

UDC: 378,662: 378,141

TEACHING LISTENING COMPREHENSION AT TECHNICAL UNIVERSITIES

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The paper stresses the importance of listening and provides advice on the proper selection, adaptation and use of audio texts in class teaching for students of technical universities. As well as the necessity of correlation between socio-cultural component and practical teaching of all language skills while dealing with authentic audio material is emphasized. The author proposes a series of progressive activities for students of technical specialties aimed at the improvement of the system introduction, training and practical use of audio information in the foreign language studying, emphasizing the ability to hear a foreign language text and responding to it properly as a vital part of the socio-cultural component of foreign language teaching and as a means of development of professional and communicative competence of future technical specialists. The proposed logical system of teaching listening to students of technical universities is designed to provide real opportunities to improve students' learning abilities through the use of a wide range of general and professional audio information and intended to raise students' interest in learning a foreign language.

Key words: listening, audio material, authenticity, students of technical specialties, individual self-development, learning activities, communicative approach, professional competence, professional and personal development, a complex result.

Introduction. At the beginning of the twenty-first century in our country the process of European integration is promoted as well as a rapid development of various cultural relations, which have raised the great interest for studying foreign European languages and socio-cultural context of other countries. We are going through a period of global innovations in all fields of culture, technology, the economy due to constantly changing system of human relations with the world. There is a need for a new strategy for education and training. Due to the growth of international relations and the process of democratization of society, the development of the world globalization and international cultural relations attracts a growing number of countries. The aim of intercultural communication is, above all, to gain knowledge about everyday life, norms and values of life of other peoples of Europe and the world. The concept of socio-cultural competence is of particular relevance and significant spread all over the world.

In our society there are new opportunities and prospects of cooperation with foreign countries, which in turn promote a culture of dialogues and cooperation. In this aspect, a socio-cultural search for mutual understanding between the peoples through international communication becomes a priority in the studying of foreign languages. In modern society we can not consider a full individual professional development of a future specialist without taking into account his/her socio-cultural competence. Teachers should teach students to see not only the lists of foreign words and the rules for their connection but the ability to develop and implement intercultural communication. The possibility for students to be involved into the educational process and the use of different cultural materials highly increases their motivation to learn. The use of cultural components is absolutely necessary for achievement of the main practical educational goal – development of ability to communicate in a foreign language.

Theoretical part. Communicative competence progress means the development of all kinds of speech activities. One of them is listening, which is the receptive type of skills and is the subject of study in this research. The last decades are characterized by the continuing interest of psychologists, trainers and teachers of higher and secondary establishments in studying the perception and understanding of the language in the process of hearing as a part of the overall socio-cultural communication.

The analysis of the works of national and foreign authors engaged in research on the development of communicative communication skills, particularly perception of the text by ear, can provide some information in the study of this problem. First of all, we should point out the scientists who investigated the mechanism of the general perception of foreign context through listening

(Zimnjaja I.A. [1]); processes of perception and understanding of verbal messages (P.S. Yakhno [10], R.P. Mil'rud [5] M. Peterson [11]), and others.

The problem of listening occupies a special place, which is in the center of the researches on methods of teaching of this special communication skill. Methodologists and researchers propose and justify different systems of exercises for learning a foreign language through listening in higher educational establishments. Among them we should mention L.Y. Kulish, G.A. Gerasimenko, I.V. Mikhaleva [4] V.V. Kuleshov, L.D. Dolynska, N.G. Kitkova [3] and others.

Recently, listening has become an object of studying in terms of specifying its tasks and functions corresponding to an appropriate language level and specific training (e.g., non-language technical university). A profound study of these issues was carried out in the works of N.I. Soboleva [6], G.D. Ushakova [8], who indicated the different approaches and methods for improvement of the effectiveness of teaching listening by drawing attention to the conceptual and semantic aspects of these phenomena of mental processes.

However, these studies have paid insufficient attention to opportunities at teaching technical students to communicate in professional areas through listening as one of vital skills for a foreign language mastering. This reason was the main incentive for writing this paper, where we attempted to explore the main steps in training listening as an integral part of foreign language communication and provide with the overall results in studying of teaching listening in foreign languages learning as a part of communication process, along with setting goals and objectives for training of the basic technical communication.

