

ARABIC AS A SECOND LANGUAGE LISTENING COMPREHENSION: INSTRUCTION AND ASSESSMENT

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this paper is to present some instructional ideas for listening comprehension in Arabic as a second language (ASL) and their alignment with listening assessment. Among the suggestions are using spoken texts as instructional input, introducing the micro- and macro markers and providing students with authentic listening texts. In addition, the paper also highlights the importance of awareness-raising on the differences between spoken and written language among ASL learners. To expand the extent of the scope of possible instructional ideas for ASL listening, the discussion on pre-teaching of listening input and its connection to learners' schemata is also included. To consolidate the discussion on instructional ideas, communicative reciprocal listening instruction is recommended for ASL listening instruction. Apart from instructional ideas, suggestions on how to develop a 'considerate' ASL listening assessment that is in alignment with classroom instruction are also presented in this paper.

Keywords: *listening comprehension, ASL, assessment, Arabic language, authentic listening input*

Introduction

In order to teach Arabic as a second language (ASL) listening comprehension, it is essential for ASL teachers to have the relevant knowledge and understanding of the listening comprehension process. Such knowledge and understanding may facilitate a more effective listening comprehension instructional design and implementation. On this platform, the characteristics of listening texts and the elements involved in the process of listening comprehension are reviewed and discussed. According to Faerch, and Kasper (1986) listening comprehension is an active process of meaning construction in which listener draws a various information sources in order to interpreted the intended meaning of the message. Additionally, Rost (1990) also described listening comprehension as a complex process that transforms an auditory stimulus to a mental reconstruction on the part of the listeners. Boyle (1984) argued that there is a substantive different between hearing and listening. He emphasized that the listening is an active process of meaning construction in which linguistic linkage, perception and word knowledge are interact in a very complex manner to determine the content of audio-text.

Rost (2011, 2005) also contended that listening is a very complex cognitive process that comprises four overlapping mechanisms; neurological, linguistic, semantic and pragmatic processing. According to Rost, neurological process involves physical process associated with hearing and listening of the audio text such as converting external sound waves auditory perceptions, arousal, attention and focus. Linguistic process, which is also known as bottom-up or decoding involves perceiving the sounds and intonation unit in the input, recognizing words and phrases, activating lexical knowledge associated with the identified words and phrases and finally translating incoming speech into syntactic representations through syntactic processing. This process assists the listeners to construct meaning from input

and modify their pre-existing knowledge based on the morpho syntactic input from text (Jung, 2003). It is worth mentioning that both top-down and bottom up processes are working in a reciprocal way; completing each other to construct meaning from income message simultaneously. Semantic or top-down process is related to the activity of linkage between linguistics information and learners' personal experience. It also involves effective usage of schemata to make inference about incoming message. Finally, the pragmatic processing encompasses the learners evaluation of absorb meanings against of his/her expectation, the activation of the social frame and integration of contextual information. This pragmatic process would provide learners with the ability to engage in interactive responses while listening to an audio task.

Listening comprehension in the Arabic, as the case in other languages, is the ability to neurologically, linguistically, semantically, pragmatically and socially understand the audio text. Arabic language audio text is believed to be very difficult for beginning learners to comprehend. This difficulty is believed to emerge from lack of neurological, linguistic, semantic and pragmatic ability to conceptualize the incoming message. In addition to discussing the listening process, the paper also provides the discussion on listening assessment and its alignment with ASL listening instruction.

Analysis of Spoken Texts

Tyler (1994) proposed the use of spoken texts that signal relationships between ideas, indicate the relative importance of ideas, and have cues for students to evaluate ideas. The discourse signaling cues in texts are such as preview (e.g., *The are four stages of this culture shock*), summarizes (e.g., *To sum up so far*), emphasis markers (e.g., *This is the key*), logical connectives (e.g., *and, or, first, and second*). Jung (2003) also stated that given the support for the facilitating effects of cues on first

