

THE TEACHING-LEARNING PROCESS OF LISTENING COMPREHENSION FOR THE INTERPRETER-TO-BE IN THE ENGLISH LANGUAGE PROGRAM

El proceso de enseñanza-aprendizaje de la comprensión auditiva para el futuro intérprete en el programa de idioma inglés

O processo de ensino-aprendizagem da compreensão auditiva para o futuro intérprete no programa de língua inglesa

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ABSTRACT

Introduction: Listening comprehension is a very important skill in foreign-language learning, since it makes learners be in contact with the language through the comprehension of an oral message, biased by phonological, prosodic, discourse-related and intercultural elements. It is particularly relevant for the training of interpreters-to-be, who must comprehend oral productions in a given code, to be able to re-express them in a different code. Materials and methods: The sample for the diagnosis consisted of 18 first-year students of the English Language with Second Foreign Language degree program at Universidad de Oriente in the 2022 academic year, in addition to 14 first-year students of the 2023 academic year. Results and Discussion: Nonetheless, in the dynamics of the teaching-learning process of listening comprehension, some difficulties limit the potentiation of this skill in the process of interpretation. Conclusions: Consequently, the study presented in this article aims at characterizing the state of the art of this dynamics, through the integrated evaluation of instruments applied in the English Language Program at Universidad de Oriente.

Key words: listening comprehension, interpretation, teaching-learning process.

RESUMEN

Introducción: La comprensión auditiva es una habilidad muy importante en el aprendizaje de una lengua extranjera, ya que permite que los aprendices entren en contacto con la lengua a través de la comprensión de un mensaje oral, sesgado por elementos fonológicos, prosódicos, discursivos e interculturales. Es particularmente relevante para la formación de futuros intérpretes, quienes deben comprender producciones orales en un código determinado, para poder reexpresarlas en un código diferente. Materiales y métodos: La muestra para el diagnóstico estuvo conformada por 18 estudiantes de primer ingreso de la carrera de Lengua Inglesa con Segunda Lengua Extranjera de la Universidad de Oriente en el año académico 2022, además de 14 estudiantes de primer ingreso del año académico 2023. Resultados y Discusión: No obstante, en la dinámica del proceso de enseñanza-aprendizaje de la comprensión auditiva, algunas dificultades limitan la potenciación de esta habilidad en el proceso de interpretación. Conclusiones: En consecuencia, el estudio que se presenta en este artículo tiene como objetivo caracterizar el estado del arte de esta dinámica, a través de la evaluación integrada de instrumentos aplicados en el Programa de Idioma Inglés de la Universidad de Oriente.

Palabras clave: comprensión auditiva, interpretación, proceso de enseñanza-aprendizaje.

RESUME

Introdução: A compreensão auditiva é uma habilidade muito importante na aprendizagem de uma língua estrangeira, pois coloca o aprendiz em contato com a língua por meio da compreensão de uma mensagem oral, enviada por elementos fonológicos, prosódicos, discursivos e interculturais. É particularmente relevante para a formação de futuros intérpretes, que devem compreender produções orais em um determinado código, para poder reexpressá-las em um código diferente. Materiais e métodos: A amostra para o diagnóstico foi composta por 18 alunos do primeiro ano do curso de Língua Inglesa com Segunda Língua Estrangeira da Universidad de Oriente no ano letivo de 2022, além de 14 alunos do primeiro ano do ano letivo de 2023. Resultados e Discussão: No entanto, na dinâmica do processo de ensino-aprendizagem da compreensão auditiva, algumas dificuldades limitam a potencialização dessa habilidade no processo de interpretação. Conclusões: Consequentemente, o estudo apresentado neste artigo tem como objetivo caracterizar o estado da arte desta dinâmica, por meio da avaliação integrada de instrumentos aplicados no Programa de Língua Inglesa da Universidad de Oriente.

Palavras-chave: compreensão auditiva, interpretação, processo ensino-aprendizagem.

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INTRODUCTION

Interlinguistic communication has acquired vital importance in Cuba in recent years, due to its role in the development of exchanges involving closer ties with various peoples of the world in the political, diplomatic, economic and research fields, as well as in scientific-technological updating.