Empirical part. From the methodical point of view learning listening is a specially organized process of activities, which helps to perceive the text by ear [2]. Among the requirements to the level of perception in listening as a component of a foreign language competence we should mention the importance of socio-cultural aspects consideration and their correlation with social values, norms, traditions and customs of the students' own cultures, their familiarization with the socio-cultural portrait of countries, languages, and peoples living in appropriate cultural communities. Also vital is students' familiarization with knowledge of spiritual, physical and material culture of the TL countries; rising of their interest in cultural heritage, cultural identity and mentality of peoples; possession of socio-cultural norms of behavior in intercultural communication.

After the analysis of communicative competence studies we can define professional language competences as comprehensive professional and personal language learning ability, which provides communication practice in a particular language situation, respecting language rules, and allowing students to adjust the appropriate behavior in the professional communication. Professional communicative competence is the result of communication training of future specialists to the basics of communication. In the process, students acquire a set of interrelated theoretical knowledge and practical skills.

In particular, future technical specialists have to acquire functional literacy in a foreign language, which would provide our graduates with the opportunity to interact with foreign language interlocutors for the purpose of professional communication and international cooperation. In this respect, teaching listening is an essential for the development of professional and communicative competence.

As a rule, the teachers aim is to teach their students to overall foreign language competence in all its aspects. If one skill is preferred, it is detrimental for the development of the other types of skills. Historically there were different points of view on the methodology of foreign languages teaching in general and listening, as part of the overall socio-cultural competence. In particular, K.D. Ushinsky believed that educational value of foreign languages learning brings learners' attention to the foreign language culture [7]. There is an inextricable link between language, culture and communication. The language barrier is not the only obstacle to be overcome by different cultures' representatives in the process of international communication. Cultural barriers hinder the effectiveness of language communication. And a language teacher should first be a mediator between languages studying and generating adequate, non-stereotypical information about the foreign language culture.

Main aspects of research problem. At present, practical foreign language skills development in technical universities is an important component of the curriculum and is aimed to educate future professional as well as to develop linguistic communication as a basic component of foreign language students training. The development of professional communicative competence means not only learning the structural components of language patterns of a new language system, but also learning social behaviour, moral values and the ability to implement them in their future careers. An integral part of this process is the ability to hear the interlocutors, to interpret their opinion and to respond to them in compliance with cultural norms.

One method of communicative competence development is listening to foreign speech. Currently, the problem of teaching to hear a foreign text is not learned properly. It has many reasons among which we could mention such as a misconception that listening should not be specially taught; curriculums often do not have specific requirements for the level of listening competence and its proper evaluation; listening is not always carried out with the assistance of technical means. In addition, there are many unexplored methodological issues, without which learning listening cannot be effective. Thus, we can conclude that the problem of teaching listening is really relevant nowadays.

The impact on learning. The process of verbal communication is bilateral and includes such components as listening and speaking, and has to cover a specific set of topics, which could be used as a subject for discussions in the relevant areas of social interaction. Quite often in the process of speaking students are faced with a certain complexity – they may express their opinion in a foreign language very well, narrate difficult topics on professional content easily, even are able to analyze complex lexical and syntactic constructions. However, they often complain about the difficulty or even impossibility of understanding the interlocutor, which makes the total communication suffer; quite effective at delivering difficult monologue speech samples student, nevertheless, feel difficulties at responding to an interlocutor in dialogues, which often distorts mutual communication or even prevents it. One common complaint in such situations – “if I had understood the interlocutor’s utterance, I would answer him/her easily”. But the problem is that understanding came only as an afterthought, or interlocutor’s words remained generally unclear, which affected the quality of communicative discourse in general.

All these problems have arisen due to shortcomings in the development of such component of the socio-cultural communicative function as listening. Practice shows that students better perceive an interlocutor in situations, where they know the outcome in advance. As example we could mention dialogues prepared beforehand, conversational topics, which students know and therefore feel quite confident, and they usually have no difficulties in listening to such materials and so are able to respond properly. In addition, the students perceive speaking of their classmates easier when they have similar experience in learning a foreign language and common social and cultural roots. More complicated for them is usually the language of their teacher, who does not always try to adapt her speech to be perceivable to all students, often due to false belief that the students would understand foreign utterances and adjust to her pronunciation sooner if they needed to overcome some difficulties. Part of the students indeed begins to understand the teacher eventually easily enough, although a certain number of members of the group may continue to experience sufficient difficulties.