language (L1) listening comprehension, one could hypothesize that second language (L2) listeners' comprehension would also benefit from the presence of these cues in the texts. Jung (2006) also found that discourse-signaling cues play a significant role in L2 listening comprehension. Some studies have indicated that L2 speakers are often not understood by L1 listeners because they have little knowledge of cues as well as their inability to use cues correctly (e.g. Rounds, 1987; Tyler, 1994; Williams, 1992). Jung (2003) argued that lack of proper understanding of signaling cues hinder listening and reading comprehension such as difficulty in identifying main ideas, recalling main points, and distinguishing between main and minor ideas. According to him, although background knowledge of the text plays a significant role in the text comprehension, however, background knowledge of the text organization is not less important. The background knowledge of the text organization commonly refers to signaling clues. These signaling clues play an important role in connecting ideas, highlighting the relative importance of ideas and evaluating the given ideas. Jung (2003) also found that clues enhanced learners' listening comprehension of high and low level information. He further noted that although many factors contribute to text comprehension such a text structures, text types, learners' background of knowledge, and L2 listening proficiency, the contribution of signaling cues both macro and micro-markers should not be underestimated.

Macro and Micro Markers

Researchers categorized markers into two overlapping categories; namely, macro and micro markers (Chaudron & Richards, 1986). According to these researchers as reported by Jung "macro-markers are cues that function at macro level to signal the relationship among main segments or to mark the major transition points in discourse" (Jung, 2003, p. 563). On the other hand, "micro-markers are cues that

function at the micro level to indicate intersentential relations or to function as pause fillers" (Jung, 2003, p. 563)

In addition, ASL teachers should also introduce the macro-markers (e.g., *What I'm going to talk about today is*) as suggested by Chaudron and Richards (1986). Based on the study of these two researchers, the findings indicate that macro-markers significantly helped the learners comprehend the lecture. There are different types of discourse signaling cues (Chaudron & Richards, 1986; Jung, 2003) such as previews, summarizers, emphasis markers and logical connective. It is worth mentioning that the difference between macro and micro markers is mainly on the functions of these cues in the sentences not on the length of the cues. Macro markers are labelled in the Arabic language as

التمهيد أو المقدمة أو براعة الاستهلال. The introduction would pave the way for the Arabic language learners to holistically comprehend the content of the listened tasks and understanding the message of the instructor. Without macro-markers the learners would fail to connect the new lesson to the previous one and fail to attain the main idea from the assigned listening tasks. Besides the macro-markers, teachers should also introduce texts that contain micro-markers that function as intersentential relations or as pause fillers (e.g., *and*, *so*, and *well*) as defined by Chaudron and Richards (1986). In the Arabic language, the intersentential relation or pause fillers are labelled as Adawatu rabti (أدوات الربط). These intersentential relations are used to establish linkage between contiguous sentences or blocks of sentences, and also between contiguous paragraphs or block of paragraph. They are very essential in connecting the sentences and play significant roles in making meanings of texts understandable and clear. Among the adawatu rabt is conjunction (حروف العطف) such as *و*, *ف*, *ثم*, *حتى*, *أو*, *أم*, *بل*, *لا*, *ولكن*, *إلا*. There are other intersentential relation such as adverb of time (ظروف الزمان), adverb of place (ظروف الزمان), relative pronouns

(والأسماء الموصولة), demonstrative pronouns (وأسماء الإشارة) and all meaningful articles (وجميع حروف المعاني) and then other essential connected words such as in addition to (علاوة) due to (نظرا لـ), in addition to (زد على), (حشية أن), for fear of (خوفاً), sometimes (تارة), in this manner (هكذا), also (وأيضاً), on the other hand (من جانب), (من المثير للاهتمام) (أخر), These pause filter and intersentential relation clauses would help the listeners to connect the previous ideas with new one which will facilitate meaning to be more clearer.

An example of this intersentential relation can be traced in the first six verses of Surat Abasa in the Holy Quran. In these six verses, the Almighty Allah uses two very essential intersentential relation word repeatedly for different semantic purposes. Although, الفاء and ثم are interconnected in term of meaning because both of them are conjunction words like الواو (additive connective), the three conjunction words (الواو، والفاء، وثم) are used differently in different contexts. For example:

جاء زيد وعمرو
Zaid and Amru arrived (both arrived together simultaneously)

جاء زيد فعمرو
Zaid then Amru arrived (both arrived but not together)

جاء زيد ثم عمرو
Zaid arrived and then after a reasonable long period Amru also arrived

Although, these three intersentential relations are similar, they are very different in terms of period. الواو indicates that both persons came together. الفاء suggests that both came but not together. There is a space between the arrival of the first person and the second one, but the time is not long while ثم shows that both arrived but there is a long gap between the first arrival and the second arrival. According to the previous verses of Surat Abasa:

Cursed is man; how disbelieving is he. From what substance did He create him? From a sperm-drop He created him and destined for him; Then He eased the way for him; Then He causes his death and provides a grave for him. Then when He wills, He will resurrect him.

