Teaching English: Listening Skills

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Abstract

The paper presents the overview of the features of perception of sounding speech and bilingual students’ phonetic difficulties while listening English speech. The issue is relevant and of considerable interest for teaching English as a foreign language. The difference between language systems and other factors such as Intonation system may cause problems in perception of foreign speech. The aim of the paper was to find out the phonetic difficulties for Russian and Tatar students with listening tasks. Distinction between a visual and acoustical image of the word also considerably complicates understanding during listening. Research problems in the paper were: 1) to follow psychological difficulties during perception and understanding of the spontaneous speech; 2) to find solutions of reducing phonetic difficulties of listening; 3) to improve the development of auditory memory and listening skills by bilingual students.

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Keywords: Education, student, learning, teacher, listening, university, bilinguals

Introduction

Listening, perception and understanding of foreign speech has always been very important for the process and the purpose of communication. The questions of forming students’ ability to percept information are much spoken among methodologists and educators. There is a positive influence of oral skills’ training on reading abilities (Alazard, Astésano and Billières, 2010). Development of Internet and technical opportunities increased the role of listening sounding speech information as means of communication between people and one of the types of speech activity. Relevance of the problem chosen as an object of research is explained by the low level of formation of listening abilities of special information, academic, scientific or social by students of University, despite much attention is paid to formation of these abilities and considerable number of the methodical works were devoted to this problem. One of the reasons of low perceiving abilities is a fact that many students of Kazan (Volga region) Federal University are native Tatars and have definite difficulties in perceiving speech in English. Globalization in all spheres of our life, development of cultural, scientific, economic world demands knowledge not of one and not of two, but more languages. By the end of the second year students have to understand lectures in both Russian and
English. At the same time students - bilinguals may perceive the prosody and the phonemes of a foreign language through their own prosodic and phonemic system (Intravaia, 2000; Troubetzkoy, 1976 [1938]). The aim of this study was to overview some difficulties of perceiving an English speech by bilinguals. Bilingualism or polylingualism is a characteristic sign of our time. Modern Tatars represent language identity of new type, equally communicating in the native (Tatar) state language, state language (Russian) and one of the foreign languages (English). Inevitable phenomena of interference are: intervention influence of assimilation of Russian language and safety of native Tatar language. Teaching English in schools and universities in the republic of Tatarstan (Russia), English language system are imposed on bilingual language base of students. The situation at which three languages enter interaction and contact has been created. During a foreign language teaching process there is a need of the accounting of similar and distinctive signs, their influences on each other. Interdisciplinary judgment acquires special relevance. In this regard, integration of knowledge from other sciences as comparing language specific features such as structure of a sentence, speed of speech, intonation, accent, and stress in different languages, cognitive linguistics and psychology became necessary. This integration of knowledge while searching the reasons and ways helps to solve some methodological problems of teaching bilinguals to perceive a foreign speech. The question of a role and the place of the native language in the course of teaching a foreign language is one of the main in methodology. Comparing of two languages, the analysis of the facts of reflection of the same concept of various languages broadens horizons and develops dialectic thinking of students. At the same time all this opens different elements and secrets of typical mistakes of students before teachers. Comparison of two languages prompts ways of overcoming of difficulties, provides sequence of selection of language material, prompts logic of the organization of educational and learning process i.e. forms a basis for the methodological conclusions.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Many methodologists consider that teaching a foreign language is willingly to begin with listening that is followed by reading, speaking and writing. Audition as the initial stage of training was for the first time offered by H. Palmer (Palmer, 1923) who considered that "passive listening" at the initial stage of learning develops ability to understand the speech and to speak. Proceeding from these directions in linguistics, pedagogics and psychology, H. Palmer puts forward imitation and learning by heart as the basic principles of learning of foreign language. The system of exercises offered by H. Palmer includes especially receptive work (subconscious understanding, conscious oral assimilation, implementation of orders, short answers to general questions), receptive – imitation work (repetition of sounds, words and offers after a teacher), conditional conversation (a question and answers, orders and answers, offers), and natural conversation. Such system of exercises provides the movement from the faultless, graduated on complexity educational speech, to free, creative speech. In Carroll’s view, some students learn foreign languages more quickly than others (Carroll, 1981) do. J.B. Carroll proposed a model of ability including four components (phonemic coding ability, grammatical sensitivity, inductive language learning ability, and associative memory), and developed the related Modern Language Aptitude Test (Carroll and Sapon, 2002). P. Pimsleur (1966) developed an alternative test Pimsleur Language Aptitude Battery (PLAB). The final version of the PLAB contains six sections (Pimsleur, et al. 2004), each one testing different aspects of the four predictive factors (verbal ability, auditory ability, motivation and grade point average). The fifth and the sixth sections are Sound Discrimination, which tests the ability to learn new phonetic distinctions and to recognize them in different contexts and is a measure of auditory ability; Sound-Symbol Association that tests the ability to associate sounds with written symbols is another measure of auditory ability. The Pimsleur Language Aptitude Battery placed more emphasis on auditory factors and less on memory (Dörnyei, 2010). The "initial" period in H. Palmer's system and an introduction course of "pure" listening can be conducted on fragments of the monological speech, short dialogues, presentations of various announcers, group discussions. Training of orally perception should begin with audition of several sentences, distinctly and emotionally said by the teacher. Listening fragments he recommends doing a pause as the psychological moment during which it is possible
to check understanding. Longer contexts and more difficult language material without evident support in presentation of voices of announcers can be used further. Contexts have to be interesting and emotionally rich. Then it is possible to use tape recordings and to listen to radio. It is also necessary to divide the audited text into parts and to ask the controlling questions after each part. Questions can be asked about all context when the listeners begin to understand the text and can keep the contents in memory. Special questions are recommended for checking understanding.

