

Learning of Listening Comprehension and Linguistic Relevance

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Kim, Bock-shik. 2000. Learning of Listening Comprehension and Linguistic Relevance. *Linguistics*, 8-2, 79-94. The learner's emotional stability is more closely related to information structure than to phonemic, lexical and syntactic structures. Therefore, in view of listening comprehension and language usage, reference is made to information structure which is practically used in communication between listeners and speakers. The learners are inclined to proceed from semantic factors directly to the comprehension stage, and only in the case of failure to find clear meaning of the contents of speech, do they rely on syntactic analysis. Therefore, since the learners are in need of wider and immediate lexical consciousness abilities, reference is made to lexical structure. The attribute of linguistic speech is a temporary phenomenon, and the perception process as a connector of numerous connected factors plays an important role in learning a foreign language. Therefore, reference is made to phonemic structure. At the early stage of language learning, the learners show a phenomenon of using non-inflectional verbs or omitting auxiliary verbs, then gradually adding grammatical morphemes to square the meaning with the whole meaning of the context. Considering the correlations, reference is made to syntactic structure. **(Woosuk University)**

1. Introduction

1.1 The importance of listening

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Listening is the activity of paying attention to and trying to get meaning from something we hear. To listen successfully to spoken language, we need to be able to work out what speakers mean when they use particular words in particular ways on particular occasions, and not simply to understand the words themselves. A speaker saying 'You're late,' for example, may be wishing to convey any one of a range of meanings: simply stating the fact that you have arrived late, or complaining because he/she has had to wait, or expressing surprise because he/she did not expect you to arrive late. What the speaker means lies only partly in the words spoken, and you, as the listener, must recognize and interpret the other factors which are used to convey the message. No one knows exactly how listening works or how people learn to listen and understand. It is a skill which seems to develop easily for mother-tongue listening, but requires considerable effort where listening to a foreign language is concerned. It is taken for granted that people can listen to their mother tongue with little or no effort. Even when very young we are able to understand at least the gist of what is said to us. It is assumed that this ability is the result of a number of factors, including the large amount of language and the number of different speakers we are exposed to over the years, and our acquired knowledge of the context, the speakers the topic and so on. Even so, we sometimes have problems when listening to our mother tongue. For example, in a very noisy room it may be hard to follow what a quiet speaker is trying to convey. And at other times a speaker may just go on and on talking, or reading aloud, for such a long time that it is extremely difficult to go on concentrating so we may simply hear what he/she says without attempting to listen and understand. But these relatively rare problems do not detract from the fact that we generally listen to and understand speech in our mother tongue with ease.

1.2 Learning to listen

Since students need to learn to use more than their knowledge of the

structure of the language - its syntax, its phonology, etc - if they are to be able to listen successfully, they need to learn not only to fathom what is meant by the words spoken, but also, and at the same time, to establish or elaborate the context to which it relates. They need to apply both their knowledge of what Widdowson calls 'language usage' (i.e. the language system) and their knowledge of what he refers to as 'language use' (i.e. the appropriate use of the language to communicate with other people). If our students do not learn to listen effectively, they will be unable to take part in oral communication. Merely to hear what a speaker says is insufficient for communication to occur. When nobody listens to a speaker or when a listener fails to understand the message, we say that communication has broken down. This does not mean that the message has not been heard - i.e. that the sounds have not been received. It means that the listener has either not been paying sufficient attention or, while paying attention and trying to grasp the message, has not managed to understand it. By 'learning to listen', then, we mean that we want our students to attend to what they hear, to process it, to understand it, to interpret it, to evaluate it, and to respond to it. We want them to become involved and active listeners.

As we have seen, we have acknowledged the ease with which people listen to their mother tongue and have looked at what listening entails. We have seen the need for students to learn more than just the structure of the language in order to become successful listeners and have identified a range of situations in which listening skills are needed to fulfill a variety of purposes.

