the common patterns of sound simplifications that occur in connected speech. Underwood (1989) showed the importance of the teacher's role in teaching listening, presents analysis of classroom teaching of listening as consisting of three stages: pre listening, while listening, and post listening. Jack C. Richards (1990) looked specifically at the design of instructional material for teaching listening comprehension and provided a framework for development of materials, based on the psychological distinction between top down and bottom down processing. Peck (1988) compared the teaching routines of different language teachers and included a discussion of how they handle listening exercise differently.

Brown and Yule (1983) suggested that there are four clusters of factors which can affect the difficulty of oral language tasks: these relate to the speaker (how many there are, how quickly they speak, what types of accents they have); the listener (the role of the listener – whether a participant or eavesdropper, the level of response required, the individual interest in the subject); the content (grammar, vocabulary, information structure, background knowledge assumed); support (whether there are pictures, diagrams or other visual aids to support text).

Anderson and Lynch (1987) introduced a graded language program with the systematically varied aspects of text which the learners heard and the task they were to perform. Anderson and Lynch (1987) suggested that, while a large number of factors were involved these fall into three principle categories; 1) the type of language; 2) the purpose in listening; 3) the context in which the listening takes place. Still not only the number of involved factors have to be considered but also the relationships between them.

In the series of experiments it was discovered that the difficulty of listening tasks was particularly influenced by the organization of information, the familiarity of the topic, the explicitness and sufficiency of the information, the type of referring expressions used, whether the text described static relationships or dynamic relationship. (Anderson and Lynch, 1987), (Richards, 1983).

Thus, the major barriers to comprehend information that emerge are as the following: not being able to get things repeated; the listener's limited vocabulary; predicting; fatigue; background problems; motive; speed; understanding different accents; using visual and aural environmental clues; coping with redundancy and noise; pronunciation problems; problems with intonation, stress and rhythm patterns; failure to recognize the signals; input; neurological development.

Another mentioned barrier is known as biological (Rubin, 1981). After the age of twelve certain processes are completed the brain's development and this often prevents learners from processing new linguistic sounds fully. Some psychologists have proposed the existence of a critical period for language acquisition which terminates around puberty when specific neuropsychological connections in brain are complete. Whether there is a specific critical age or 'sensitive period', many adult learners do have considerable difficulty learning to listen in a second language. Adult may have superior grammatical and lexical knowledge that is available to them during reading and writing, but may be unable to use this knowledge during speech processing.



If we consider the revealed problems from the point of view of the second language learners, it becomes clear that not every problem discussed could be crucial. Some students pay much attention on pronunciation and intonation, the other on vocabulary enrichment. Sometimes students complain about speed and possibility to get repetition. There are cases when students put much emphasis on possibility to predict or talk about background knowledge. Students are not aware of and do not compile a precise list of problems while learning English, but in many cases it is possible for the teacher to preview some problems through analyzing and evaluating classroom situations when the students are able to listen with success or completely fail in listening. Therefore, the present study sets the goal to determine the most essential problems for a particular group of students and try to reduce at least the most needful ones with the help of the developed strategy instructional program.

Research into learning strategies

Foreign learners even those who have gone through listening comprehension courses still find problems with understanding the spoken form of the foreign language when it is addressed to them. The considered common situation of the foreign learners in the typical listening comprehension lesson reveals that students are asked to listen to a fairly long passages which are presented in course books (with the average length of three or more minutes), the conversations or speeches that are never addressed to them. Students are always in the position of eavesdroppers. As eavesdroppers they have to reconstruct from the language, which they only partially understand, the context of situation in which this language would make sense (Underwood, 1994). They need to be able to determine intentions for speakers, in order to know what the appropriate processing strategy is.

In real life situation when listeners miss disclosure they usually interrupt speakers and demand explanations, clarification, justification or ask for some details of background knowledge. The listeners do not normally expect to remember everything they hear, they focus their attention to segments important of them. Nunan (1989) stated “An important factor in interactive listening is whether or not we are taking part in the interaction. Eavesdropping on a conversation is very different from participation in one. Because of this, it may seem a waste of time to involve learners in classroom tasks in which they are involved in listening to conversations among other people” (Nunan, 1989, p. 26) The listeners’ own personal interest is a powerful determiner of what they abstract from what is said. The strategies listeners adopt are, in part, determined by the purpose of the conversation. Brown and Yule (1983) noted that “The listener will identify a discourse as containing one type of language rather than another, he will recognize the difference between largely interactional language, where what is primarily at issue is people being nice to each other, and primarily transactional language, where what is at issue is the transfer of information. He will recognize the difference between language which is directly addressed to him and intended as instruction, and language which is intended to inform him about what the world is like. He will attribute different purposes in speaking to speakers. He will not suppose that speakers always, or even mostly, speak in order to inform” (Brown and Yule, 1983, p. 70).



Speech can be divided into segments, in each segment the speaker transaction bit of information, which is failed with confirmation checks, clarification requests, comprehension checks. In any segment of collaborative discourse, the speaker and listener can adopt a type of low risk orientation towards the discourse transaction. Brown (1985) distinguished between low risk and high risk strategies defining them as: low risk strategies are those associated with the success principle, in which the listener wants to be assured that the understanding arrived at is as close as possible to a targeted understanding. Brown and Yule (1983) defined high risk strategies, on the other hand, as those which are associated with the parsimony principle in which the listener assumes that new information requires no change or minimal change from current knowledge. It was identified three main strategies for comprehension emerge from the studies as being of prime importance for the L2 listener (Anderson, 1987):

- The ability to recognize the topic of conversation from the native speaker's initial remarks
- The ability to make predictions about likely developments of the topic to which he will have to respond
- The ability to recognize and signal when he has not understood enough of the input to make a prediction or a response. These explicit signals are crucial, as they usually elicit a repetition or reformulation by the native speaker, and so give the listener another chance to make a relevant response

Students can survive very well when listening if they are prepared to make the most of all the helping factors presented in the situation, if they can make situation work on them. Rixon (1981) states "Real life listening not only poses problems for the learner, it also offers safely nets and extra helping factors" (Rixon, 1981,p. 5).

In order to improve performance, the listener need to develop strategies for increasing a repertoire of responses and for addressing non understandings and misunderstandings that occur. Rost (1990)points that "The development of listening strategies will tend to be cyclical: the learner applies an old rule for interpretation and evaluated the outcome or the event in which the rule is applied, revises old rules for interpretation, elaborates old rules for interpretation, or constructs new rules for interpretation in similar situation in the future, or in repairing the current situation." (Rost, 1990,p. 154)

Listening development can take place only if the learners are able to evaluate the quality of response. As long as the listeners can compare current responses to a language event with more favorable responses listening development can occur. Conscious strategies to bring more of a language event into focus are the means by which listeners maximize their performance (McGruddy, 1998). Through strategy use, learners an understand as much as possible and respond as appropriately as possible given current capacity in the L2 (Graham, 2007). The adoption of strategies cannot effect miracles of understanding; the activation of viable strategies will at best take one as far as current knowledge allows (Vogely, 1995).