Most of the problems in the perception arise at listening to information delivered by native speakers, especially with an unusual accent, local dialects, slang, etc. If in addition to passive hearing students should somehow respond with relevant remarks they are quite often lost as they are generally not accustomed to listening as an active component of communicative function. In addition, most of our students are accustomed to the British pronunciation (RP or BBC English) and are the best at understanding it. But nowadays it is not sufficient as the English language has long been a means of international communication and the real professional environment the students will face is a huge variety of different pronunciations and accents. The task of foreign languages teacher is to simplify the students’ future professional life by teaching them to understand foreign interlocutors in any situation and respond appropriately to the information heard.

At the curriculum planning listening should be considered as an integral part of teaching communication and included in a wide range of communicational topics. Development and training of complex listening skills as well as knowledge of national and cultural systems and realities of the TL are necessary to take into consideration in the curriculum content. The selection of topics for listening also affects communication. Planned topics and communicative situations have to meet the real interests and abilities of students. As for the texts, they must be authentic, “produced by native speakers for native speakers, creating conditions for real but not artificial learning situation” [9]. The text can be adapted, but without hindering authenticity. The curriculum should offer students a variety of text types that really reflect the specifics of life and culture of the TL country. These texts might be articles from magazines and newspapers (interviews, reports, etc.), professional technical texts, manuals, scientific professional articles etc.

All text types should correlate with the planned topics and completed by adequate methods of teaching listening. Let us consider the organization of a lesson on teaching listening with use of an authentic audio text. The teacher should start her work with the search of adequate foreign material. At the selection of materials for listening the teacher has to give preference to the interests and problems that concern modern youth (including different age groups). This should be reflected, above all, in the selection of authentic texts, topics for discussion, in bringing contemporary audio and visual material, including via the Internet. The selection of material for teaching listening requires consideration of two levels of representation of audio material: level of presentation and level of perception, which is slightly below the level of presentation. This permits to differentiate individual approach and offers a choice of interesting topics for students as well as encourages them and provides greater independence during the communicative situation. Moreover, the audio texts should provide materials appealing for the students’ personal experience, their feelings and emotions, induce the expression of opinion, provides the development of cultural value orientations though it might cause difficulties in combining all these aspects with the curriculum of technical universities.

Regarding students as the center of the learning process and active subjects of training activities, the teacher should organize their mutual interaction and provide real teaching situation for developing communicative listening skills. Usage of authentic audio texts helps students in the process of achieving of a foreign language comprehension.

The main characteristics of the proposed methodological system. For the development of students’ comprehensive professional and personal language learning competence in a foreign language we devised a special system of teaching listening skills aimed at technical students, which regards listening skills as an integral part of professional and socio-cultural communication. It is designed to combine a number of methods and techniques of introduction and consolidation of audio material, linking them into a single logical system, designed to develop most of listening skills in technical universities. The proposed system appeared as a result of long years of practical teaching and reflection on the students’ problems in developing listening skills. It combines a set of methods widely used in teaching listening but presents them in the way suitable for teaching listening as a part of socio-cultural communication for students of technical universities.

At the first stage we should motivate students’ interests to the content of the listening text through the series of associations, use of illustrations, visual stimuli (photos, videos, sketches), acoustic stimuli (sound, music, voice etc.). For alleviating language difficulties we should pre-teach vocabulary or plan a range of appropriate activities while or after listening. If necessary, at the first listening stage we may organize sounding of audio material in a slightly slower pace than usual (in case the teacher reads it herself or inducing special technical means). This permits the students and especially weaker or less confident ones to hear separate individual lexical items more effectively and helps to ease language difficulties at the perception of the audio text by ear. The next step is checking understanding of listened text through implementation of different discussions, questions to the text, filling gaps exercises, visual dictation, arrangement of the text parts in the correct order, preparing monologues and so on. It is necessary to organize a range of appropriate communicative activities for practicing communicative skills based on the listened text. This can be appropriate monologue and dialogic speech, various discussions, writing tasks, special projects, and searching

for additional information online, creating collages, organizing interviews, web-pages writing or other creative work based on the information from the listened text.