2. Learning of Listening Comprehension and Linguistic Relevance

2.1 Information Structure

For the last two decades, scholars of linguistic learning theory have worked, considering the reason why some learners failed to learn a foreign language while others could learn it quickly and thoroughly as a correlation between emotional and linguistic factors. Connecting this matter with listening comprehension as a part of foreign language learning, this study viewed it as a matter of information structure learning used in communication between speakers and listeners in an aspect of language usage. Since communication at which the current foreign language education aims premises active listening comprehension activities, it means a give-and-take process of information, that is, communication of one's feelings, manners, thoughts and behaviors to others. Therefore, communication may imply interaction or transaction, being a reliable guide to interhuman functions. The speaker should convey his(her) internal thoughts and current circumstances for the listener's understanding, by explaining information clearly as intended. For the listener's understanding, the speaker should communicate and explain "what I learned and experienced," "what I think and desire," "what I consider, feel and think of your behaviors," "what I feel pleasant and unpleasant," "what I am concerned about," and "what you think of me." At this time, with clear and precise expressions by the speaker and then mutually, they can suggest evidences of their assertions to the other party, clarifying the contents. The listener should ask the speaker to explain the context exactly and clearly. When required by the listener, the speaker should re-explain in another proper way for the listener's understanding. When the speaker expresses correctly, the listener should endeavor to understand the speaker's explanation of the context, which may be a sympathetic aspect having similar experiences in his(her) thoughts, feelings and circumstances in the other party's place. The speaker should arrange congruent communication. Even though two or more contents are conveyed at different levels, they should be consistent.

Most learners say that listening comprehension of a foreign language is a painful process that cannot be learned with pleasure. The learners

who are distressed about learning listening comprehension because no communication is available, when are difficult to free themselves from shame and embarrassment communicating with native speakers even after attaining adulthood. Therefore, the main purpose of learning listening comprehension is to promote self-confidence upon communication with native speakers in real life. Thus, in an attempt to eliminate the sense of threat given from the learning of listening comprehension as much as possible, the learners should consider emotional factors as functions supplementary to information learning of linguistic factors. Meanwhile, learning of a foreign language may not be available only by emotional factors without any knowledge of the foreign language, but they should know that the learners with a vivid motive for learning accelerate their learning of a foreign language rather than those without one as do, the learners in a comfortable learning atmosphere as opposed to those who have a feeling of uneasiness, and the learners who respect themselves rather than those who have low self-confidence. Because it is important for foreign language teachers not only to perform their duties to offer linguistic input to the learners, but to break down emotional barriers which may cause failure in the learning process of a foreign language. Like this, you can find the learner's emotional stability functions as a factor of non-linguistic listening comprehension and is closely related to information structure rather than to phonemic, lexical and syntactic structures.

While the learner's goal is to acquire interlanguage having function in spoken communication to convey his(her) intention individually in a foreign language, comprehension unit learning is concentrated on four fluent linguistic performances, neither knowledge of target language nor translation of one's mother tongue. Unlike indirect communication, such as reading and writing, direct communication is the process of acquiring only vivid information conveyed through sounds, and thus it suggests models to explain how and why the learner's linguistic performances are different. In communication, the logical connection form being informational clues can be classified into the following six

patterns.

First, since there is a progressive form of the lexical rule system dealing with the progress in the contents of communication, the learners who acquired the rule system can grasp the correlation of verbal expressions with communication easily. The progress is a method to perform something or reach somewhere, and the progressive form is a comprehension unit which includes a lexical group containing this information.

Second, in the number of nouns and verbs, among constituents of a comprehension unit, there is a high possibility to be inserted by a vocabulary showing classification. Classification is a method to classify expressions of characters, places, things, etc. by parties, groups or classes. The classification form indicates a comprehension unit constructed by a lexical group containing information of classification.

Third, the main vocabulary which constructs comprehension units maintains connections between lexical items enough to convey the whole information only by the vocabulary. Particularly, when conveying information of a definition, the connections of meaning will be available even only by his(her) memory of a vocabulary. Since a definition is a method to describe what and how, it comes to be a constituent of common classification and then to describe what difference is made between specific information, the main body, and all the others of classification and it can be a standard for construction of comprehension units.

Fourth, when receiving information, the listeners should expect and grasp one's speech through logic or time-conceptual expressions, to avoid discontinuation of the stream of thoughts. A chronicle is one of the methods to find sequence of occurrences.