It has been noted that a learner's problem of understanding in the target language become more easily defined as acquisition progresses (Braidi, 1998). At the beginning



stages of acquisition learners tend to have global problems with the interpretation of utterances, while at later stages, problems tend to be more locally identifiable.

The role of the learning strategies in the language acquisition process was emphasized in cognitive theory, individuals are said to process information, and the thoughts involved in this cognitive activity are referred to as mental processes (Schuler, et.al. 2010). Learning strategies are special ways of processing information that enhance comprehension, learning, or repetition of the information (Rubin, 1975). It was either pointed that competent individuals are effective because of special ways of processing information (Stern, 1999). These strategies are not the preserve of highly capable individuals, but could be learned by others who had not discovered them on their own.

Amderson and Lynch (1987) developed a technique for making listening tasks more interactive. They had done this by changing the roles of the teacher and learners. The students could request the teacher to stop the tape at any point so they could discuss the task. The teacher only provided information on demand from the students. The tasks were designed to increase the processing demands on the learners and to encourage students to interact.

Nunan (1989) presented technique called dictogloss which encouraged learners to utilize both bottom up and top down listening strategies. There were four stages in the dictogloss approach: preparation, dictation, reconstruction, analysis and correction. The dictogloss technique provided a useful bridge between bottom up and top down listening. Weinstein (1986) stated “The method requires learners in the classroom to interact with each other in small groups so as to reconstruct the text as a co operative endeavor. Learners working in self study are required to bring their own grammatical resources into play with the notes taken during the dictation so as to create a text. Both in the classroom and in self study, learners are actively engaged in the learning process. It is believed that through this active learning involvement student come to confront their own strengths and weaknesses in English language use” (Weinstein, 1986, p.316).

The role of learning strategies in the acquisition

The role of learning strategies in the acquisition of information generally can be understood by making reference to the information processing framework for learning. The purposes of this framework is to explain how information is stored in the memory and particularly how new information is acquired.

Weinstein and Mayer (1986) suggested that in cognitive psychology paradigm, new information is acquired through a four stage encoding process involving selection, acquisition, construction, and integration. Through selection, learners focused on specific information of interest in the environment and transfer that information into working memory. In acquisition learners actively transfer information from working memory into long term memory for permanent storage (Krashen, 1983). At the construction stage learners actively build internal connections between ideas contained in a working memory. At the integration process the learner actively searches for prior knowledge in long term memory and transfers this knowledge to working memory.



Learning strategies have learning facilitation as a goal and are intentional on the part of the learner. The goal of strategy use is to affect the learner's motivation or affect state, or the way in which the learner selects, acquires, organizes, or integrates new knowledge. This broad description of learning strategies may include any of the following: focusing on selected aspects of new information, analyzing and monitoring information during the acquisition, organizing or elaborating on new information during the encoding process, evaluating the learning when it is completed, or assuring oneself that the learning will be successful as a way to allay anxiety. Tarone (1981) notes that learning strategies are attempts to develop linguistic and sociolinguistic competence in the target language. The motivation for use of the strategy is the desire to learn the target language rather than the desire to communicate.

Strategies may have an effective or conceptual basis, and may influence the learning of simple tasks, such as learning vocabulary or items in a list, or complex tasks, such as language comprehension or language production. The distinction among learning, communication and production strategies are particularly important in second language acquisition. Production strategies are used to accomplish goals; they reflect an interest in using the language system efficiently and clearly without excessive effort. Communication strategies are an adaptation to the failure to realize a language production goal. They therefore serve an important role in negotiating meaning where either linguistic structures or sociolinguistic rules are not shared between a second language learner and a speaker of the target language. Communication strategies might entail approximations, mime, circumlocution, or message abandonment.

Nunan (1991) approved "Learning strategies are the mental processes which learners employ to learn and use the target language." (Nunan, 1991, p. 18). A major problem for learning strategy theorist has been the development of coherent taxonomy of learning strategy types (Mendelsohn D, 1994). Most researchers have developed their own lists of strategies. For example, Ellis (1985) suggested that strategies can be categorized under three broad process types: hypotheses formation, hypothesis testing, and automatization. Hypothesis formation includes such strategies as simplification and inferencing, and refers to strategies whereby learners come to a conclusion about the structure of the target language. Hypothesis testing refers to strategies such as trying out rules when communicating with a native speaker and monitoring the speaker's reaction to evaluate whether or not the rules seems to work. Automatization includes strategies for participating the language. It is crucial to draw a primary distinction between strategies for managing the learning process and strategies for managing information (Wilson, 2008). Managing the learning process involves such things as developing an understanding of one's own language learning preferences, managing communicative situation for learning purposes, participating, monitoring and evaluating. Managing information includes strategies such as attending selectively, associating, categorizing, pattern learning and inferencing.

David Nunan (1989) presented language skills and strategies and their application to the classroom processes. He suggested that in terms of language processing learners needed access to top down as well as bottom up processing strategies (Nunan, 1989).



Classification of listener strategies

Research efforts concentrating on the good language learner had identified strategies reported by students or observed in language learning situation that appear to contribute to learning. Rubin's (1981) first primary category, consisting of strategies that directly affect learning, includes clarification/verification, monitoring, memorization, guessing/inductive reasoning, deductive reasoning, and practice. The second primary category, consisting of strategies that contribute indirectly to learning, includes creating practice opportunities and using production tricks such as communication strategies.

An alternative classification scheme proposed by Naiman et. al. (1978), contains five broad categories of learning strategies and number of secondary categories. The primary strategies were found to be common to all good language learners, whereas the secondary strategies were represented only in some of the good realization of language as a system, realization of language as a means of communication and interaction, management of affective demands, and monitoring of second language performance (Carrier, 2003).

The Rubin's (1981) and Naiman's et. al. 1978 classification schemes are substantially different, and do not have any grounding in theories of second language acquisition or cognition. It is difficult to winnow out from the extensive listing of strategies and techniques which ones are fundamental for learning, which ones might be most useful to other learners, and which should be combined with others to maximize learning effectiveness.