For listening activities the teacher should provide the appropriate technical means (tape recorder, computer). Nevertheless, reading by the teacher is also a possible option. Students can at first listen to the text in slightly slower tempo. But it is necessary to keep the right balance between listening to audio tools and voice of the teacher. Typically, students prefer the texts in the interpretation of the teacher, because it is easier to perceive the familiar voice. Moreover, the teacher often tries to facilitate the perception of the text, slowing or simplifying her pronunciation according to the level of a particular group. But we should remember that in real life students often need to listen to the information from different sources without possibility of slowing or simplifying it. Therefore, the teacher should plan teaching listening activities on the sample texts of different complexity.

It should be noted that practical application of the proposed system of teaching listening though logical input of audio material in before, while and post-listening stages was beneficial for developing different language skills based on a range of audio texts and proved its effectiveness in teaching of technical universities students.

Conclusion. Choosing appropriate audio material we should take into consideration its cultural and socio-cultural values, through the best examples of foreign language culture that arouse the curiosity of students, motivate them to promote further cultural and professional cooperation, convergence of nations, promote respect to other nations, contribute to manifestation of tolerance and better understanding of different cultures.

In this paper we have attempted to consider the possibility of using listening in foreign language teaching as a means of professional and communicative competence, analyzed traditional methods of developing listening skills and presented various forms of organization of audio text in class as well as suggested the ways of effective development of listening skills for students of technical specialties through organization of appropriate listening activities in class.

It is obvious that the question of teaching listening as a vital part of teaching foreign language communication requires further studies and practical development of new ideas for improving the level of foreign professional competence of future technical specialists.

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К. М. Гавриленко. Аудіювання на заняттях англійської мови як засіб формування професійної комунікативної компетенції.

У статті наголошується на важливості врахування у плануванні навчання іноземній мові такого важливого її аспекту як аудіювання, надаються поради щодо правильного підбору, адаптації та використання аудіо текстів на занятті та для самостійного опрацювання. Також підкреслюється нерозривність взаємозв'язку між соціокультурною складовою та практичним навчанням під час роботи з автентичним аудіо матеріалом. Автор пропонує ряд послідовних дій для покращення системи введення, опрацювання та засвоєння аудіо інформації іноземною мовою студентами технічних спеціальностей, позиціонує вміння чути іншомовний текст і відповідно реагувати на почуте в рамках соціокультурної мовної складової як один із засобів формування професійно-комунікативної компетенції майбутніх фахівців. Запропонована система навчання студентів сприйняттю іншомовного матеріалу, яка покликана реально надавати можливість покращити сприйняття аудіо інформації і спрямована на підвищення їх зацікавленості у засвоєнні іноземної мови.

Ключові слова: аудіювання, аудіо матеріал, автентичність, студенти технічних спеціальностей, саморозвиток особистості, навчальна діяльність, комунікативний підхід, професійна компетентність, професійно-особистісне становлення, комплексний результат.

К. М. Гавриленко. Аудирование на занятиях английского языка как средство формирования профессиональной коммуникативной компетенции.

В статье подчеркивается важность планирования такого важного аспекта обучения иностранному языку как аудирование, даются советы по правильному подбору, адаптации и использованию аудио текстов на занятии и для самостоятельной работы. Также подчеркивается неразрывность взаимосвязи между социокультурной составляющей и практическим обучением при работе с аутентичным аудио материалом. Автор предлагает ряд последовательных действий для улучшения системы ввода, обработки и усвоения аудио информации на иностранном языке студентами технических специальностей, позиционируя умение слышать иноязычный текст и соответственно реагировать на услышанное в рамках социокультурной языковой составляющей как одно из средств формирования профессионально-коммуникативной компетенции будущих специалистов. Предложенная логическая система обучения студентов восприятию иноязычного материала, призвана реально предоставлять возможности улучшить восприятие аудио информации и направлена на повышение их заинтересованности в освоении иностранного языка.

Ключевые слова: аудирование, аудио материал, аутентичность, студенты технических специальностей, саморазвитие личности, учебная деятельность, коммуникативный подход, профессиональная компетентность, профессионально-личностное становление, комплексный результат