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## **LISTENING COMPREHENSION STRATEGIES FOR ESP STUDENTS**

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**Abstract.** The paper deals with the peculiarities of listening comprehension, which is considered to be the most difficult foreign language competence to acquire. The author describes some of the techniques that have proved to be helpful and efficient to enhance listening comprehension skills and identifies some up-to-date Internet resources that could be recommended.

**Key words:** listening comprehension, learning strategy, listening skill, podcast, audiobook, multitask, context meaning

Listening is the most common communicative language activity in daily life. In 1991 Joan Morley stated that “we can expect to listen twice as much as we speak, four times more than we read and five times more than we write”. [1, p.32] In foreign language learning listening comprehension often appears to be the principal stumbling block, the most difficult skill to develop.

Listening comprehension involves a number of rather complex processes, the most relevant being speech perception (recognizing sounds, intonation patterns etc.), building up the literal meaning of words and sentences, inferring the contextual meanings and rhetoric characteristics. It also includes recognizing cohesive devices, retrieving lexical, grammatical and semantic information in order to predict what is to be heard next and take decision how to react, in what way to reply. Listening is an active process claiming for deep and mature general language skills and wide background knowledge.

Teaching listening transfixes foreign language classes at any stage of learning. It apparently prevails over all other aspects, being both the subject and the tool of learning and instruction. Listening teaching strategies on the teachers` part include using authentic and various in terms of speakers` characteristics materials, choosing stuff that is relevant to their students, different techniques to check up the comprehension and evaluation of the information [2, p.53-67].

The objective of this paper is to describe the listening comprehension learning strategies that have proved useful and efficient and can be tried by ESP students. Obviously, these strategies are student-oriented, because listening practice predominantly relies on self-study and independent work. Below are some easy-to-follow techniques to improve English listening skills and understand oral English better as well as feel more confident and comfortable.

The very first thing worth mentioning is that the corner stone principle “Practice makes perfect” refers to learning listening comprehension as well as any other language activity. Listening should be practiced on a regular everyday consistent basis. How much time is to be allotted depends on the aim, terms, situation in general, but overtaking as well as undertaking are known to kill the motivation. On average 30 minutes of everyday listening exercise seems optimal for ESP students striving at understanding English speech more easily and effectively. Regular work, making listening practice a part of everyday routine is more important than the time shared to it. The listening practice itself does not mean the same each time. It can be a part of a multitasking. If you can manage two things at a time, it’s a win-win situation. Some teachers recommend to do much listening at the initial stages in order to get used to the music of the language, to its rhythm, sounds, intonation patterns. But the real listening practice takes full attention and cognitive effort of the learner. Two aspects here are of primary importance. First, the student has to recognize and to analyze the speech patterns: homophones, minimal pairs i.e. words differing in one sound, weak forms of words affected with assimilation, when schwa sound can represent many other sounds. It is also not easy to “catch” contractions, idioms, slang etc. These issues completely rely on grammar, lexical and stylistic competences. The second troublesome aspect is to stop translating in your head. It is necessary to learn to listen for context, for general meaning.

There is no need to understand every single word, moreover, it wastes time, prevents understanding the whole statement. It is a significant skill, very often hard to develop on psychological reasons.

Another pertinent question is what to listen to. The number and variety of resources nowadays is amazing. Some are included into the reference list. Students can choose and get better results provided the materials are personally interesting and relevant. That being said it is important that the listening practice embraces a wide range of genres, styles, accents and particular speech peculiarities. Audiobooks, TV shows, movies, TED talks represent the diversity of Modern English in different discourses.

Real listening practice, doing listening comprehension exercises is time-consuming and pains-taking. Some rules should be followed to ensure real progress. Experts emphasize that it is important “to learn with your ears” first, and then “with your eyes”, that is not to rely on the subtitles from the very beginning. Listening to the same passage several times, then writing down everything you have heard and eventually reading the subtitles, comparing and analyzing can be recommended as a listening exercise. For the best possible results it is advisable to finish with speaking, imitating the pronunciation and intonation of the speaker or speakers. Psycholinguists have stated that imitating improves listening. Such listening practice is sort of analytical listening (like analytical reading), when a student thoroughly thinks over the vocabulary, grammar structures, style and rhetoric drive of the passage. BBC News Reviews available as podcasts can be strongly recommended for such exercises. [4]

Foreign language learning is a complex integrative process that can only conventionally be divided into its constituents. Listening is naturally connected with speaking. Mature listening skill acquisition involves reading and writing. The synergy ensures the success. But it really takes time, effort, dedication and persistence on the students’ part. Evidently, strong positive motivation, personal ingenious approach and commitment appear decisive factors on the way. But it is awarding and always pays off.

Up-to-date ESP course at Ukrainian technical universities lasts for two years and, as the name (for professional purposes) implies, is focused on professional vocabulary, reading professional texts, analyzing the appropriate grammatical tips. Incidentally, listening is involved. Actually whatever the academic hours, listening practice heavily relies on student’s work on his/her own. In fact in class it can only be tested in some way. It brings us to the question of the new role of EFL teacher in the classroom. Today the teachers are experts, consultants, advisors and supporters rather than committed people who strive to “feed” students with knowledge. And the new way of getting ESP competences at the university is likely to lead our students to the dominant idea of life-long education.

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