The cognitive theories gave a descriptive view of language comprehension which indicated that comprehension of both oral and written texts is an active, constructive process that progresses from attentional and encoding processes through utilization of the meaning interpreted. Language production was seen as involving selection and organizational processes required to express meaning. Learning strategies were also viewed in cognitive theory as complex cognitive skills.

In cognitive psychology, studies of learning strategies with first language learners are concentrated on determining the effects of strategy training on different kinds of tasks and learners (Anderson, 2002). Findings from these studies generally (Berne, 2004), (Brown et al, 1983), (Carrier, 2003), (Goh, 1997), (Chamot, 2005) indicated that strategy training is effective in improving the performance of students on a wide range of comprehension tasks.

Therefore, systematic strategy instruction component would be important as learners become aware of the learning process and gain the ability to control their own learning through the use of appropriate learning strategies.

Data Methodology

The objective of the study was to identify the range and variety of strategies used by the pilot foreign language students groups for the different listening activities they encounter in language study. For program implementation it was needy to identify the range of learning strategies, to determine if the strategies could be defined and organized within existing strategy classification frameworks, to identify potential problems students encounter while doing listening exercises and whether strategy instruction would



decrease number of problems or not. Adhering to the purposes of the research the authors of the study established integrated instruction in learning strategies with short explanations when necessary on how to use strategies effectively.

In order to check the effectiveness of the strategy instructional program a study has been carried out on the pilot groups of intermediate students with different previous learning backgrounds. Participants included 120 students from the language course at Language centre of Saint Petersburg. Males represented 28.2% of the sample, and females represented 71.8%. The sample ranged in age from 18 to 35 with a mean of 18.01 and a standard deviation of 4.25. Learners were provided with explicit instructions in elaboration, selective attention, note taking, cooperation and self evaluation strategies plus some additional strategies in order to improve their listening comprehension. The program included training on vocabulary enrichment as well. That it was important to add motivational training component as a component of metacognition. It plays a self-regulatory role in learning, to assist students successfully through the classroom procedures.

The authors of the present research employed coursebook materials adapted to learners needs and supplemental listening materials to demonstrate the work of strategies with further incorporation into ordinary classroom setting. Strategy presentation and practice help learners to reach the level when they no longer feel lost without teacher's assistance. Practicing strategies on authentic academic and learning tasks facilitates the transfer of strategies to similar tasks encountered in other classes.

Procedure

Students were asked to work individually while filling out two questionnaires. The questionnaires were completed twice: at the beginning of the course and at the end of the course. The first questionnaire tested existing problems encountered by students while doing listening tasks. The second questionnaire revealed what frequent type of strategies students applied while listening.

With the latter questionnaire we managed to distinguish what strategies from students' point of view could be more effective and useful for listening, and what strategies they would like to be taught in training further. Then, after the collection and processing the data received from the questionnaires, the special strategy training was conducted with the help of the activities adjusted to the concrete group of students. Level of the group, number of students, age, effective ineffective language learners styles, the length of the course and the required results were taken into account while designing training activities.

Research in metacognitive and cognitive learning strategies Brown et al. (1983) suggested that transfer of strategy training to new tasks can be maximized by pairing metacognitive strategies with appropriate cognitive strategies. Chamot and O'Malley 1987 8 agreed that "Students without metacognitive approaches are essentially learners without direction or opportunity to plan their learning, monitor their progress, or review their accomplishments and future learning directions." Chamot and O'Malley, 2002, p. 18). Therefore, strategies were not presented in isolation but in combinations and clusters

that seemed appropriate for the types of tasks students were asked to perform. The principal strategies taught for listening comprehension were: **Metacognitive, Cognitive, Social and affective strategies**

Metacognitive SELECTIVE ATTENTION

This term refers to the set of while – listening activities. While performing the task students were told to focus on specific items, such as nouns; explanation or clarification of unknown words; important words that carry meanings; intonational contours and stressed words; language function of the word or phrase.

Metacognitive (SELF-EVALUATION)

As sense of progress is important in learning process, students were asked to assess how well they were able to perform the task. Sense of achievement increases the level of assurance, that in its turn counteract the feeling of repeated inappropriateness of learning (Flavell, 1979). This has been achieved due to follow up activities. Students tried to assess their performance through using various check lists, group work and class discussions.

Social and affective strategies (COOPERATION) implies that students work in groups or pairs to solve a problem, pool information, check learning tasks. Students were taught to appreciate the possibility of receiving support in their efforts from their classmates and teachers.

Cognitive strategies

- **Cognitive strategies (NOTE TAKING)** means that primarily while listening student use the skill to recognize and write down key words that assist performance of a language task.
- **Cognitive strategies (ELABORATION)** entails the use of academic or world knowledge to make meaningful association of new information with prior knowledge. If acquired successfully students would be able to construct meaning by making connections between the listening passage and individual schemata knowledge framework. Knowing how and when to access prior knowledge is a characteristic of effective learners. Jones et al. (2006) pointed that prior knowledge is stored in memory in the form of knowledge framework or schemata, and new information is understood and stored by calling up the appropriate schema and integrating the new information with it.

Strategies were not identified by name but demonstrated to students often by thinking aloud about the goals and mental processes involved. Before playing each tape segment students were reminded of what and how to listen to. For example, students were reminded to listen for specific items, such as nouns, stressed syllables, intonation patterns, pronunciation of final /ed/, listen in order to fill in the gaps or to answer to the comprehension questions, and to tune out irrelevant background noise.



In case the focus was on special vocabulary items, after playing a passage, students were asked to identify new words, recall what they already knew, using the skills to make guesses about new items.

Procedures for planning the scope and sequence of strategy training activities have been suggested by a number of researchers. The present paper utilizes the sequence that was developed by O'Malley and Chamot (1988) as part of ESL program. The specific sequence recommended for strategy instruction begins with assessing current student strategy use, explaining the new strategy, modeling the strategy, and finally providing scaffolding, or support for students when they first try out the new strategies. Three recursive phrases were identified for instruction: preparation, presentation, and application/integration. The teacher first identified and showed students how to assess their current strategies, explained the application for using additional learning strategies, provided opportunities and material for practice and evaluates or assist students to evaluate their degree of success. In the preparation phase the teacher activated students' prior knowledge of the topic through questioning, evaluating the relevance of the prior knowledge, and refining that knowledge (Dolianac, 1994). The main objective was to prepare the learners motivationally and linguistically for the further work of the lesson In the presentation phase students interact with the new information presented by the teacher. The application and integration phase served the dual purposes of evaluating and consolidating the learning task. It encouraged the learners to put together the language and knowledge they gained in attempting a piece of authentic communication.

Described sequence was repeated at a reasonable pace slow or even rapid in dependence on the type of the activities, with encouragement and certain amount of enthusiasm.