Fifth, grasping the information structure of spoken language in anticipation of the concepts of comparison and contrast may facilitate listening comprehension activities. Comparing and contrasting are two of the methods to show what similarities and/or differences are made between persons, places, things, thoughts or matters.

Sixth, a pattern of cause and effect as a clue for understanding of speech is a comprehension unit being used, regardless of the length of speech. The relation of cause and effect is a method to analyze the basis accountable for a certain result.

2.2 Lexical Structure

The learners are inclined to proceed from semantic factors directly to the comprehension stage, and only in case of failure to find clear meaning of the contents of speech, do they rely on syntactic analysis. Therefore, since the learners are in need of wider and immediate lexical consciousness abilities, reference is made to lexical structure.

In the learning of listening comprehension, the reason why the lexical structure is indispensable for basic scholastic ability to learn a foreign language is not only that it is a means of communication functions, but much more important in that it may extend understanding of the world, that is, the world of consciousness, then enrich human beings themselves. By a language, human beings obtain knowledge and information widely, deepen consciousness and thoughts as human beings, or express and extend their inner world. Meanwhile, they proceed to cultivate thinking faculty, creativity and information. Therefore, a part of the learning process for the extension of linguistic abilities may improve their vocabulary and quality as human beings. In other words, human beings create and command a language, and they are formed in turn by the language. The function making human beings human-like is the nature of a language, and the primary reason for placing vocabulary learning on the center of basic scholastic ability may exist at this point. However, because a vocabulary forms the basis of the whole scholastic ability, supporting a part of school subjects among various factors of linguistic abilities (sounds, written words, grammar and vocabulary) to fulfill listening comprehension, and it is the very word group expressing various concepts of the human consciousness world as well. Therefore, in view of the concepts as thinking factors,

cultivation of linguistic ability, that is, vocabulary for expression of the concepts may improve thinking faculty, consequently improving the abilities of listening and reading comprehension, which may be a wide way to reach every scholarship-oriented destination. If so, it will be self-explanatory that grasping the lexical structure suitable for the expression of concepts, the thinking factors, will never be effective, unless through the processes of expression and comprehension whether in school education or in social life. Consequently, when managing the scholastic ability, the basis for the scholastic ability may depend on linguistic ability, that is, vocabulary ability. Like this, a vocabulary has the function expressive of general concepts constructing the human consciousness world, but it should clarify the correlation of concept-learning with lexical structure which is dependent upon listening comprehension. If so, regarding the suggestion that learning of one's native tongue is identical with the case of a foreign language, a few problems can be addressed.

First, unlike most foreign language learners, the native language learners learn a language from their childhood. Therefore, on the whole, their language learning follows up with rapid advancement of cognition. The reason why language learning is more notable in lexical structure than in phonemic or syntactic structure, with the advancement of cognition, is because the development of lexical structure is mostly connected with the process conceptualizing conventional styles which reflect cultural characteristics of the world itself, persons, places, matters, things, etc. in the world. Like this, the native language learners' knowledge processes of lexical structure following conventional styles are different from foreign language learners'. Foreign language learning is a chain of new acquisitions, squaring the concepts partly with the already-established, whole concept category. In the vocabulary part of native language learning, the concepts of a vocabulary have been systemized based on the aspects of customary cognition activities accumulated over a long period. Therefore, in foreign language learning, it is not easy to lead to learning of word structure through immediate

and direct connections between concepts and words.

Second, regarding lexical structure learning, another reason why there is a pattern in foreign language learning different from the learning process of one's mother tongue is that the native language learners are faced with the problems of simple articulation, formation of a concept, systematization of a vocabulary, etc., while foreign language learners are faced with the reasoning problems derived from preestablished concepts and vocabulary systems.

