

LISTENING AND SPEAKING SKILLS IN TEACHING FOREIGN LANGUAGES

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Abstract: *A foreign language as a means of communication, cognition, a way of receiving and storing information predetermines the need to own all types of speech activity. In the context of the integration of Azerbaijani universities into the European space, knowledge and knowledge of English, especially the development of speaking skills, is of paramount importance. One of the problems of fluency in English is the lack of an appropriate language environment. To overcome difficulties in this area, it becomes necessary to apply a certain strategy that promotes productive mastering of oral communication skills. For this purpose, the use of such techniques as leading questions, pictures, entering unfamiliar vocabulary, listening to CDs for textbooks, watching movies with subtitles seems appropriate. Based on the existing difficulties in mastering a foreign language, the article describes the approaches to two types of speech activity, namely, speaking and listening, and indicates the ways and means of developing skills in a bilingual audience.*

Keywords: *fluent English, communication, speaking activity, comprehension, authentic, nonnative language, capacity, methodological issue, appropriate level, mastering the skills.*

The present international situation, information explosion, international economic and political integration determine the involvement a growing number of experts in various fields of science and technology in the direct implementation of international scientific and technical relations accompanied by significant growth and expansion of the cultural and business contacts all these present their claims to the nature of foreign language speaking. Terms of foreign language communication in the modern world, when a foreign language is a means of communication, knowledge, receiving and storage of information, determined the necessity of owning all kinds of speech activity: primarily of speaking and listening. When mastering a foreign speech in bilingual situation we face the problem of non-compliance of the used training methods with the modern requirements to mastering a foreign language [1]. We have to bear in mind that nowadays university education has changed, and the Azerbaijan Universities have been integrated in the European Space, so students will need a second language to finish their careers. In spite of the fact that our students spend a lot of years studying English, from school to University, it has been always said that English is not well spoken in Azerbaijan and some of the learners can assure that they are not capable of speaking and expressing fluently in English. Our people are generally considered to be good at foreign languages, especially, when we refer to listening and speaking skills, as for centuries people of different nationalities are living side by side in Azerbaijan and for them speaking some other languages, in addition to native, (Russian,



Georgian, Lezgin, Talysh, Avar, and some other) is quite a common thing for both children and adults. But as far as the English language is concerned it is still an unsolved matter in our country. Of course, we must accept that in the years of independence, when the relations with the European countries and the USA considerably expanded, numerous representatives of the young generation, especially those who have the opportunity of going abroad for study and traineeship, can already communicate in English quite fluently (0.8% of the population). Nevertheless, the greatest part of those learning English as a second language are experiencing some difficulties in speaking and listening while mastering the language. One of the problems why Azerbaijani students suffer this problem is that when students finish their English lessons, they forget the language. They are not in contact with the language because all the things that surround them are in Azerbaijani: television, films, TV series, talks in the streets, busses, in a word everywhere in their surroundings. Only some students assure that they are very keen on TV series in English and they watch films with subtitles. In order to overcome the obstacles, that impede mastering the skills of speaking and listening we implement the usage of some strategies for developing these skills. Students often think that the ability to speak a language is the product of language learning, but speaking is also a crucial part of the language learning process. While teaching the language the slogan «Can You Learn to Swim Sitting on the Shore? – Then, learn to Speak by Speaking» must be taken for a rule. Training natural, modern foreign language is only possible if we use materials taken from the life of native speakers and compiled by taking into account the peculiarities of their culture and mentality. Speaking does not itself constitute communication unless what is said is comprehended by another person. Teaching the comprehension of spoken speech is therefore a primary importance of the communication aim to be reached. [2] The problem of training perception of authentic speech by ear is one of the most important aspects of learning foreign language communication, and that is why the development of learning technologies and the development of listening, meeting the demands of the time is extremely important. Perhaps an assumption that “listening is a reflex, a little like breathing, listening seldom receives overt teaching attention in one’s native language”, so listening with understanding in a non-native language being though complex but very important [3]. The main problems observed by the teacher when students are listening to English are lack of concentration and lack of practice. They do not usually train their ear and they do not know how to improve this skill because they need to get used to listen to English to develop their capacities. The more practice they do, the better results they will obtain. First we should carry out the pre listening work. It is necessary to anticipate them what the listening will be about by paying attention to questions, pictures... and also to introduce them any difficult vocabulary. Moreover, as a new tool, the teacher is trying to send students some listening activities as homework due to almost all textbooks are accompanied by the corresponding CD and it is a way to practice this skill if teachers have not got enough time to do it in class. The teacher generally encourages students to watch TV with subtitles even if they do not understand, only with the purpose of training and developing their ear. When dealing with the listening process, it must be mentioned that there are two possible ways of