Preparation: Develop students awareness of different strategies through:

- Small group retrospective interview about tasks
- Modeling think aloud Having students think aloud in small groups
- Discussion of interviews and think-alouds

Presentation: develop student knowledge about strategies by:

- Providing rationale for strategy use
- Describing and naming strategy, telling how to use it
- Modeling strategy demonstrating it

Practice: develop student skills in using strategies for academic learning through:

- Cooperative learning task
- Think-alouds while problem solving
- Peer tutoring in academic tasks
- Group discussion
- Individual work

Evaluation develop student ability to evaluate own strategy use thorough

- Writing strategies used immediately after task



- Discussing strategy use in class
- Keeping dialogue journals on strategy use

Expansion develop transfer of strategies to new tasks by:

- Discussions on metacognitive and motivational aspects of strategy use
- Additional practice on similar academic asks
- Assignments to use learning strategies on tasks related to cultural background of students

In addition to the major strategies students were encouraged to use a number of other strategies that supported the main when used in combination with them. Students were reminded to self monitor comprehension, to self monitor their production for errors, to ask for repetition, to use substitution (finding a different way of saying something), to ask questions for clarification when they did not understand, to make mental images to assist comprehension.

Self-monitoring was used in a variety of ways, incomprehension. Students monitored visually presented information as well as monitored auditorially. Questioning for clarification occurred when students inquired about task, they asked the teacher or the partners or state addressed questions to themselves as they worked through a language activity. With each new activity, students were reminded of the strategies and explained how they could be applied to the new task. Additional practice sessions included vocabulary games using the strategies of substitution and cooperation. Vocabulary sessions involved strategies including paraphrase, metaphor, and the use of vocabulary to vary the degree of precision. Students used words more carefully, chose a metaphor or a paraphrase a particular aspect of a message, its seriousness or its humor. Working with the vocabulary major emphasis was placed on paired associations methods to assist in vocabulary recall, then they selected their own new words from the listening passage and made associations for them.

Training procedures for paired associate techniques include peg words method, when second language learners use a list of memorized cue words to memorize vocabulary items Desrochers 1980, Pavio and Desrochers 1979, as well as key word method, when students learn sets of words through the combination of an auditory and imagery link Atkinson 1975, Pressley, Levin, and Delaney 1982

Activities

The listening tasks used were the types of academic tasks that students were expected to perform in the classroom. Activities were specially adjusted to the concrete classroom situation, corresponded to the purpose of the study. Learners were exposed to examples of natural authentic English that they could hear in real life situations in which they would have to listen to ungraded English. Listening activities presented and taught vocabulary items, intonation and stress patterns, stimulated discussion and trained learners to understand natural speech. A number of different native and non native accents were



used in the listening passages. This reflects the fact that in real life very few speakers using English speak with standard pronunciation. The choice of the activities depended on the level of the group, the number of students in it, age, type of strategies needed to train, students' learning styles and personality, the number of teaching hours.

Most students in the study needed supplementation, some extra work on particular listening problems. Therefore, supplementary listening was recommended with further small talks based on listening.

The present study employs a model of sequence of instruction steps in a listening phase for training different skills that incorporates useful learning principals (Rost, 2002).

The first stage attempted to help the students focus their attention. It presupposed to think about the content and setting a purpose for participating.

The second stage submitted the task. It implied to provide criteria for successful listening, give instructions on using strategies for understanding, model the listening behavior.

The third stage involved students into the task. It meant to observe students at while listening, take notes of the succeeding attempts as well as of the problematic.

The fourth stage evaluated the tasks through the questioning

- Did everyone succeed at the task?
- Is a second attempt necessary?
- Can you point out how certain skills and strategies helped them to do the task?
- Can the students take note of any new words or ideas for future study?

Provide a follow up

- Use the listening task and evaluation as a lead in to the next classroom or homework activity

Different types of listening were covered by specially selected listening activities: attentive listening, intensive listening, selective listening and interactive listening. Each type of activities stimulated students to develop a range of strategies. Students trained strategies in combination.

Attentive listening

This type of activities gave students practice with listening and with supplying short responses to the speaker, either verbally or non verbally. That involved immediate processing of information and quick decision on how to respond. The activities provided an enormous amount of support to help students to process the information they hear. The support was of three types: linguistic, in the form of cue words and previewed utterances, non- linguistic, in the form of visual aids, photographs, tangible objects and music used in the activity, and interactional, in the form of repetitions, paraphrases and confirmation checks by the speaker. The main strategies practiced with attentive listening were elaboration and self evaluation. The additional strategies were cooperation, inferencing, substitution.

Before hearing a listening passage, students were instructed to selectively attend to listening markers (key words in a listening passage that signal a main idea or a detail)

They were also given directions in how to take notes. After hearing the listening passage and taking notes, students had an opportunity to interact using cooperative learning, where they exchanged information on what they considered to be the main ideas and details of the passage. They were then tested for recall.

Additional purposes of the activities were: develop ability to respond quickly to directives listen to gist, develop visualization and imagination while listening, develop longer attention span for listening, promote ongoing interaction with the speaker, develop quick interactions with a speaker, promote clarification exchange, promote listening for detail, promote group interaction, develop responsiveness to instructions, review fixed expressions, promote fluency in interaction.

Intensive listening

Students needed to develop awareness of language to which they were exposed and identified constituent bits within the whole. This type of listening focused students' attention on language form, lexical items. The aim was to raise the learners' awareness of how differences in sound, structure, and lexical choice can affect meaning. The main strategies taught were: selective attention, elaboration, self evaluation. The additional strategies were: repetition, resourcing, note taking

Additional purposes of the activities were: focus on phonological features, develop attention to stress and intonation, identify vocabulary items, identify grammatical features and discourse links, develop inferencing ability, compare different words and grammatical forms, develop aural discrimination, develop awareness of functions of stress and intonation, develop awareness of tone groups as units for processing spoken language, identify meaning from fast, natural speech when assimilation are used; appreciate that many individual phonemes in English have variant pronunciation.

Selective listening

This type of activities helped to enable students to identify a purpose for listening. Activities helped direct students' attention on key words, discourse sequence cues, or information structures. By learning to attend to words, cues and facts selectively, students come to handle short texts as well as longer and more complex texts (such as authentic video programs). The main strategies taught were: elaboration, note taking, self evaluation. The additional strategies were: inferencing, grouping, self monitoring, selective attention, repetition, substitution.