The teaching of foreign languages in Cuba, has therefore received special attention from the Ministry of Education. The teaching of such widespread languages as English, French, Russian, German, Portuguese and Italian, among others, has been present at the different levels of the National Education System.

In the Cuban higher education, specifically, this type of training is included in all degree programs, and in two of them it is the training objective: in the foreign languages degree program, which trains future teachers in this area, and in the language degree programs (English, French, German and Russian with second foreign language) which train future translators, interpreters and teachers for higher education.

High competitive levels of interlinguistic mediation (translation and interpreting) in the languages in which they are trained are required from these future professionals. To achieve these objectives, the curricular design of these degree programs was conceived in such a way that students develop, in a harmonious and comprehensive manner, the four basic skills of verbal activity in an intensive way, allowing them to use the first language as a medium of instruction from the first year of the course, and adequately preparing them to be able to develop during their university studies the professional skills necessary for the use of the first and second foreign language as instruments of specialized work. (Plan de Estudio D Carrera Lengua Inglesa con Segunda Lengua Extranjera, 2010)

To achieve the professional model in these degree programs, two objectives are particularly highlighted:

- To understand authentic oral texts of diverse functional styles and subject matter in the first foreign language.
- To process information from authentic oral texts within the cognitive framework of an advanced level in the second foreign language. (Modelo del profesional. Licenciatura en Lengua Inglesa con segunda lengua extranjera, 2010)

The objectives described above are dynamized in a skill that requires a high degree of generalization and that the scientific literature addresses with different denominations, the term listening comprehension being the most commonly used. Córdoba (2005) states that it is practically impossible to have a single definition of listening comprehension and cites Dunkel (1991), who provided 34 different definitions, presented in various texts, concluding that, in fact, there is no universally accepted definition.

Among the authors who assume the denomination of listening comprehension, Domínguez (2011) defines it as the receptive form of verbal activity that guarantees the assimilation of the message coming through the auditory analyzer. It shows in levels of fragmented (superficial), global (general), detailed (complete) and critical comprehension, a qualitatively higher level of complexity. Brooks and Heath (1989) define it in a simpler way: "listening comprehension is a combination of what we hear, what we understand and what we remember"

(Brooks and Heath, 1989, 54). The International Listening Association (ILA) defines listening comprehension in the following terms: "listening comprehension is the process of receiving, constructing meaning from what is received and responding to verbal and nonverbal messages" (ILA, 1996).

Domínguez (2011) identified that listening comprehension is composed of a series of skills such as:

1. Recognizing the sound segments and their division into the units that compose it: sounds and words, the article and the noun, verb and pronouns, combination of pronouns, etc.;
2. Selecting the relevant words in a discourse (nouns, verbs, key phrases, etc.) from those that are not relevant (fillers, repetitions, redundancies) and knowing how to group the various elements into higher and meaningful units: sounds into words, words into syntagms, syntagms into sentences, sentences into paragraphs;
3. Interpreting, which involves understanding the content of the discourse, the communicative intention and purpose, the overall meaning and main ideas; discriminate relevant from irrelevant information, understand assumptions, over-understandings, ambiguities, ellipses; understand the form of the discourse, its structure and discourse organization; identify transitional elements that mark the structure of the text, that change the topic, that open a new and conclude it; to identify the variant and register of the discourse; to grasp the tone of the discourse: aggressiveness, irony, humor, etcetera;
4. Anticipating, i.e., be prepared for the comprehension of a discourse;
5. Inferring, knowing how to infer data from the sender: age, sex, character, purposes, knowing how to extract information from the communicative context: situation, role of the sender and receiver, type of communication, etc., and to know how to interpret non-verbal codes;
6. Retaining, recalling words, phrases and ideas for a few seconds in order to be able to interpret them later; retain in long-term memory aspects of a speech: topic and basic data, special words (rare, new, relevant).