Almighty Allah uses *ءافلا* between creation and destination because there is a distance between both according to Islamic belief but the distance is not so long. However, He uses *هث* between destination and easy the way, because the minimum period between both is five months. Also, Allah uses *هث* between the birth and the death but *ءافلا* between the death and a grave because that should be immediately after the death, and finally Allah uses *هث* between the grave and resurrection because of the long period human beings will spend in their grave before the Day of Judgment and the Day of Reckoning. It is obvious from these verses how Almighty Allah precisely selects the appropriate intersentential relation words in order to make the meanings clear. This is the beauty of the Arabic language that is difficult to be found in other languages.

Intersentential relation plays enormous semantic role to create linkages between clausal units in the text. Hence, it is essential for ASL instructors to highlight intersentential relation because according to ‘Aasim (2013) without proper introducing this intersentential relation clause, the learner would fail not only in comprehend the Arabic text, but also to appreciate the beauty of the Arabic language and able to enhance his/her competency. Connective facilitative cohesion offers cues about the type of relationships between ideas in the text.

The reason why teachers should also introduce the micro-markers is because studies have indicated that micro-markers may help increase listening performance when listening to texts that contain naturally occurring micro-markers (e.g., Flowerdew & Tauroza, 1995; Jung, 1999). In Jung’s

(1999) study, the combination of micro- and macro-markers had led to a significantly better performance in the signaled groups in recalling both high level and low-level information and high students' perception of their comprehension. It was also found that lack of cues in a text or inappropriate usage of it would hinder learners' assimilations of income message, recalling the main points and cause confusions in comprehending the message (Jung, 2003).

Authentic Listening Input

Apart from the above features, Jung (2003) and Field (2002) also suggested that teachers use authentic listening texts. Jung stated that by using authentic texts, students will gain familiarity with the naturalness of spoken language in L2 while Field reasons that authentic texts mirror real life listening experience. According to Field, when teachers use real life spoken texts, teachers are actually training the students using a strategic activity. Since understanding spoken text in real life involves a lot of inferencing and guessing on the listeners' part, Field states that strategic activity will develop risk-takers among L2 listeners to make inferences using identifiable resources. In the Arabic language, it is believed that learners would acquire and master the target language through authentic text (العبارة النموذجية) in which they will construct their own sentences and express their own feelings based on the authentic listening input they have learned. According to Ibn Khaldoun, listening is the leader of all language skills (ابتهاج) (مهارة الاستماع هي أبو الملكات اللسانية) (٧٠٠٢، محمد علي). Ibn Khalidoun did not mean that other skills are less important or supplementary to listening, but rather because language is acquired through imitation and because hearing is the first faculty used by human beings immediately after the birth. Interestingly, the Almighty Allah also gives priority to the hearing before any other human faculties due to its significance in acquiring knowledge and obtaining information. In Surat Al-'Isrā',

Almighty Allah say

And do not pursue that of which you have no knowledge. Indeed, the hearing, the sight and the heart - about all those [one] will be questioned. (Al-'Isrā', 17: 36)

Surat Al-Mu'minun

And it is He who produced for you hearing and vision and hearts; little are you grateful

(Al-Mu'minun, 23: 79)

Surat Sajda

Then He proportioned him and breathed into him from His [created] soul and made for you hearing and vision and hearts; little are you grateful

(Sajda, 32: 9)

Surat Mulk

Say, "It is He who has produced you and made for you hearing and vision and hearts; little are you grateful

(Mulk, 67: 23).

There verses are clear evidence of the importance of listening skills as an effective instrument of leaning and acquisition.

On the other hand, it was suggested that when the learners comprehend the authentic text it will help them to strengthen their target language skills, improve the level of the vocabulary, increase their confidence and enhance their listening comprehension and performance (Rushdi Ahmad Tuaimah, 1993). Traditionally, according to the Arab belief, the ability to construct a meaningful speech and to be an orator emerges from imitation of others. Imitation of typical phrases and their memorization plays significant role in helping learners to enhance their level of competency. This simply means that when some would like to be a good orator, he/she should familiar with earlier orators' usage of language through available authentic text. Therefore, providing ASL learners with authentic text would not only facilitate

their opportunity to comprehend the listening text but also boost their chances to master the target language.