Additional purpose of the activities were: develop inferencing skill, develop use of background knowledge to fill in missing information, develop ability to identify inconsistency and contradiction in information heard, develop strategy of listening for selected information, develop organization skill, develop recall ability, develop ability to listen for discourse markers, develop aural memory, develop ability to listen for main ideas, develop note taking and review skills, develop skill in making references based on unknown information, develop ability to listen for gist, develop skill of identifying missing information prior to listening.



Interactive listening

This type of listening helped learners assume active roles in shaping and controlling an interaction, even when they were in the listeners' role. As it was important for learners to take an active role as listeners, each activity had a built-in need for information or clarification questions by the listener. In order to work toward the goal of active participation by the listener, the students themselves became the focus of the activities. The main strategies taught were cooperation, questioning for clarification, note taking. The additional strategies were: elaboration, self evaluation.

Additional purposes of the activities were, develop ability to initiate interactions, encourage careful listening to classmates, increase attention span for listening, develop aural memory, encourage students to listen carefully to partners to obtain specific information, encourage students to ask clarification and confirmation questions and respond to questions, develop ability to listen for gist, develop skill of identifying missing information.

Results

Comments on Questionnaire Problems in Listening at the beginning of the course.

The main objective of listening comprehension practice in the classroom is to teach students how to function successfully in real life listening situations. Therefore, the attitudes towards the students' real-life listening perception, including strategies that help to comprehend satisfactory in a variety of situations, situations of distractions that disturb students from comprehending correctly, were actively shared within the groups of students. Most of the students reported to have a good visual memory and ability to remember things best when they could visualize than write. Students noted either the need for special training in listening. Talking about the personality, participants characterized themselves as gregarious, outgoing, confident and keen to work in cooperation and communicate with everyone provided there is supportive atmosphere in the classroom. Answering the questions about the attitudes towards language learning it was highlighted that in real life listening comprehension is still a big problem for most of them, however they are willing to work hard to cope the problem.

- Students stated different purposes in learning English. They highlighted their individual goals and achievement orientation. The majority of students were learning English because they were responding to the needs of their job (49%), some were going to live in English speaking countries (6%), some were willing to visit an English speaking country as tourists (5%), the other were going to take Examination in English (39%). Students were asked to recall everyday situations when they were listening to other people simultaneously perceiving the meaning accurately in order to function in the conversation satisfactory. Students expected to use English: in ordinary conversation, on the telephone, watching television, shopping, radio news, listening to songs, interview, communicating

at the meetings, lessons. Nevertheless, despite the high level of motivation small proportion of students (1%) was not aware of why they were learning language and what for.

- Students as individuals with different needs, styles and interests differed in their cognitive abilities and language learning aptitude. The study identified the majority of students were as quick thinkers (73%) while the other was marked as slow thinkers (27%). As well, they turned to be differing in their learning styles and preferences of processing information: some were predominantly auditory channel learners while the others were visual learners. Students demonstrated strong differences in their personalities and study habits. 45 % of all participants learnt better through different media (textbooks, films, games, physical activities). Only 15% of all students performed differently in different group arrangements (small group activities, alone whole class discussion). 20 % of students learnt through different styles of content (memorizing, discovery, learning by doing). However learning process of the 10 % of learners was dependent on the workshops hours and place. Merely 10 % found questions difficult to answer.

Students were working in small groups and classifying the mentioned activities in order of preference: the following activities were ranged as the most effective and interesting:

- looking at pictures and talking about them
- pre viewing vocabulary
- putting pictures in order
- carrying out actions
- finding new information about the listener
- class discussion
- answering questions

For the most difficult activities that students' choice was set for: following a route, predicting, finding new information about the listener and pre – viewing vocabulary. Unfamiliar activities that students have never done in the classroom were: reading the text and then listen to it, drawing pictures. Less popular were identified as filling gaps, dictation, role play based on listening, writing a response after listening, pronunciation, stress and rhythm activities.

- With respect to repetition 75 % of students noted that they needed to hear things more than once in order to understand. That happened because the possibility of asking for repetition, explanation or requesting attempted to compensate for the understanding gap. Students admitted that used that strategy not often, rarely, sometimes, hardly ever, simply because they were not open to criticism on the part of the teacher or the classmates.
- 40 % of students did not distinguish between formal and informal language, between the language used in different listening situations. Yet, minority of students (5%) expressed concern that they failed to understand every word in the listening passage.



- In real life when people communicate it usually happens in small groups of two or three. For the majority of learners (88%) the number of people participating in a conversation affected their progress in listening comprehension. Communication in a large group such as a whole class was not easy and natural, especially for shy students or anyone anxious about their spoken English. Participants complained it was difficult to concentrate, it was too noisy, students had less opportunity to take a turn, students did not feel that someone need their participation, some students did not consider communication to be one of the listening situations.
- 60 % of students had never thought about the purposes while listening, as they simply listened to the content trying to assess how much they were able to understand.
- Visibility of the speaker was required by 50 % of the students. At the same time the other 50 % of students stayed indifferent. The visibility of the speaker, direct interaction with the listener, the help of eye movements, gestures, mouth movement, support the comprehension of the content. Students indicated the importance of viewing different body movements and especially to hold eye contact because speakers always renew eye contact if they are seeking a response from the listener. In conversation speakers could lean closer to the listener, made physical movements or facial gestures like smiles, nods, frowns, laugh.
- 75 % of the students stated that typescripts were extremely valuable to students for the following reasons: the presence of a tape script encourage them to listen and provides them with the written form of words they may not know, thereby enabling them to lookup the words in a dictionary. A tape script allowed students to make detail comparison between the sounds of English and their written forms.

Students were provided with the instructions on how to use tape scripts. Students were grouped and followed the procedure: read through the tape script before listening, listen to the tape without the tape script and try to understand as much as possible, refer to the tape script again only when absolutely necessary.

- read the tape script through while you listen to the tape for the first time. It allows to build confidence and learn how written English sounds when spoken at normal speed. Look up any words you do not know. After that listen to the tape again without the tape script and try to understand as much as you can.
- listen to the tape first without the tape script and try to understand as much as possible. Then listen again while following the tape script in order to fill in the bits you did not understand first time. Perhaps you did not recognize some words you knew because of the pronunciation and the speed of speaking. If so, listen again to the pronunciation and make a note of it.
- listen to the tape first without looking at the tape script and try to understand as much as possible. Then read the tape script silently without listening in order to fill in bits you did not understand the first time. Finally, listen again without the tape script and try to understand as much as possible, referring to the tape script only when absolutely necessary.