Comprehension is the first step in any process of message translation between two languages, and in the case of interpreting, due to its oral and discursive nature, listening comprehension is greatly important in any of its modalities. Therefore, the development of this skill is a necessity in the training and specialization of the interpreter. It involves activating a complex cognitive process of meaning construction, of grasping the meaning of the utterances delivered considering visual and prosodic cues such as intonation marks, pauses and rhythm variations (Domínguez, 2011).

Taking these elements into consideration, Abreus (2015) defines listening comprehension for interpretation purposes as the linguistic ability that presupposes perceiving, decoding and interpreting spoken symbols, remembering their meaning and re-expressing it orally and immediately in an output language different from the source language, for which attention must be paid to the linguistic and paralinguistic aspects that are present in a given sociocultural context.

The experience and pedagogical practice of the teachers who teach the subjects of Interpretation in the English language degree program at Universidad de Oriente, in relation to the insufficient development of listening comprehension in the students who receive these subjects for the first time, motivated to investigate the causes of this problem and proceeded to carry out a factual diagnosis of the teaching-learning process of listening comprehension in the aforementioned degree program.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

In order to carry out the diagnosis, different research methods and techniques were applied, and the following indicators were taken into account:

- Didactic treatment of phonetic and prosodic elements in the listening comprehension classes, for the purpose of decoding the text in the foreign language.
- Use, by the students, of inferential mechanisms from the listening comprehension, which make possible the re-expression of the initial discourse.

The instruments applied consisted of:

- Test on listening comprehension for students in the first and third years of the degree,

- Survey of students in the fourth year of the degree,
- Survey of professors who have taught listening comprehension skills,
- Observation of listening comprehension classes in the three languages taught in the program (English, French, German),
- Documentary analysis: programs of the disciplines English Language and Second Foreign Language French and German and E syllabus with its corresponding model of the professional,

Sample selection

The sample for the diagnosis consisted of 18 first-year students of the English Language with Second Foreign Language degree program at Universidad de Oriente in the 2022 academic year, in addition to 14 first-year students of the 2023 academic year. Similarly, 11 third-year students of the 2022 academic year and 20 third-year students of the 2023 academic year participated. There were also 11 fourth-year students of the 2022 academic year and 10 fourth-year students of the 2023 academic year. Taking into account that the enrollment of this degree is usually of few students, it was decided to take two courses for the sample.

The selection of the first-year students was motivated by the need to carry out a diagnosis of the students who had studied the four basic skills of verbal activity in English (speaking, writing, reading and listening comprehension) intensively in the preparatory year and to check what difficulties they presented in the comprehension of oral texts, specifically in the identification of phonic and prosodic elements.

In the third year of the degree, students conclude the English Language Discipline subjects and, consequently, the listening comprehension classes, in addition to beginning the Interpretation subjects. For this reason, the second test applied to this year's students was carried out at the beginning of the course with the aim of checking whether they were able to process the information contained in authentic oral texts and use mechanisms to understand the meaning of unknown words or expressions.

The survey carried out in the fourth year was aimed at finding out the students' criteria on the listening comprehension classes they had received in the degree, the type of exercises developed in those classes, the technological means used, the complexity of the texts used in the listening comprehension classes of the different subjects, the development of memory, among other issues.

The purpose of the survey of teachers was to know their methodological mastery in relation to the development of listening comprehension and the link between it and interpretation, as well as the importance they attach to this skill for the successful development of the interpretation process and, therefore, to determine the existing needs. Twelve professors from different universities where English with a second foreign language has been taught for more than 25 years participated in this survey: two from the University of Matanzas, two from the University of Holguín, two from the Central University of Las Villas and six from the University of Oriente, in addition to two professors from the Faculty of Foreign Languages of the University of Havana, a precursor center in the teaching of this degree. Of the 12 teachers surveyed, 66.6% (8) have more than 30 years of professional experience and the rest have between 10 and 20 years of experience.

All the teachers surveyed have worked on listening comprehension skills, in addition to other skills, within the disciplines of English Language and Second Foreign Language. The fact that 66.6% of the respondents have more than 30 years of teaching experience demonstrates a great mastery of the particularities of teaching listening comprehension, making their criteria invaluable for the present research.