Field (2002) also recommended that teachers encourage students to monitor the accuracy of their guesses based on the new upcoming input from the speakers. Students should be informed that they are not expected to understand everything or partial understanding is acceptable. This will assimilate real life situation where very often we understand only part of what is being said by a native speaker. Field also suggests that when using authentic texts, teachers should simplify the listening tasks and not the language. As indicated by Chin-Shyang and Read (2006), one of the difficulties faced by L2 listeners is lack of experience in hearing fluent natural speech. By exposing students to authentic speeches in the classroom, students will be equipped to be tested in L2 listening where listening support such as repeated listening is minimal (they normally can only hear once (Chin-Shyang & Read, 2006) or twice in an actual test setting. Hence, Arabic language learners should be given opportunity to guess meanings of unknown words through available channels such as linguistic context, emotional context, situational context and cultural context (Ahmad Mukhtar, 1992). Traditionally, context has been used in the Arabic language to connote the part of written or spoken statement that precede or follow a specific word or passage that usually influencing its meaning. In Arabic language, context plays a pivotal role not only in bounding the sentences (conjunction), but also in making meaning more understandable and coherent. Terminologically, context was first introduced Al-Zamkharzi (الزمخشرى) in his book *Al-mufasal* but Ibn Ya'hish (ابن يعيش) explained its content in explanation of the book (شرح المفصل). However, the Arab great Grammarians such as Sibawayh, (سيبويه) Al-Mubarid (المبريد) and Ibn Babashaz (ابن بابشاذ) have extensively discussed the meaning of context and its usage but without using the terminology.

Since the context in the Arabic language means links parts of the sentences with each other and show that there is a coherent unit and unique relationship to explain the meanings, the Arabic scholars have rigorously studied the Arabic context. The context was categorized into different categories and the significance of each category is in building coherent meanings. Although construction of meaningful sentences in the Arabic language relies heavily on syntax relations, the crucial roles played by context cannot be underestimated. Interestingly, the context in the Arabic language can be linguistic context, meaning context, rational context (mental) situational context, emotional context, cultural context and receptivity context. Thus, it is firmly believed that the precise meaning of a sentence cannot be conceptualized without putting it in its context. Due to the significant role of context, the Arabs perceive that each situation has its own context and message (لكل مقام مقال), which indicates the awareness of Arabs about the importance of context in delivering messages and receiving information.

Ahmad Mukhtar (1992) stated that it will be very difficult if not impossible to truly comprehend a message or a text whether in audio or written form without putting it into its own perspective and proper context. According to 'Aasim (2013), real communication in dealing with language should be based on effective input through listening or reading. According to him, listening comprehension is more than decoding an incoming speech and assimilating the information but in addition to the assimilation of the information in the incoming speech, teachers must match the listening input with learners' previous experiences and existing knowledge. Hence, when learners are familiar with the context of a speech or an utterance, the process is simplified significantly because they can assimilate the incoming information with the existing knowledge and then make appropriate inferences

in order to affectively understand the incoming message.

As Richard (1990) argued, listeners do not pay attention to all the utterances but rather being selective based on the purpose of the task. It is generally believed that the way the listeners approach the listening task would largely depend on their selection of the processing information. Richard (1990) also distinguished between two types of communication, which are interactional and transactional. He argued that an interactional purpose of communication is socially oriented in which people share ideas to fulfill social needs such as small talk and casual conversation. Hence, the interactional communication is a two-way conversation, highly interactive and extremely contextualized. Transactional communication, on the other hand is mainly to transfer message. It is a one-way communication, highly rigid and well-structured such as lectures and news broadcasts. Transactional communication needs accurate comprehension and appropriate usage of language because the accuracy and precision would compensate the body movement and clarification with the speaker in an interaction. The awareness of the purpose of listening to a text or utterance will help a listener to determine what to listen for and consequently which processes to activate (Vandergrift, 2002).