Student's success in listening is depended on recognition of vocabulary items. 67 percent of students felt anxious with each unknown word, moreover reported to be frus-

trated when came across unknown words. The most popular responses were: looking word up in the dictionary and asking the teacher or other students to explain unknown words. Only 10 % of the students tried to guess the meaning, small quantity of students, only 3 %, listened to the passage once again and one third (33%) did not pay attention to unknown words. Vocabulary expansion requires efficient methods of noting down new vocabulary items and ways of learning what they have noted. The following ways of noting information about vocabulary were discussed and tested:

- writing the word with a translation
- writing the word with a mother tongue explanation
- writing the word with an English explanation
- writing the word with example of its use
- writing the word with drawing
- writing the word with grammatical notes

Students attempted to compensate for their vocabulary gap by improvising a substitute. This involved attempting to find a way of conveying their message by guess work, intuition or various kinds of analogy. Different students learn best in different ways, but for most students, systematic vocabulary study is necessary. Techniques of learning new vocabulary were suggested and discussed with students

- 40 % of the students agreed that knowledge of intonation, stress, accent, pronunciation was very important, 40 % thought that it did not influence learning, and 20 % were reported to hope to get some knowledge but not at that moment. Pronunciation was identifies as a difficult skill for students to improve entirely on their own. Word stress was the most critical area of pronunciation in that native speakers rely very heavily on the auditory shape of words, the number and combination of stressed and unstressed syllables for recognition and comprehension. Errors in word stress were more likely to lead to a breakdown in listening comprehension than any other kind of pronunciation error. One of the most difficult areas of word stress was the question of where to place stress in compound words. English intonation can reveal a great deal about the speakers' attitude and behavior. The same sentence can have quite a different meaning depending on the intonation it has.
- The choice of the topic increase motivation and effectiveness of comprehension. Topics students recommend to cover while practice listening were: listening to music, customs and traditions, traveling, fashion, food.
- Students experienced more frequently the second type of listening. (See Appendix) They found that way of listening very problematic because they were not in control of the rate of delivery of the information they were listening to. That way of listening created nervousness and a lack of confidence. Students had to be encouraged to listen for the main ideas without worrying about words which they did not understand. It was important not to play the tape bit by bit, stopping after each line as that could encourage students to believe they were obliged to understand every word. In real life the students will constantly be exposed to language which is more complex than their current level. So, it was important to prepare them for this situation in the classroom. In real life situations the students will be



constantly confronted by language which is more complex than their level, allowing them to cope with ambiguity. Similar situation was simulated in the classroom, for the students to prepare themselves better for language use in real life.

- The main difficulties in listening students complained about were speed, noise, vocabulary problems, fatigue, and uninteresting topics. Students underlined that it was more difficult to listen to dialogues than to monologues and showed the desire to spend more time doing listening in the classroom. 60 percent of students thought that they spend 70 -80% in the classroom listening and 40% thought that they spend 40-50% of the time listening. When the speaker speaks too fast students usually try to be cooperative and ask someone to help, ask for repetition, ask for explanation, and sometimes ask for the typescripts. When there is a certain amount of noise students comprehend less than 60 % but try to ignore sounds and get the main idea in order to respond. When it happened that students could not see the teacher they feel uncomfortable as if something is missing and considered that it was not average situation when listening is done in blind, without someone to look at. In cases when students were listening to people who were speaking with different accents 50 % of them felt confused and perplexed, though 50% accepted it as challenging. As for unknown words 50% of the learners ignored and 50% got lost and frustrated. If students fail to understand the main idea of the passage they feel as if they have failed to do the task and there is no use for further discussion. When the listening passage turned out to be long they got tired and do not listen to it up to the end.
- The 11th question was aimed to find out to what extent students can use mentioned aids, how correctly they can match aids to the appropriate situations, to what extent they are familiar with the mentioned aids. Half of the students can manipulate with different aids without hesitation, bare them in mind while doing listening tasks. However, the other half of the students experienced hesitation in answering question.

Comments on Questionnaire Problems in listening at the end of the course.

At the end of the course the students submitted the following answers while evaluating their problems:

- Absolutely all students managed to identify their individual purposes for learning English. The strategy training study increased the degree of motivation. The learner's motivation was sustained through the possibility to observe how classroom learning was related to the personal objective and helped to achieve the goal with increasing success.
- Close to the end of the course nearly all students knew for sure about their learning styles and could determine interests. 65 % of students were convinced that they learn better through books, films, media, and physical activities. 10 % of participants still performed differently in different group arrangements. 20 % of learners have not changed their learning styles. 5% of participants found it better to study in the morning than in the evening. Students have changed their attitude



toward the degree of interest of activities. The most interesting activities became the following: predicting and previewing vocabulary, role play based on listening, ending stories, carrying out actions, putting pictures in order, filling gaps.

- Students felt more confident in using strategy called asking for repetition. They reported using it almost always, often, and sometimes. They mentioned that criticism could differ to larger extent; this was dependant on the way teacher presented the criticism, and whether the learners expected their performance to be evaluated according to its comprehensible effectiveness.
- 67% of learners stated that focusing their attention on difference between formal and informal language helped them in their performance to produce correct language, to comprehend meaning intelligibly.
- 79% of students considered visibility of the speaker important to understand interlocutors better, but there were learners (21%) who remained indifferent.
- 20% of students thought that tape scripts no longer helped them to understand even when they listened to longer texts. Some of the students (15 %) asked to include more comprehension questions to accompany listening tasks. In students' opinion if they look at the questions before they listen –the questions become a focus for their listening and they can practice the skill of listening for specific information.
- Students distinguished between different types of listening. A quarter of students were still anxious with unknown words but they were confident that they understood what they were required to do in a listening activity. 20% ignored unknown words while listening, 28% of students preferred to listen to the passage once again, and 27% of students tired to guess the meaning. Discussing the different ways of coping with vocabulary problems while listening helped to manipulate language as a tool.
- Strategy training study increased number of students who supported the view that knowledge of intonation, stress, pronunciation influenced learning and approached 73%. 9% of participants were intending to get this skill later, 18% thought it did not influenced learning.
- Students were no longer puzzled or confused while listening to long passages.
- Main problems while listening that still reminded were speed, noise. At the end of the training students assessed their degree of comprehension when there was a certain amount of noise as more than 83 % of the whole content. While comprehending speakers with different accents, 80% of participants found it good opportunity to experience real life listening situation. Dealing with unknown words caused problems among 17% of the participants. While listening to long passages the majority of learners preferred to listen to them divided in chants.
- At the end of the study 100% of students were familiar with aids for listening activities and to some extent manage to manipulate with them successfully or less successfully.