In the observation of listening comprehension classes in the three languages, the objective was to check whether in these classes exercises aimed at training short and long-term memory were carried out, whether auditory tasks were performed in which attention was paid to the prosodic elements of language (accent, rhythm, intonation), and whether exercises involving the inference of unknown words were developed.

The test applied to first-year students, carried out in the second week of classes, consisted of a three-minute audiotext containing 3% of possible unknown words that did not affect either the global or detailed comprehension of the text. The English variant used was American English.

A more complex test was administered to third-year students in the second semester, taking into account that English Language discipline concludes in this year. The audiotext consisted of part of a lecture on research methods with duration of approximately five minutes. The variant of English used on this occasion was British.

The survey was administered to the fourth-year students at the beginning of the first semester, once the English Language discipline had concluded and they were no longer receiving listening comprehension classes.

RESULTS

The descriptive statistical method was used to process the results of the research techniques employed in this study. The results of the teacher surveys show that of the linguistic skills to be developed by students, listening comprehension was the most difficult to teach for 45% of the teachers, while 20% indicated reading comprehension and the same number for speaking. Thirty-five percent pointed to writing.

On the other hand, only 25% of the teachers surveyed consulted updated bibliography to improve the methodology to be followed in listening classes. Forty percent consult it sometimes and 35% never. In the English Language department at Universidad de Oriente, the number of teachers who stated that they do not consult the bibliography is 40%, which shows the need to strengthen the methodological work in this sense.

85% of the teachers surveyed are of the opinion that the current program of the English Language discipline does not offer many possibilities for teachers to learn how to develop linguistic skills.

Likewise, 80% of the teachers find it complex to recognize which skills should be developed in their students when teaching listening comprehension, taking into account that students in this degree are trained as interpreters of the first and second foreign language.

Seventy-five percent of the professors consider that a different structuring of the skill under investigation would enable a better development of it in the students.

In relation to the aspect that should be improved in the listening comprehension classes, 45% of those surveyed consider that the typology of exercises to be developed in this type of classes should be improved, so that in these classes the presence of exercises aimed at enhancing short-term memory, inference, prediction and other essential elements in the training of the future interpreter can be observed.

In relation to the surveys to the fourth-year students of the degree during two consecutive courses, the following results were obtained: 46.66% of the students expressed that listening comprehension is the most difficult linguistic skill to assimilate, 33.33% pointed to speaking, 13.33% to writing and only 6.66% to reading comprehension. 100% of the respondents coincided in affirming that in listening classes the most frequent teaching aid was the tape recorder. 53.33% of the students stated that they never did exercises before listening to the text, and 33.33% stated that they were only done sometimes. 26.66% of the students expressed not noticing differences in the complexity of the texts used in the listening classes in the different subjects, while 56.66% indicated that they did not always notice the difference, which is motivated by the ambiguity existing in the program with respect to the level of complexity of the texts.

The quality of the recordings used in the listening classes is rated as good by 43.33% of the students and as fair by 46.66%. This result is due to the fact that in most of the occasions the students do not have the original recording of the texts, but copies that present some difficulties.

An aspect of singular importance is the fact that 86.66% of the students surveyed expressed that in the listening comprehension classes memory was not exercised, thus demonstrating that the importance of a good memory development for the future interpreter is not taken into consideration. 56.66% of the students evaluated their listening comprehension competence as poor and fair when they started the Interpretation course, which shows the need to pay more attention to the teaching-learning process that is currently being developed in the listening comprehension classes in the degree. With respect to the difficulties presented by the students in the Interpretation subject, they pointed out as fundamental causes the poor development of the listening comprehension skills (40%) and a poor development of memory (36.66%).

Most of the respondents (93.33%) consider that the problems they present in the Interpretation subject can be solved in the listening comprehension classes if a more focused work on their preparation as future interpreters is achieved. Finally, 43.33% of the students said they were partially satisfied with the listening comprehension classes they received during their studies, while 46.66% were not completely satisfied with them.