Third, in foreign language learning, lexical structure learning indicates the vocabulary learning process that approaches new lexical concepts partly to the existing one, based on semantic concepts acquired upon learning of one's native tongue. Although there is no explanation of a vocabulary, apart from the reasoning problems occurred during the learning process, the differences between the concepts contained in the same vocabulary can be described because the concepts or lexical relations are repeatedly-variable, focusing on the meaning of lexical structure. For foreign language learners, upon learning of lexical structure, the meaning of the word "certain" in English may variably change from the concept 'some, without concrete clarification' to the opposite meaning 'clear and definite,' and thus it is still more difficult in lexical structure learning than in other linguistic structure learning. Since foreign language learners proceed to match foreign language vocabulary with the concepts of their mother tongue in the light of experiences, the foreign language vocabulary being expressed in learning an interlanguage at the early stage will be possibly connected with the concepts of their mother tongue which has been learned more complicatedly. Vocabulary expression with one meaning repeatedly changes in the contents and structure, in connection with the advancement of the learner's interlanguage, then the meaning is gradually extended to different meanings. Therefore, when comparing with native speakers' uses of vocabulary concepts or structure learning, foreign language learners are in the process being approached by compounding the vocabulary structure and contents partly, and thus

they have difficulty in grasping the correlation of concepts with vocabulary at a level with native speakers. Since there are cases that the concepts - even the concepts known to learners through their mother tongue - contain other concepts involved in a foreign language, that they do not know the vocabulary itself, or that the change of a meaning is an attribute of vocabulary itself, foreign language learners may find new and more vocabulary at a deepened understanding level and tempo than one-language speakers.

2.3 Phonological structure

Since the attribute of speech is a temporary phenomenon, and the perception process as a connector of numerous connected factors plays an important role in learning a foreign language, reference is made to phonemic structure.

Traditional learning of phonetic structure has been closely connected with and representative of listening comprehension. This is because the first stage of the learning process of listening comprehension is receiving the other party's information through sounds. In comparison with learning of lexical or syntactic structure, the phenomenon of phonetic structure learning, which plays a complementary part with the learning process of listening comprehension, may suggest a foreign language theory model independently. Learning of phonetic structure occurs centering around comprehension units connected with speech information concerning phonetic structure of content words, not around individual phonetic structure like a phoneme. Therefore, it is clear that phonemic structure is a field describing the connections with the learner's linguistic intuition using interlanguage. In learning a foreign language; phonetic structure acts as an important variable, and thus how often the learner experienced the opportunities of conversation with native speakers is connected with the motive of learning. The learners come to realize that the stream of correct information of their listening comprehension is important, through their experiences of

non-understanding of the contents of native speaker's speech, confusion or discontinuation of conversation. This is the case of interruption of communication found by the learners. For instance, in case an electric current is interrupted in any part of an electric circuit, the electric current is interrupted in the whole circuit. Like this, in case there is any of the factors interrupting the stream of learner's thoughts, the conversation is interrupted. The learners and teachers are expected to know how to analyze obstacles which may occur in a moment. If they can find such obstacles promptly, the problems will be solved promptly to that extent. Meanwhile, the teachers can guide the learners to resume the stream of conversation, by connecting the interruption. In colloquial communication, a part of the obstacles may be caused by improper linguistic intuition regarding lexical or syntactic structure, but another part may occur due to mistakes in listening. In colloquial speech of one's mother tongue, native speakers clearly understand and sum up the phrase analysis process of colloquial speech, such as syllable, accent, reduction, contraction, lengthening, intonation, routine and homophone, and then present phonetic structure in a regular pattern. However, since foreign language learners cannot listen to without preliminary knowledge of obstacles, the teachers, as well as the learners, should know how to overcome these obstacles. Therefore, listening comprehension is the most important security which can be directly used, being given effective experiences, upon colloquial communication with a native speaker. The process that the learners approach native speakers should be connected with learning of lexical and syntactic structure, in addition to phonetic structure aiming at acquisition of information in linguistic ability, and with learning of speaking, reading and writing, as well as hearing, a linguistic performance aspect.