Comments on the questionnaire strategy use

The objective of the questionnaire was to examine the range of learning strategies students used unconsciously and recognized as strategies, to find out which strategies students would like to get special training on. Students of all ability levels were found to use learning strategies. More effective students used learning strategies more often, purposeful and had a wide repertoire of strategies in comparison to less effective students. Students reported strategies like taking notes, asking for clarification and explanation, making associations, focusing on key words as strategies they need special training on. Strategies like getting feedback, planning for listening, pool information students reported as a worthless.

The social/affective strategies – cooperation and asking for clarification were not used by students consistently. It could have been due to the dominant role of the native language while performing tasks or due to the difficulty of the tasks to which they were exposed.

Almost all participants were aware of their strengths and weaknesses as language learners and were ready to talk openly about them to assist strategy training study. Half of the students reported their weaknesses in social interactions as found it difficult to work in groups and did not feel comfortable while asking for repetition and explanation. About 65 % of students found it difficult to evaluate and monitor learning activities; however students used note taking, summarizing effectively, were able to use synonyms and paraphrases as substitutes for language items, and were enthusiastic with performing guess work and using visuals.

The noticeable implications have emerged from the questionnaire. Although students reported using strategies they completely ignore them while doing integrative tasks. Some of the mentioned strategies were used in combination with the other strategies. Thus, mostly there were combination of metacognitive and cognitive strategies or combination of cognitive and social/affective strategies.

Conclusion

Learners may fail to become proficient listeners simply by attending a course in foreign language. The main reason is that learning is strategic. While studying languages in the classroom as well as processing information in real life situations interlocutors unconsciously use a wide repertoire of strategies. For example, they usually ask for explanation or repetition, use dictionaries, use gestures or create patterns that make them feel comfortable with the language. Normally they use a series of strategies rather than a single one when engaged in communication or in a learning activity. Therefore, training strategies in clusters or combinations has appeared to be beneficial.

Students could benefit from strategy instruction only if they are willing to assume some responsibilities for their own learning. The taught strategies could facilitate learning but one disadvantage is that number of strategies could not be transferred to new tasks and used as effectively as it happened before when the activity was over. Students expected the teacher to direct their learning, attempted to avoid being passive observers.



Students performed the task with enthusiasm and interest, but appeared less enthusiastic when engaged in follow up activities.

The success of learning strategy instruction is dependent on a number of factors, including teacher interest, choice of the topic, development of techniques for instructing students in the effective use of learning strategies and the ability to provide a motivational framework that can convince students of the value of learning strategies. Prior foreign language experience, task demands, students' motivation must be taken into account in understanding the use of learning strategies.

Learning strategy instruction would be most valuable for students who are not successful learners. In the case of second language learners, some students indicate that they are not good at language or do not have an ear for language, therefore refused to consider it worth to make an effort to improve their own language learning.

The major difficulty is detected in planning training study for a group of students and adjusting it to students needs. In this respect one to one teaching such as course planned specially for one student the teachers have to tailor strategy instructional program very closely to the students' needs. Within the group work there is a need to prioritizing of the most commonly expressed needs from within the group.

The approach to assess students' performance only by number of strategies used could not be more wrong. Provided that the listeners have absorbed all needed strategies within the language learning, it could be evident that with some of the strategies they are not able to cope, some strategies they ignore, but some they have acquired successfully to be competent listeners. Some students had a tendency to get stuck on some strategies and overused them while the other could not take advantage of the appropriate strategies that affected learning process.

Motivation was the most important characteristic that students brought to a learning task. Experienced and confident students were likely to approach new learning tasks with a higher degree of motivation in comparison to less successful, who were likely to show negative attitude toward their ability to learn.

Characteristics such as motivation aptitude or effectiveness as a learner, age, sex, prior education and cultural background, learning style may play an important role in the receptiveness of students to learning strategy training and their ability to acquire new learning strategies.

The task requirements and the strategies used could be seen to vary depending on the type of the task. Crucial factor in strategy implementation was the task itself. The demands of the task heavily influence the strategy selection process. This was evidenced in activities which encouraged selective attention, note taking and working with partners. The students nominated as effective listeners addressed strategies more successfully than those nominated as less effective listeners suggests. As a result the less successful students definitely required assistance in becoming more strategic learners.

During the training there were significant differences between effective and ineffective listeners on self evaluating, checking comprehension while it was taking place, relating new information to prior knowledge and working in pairs or groups. Listening comprehension entails active and conscious processes in which the listener constructs meaning by using cues from contextual information and from background knowled-



ge. After the study was over students reported using more strategies than did at the beginning of the study. Strategies in the foreign language study appeared as a result of direct instruction by the teacher. For example, students reported using cooperation, elaboration, note taking, self evaluation strategies which were actively encouraged by the teacher. More effective students (under the guardians of the teacher) used learning strategies more often than did less effective students. However the fact that the less effective students were acquainted with some learning strategies has proved that instruction of learning strategies may benefit those students who are not successful in the learning of the second language. At the end of the course while the effective students used nearly the same types and number of strategies the less effective students showed a higher degree of awareness in using of metacognitive (selective attention, self evaluation), cognitive (elaboration, note taking) and social/affective (cooperation, asking for clarification) strategies used for the activities students were more concerned with monitoring the comprehensibility of their production.

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APPENDIX

Questionnaire 1

The most common problems in Listening Comprehension

1 Do you expect to use English:

- In ordinary conversation
- On the phone
- During meetings
- To give/listen to lectures/demonstrations
- Others.....
- Do not know yet

2 Learners differ in their study habits. What type of learner are you? Make your choice from the given list of individual differences

- Students learn through different media (textbooks, games, films, physical activities)
- Students learn through different styles of content/process organization (deductive, inductive, discovery, memorizing, learning by doing)
- Students' learning efficiency varies differentially according to place of study (in-class study, library study, laboratory study, home study)
- Students' learning efficiency varies differentially according to time of study (longer versus shorter study periods, morning versus afternoon, beginning of class period versus end of class period, first term versus last term)
- Students perform differently in different group arrangements (working alone, peer tutoring, small group activities, whole class discussion, project work)
- Other

3 When is it easier for you to do listening activities?

- At the beginning of the lesson.....
- After the break.....
- Close to the end of the lesson.....
- It is all the same for me.....
- Other.....
- Give reason (Why?).....

4 Read through the following listening situations:

- A You listen to something in a relaxed way, not concentrating on every word, but for pleasure
- B You listen with great attention, trying to pick up and remember a series of important instruction and the speaker is using complex and unfamiliar language.
- Which of these two types of listening do you experience more frequently in the classroom?
- Which one is more problematic from your point of view and needs special training?
- A, B, Both

5 How important is it when you do listening activities? Choose 6 the most important items from the list below

- The number of people speaking
- Location of the interlocutors
- Tone of the voice
- The range of vocabulary used
- What the speaker actually say (purpose)



- Ability to observe the use of gestures
- Quality of the recordings
- Visibility of the speaker
- Watch the speakers' mouth as they talk
- Use of the surrounding context
- Speakers reaction to what they hear
- When the speaker ask for repetition
- Using tape scripts

6 Do you agree that listening passages in which there is more than one speaker often cause more difficulties than monologues?