The results of the surveys, both with students and teachers, reveal a decontextualized didactic treatment of listening comprehension with respect to interpreting; that is, the distinctive features of listening comprehension as a sub-skill or step within the interpreting process, which differentiate it from listening comprehension as a

language skill, are not taken into account. Consequently, the elements that the interpreter needs from listening comprehension to be able to efficiently develop the interpreting process are not sufficiently addressed from the didactic point of view.

Regarding the results of the tests applied, it is worth noting that the selection of the first year students, as it was stated before, was motivated by the need to make a diagnosis of the students who had studied the four basic skills of verbal activity in English (speaking, writing, reading and listening comprehension) intensively in the preparatory year and to check the difficulties they had in understanding oral texts and in identifying phonic and prosodic elements.

Of the 32 students who took the test, 40% achieved the maximum score in the questions on text comprehension and identification of phonic and prosodic elements. The other 60% presented difficulties in some comprehension questions and in the recognition of certain phonemes that do not exist in the Spanish language. In the test applied to the 31 third-year students, 55% showed full comprehension of the information contained in the audiotext. However, 45% of them presented difficulties with the comprehension of the text, in addition to not being able to understand the meaning of some unknown words because they did not make use of inference mechanisms provided by the context. This shows that there are biases in the appropriation of the message, based on the understanding of what is stated, and its respective processing for an effective decoding of the oral discourse.

The factual diagnosis carried out in the present research made it possible to determine that in the teaching-learning process of listening comprehension in the English Language with Second Foreign Language program at the Universidad de Oriente there are:

- Insufficient theoretical approaches to the didactics of listening comprehension in foreign languages, which do not sufficiently deepen the theoretical-methodological systematization of the dynamics of this process in relation to the object of the profession.
- Theoretical gaps in relation to the treatment of listening comprehension, which do not guarantee a coherent articulation with interpretation in the didactic process of the future translator-interpreter.

DISCUSSION

The above evidences the lack of a systemic approach in the dynamics of the formation of the listening comprehension skill in foreign language disciplines, which promotes a limited performance of students in the decoding of oral text. The listening comprehension skill pursues objectives that range from obtaining information in instructions and orders to understanding interviews, lectures, radio and television programs, films and documentaries without subtitles. (English Language Discipline Program). For the student of the English Language degree - the future interpreter - it is essential to adequately develop the skill that is the object of this research, since it is through the ear that the interpreter receives the information that must be re-expressed in another language, and it is not possible to interpret what has not been clearly understood.

The programs of the disciplines English Language and Second Foreign Language French and German, in the opinion of these authors, are very imprecise in many aspects (Programs of the Disciplines English Language, French Second Language and German Second Language). A system of skills and knowledge is not structured for each of the subjects, nor are the levels of assimilation and complexity for these subjects delimited. This sometimes causes overlapping in the contents that the students must receive when passing through each subject.

The integrated evaluation of the results of the instruments applied revealed the following shortcomings:

- Insufficient discrimination of consonant and vowel reductions and elisions that affect the decoding of the text in the foreign language.
- Insufficient processing of the information contained in authentic oral texts.
- Limited development of immediate memory.
- Insufficient use of inferential mechanisms to understand the meaning of unknown words or expressions in the re-expression of the source text.

These results show that there are still limitations in the teaching of the skill of listening comprehension in terms of interpreting in the English Language degree, so it is necessary to conduct an in-depth study in

this regard, which will allow perfecting the teaching-learning process of this skill, so necessary for the good performance of the interpreter in training.

CONCLUSIONS

The study presented in this article made it possible to diagnose and characterize the current state of the dynamics of the teaching-learning process of listening comprehension, in terms of interpreting skills.

The integrated analysis of the results revealed limitations in the decoding of foreign language texts, insufficient processing of the information contained in them, as well as a limited development of immediate memory and the use of inferential mechanisms for the comprehension of meanings in the source text.

The foregoing lays the foundations to provide scientific proposals that, from the didactics of foreign languages, contribute to attenuate these insufficiencies, and therefore to raise the quality of the training of future interpreters.

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Los autores declaran no tener ningún conflicto de intereses.

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