RESULTS
The difference between writing and pronunciation is a phonetic difficulty for Russian and Tatar students during listening. Distinction between a visual and acoustical image of the word considerably complicates understanding during listening. “Universal phonologic classification” — classification of segments of the speech by the distinctive signs having articulation character has been offered by the American linguists N. Chomsky and M. Halle in 1968. They recommend studying the whole families of related words and rules of spelling, a vocalic and consonant ablaut so that spelling did not cause difficulties (Chomsky and Halle, 1968). Deleting of a side between words can be referred to phonetic difficulties of audition as well as existence of acoustical similarity between oppositions under the influence of the next sounds.

Phonetic difficulty in audition is presented also by an accent. T. Bowen and J. Marks (1992) recommend training perception of an accent with visual aid. While training intonation is also necessary to use contrast. J. Kerr (2000) suggests that global improvements in intelligibility may be made by working on vowels alone. He also says that structures may be practiced first in slower, more prolonged utterances. The speed of utterances has to be gradually increased to normal speaking speed. This progression may also be important in helping the speaker internalize the motor patterns (Kerr, 2000).

Because of linguistic comparison of the English and Tatar languages at the phonetic level (first of all at the level of timbre registration of the speech); the English pronunciation can reveal some regularities of an interference of the native language in the process of teaching Tatars.

According to it, contrast comparison of the Tatar and English languages in respect of distribution of concordant phonemes has been carried out. Consecutive comparison of the specified phenomena of the compared languages has given the chance to reveal essential distributive distinctions.

Reflecting the general regularity of a structure of a speech chain in the German group of languages, English is characterized by very high consonant saturation of sound chains. It means that the structure of a syllable typical for English allows confluence of a row to 7 consonants. We will note that Russian is also inclined to complication of combinations of concordants though this feature is not so brightly expressed in it as in English.

Examples from English language: scheme, neck, scream, next, texts.
The syllabic type consonant + vowel is peculiar to Tatar therefore confluence of several concordant phonemes to be perceived for them unusual and where within one syllable there is a group of concordants which is inconveniently said for them, it right there breaks by vowels.

Examples: project – [prɔdʒekǝ], text – [tekǝst].
Teaching English of bilinguals, teachers often come across with the following misunderstandings while students perceive information orally. The sentence He has seen Nelly may be heard as He has seen Elly; It is a nice house as It is an icehouse. The lack of logic signs of phonemes also belongs to phonetic difficulties of audition: e – æ; i – i; ʌ – ɑ. Tatar students, whose Tatar language is native, hear no difference between phonemes [ɔ] and [ʌ]. The word nut can be apprehended as not. Phonemes [e] and [ɔ] also poorly differ for Tatar students and are perceived as the Tatar sound [э]. The sound [r] is linking and is perceived by Tatars as the beginning of the next word [faðə + rənd məðə]. English short sentences are often heard as one word. For example, Here he is …, and so on …, etc. aurally seem to Tatar students as words [hiəhiiz] and [souɔn].
Unfamiliar parenthesis is perceived not as introduction, but as the speech pieces that are directly connected with sense of the sentence or representing independent semantic groups. Instead of a lip and tooth slot-hole sound [v] Tatar students perceive it as slot-hole sonant [w] and vice versa. **Where is** they perceive as **Varies**.

