

LISTENING DIFFICULTIES

The article reveals the main language difficulties in listening to a foreign text and describes the success of overcoming them. It explains the psychological characteristics of the listeners and the factors that make comprehension easier and complicated.

***Key words:** comprehension, listening, students, language difficulties, a foreign text*

Successful listening and understanding depends on 1) the listener (the level of his/her development of speech hearing, memory, attention, interest, etc.) and his individual psychological characteristics; 2) the linguistic characteristics of the audio text and its conformity to the voice of experience and knowledge of the students; 3) from the conditions of comprehension of an audio text.

Subjective difficulties associated with individual age-related characteristics of students

Difficulties in listening that are due to individual age characteristics of students are subjective, unlike the objective difficulties related to the content and structure of the audio text and also the conditions of its comprehension. The success in overcoming these difficulties depends on the ability of the listener to use the mechanism of probabilistic forecasting, to transfer native auditory skills into a foreign language. A significant role is played by such **individual characteristics of the student** as intelligence, ability to listen and respond quickly to signals of oral speech communication (pauses, logical stress, rhetorical questions, phrases, context, etc.), ability to switch from one mental operation to another, quickly grasp

the subject, and correlate it with a wide context. These skills are developed in the process of learning many subjects, including foreign languages.

In the process of teaching listening comprehension of a foreign language, a decisive role is played by the **individual psychological features** of students: the level of development of differential auditory sensitivity, the auditory memory mechanism, and the level of concentration. Attention depends on the emotions and develops because of them too, but human emotions always occur together with strong-willed processes. The success of understanding depends on the needs of the students to learn something new, the availability of interest in the subject, awareness of the objective needs of studying, which all means that the focus is on cognitive activity and the motivation of this activity. However, this orientation can result in both positive and negative listening. Depending on individual psychological characteristics of the listener in the understanding of information, its identification, grouping and differentiation, it can make perception more accurate and deeper or even incorrect, if the listener is influenced by the expected and attributes to the ideas of a text non-existent characteristics.

Therefore, when we teach listening, we must rely on those characteristics of a learner that play a significant role in the process of comprehension of verbal messages. These features are discussed in the psychology on the level of such **substructures of personality** as the focus, experience, and reflection forms. **Focus** is defined as the sustainable apperception that underlies the comprehension of speech and forms the whole process of education of a person. Their roles in the structure of activities of a person, associated with the perception of speech, are quite significant, because all its forms are the demands of the personality and potential motives of action.

In the framework of the substructure *experience* in psychology considers knowledge, skills, abilities, and habits acquired in personal experience through training. From these characteristics, the manner determines the comprehension of verbal messages and the result of this activity.

The amount of linguistic and non-linguistic knowledge significantly affects the level of comprehension of audio text. It is necessary to have not only linguistic, but also non-linguistic knowledge and associations, to understand the content of hearing and take into account various factors of a speech situation. The stock of non-linguistic knowledge and concepts, which are peculiar to the auditor (his/her thesaurus), affects the process of text interpretation at the level of values and meanings. Inadequate understanding of the perceived information, as well as differences in understanding the same messages by different auditors are due to different levels of the author's thesaurus of the text and the audience—and due to the heterogeneity of their experiences. Such differences are especially noticeable under the condition of an insufficient supply of "background" knowledge related to the peculiarities of socio–historical experience of people, culture and traditions of the countries, and the cross-cultural realities of those whose language is being studied. All these necessitate the enrichment and formation of a thesaurus for the students.

Language listening difficulties

Language difficulties in listening are objective difficulties in the process of teaching listening, and they are defined with the following **objective parameters**:

- The available amount of productive knowledge, which is essential for receptive speech activities;
- The amount of existed acoustic-receptive foreign-language knowledge;
- The range of understanding of different phonetic ways of vocalizations;
- A relatively long latent period at the time of “the defiance” of existing knowledge from long term memory to identify them with the perceived sign, or analysis and semantics which has not been studied linguistic phenomena that are difficult to understand if you increase the speech rate.

Language difficulties are also determined by the **communicative purpose of** this activity, which is characterized by the following parameters:

- Level of understanding of information contained in the audio text (full understanding, understanding of important ideas, specific selection of information);
- Type of audio text (description, narration, message, monologue, dialogue);
- Theme / topic;
- The amount of text in the audio (number of words in it);
- Method of monitoring /evaluating (native language / foreign language, answers to questions, sample answers, multiple-choice tests, summarizing passages, a story, etc.).

