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METHODOLOGY OF TEACHING LISTENING AND SPEAKING: INTEGRATED APPROACHES FOR ORAL COMMUNICATION

Tangirova Sevara Rustamovna
Toshkent Ijtimoiy
Innovatsiyalar Universiteti o‘qituvchisi
sevara.rustamovna.tangirova97@gmail.com
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Abstract

This article provides a comprehensive examination of the methodologies employed in teaching listening and speaking, tracing the evolution of oral communication pedagogy from behaviorist repetition drills to contemporary, integrated approaches. Drawing upon decades of research in second language acquisition, psycholinguistics, and communication studies, the article synthesizes major theoretical frameworks including the comprehension approach, the cognitive model of listening comprehension, and the communicative approach to speaking. The central argument posits that effective listening and speaking instruction requires a principled, integrated approach that recognizes the reciprocal relationship between receptive and productive oral skills, addresses the cognitive processes underlying comprehension and production, and provides opportunities for meaningful interaction.

Keywords: listening comprehension, speaking skills, oral communication, bottom-up processing, top-down processing, fluency, interaction, authentic materials, communicative competence, task-based teaching

Listening and speaking are the most fundamental modes of human communication. Long before humans developed writing, they communicated orally, sharing stories, coordinating activities, and building relationships through spoken language. For most language learners, the primary goal is oral communication—the ability to understand others and to be understood in return.

Despite this centrality, listening and speaking have often been neglected in language teaching. Reading and writing, as more measurable and teachable skills, have traditionally received greater attention. Listening has been called the "forgotten skill," with instruction focused primarily on comprehension rather than the processes of listening. Speaking instruction has often been limited to repetitive drills and formulaic exchanges, failing to develop genuine communicative ability.

Recent decades have seen a transformation in the teaching of listening and speaking. Research in psycholinguistics has illuminated the cognitive processes underlying comprehension and production. The communicative revolution has emphasized the importance of meaningful interaction. Technology has provided unprecedented access to authentic speech and opportunities for practice. And teachers have recognized that listening and speaking are not separate skills but integrated dimensions of oral communication.

Understanding the methodology of teaching listening and speaking requires familiarity with theoretical frameworks that define the nature of oral communication and the processes by which it is developed.

Listening comprehension is a complex cognitive process involving the simultaneous activation of multiple types of knowledge. Bottom-up processing involves decoding the acoustic signal, segmenting sounds into words, recognizing words, and parsing sentences. Bottom-up processing is data-driven,

proceeding from the smallest units of sound to larger units of meaning. Top-down processing involves using prior knowledge, context, and expectations to interpret meaning. Top-down processing is conceptually driven, proceeding from higher-level knowledge to the interpretation of incoming data. Effective listening requires the integration of both bottom-up and top-down processing, with the listener shifting between the two as needed.

The cognitive model of listening comprehension, proposed by Anderson and others, identifies three phases of listening. The perceptual phase involves decoding the acoustic signal and recognizing sounds and words. The parsing phase involves segmenting the stream of speech into meaningful units and building a representation of the message. The utilization phase involves connecting the message to existing knowledge and integrating it into the listener's understanding. These phases are not strictly sequential but overlap and interact.

Speaking production is equally complex, involving multiple processes. Conceptualization involves formulating the message to be conveyed, including its content and intention. Formulation involves selecting words and grammatical structures and organizing them into coherent utterances. Articulation involves the physical production of speech sounds. Monitoring involves checking output for errors and adjusting as needed. These processes must be coordinated with remarkable speed and efficiency.

The relationship between listening and speaking is reciprocal and dynamic. Listening provides the input that drives acquisition and serves as a model for production. Speaking provides the output that consolidates knowledge and pushes development. The two skills are mutually reinforcing. Effective oral communication involves not just the production of speech but the ability to listen actively, respond appropriately, and manage interaction.

The communicative competence framework, developed by Canale and Swain and others, is foundational for understanding oral communication. Grammatical competence involves knowledge of sounds, vocabulary, and sentence structure. Sociolinguistic competence involves knowledge of appropriate language use in social contexts. Discourse competence involves the ability to produce coherent and cohesive extended speech. Strategic competence involves the ability to compensate for gaps in knowledge and manage communication breakdowns.

The Interaction Hypothesis emphasizes the role of interaction in language acquisition. Through interaction, learners receive input, produce output, and negotiate meaning. Interaction provides opportunities for feedback, modification, and adjustment, all of which support acquisition.

Research in listening and speaking pedagogy has identified several principles that guide effective instruction. These principles are grounded in empirical studies and cognitive theories of learning.

The principle of integration holds that listening and speaking should be taught in an integrated manner. While each skill may be practiced separately, authentic oral communication involves both. Integrated instruction reflects the real-world nature of communication and supports the transfer of learning.