There are no diphthongs, trip thongs in Russian. In Tatar language there is one diphthong [symiy] and there are no trip thongs. Two and three syllable combinations are similar to diphthongs and arise on a joint of words. Words with diphthongs and trip thongs in English present a certain difficulty for Tatar students at audition and perception of the English speech. In Tatar language, there is no phoneme [tʃ], so words watches, matches etc. by Tatar students are perceived as [wɔʃiz], [mӕʃiz]. The word with a suffix is often perceived as two words: [daut-lis], [di’velǝp-ment]. Prosthetics of vowels by Tatar students also complicates listening and perception of the English speech. For example, *circus* is heard as [sikǝs]. Essential work on differentiation of phonemes has to be carried out in a context by the principle of contrast of acoustic properties and distinctive signs.

Only contrast accents can help to learn and understand the sense of English sentences (Allen, 1972). The same sentence should be said with an accent on various words, explaining thus change of sense. It allows students then to understand the lectures given in English. The correct partitioning of a flow of the speech on semantic pieces – syntagmas, the use of pauses, the correct use of verbal and phrase stress also present phonetic difficulties of audition for Tatars. Pauses in Tatar speech can arise in any place of a sentence.

Min /kiche belen/oyden chictym da/tury kinoga kittem.

The intonational system of Tatar language considerably differs from the English one. If the English intonation pattern is characterized by the variety of intonation scales and tone of completions, the scale in the syntagma of Tatar language is usually flat with a slight rise and fall at any stressed syllable word, which is important semantically. Quick rise and fall of speech tone in the stressed syllables hardly perceived and the speech seems monotonous in Tatar. The perception of an intonation system of the English speech is difficult for Tatar students because of the seemingly fast speed and higher frequency level especially of English speakers-women. Normal rate of the English speech is 180 words a minute, Tatar speech is 120. It is explained also by a different lexical and grammatical system of languages. It is difficult for Tatar students to divide English phrases into syntagmas because of higher speed of pronouncing. Syntagmas length and the length of the pauses between syntagmas is more important than the speed of pronouncing words in syntagmas (Rivers, 1964). The longer the syntagma, the harder it is perceived when listening and less strongly keeps in memory. During the pause, the listener pronounces the piece of apprehended thought. If the syntagma consists of ten words or more, the listener during a long pause realizes the heard piece, unites the previous syntagmas and try to foresee semantic character of the sentence. In natural speech with long pauses the phenomena of hesitation is followed by certain fixed expressions, which lengthen a break in sounding of syntagmas without changing sense. The phenomena of hesitation extend pauses and reduce the amount of perceived information. The longer the pause, the easier is listening and understanding processes.

There are also phonetic and psychological difficulties during perception and understanding of the spontaneous speech. Repetitions of words, expressions and correction or amendment are peculiar to spontaneous statements in any language.

He, he has come.

The scientific research, you know, is of great importance.

The phenomena of hesitations in spontaneous statements, which have a certain degree of modality, can be closely connected with sense (Dickinson, 1970). This phenomenon includes "intimacy signals" i.e. they give the relations of the statement speaking to a subject and such “intimacy signals” help to come into contact with the interlocutor. They can express anger, grief, irritation, pleasure, delight, doubt, consent, uncertainty, etc. All this is also perceived in intonation of the phrase.

The perception of the speech is not automatic process (Rivers, 1964). People selectively react to these or those aspects of a situation. Native speakers do not perceive reservations, phenomena of hesitation, fillers of silence and the false beginnings of their own and of an interlocutor. Native speakers usually do not perceive all excess
phenomena in the speech the lack of which would not violate the content of statements. In the process of listening, it is extremely important to acquire the skill of conscious perception of "intimacy signals" which are not connected with sense of expressions and the ability to select and to understand the sounding speech.

DISCUSSION
As a supportive application for understanding, use the written text at all grade levels of teaching language (Rivers, 1964). L. Dickenson (1970) offers the following types of work:
1. Record contexts completely without gaps;
2. Make the mark up stress and intonation;
3. Perform exercises in simultaneous interpretation;
4. Use audited record as material for discussion.
W.H. Sumby (1962) suggests to use the illegible speech for training listening with accompanying noise as such speech should be heard in most cases on all sources of information. I.A. Zimnyaya (2001) also recommends training listening in the complicated conditions of perceptions. A number of authors do not recommend training audition and perception of the text using two channels: auditive and visual as the graphic support will not provide students an understanding skill in listening further (Stack, 1960). I. Kondrateva, A. Valeev and M. Safina (2016) think through learning of listening as speech culture.