So, **listening language difficulties** are described by the nature of the language means, and structural and compositional characteristics of audio texts. In the field of *grammar* these difficulties relate to both syntax and morphology. Sensing the phrase, a student must divide it into separate elements to establish a connection between them and their role in the utterance. The difficulties of analytical and synthetic activity, which is the basis of discernment of information, increases proportionally to the length of the audio text and the complexity of syntactic structures in it. Some grammatical difficulties come from analytical forms which are absent in the native language. And difficulties are caused by grammatical homonymy, especially in the service words.

Lexical difficulties arise not only in the quantitative increase of a vocabulary and its diversity (which is typical for the senior degree of studies), but also in the use of words in a figurative sense, the presence of words that do not carry a large information load, and the use of amorphous, unmotivated words and phraseologisms.

Polysemous words, paronyms (which differ only in one sound), and antonyms and synonyms also bring difficulties in understanding. To perceive such words by ear, one needs to keep in mind the whole context or situation, because the listener first hears the word which was learned earlier and better, rather than the meant word. False friends, words similar-sounding to native-language words but having different meanings, also cause difficulties in comprehension, although

cross-language interference at the lexical level is much less tangible than interlingual in the listening process.

Phonetic speaking difficulties are the main difficulties of listening. This particularly applies to the early stages of learning. Underdevelopment of phonemic hearing, the lack of adequate spoken skills, and insufficient formation of acoustic–articulatory images distract the attention of the listener from the linguistic form of a message. As a result the meaning of words and syntagm as units of perception are not recognized. The next stages of learning develop the ability to distinguish the phonetic variants of words by their main characters, even with some deviation from the norm.

The main phonetic difficulties of listening are difficulties with intonation, logical stress and speech rate. Emotional intonation does not create big difficulties, because it has the same characteristics in all languages. A logical intonation is difficult to comprehend, as it separates a phrase at the end of the semantic segments, serves to highlight the basic idea, and determines the communicative type of the sentence. A logical accent has great importance for adequate understanding. It carries the main semantic load of a phrase.

Compositional-semantic structure of audio texts, ***method of presentation of ideas*** in them and interphrase links have a great importance for understanding in listening. A dialogical speech is especially difficult for aural comprehension (compared to a monologue) because a student needs to differentiate the speech partners and additionally to perform analytic–synthetic actions all at once. However, to give preference to a single listening form is impractical. It is important to teach students to perceive both forms of speaking.

Insufficient knowledge of speaking also creates difficulties in understanding. A teacher must choose the audio texts carefully, paying attention to students' knowledge of the subject matter as a whole and simultaneously including elements of novelty. With this in mind, it is expedient to introduce graded language difficulties to academic audio texts and to teach students to overcome them, leaning on conjecture, knowledge and speech experience. This should be taken into

account *factors that make listening easier*: rhythmic, pausing, methodic has components of intonation; the possibility of visual contact with the interlocutor; the use of non-aural support for the situation; and *factors that impede the comprehension of listening*: the lack of clear boundary signals between lexical units and their fusion in a speech flow, phenomena of assimilation at the juncture of words—and within words; phonetic reduction; the transience of the process due to the tempo of oral speech; the irreversibility of the auditory response; and the interfering influence of lexical units.

Difficulties in listening due to the conditions of comprehension

The listening depends on the **conditions of comprehension** and is determined by a) rate of speech and b) the number of audio presentation of the text, depending on its length. Objectively **the tempo of the speech** determines the speed and accuracy of comprehension, as well as the efficiency of memorization.

The overall tempo of speech consists of two variables: the number of words per minute and the number of speech pauses. The measurement of these two parameters shows that the difference between the minimum and maximum tempo is pretty big. It depends on many factors: type of text (monologue, dialogue, description, story, message; prose or poetry); the importance of the information (more important information is given more slowly); the specifics of the lexicogrammatical system of a particular language (in English, the letter carries a greater amount of information and words have an average of 4-5 letters, while in German – 6-17). The average tempo of speech in English and French – 140-150 words per minute, in German – 110-130 words per minute! Unfortunately! There are no instructions regarding speech tempo in the standards of school curricula and teachers' books, although it is known that from the very beginning of learning a foreign language that the tempo of speech should be normal. If it is slow, it changes the intonation of a phrase, violates the norms of voice, interferes with reaction speed and significantly weakens the mind, which is very important for comprehension and understanding of speech.

The tempo of presentation of audio text may slow down in some cases due to the increase of pauses between semantic units in order that the tempo of speech does not become an obstacle in the process of listening, especially at the basic stage of training. This method improves probabilistic forecasting and helps to fill the gaps in understanding on the basis of the overall meaning of the comprehension message.

In the process of teaching listening, speaking tempo should not exceed the tempo of the internal speech of the listener. So, when the first one is increased, we force the second one to increase as well.

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