performing this task: 1) the Topdown listening process and 2) the Bottom up listening process. The former consists of understanding the general meaning of a listening selection without paying attention to specific structures, words and so on. "It is like a general overview where the listener gets a general view of the listening passage while still understanding the general idea. Bottom up processing is essentially a linguistic process in which we try to make sense of acoustic signals by using knowledge of language. According to this model, sound is assumed to be decoded by accreditation and in a linear fashion- from phonemes, to words, to phrases, to utterances, to complete meaningful texts" [4]. The difference between them is the following: for the Top-down process, students take into account the context and do not need to pay attention on specific details while in Bottom up listening process, students have to pay attention because here, specific details are very important to understand the whole meaning of the conversation or another kind of listening activity. The listener focuses on individual words and phrases, and achieves understanding by stringing these detailed elements together to build up a whole. According to Lindsay and Knight, people have four different purposes when they listen: "We listen for a purpose, but this purpose can be very different depending on the situation: listening for specific details, listening for general meaning, listening for the general idea or gist. There is also a difference between listening: for information; for enjoyment or social reasons; to learn new language" When teachers are teaching listening, apart from the purpose, it is very important to follow a pattern. 1) Pre-listening would be the first stage, where the context is established. The teacher creates motivation and students do some activities with the purpose of preparing them for what they will hear. 2) The following stage is listening, where learners do the mentioned tasks or find answers. There are two kinds of material and procedure. On the one hand, extensive reading helps students to acquire vocabulary and grammar and it usually takes place outside the classroom. They do it for pleasure, so that their knowledge of the language improves and it makes students better readers. On the other hand, intensive listening is what students usually learn in the classroom, through audio CDs, video films and activities such as answering questions, following a route on a map, making notes, etc. 3) The last stage is post-listening, the part where students have the opportunity to check their answers about they have been listening to, to give feedback and consolidate what they have learnt. It is useful for teachers because it helps to analyze particular difficulties the students could have with the listening activity. However, within the Azerbaijani education programme, teachers usually do not have enough time to teach this skill as it is required because they only have three hours per week taking into account the typical setbacks in the classroom and the great majority of the time is used to go into grammar because it is the base of the language. Furthermore, the student is in such a social, cultural and linguistic context where the English language is not often present and he or she does not need it to interact and survive in his or her life. In short, these are not the most suitable conditions to develop the desired or required level. For this reason, we want to explore the characteristics of the speaking skills and propose some ways of practicing speaking and giving feedback. Speaking is an "activity requiring the integration of many subsystems...all these factors combine to make speaking a second or foreign language a

formidable task for language learners...yet for many people, speaking is seen as the central skill". [2] Speaking activities included dialogues, problem-solving activities, role plays, descriptions, storytelling, questions and answers, etc., Participation in communication involves the mastery of oral speech in a foreign language, i.e. creation of speaking skills. Unlike listening, speaking itself does not impose such high requirements to the volume of the dictionary, the volume of linguistic material as the conditions that ensure the realization of this skill. However, speaking quite firmly establishes the amount of the required minimum vocabulary and general language material, which the student must master to participate fully as a personality in the process of communication.[4] We can speak of the following two types of speech: dialogic and monologic. During the observation, it was discovered that a great part of the time of each lesson was devoted to the study of the grammatical structures followed by the corresponding exercises to practice what they had learnt. Consequently, listening and speaking skills are hardly practiced due to there is not enough time left. Besides, there are other factors, which prevent from developing these two skills such as the big amount of students in each class or the impossibility of assessing all the students individually during a lesson. The major problems the teacher finds when students try to speak in English are: on the one hand, as they do not listen a lot of English, their amount of grammar and vocabulary is not wide enough. On the other hand, they feel "embarrassed and they find it really difficult. In general, they do not pay much attention to pronunciation and most of them feel frustrated when they know they are making mistakes all the time" [5]. In conclusion we can say, that students learn best when they are engaged and given an appropriate level of challenge; when their prior experience and knowledge is valued and built upon; when they are expected to take responsibility for their own learning; and when they work collaboratively with their peers. Thus, teaching strategies used during the course will include: - Weekly, face-to-face contact sessions. - Small group cooperative learning to demonstrate the use of group structures to address teaching and learning goals; - Structured occasions for students to reflect critically on and improve teaching practice; - Plenary discussions around core methodological issues and debates - Extensive opportunities for whole group and small group dialogue and discussion, allowing students the opportunity to demonstrate their capacity to communicate and liaise with the diverse members of an education community, and to demonstrate their knowledge and understanding of method content. - Online learning from readings and other useful web links. These activities will occur in a classroom climate that is supportive and inclusive of all learners

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