Language redundancy is a positive factor in perception of information when listening. Excess elements in language are the words, which are not connected with contents of the message, syntactic relationship and word compatibility. They are repetitions, redemands and fillers of silence. Grammatical forms if they duplicate each other can be superfluous. Communicative language must have a certain amount of redundancy. The authors of the article form their experience consider that students’ acoustical memory develops poorly. In school training the basic are visual sources of information. Teaching a foreign language in high school it is necessary to conduct target listening in order to "revive" the auditory memory and make it a reliable communication channel, providing a high quality of experience and opportunity to listen lectures on specialty in English increasing the academic mobility. Any auditive sources as listening to presentations during conferences, symposiums, listening to the radio and even a phone conversation promote the development of auditory memory and listening skills. It is necessary to practice as much as possible listening without support of visual perception (Rivers, 1964).

CONCLUSION
The English phonetics is based on historically developed pronunciation of various groups – native speakers of English and is not absolute or identical to all its carriers. There are many types of pronunciations and not only outside Great Britain, but in the Oldest England too. Up to that, representatives of different nationalities, of different types of pronunciation badly understand each other, the same situation is with other groups of people who only started studying English. Studied methodological works and papers, authors’ own experience in language teaching allow giving some recommendations on teaching bilinguals. It may be essential laboratory work consisting of exercises for intensive listening. After repeated listening, the studied text is analyzed in terms of the challenges contained in it, which may include the following types of problems:
1. Phonological: the sound quality of the recorded text, sounds unclear to the listener, drawing syntagmas intonation phrases, unusual intonation patterns, etc.
2. Syntax: text contains complex semantically rich and unusually constructed sentences.
4. Phenomena of hesitation, reservations, and silence fillers, false start, and so on.
It is necessary to recommend the exercises in intensive listening to overcome difficulties. After listening of one of the moments, difficult for perception, it is necessary to stop the tape recorder and to analyze the difficulties in the text. After the analysis of difficulties, it is necessary to listen to the text in general, divide sentences into syntagmas, note words or a number of words, which are the semantic centers, or predicates of syntagmas. It is a phonological factor of the analysis of the text. To define also nature of terminal tone of a syntagma is important too.
sentence breaks up to a number of syntagmas, it is necessary to define also degree of the semantic center or a predicate of every syntagma. Due to that, it will be possible to establish syntagma, which is the most powerful in the semantic relation. This syntagma should be allocated especially.

Tatar students often perceive geographical and proper names as the common nouns, so it is important to give place names, proper names, figures, dates in a graphic representation as the visual support.

Mark Hancock’s (Hancock, 2012) new edition of “English Pronunciation in Use (Intermediate)” has the distinction between the models to copy. In previous editions students were confused which native or non-native accents used in listening activities should be imitated by them (Henderson, 2012). Such textbooks will be of great help in training of pronunciation.

In the spontaneous speech of English, namely in its phonetic registration considerable quantitative and qualitative variability is observed. Intonational coloring of the statement can indicate speaking person’s character and temperament, and the relations between interlocutors (Phonetic analysis of spontaneous English speech, 2015).

After conducted research, it was possible:
1) to reveal and analyze the reasons of an unsatisfactory condition of possession of listening skills in a foreign language;
2) to find reserves of the organization of systematic listening and to develop a way of its realization by means of modification in relation to specific conditions of training;
3) to determine the content of training in systematic listening at the definite language levels;
4) to allocate educational actions as a part of listening without "visual" help and with it; to develop the set of exercises adequate to process of improvement of listening and formations of "visual" listening;
5) to carry out selection of listening material in the specialty for systematic listening on the basis of a method of allocation and the description of semantic structure of the text which is most fully reflecting specifics of scientific style of the speech.

Psychologists recognize positive influence of visual support during listening because it is possible to apprehend six times more information for the same period than aurally. The visual support helps to minimize phonetic difficulties. This is not a complete overview of the features of perception of sounding speech and phonetic difficulties for listening English by bilingual students. Ability to perceive the speech orally demands necessary training on contexts with gradually increasing difficulties for a long time. The offered forms of the organization of systematic listening; the developed set of exercises and ways of selection of listening material can be used in practice of training in other foreign languages taking into account their specifics.

Further research of this problem may provide the development of the technology and the organization of systematic listening for initial and other language levels for bilinguals; a system of listening for an English language course taking into account structure of semantic information in different areas of scientific knowledge; criteria for selection, introduction and fixing of lexicon, intonation, and stress.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The work is performed according to the Russian Government Program of Competitive Growth of Kazan Federal University.

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