- Agree
- Disagree
- Other

7 In your opinion how much time do you spend in the classroom on listening?

- 100%
- 70 – 80%
- 40 – 50%
- 10- 30%
- Other

8 How do you usually react (ignore, panic, get lost, get frustrated, get tired, try to be cooperative, feel uncomfortable) if:

- The speaker speaks very fast.....
- Students are talking in groups and it is very noisy.....
- You can not see your teacher speaking
- Most of the students in your group are speaking with different accents
- You are tired but the teacher asks you to listen to a recording and do some listening activities
- You are working in pairs and your partner uses too many unknown words you gave not learnt yet.....
- You fail to understand the main idea of the passage.....
- Listening passage is too long

9 Do you agree that knowledge of intonation, stress accent, pronunciation, rhythm will help you in listening?

- Yes, it is very important especially at the beginning of the course
- No it does not influence learning
- Not now, may be a bit later
- I do not know, because I have not thought about it

10 You have an opportunity to listen to native speakers of English. Which topics will you suggest/recommend for discussion?

- A member of your family
- A friend/someone you have met
- Something you like doing
- A place you know
- Your childhood
- Happy/amusing/unhappy/surprising experience
- Something you did that you are proud or ashamed of
- A film/book/article



- Hobby/food/clothes
- Your plans for the future holiday/weekend/eomorrow
- Other.....

11 Which aids in your opinion will be appropriate for the mentioned listening situations (more than one answer is possible)

Situations:

- Station, airport announcement
- Classroom situation
- Giving a tslk
- In the theatre
- Watching a film
- Talking in the street
- During a meeting
- Participating in face-to-face conversation
-

Aids

- Possibility of asking for clarification
- Background knowledge
- Context of the situation
- Visual clues
- Possibility of getting repetition
- Ask someone to help
- Personal interest
- Notice a board or other people

12 Does your success in listening depend on recognition of vocabulary items? YES NO

How do you usually react if you come across unknown words in the listening passage?

- I Ask the teacher to explain unknown words
- I look up the words in the dictionary
- I try to guess the meaning
- I listen to the passage once again'I usually do not pay attention on unknown words, because I will have opportunity to memorize it later
- Other.....

13 There are situations in the classroom when you paid special attention to something you heard/ What kind of difficulties do you experience?

- Difficulties.....

14 Which of the following listening activities will influence effective listening? Choose 6 the most effective.

- Looking at pictures and talking about them
- Reading the text and then listen to it
- Reading through questions to be answered after listening
- Class discussions
- Completing part of the chart
- Pre-viewing vocabulary
- Matching pictures with what is heard
- Putting pictures in order
- Drawing pictures
- Carrying out actions



- Following a route
- True/false
- Answering questions
- Dictation
- Finding new information about the listener
- Role play based on listening
- Writing a response after listening
- Spotting mistakes
- Filling gaps
- Predicting

Assess the difficulty of the mentioned activities (1-6)

If you have never done the activity in the classroom put a cross (X)

Questionnaire2

Learner strategies

1 Is it easy for you to get general idea of the content?

YES NO

2 Can you identify your areas of weakness using your own errors and explain why you are making certain type of errors, or you need your teachers' help to do it?

.....

3 Do you need special training in how to use what you already know to understand and produce the new language?

YES NO

4 Do you feel embarrassed while making errors, and panic if you do not understand everything?

YES NO

5 Is it a problem for you to keep the conversation going?

Explain why?

YES NO

.....

6 While doing the listening task how often you (often, almost always, always, sometimes, never, rarely) do you:

Apply to the dictionary.....

Ask for an explanation.....

Ask for repetition.....

Take notes.....

Ask for translation.....

Grouping materials.....

Work with other students.....

Revise material.....

Evaluate your performance.....

Ask for feedback.....

Use synonyms and paraphrases as substitutes for language items that you do not know or can not recall

Use any techniques for memorizing language items.....



7 How often do you ask yourself the following questions while doing listening tasks? (always, usually, sometimes, often, hardly ever, never)

- How does this language work?.....
- What is it like to learn a language?.....
- What should I learn and how?.....
- What should I emphasize?.....
- How should I change?.....
- How am I doing?.....
- What am I getting?.....
- How is language learning affecting me?.....

8 Does thinking about the learning process help you in doing listening task?

YES NO

9 Do you find the following strategies important

YES NO SOME OF THEM (tick which)

- Focusing on mistakes.....
- Working in groups.....
- Writing key words.....
- Relating new information to prior knowledge.....
- Receiving immediate feedback when the task is finished.....

10 Read through the following listening tasks. Which of the mentioned above strategies in your opinion could be helpful in performing the task? Tick which.

- Story in sound. Listen to the recorded sounds. Then try to write down everything you hear in the correct order.....
- You will hear the story sentence by sentence. Guess how the story continues.....
- Different groups of students listen to different but connected passages, each of which supplies some part of what they need to know. They often come together to exchange and pool their information and are thereby able to reconstruct a complete picture of a situation.....
- Look at the pictures below and listen to the recordings Which things is described in each sentence? Could you describe better?.....
- You listen to the part of the talk/ try to complete the given notes.....
- Listen to the story and answer the questions.....
- Contrastive stress. Look at the pictures and listen to the sentences. There are some mistakes in the sentences. Can you correct them? Make sure you use the right stress. (you can work with your partner).....

11 Read through the following strategies and answer the questions

Which of the mentioned strategies (put the number)

- You have never heard about, but would like to get more information in order to use while listening
- You are familiar with but still have difficulties in using
- You use in the classroom
- You use outside the classroom
- You think that is a waste of time to talk about
-



Group 1	Group 2	Group 3
1 checking comprehension after completion of listening activity	5 repeat word or phrase	13 ask the teacher to give additional explanation
2 focus on special aspects (for key words and phrases)	6 use dictionaries, textbooks and prior work	14 ask questions for clarification
3 panning for the organization of spoken discourse	7 take notes	15 work together with other students to solve a problem
4 reviewing comprehension of information that should be remembered	8 use available information to guess the meaning or usage of unfamiliar language items	16 pool information
	9 translation	17 get feedback
	10 relating different parts of new information to each other	
	11 make associations	
	12 using actual pictures or visuals to represent information	