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LISTENING COMPREHENSION AND ITS IMPACT ON THE PARAPHRASING ABILITY OF STUDENTS BELONGING TO DIFFERENT STREAMS OF A PRIVATE COLLEGE

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ABSTRACT

The aim of this paper was to see what impact listening comprehension exercises had on the paraphrasing ability of 175 students belonging to 5 different streams of a private college in India and if there was any significant difference in their performance in the activity. The recorded lecture of a two-minute duration had a professor talking about a historical movement. The students were asked to take down notes during the exercise and then given a minute each to paraphrase the contents. The results showed that barring a few students, almost everyone else did well on the exercise. This manifested itself in coherence of thoughts, accuracy of ideas and appropriateness in the use of words and grammatical structures. The test proves the fact that listening, if incorporated in the teaching pedagogy, can lead to significant improvement in the communicative ability of the students.

Key words : Listening comprehension, communicative ability, paraphrasing, articulation

1. Introduction

The foundation of any successful communicative and language learning activity is mastery over the four skills, viz., listening, reading, speaking and writing. While listening and reading fall under the receptive skills; speaking and writing are productive skills. Extensive research carried out in the field of language learning and teaching has shown that one skill is inextricably linked with the other. An improvement in one, consequently, will lead to an improvement in the other. Effectiveness in writing and speaking is directly related to seriousness shown in reading and listening. The more ones reads and listens in the target language; the better would be his communicative ability.

For the last few years, the language skills of students in India have been showing downwards trend. In any communicative activity or situation, one finds traces of not only code mixing but also

those of the levels of formality. The reasons behind the trend range from excessive use of technology that has made the language more and more casual to a complete absence of an appropriate approach to teaching. In order for an individual to become an adept user of the language, it is important that s/he has an adequate command over the resources- codes and forms- of that language.

The present paper will observe the impact of listening comprehension exercises in the classroom in improving the paraphrasing ability of the students. Paraphrasing is nothing but rephrasing of the words heard or read. This is an activity that makes the learner retrieve words and grammatical structures stored in his mental lexicon and string them together as coherent wholes.

The constitution of India accords English the status of an official language alongside Hindi. Parliamentary proceedings, legal documents,

speeches and lectures, especially in schools and colleges, all make use of English language. Parents prefer sending their children to English medium schools as they feel that the professional future of their children is somewhere linked to their proficiency in this language. Keeping all this in mind, the present research focusses on the activity of listening and paraphrasing the content.

2. Literature review

Cohen terms listening as the most “fertile and the fastest ground” for enhancing vocabulary, especially for those not aware of the first 2000 high-frequency words. He quotes limited research in the field of listening as the reason behind the ignorance of it by the teaching fraternity about its advantages (1-2).

Hamada proposes the use of shadowing with difficult material to improve the listening comprehension abilities of students. This is a process that requires the learner to listen and speak simultaneously. Initially used as a training method for interpreters, it is being used for more than a decade now in Japan for education purposes (140). This method, however, does not just improve listening skills but also leads to a marked improvement in language acquisition (141).

Sullivan takes a step further in describing listening as a workplace skill without which the problems have the potential to grow out of proportion(1). Echoing the sentiments of other scholars in this study, he also mentions “listening” as an area neglected by researchers (2-3). His study, however, views listening as an instrument that can be used for understanding and addressing issues at the workplace rather than developing language skills. Workplace, however, would also benefit from well-developed listening skills and so he lays emphasis on “training for listening (1).”

Renukadevi underlines, in a great measure, the importance and role of listening in language acquisition. “Sound, rhythm, intonation and stress”(60), she states can best be learned through listening exercises yet scant attention is paid to developing this skill in the classroom. Quoting figures from studies conducted previously, she says

“45% of the communicative competence” comes from listening activities alone (60). “Linguistic and prior knowledge” of the context combined together, she observes, can help the learners improve comprehension (62).

Rocío , likewise asserts that it took many years for “listening to get the importance it deserved in second and foreign language teaching”. He corroborates his statement through a quotation by Rivers, which claims that speaking by itself does not constitute communication and that it becomes a part of it only when it is comprehended by the other person (12).

Emphasizing the importance of listening, Narjes quotes Krashen and Hamouda as strong advocates of this activity. They maintain that this activity provides an impetus for acquisition of language by providing “comprehensible input” and it is this “input” that expedites the process of learning (Sabouri 1670). Further, Sabouri explains that this skill can be developed with extensive practice in a warm classroom environment. If this is carried out meticulously, then the learners can be in “control of their own learning” (1675).