The principle of authenticity holds that materials and tasks should reflect real-world oral communication. Authentic listening materials include news broadcasts, podcasts, lectures, and conversations. Authentic speaking tasks include discussions, presentations, role plays, and problem-solving activities. Authentic materials and tasks prepare learners for the demands of real-world communication and are more motivating than artificial materials.

The principle of process orientation holds that instruction should address the processes underlying listening and speaking, not just the products. For listening, this means teaching strategies for comprehension, such as predicting, inferencing, and monitoring. For speaking, this means teaching

strategies for communication, such as circumlocution, paraphrasing, and repair. Process-oriented instruction builds strategic competence and supports autonomous learning.

The principle of scaffolding holds that learners need support to engage in listening and speaking beyond their current level. Scaffolding includes pre-listening activities that activate background knowledge, listening tasks that guide comprehension, and post-listening activities that deepen understanding. For speaking, scaffolding includes models, prompts, and structured tasks that support production.

The principle of meaningful practice holds that practice should be meaningful and contextualized, not mechanical. Repetition drills have a role but should be supplemented with practice that connects to genuine communication. Practice should move from controlled to freer, from structured to spontaneous.

The principle of feedback holds that learners need information about their comprehension and production. For listening, feedback can be provided through comprehension checks, answer keys, and teacher explanation. For speaking, feedback can be provided through error correction, recasts, and prompts. Feedback should be selective, timely, and supportive.

The principle of learner autonomy holds that learners should be equipped with strategies for independent listening and speaking practice. Learners need to develop the ability to select appropriate materials, monitor their own progress, and practice effectively on their own.

Translating the principles of listening instruction into classroom practice requires a range of strategies for developing listening comprehension.

Pre-listening activities prepare learners for listening. These activities activate prior knowledge, introduce key vocabulary, and set purposes for listening. Pre-listening might include discussion of the topic, prediction of content, or previewing of vocabulary. Pre-listening reduces cognitive load and improves comprehension.

While-listening activities guide comprehension. These activities may include listening for gist, listening for specific information, and listening for detailed understanding. Tasks may include answering questions, completing charts, taking notes, and making inferences. While-listening activities should match the purpose of the listening and the level of the learners.

Post-listening activities consolidate comprehension and extend learning. These activities may include discussion of the content, analysis of language, and application of the content to new contexts. Post-listening activities connect listening to speaking, reading, and writing.

Bottom-up processing activities develop the ability to decode the acoustic signal. Activities include phoneme discrimination, word recognition, and dictation. These activities build the foundation for comprehension.

Top-down processing activities develop the ability to use prior knowledge and context. Activities include predicting content, making inferences, and using contextual cues. These activities build interpretive skills.

Interactive processing activities integrate bottom-up and top-down strategies. Activities include listening for multiple purposes, using multiple sources of information, and adjusting strategies as needed. These activities reflect the dynamic nature of real-world listening.

Strategy instruction teaches learners how to manage the listening process. Strategies include predicting, monitoring, problem-solving, and evaluating. Strategy instruction should be explicit, with learners practicing strategies in context.

Extensive listening involves listening to large amounts of comprehensible input. Extensive listening builds listening fluency, vocabulary, and overall language proficiency. Learners should have access to a range of listening materials appropriate to their level.

Translating the principles of speaking instruction into classroom practice requires a range of strategies for developing oral communication skills.

Fluency-building activities develop the ability to speak smoothly and continuously. Activities include discussions, debates, storytelling, and free conversation. The focus is on communication, not accuracy. Fluency activities should be low-stakes and supportive.

Accuracy-focused activities develop grammatical and phonological accuracy. Activities include pronunciation practice, grammar drills, and controlled speaking tasks. Accuracy activities should be integrated with meaningful communication, not isolated.

Strategic competence activities develop the ability to manage communication. Activities include using circumlocution, paraphrasing, clarification requests, and repair strategies. Strategic competence is particularly important for lower-proficiency learners.

Task-based speaking activities involve completing tasks that require spoken communication. Tasks may include problem-solving, decision-making, and information-gap activities. Task-based activities provide authentic purposes for communication and promote interaction.

Role plays and simulations provide opportunities for practicing language in specific social contexts. Learners take on roles and interact in simulated situations. Role plays develop sociolinguistic competence and confidence.

Presentations develop the ability to speak in formal, extended formats. Learners prepare and deliver presentations on topics of interest. Presentations develop organizational, delivery, and audience awareness skills.

Discussion and debate develop the ability to express and defend opinions. Learners engage in structured discussions and debates. These activities develop critical thinking, argumentation, and interactional skills.

Interaction management activities develop the ability to manage spoken interaction. Activities include turn-taking, topic management, and feedback provision. These activities develop discourse competence.

A final reflection: listening and speaking are the heartbeat of human connection. Through spoken language, we share our thoughts, build relationships, and participate in communities. The methodology we adopt should serve this deeper purpose, supporting learners in developing the oral communication skills they need for meaningful engagement with the world.

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