2.4 Syntactic Structure

In linguistic performance aspects, the problems of language

comprehension and language production are complicated. For that reason, only a certain aspect has been the object of attention until the present, according to the investigator's position. However, to lead linguistic performance to complete language learning, transfer of language comprehension to language production should be available. Since successful linguistic performance interacts with linguistic abilities, linguistic intuition may be developed by a cognitive process dependent on both linguistic ability and linguistic performance. Meanwhile, since it is difficult for the learners to have experience in practical communication, realistically depending on school lessons in a classroom, the teachers may have to offer sufficient input to the learners. This guides each learner to introduce a basic, linguistic rule system suitable for support of individual language learning, by giving them opportunities to hear the target language. Since grammatical descriptions of syntactic structure and semantic functions are decisive in time required and how to learn a foreign language, the foreign language learning strategies require syntactic structure coinciding with the foreign language speech and perception processes. Brown(1973) says that there is a connection between internal languages spoken and heard. At the early stage of language learning, the learners show a phenomenon of using non-inflectional verbs or omitting auxiliary verbs, then gradually adding grammatical morphemes to square the meaning with the whole meaning of the context. This shows that the individual internal language system has been reflected, based on language used upon communication, and that substantial language learning may be available by meaningful learning practice rather than by mechanical one.

In view of the above, learning of listening comprehension is closely related to learning of other linguistic functions, and allowed to grasp the actualities more comprehensively in connection with vocabulary, phoneme and syntactic structure as well.

3. Correlation of Listening Comprehension with Other Linguistic Functions

As above, we examined how listening comprehension is connected with information structure, lexical structure, phonemic structure and syntactic structure. However, in this chapter, we will examine the correlation of listening comprehension with other linguistic functions, as well as with information, lexical, phonemic and syntactic structures.

The goal of foreign language learning cannot be specified simply as colloquial communication because the amount of foreign language learning to be trained through reading and writing, as a means of written communication in foreign language learning, cannot be ignored.

Since listening comprehension puts emphasis on language production to use a foreign language, breaking away from the passive manner without any demand for response after listening and understanding, it can be considered at a level with speaking. Speech production can be attained not based on the ability used in an isolated pattern, but based on other abilities, mostly on linguistic comprehension and linguistic harmony. However, Gary and Gary(1981) says that, although there is the same rule system required in speech and comprehension simultaneously, linguistic surplus added to the context can be obtained only when useful for the listener. Consequently, speech-centered learning aiming at active listening activities is a method in which foreign language learners relate their linguistic abilities to linguistic performance aspects and participate in conversation, and thereby the learners can bring good results with more colloquial-linguistic input.

Upon examination of the correlation of listening comprehension with reading, listening comprehension does not show a phenomenon of active and positive transfer of language learning to reading which is the same linguistic function in terms of linguistic comprehension aspect. Consequently, for foreign language learners to attain the purpose of written communication, it may be infeasible to attain listening

comprehension and speaking aiming at colloquial communication and then to expect later transfer effect. Finally, listening comprehension should expect active learning for its transfer to other linguistic functions, not ending in listening only. Writing used in evaluation of listening comprehension is measured by the ability to understand a foreign language after listening and then to express it in writing, but there is quite a possibility that fails in checking whether the students understood the meaning of expressions properly. Therefore, in the case of evaluations on summing up the contents after listening, writing the persons and matters in the contents, description of concrete contents, etc., it can improve active listening comprehension.

4. Conclusion

As above, we examined the correlations of listening comprehension with four linguistic structures and three linguistic functions. Among linguistic structures, the core aspects are as follows.

First, a learning method to find linguistic expressions and information structure implied in those expressions promptly and easily, which is because learning of information structure is characterized by distinction from all linguistic units, grammatical units and speech units;

Second, in learning of listening comprehension in daily life, lexical structure is important because communication is possible only with a vocabulary;

Third, phonemic structure is mostly formed by listening. Therefore, phonetic discrimination, as a factor indispensable for listening comprehension, should be used in learning activities from the beginning; and,

Finally, the core aspect of listening comprehension is lexical structure. Lexical structure should be learned enough to use in colloquial communication frequently, by gradual learning and reviewing in a twice-listening method based on known information. Meanwhile, even

native speakers cannot listen to the whole words or speech in full attention and thus, it is necessary to cultivate listening abilities to concentrate on more important words regularly.

Assuming that this learning of listening comprehension is for the learners' communication, when grasping information, lexical, phonemic and syntactic structures, the learners should begin with an easy, concrete, regular and mechanical one for effective learning of listening comprehension, and the sequence of this learning should be in most cases based on the learner's ability and also allowed to change according to the learner's requirements.

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