Shalawati and Hadijah consider competence in listening as the ability to comprehend and convey information quickly during oral and written communication. It allows one to utilize his/her mental faculties to understand, communicate and respond all at the same time (70-71).

While talking about the importance of media exposure in enhancing one’s language performance, Alaga speaks about the salubrious effects of audio-visual media in developing one’s speaking skills(144). She also confirms the findings of several researchers before her who maintain that the “Asian learners are highly visual(151).” The maximum amount of learning, during her experiment using audio-visual aids , is said to have taken place via viewing.

Advocating the use of multimedia technology, Sejdiu says that “pupils with strong L2 listening skills can demonstrate proficiency in other language skills”(60). This area , however, has been

neglected for many years as reading, speaking and writing have been used as parameters for assessing the proficiency of a student in L2. With the introduction of Computer-Assisted Language Learning, the learners are now getting exposed visual and aural inputs which goes a long way improving a learner's communicative ability.

Tisma maintains that research in ELT over the years has shown a positive relationship between "target language vocabulary and listening comprehension"; the better the vocabulary, the better is listening comprehension(303). Since listening, as termed by Nunan in this paper, is a "fundamental language learning skill", it is important that it be made to include a wide range of authentic listening comprehension material for use in the classroom teaching(301-302).

The papers above strongly advocate the use of listening in the classroom for the improvement of communicative ability of the students. Most of them even stress that this ability has not received adequate attention from the teaching fraternity as a tool for improving the spoken skills or written skills of the students. Extensive research in the area, however, has been carried out in countries outside India. The Indian language teaching classroom environment either does not have adequate facilities for listening exercises to be administered or does not have trained instructors to carry out this activity productively.

Following the inputs received from the papers above about listening as an effective means for improving language, this paper studied the impact of listening comprehension exercises on paraphrasing ability of the students.

3. Purpose of the study:

The purpose of the study was to find out how listening comprehension exercises impact the paraphrasing ability of the students and if there is any significant difference in the performance of students belonging to different streams.

3.1 Research Problem:

Undergraduate students find it difficult to articulate well in English language.

3.2 Context:

The study is being conducted in the Indian context where English language in the classroom is mostly taught using oral inputs. The use of listening comprehension exercises is either totally absent or is present in a restricted way.

4. Objectives:

- To understand how listening comprehension exercises impact the ability of the students to paraphrase
- To understand how students belonging to different streams perform on the listening comprehension-paraphrasing exercises
- To understand if the performance of all the groups is similar or different

4.1 Null hypothesis:

There is no significant difference in the performance of different groups on the listening-paraphrasing exercise.

Alternate hypothesis:

It is hypothesized that there is a difference in performance of different groups on the listening-paraphrasing exercise.

5. Proposed methodology:

This was a survey based research that aimed to administer a listening comprehension test to 175 second year students of five undergraduate courses –Management, IT, Hospitality, Media and Design students of a private college. A recorded lecture/conversation was used as a test to study its impact on paraphrasing. A method of convenience sampling was used to select 35 students from each course.

5.1 Technique :

Students were made to listen to a recorded lecture in the classroom while simultaneously taking down the notes. After the lecture was over, they were given a minute to paraphrase what they had heard. The evaluator then assessed the language used for content, coherence, the forms and the structures. Total score for the test was 20. The scores obtained were then placed in tables and the

variance between and within groups was tested through ANOVA.

5.2 Participants:

175 students from second year of 5 different courses of a private collegewere given a listening comprehension exercises to see how well the students understood the message and paraphrased it.

6.Result :

Anova Single factor

SUMMARY				
Groups	Count	Sum	Average	Variance
Group-1	35	518	14.8	8.047059
Group-2	35	506	14.45714	11.19664
Group-3	35	516	14.74286	7.314286
Group-4	35	509	14.54286	7.373109
Group-5	35	512	14.62857	9.122689

ANOVA

Source of Variati on	SS	df	MS	F	P-value	F crit
Betwe en Group s	2.7657 14	4	0.6914 29	0.0802 98	0.9882 97	2.4248 15
Within Group s	1463.8 29	17 0	8.6107 56			
Total	1466.5 94	17 4				

The P-value: 0.988297159> the alpha: 0.05. Therefore, we accept the null hypothesis that there is no significant difference in the performance of different groups on the listening-paraphrasing exercise

7. Conclusion

From the result above, it can be concluded that the listening exercises given to different streams of students has a similar impact on the paraphrasing ability. A mean score of 14.774 of all the five groups put together all also goes to prove that the listening has a positive impact on the paraphrasing ability of the students. The results

obtained in this study , therefore , are in consonance with the research results of previous scholars.

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