Awareness-Raising

In relation to using authentic materials, Lam (2002) promoted the idea that teachers raise students' awareness of the different features between written texts and spoken language. She suggested that teachers provide both reading and spoken scripts to students so that they are able to unravel the differences between the two scripts with the teacher's facilitation. According to Lam, teachers can use authentic materials produced by the students' themselves. Geddes and White (1978) purported the idea of teachers assisting their students to write semi-scripted speeches (using brief notes, flow charts or role play) that

assimilate authentic speeches. This way, they will better understand the nature of listening input and able to respond to the listening input more effectively whereby this is also a good integration of listening and speaking practices.

Lam also encouraged teachers to draw students' attention to pause fillers (Olynak, Anglejan, & Sankoff, 1990), stock phrases as a facilitation device (Bygate, 1987), and less complex structures as a compensation device (Bygate, 1987). By knowing and understanding how these devices can be manipulated, learners can use this knowledge to manage real life L2 discourse, to guess and infer meaning as well as to respond appropriately with spontaneity.

It is a general belief among ASL practitioners that the better learners can comprehend what is being said, the better will be their ability to use the pattern of what they heard for an effective communication and master the features of target language which would eventually help them to improve their language skills. Therefore, Arabic language instructors should promote active learning strategy by giving the text to learners to ensure that they are fully engaged. Furthermore, an appropriate listening strategy should be identified by giving learners tools such as looking for specific information, identifying predictable words or phrases to guide their listening activities and discussing what they expected in certain forms of speech e.g. newscasts or advertisement. Additionally, instructors should also select appropriate strategic lesson presentation because that would help learners to fully engage and comprehend the text such as using a top down strategy (general meaning and summarizing) or bottom up (cognates, specific words and word order patterns) approaches.

As Ibn Khaldun argued, listening skill is the head of all language skills. Therefore, learner should be given ample opportunity to hear as much as Arabic language audio text as possible while

using variety of teaching methods. For example, sometimes using visual cues and another time using other materials. This kind of variety would empower learners and enhance their listening comprehensions. As previously highlighted, authentic listening texts such as a radio announcement and a lecture in Arabic would assist learners to accustom with different forms of Arabic language and its realistic pace of speech. Giving Arabic language learners' opportunity and enhancing their available chances to comprehend the listening materials through reflections and discussions would galvanize them to share their experiences in the target language and employ effective strategies.

Pre-Teaching and Schemata

As mentioned by Underwood (1989), L2 students are lacking everyday experience with the spoken language and this calls for listening support in the classroom such as tuning the students into the listening text rather than getting them to deal with the task right away (Ching-Shyang & Read, 2006). As proposed by these two researchers, teachers can use pre-listening activities such as pre-teaching vocabulary and sentence structures, previewing questions, pre-listening to relevant topics, and pre-discussion relevant topics. Field (2002) also recommends pre-listening activities to create students' motivation when they are able to build connection between the topic and their real-life experiences.

According to Bartlett, (1967) human memory aggregates experience into schemata. This statement illustrates that comprehension is an integration process in which the listener constructs an interpretation of a text based on input from text and inferences he/she draws based upon his/her prior experiences. Schemata are "data structure for representing the generic concepts stored in memory" (Rumelhart, 1980, p.34). These schemata had been categorized into two distinctive categories, which are content schemata and formal content, while the former refers to

background knowledge about a content of the text and the latter is background knowledge about the organizational pattern of the text. Thus, listening comprehension is believed to be a process of making meaning from linguistic meaning and integrating these units in which prior knowledge plays a pivotal role.

Elkhafaifi (2005) unequivocally argued that pre-listening activities and repeated listening exposure to pre-listening tasks such as Arabic vocabulary preview, distractor activities, and Arabic verb conjugation have tremendous effects on Arabic learners' listening comprehension and their language proficiency. Elkhafaifi (2005) found from his study that second exposure to listening passage improved his participants' scores, which suggested that repeated exposure to the Arabic language passage and listening task is some better predictors of improved performance.

By pre-teaching, teachers can provide context for interpretation and activate students' prior knowledge (Buck, 1995) so that they can build connection with the listening text and thus able to perform the listening tasks better. By providing pre-listening activities, teachers can still give students listening text topics that are unfamiliar because these activities build schemata with the topic at hand. Nunan (2002) also promotes schema-building activities when there is a gap between learners' knowledge and the listening topic. This activity, according to Nunan, may help learners prepare for the upcoming listening tasks.

Jacobson, Davis, and Davis (1989) stated that background knowledge helps students to get the global meaning of the text. This means that the absence of schemata may cause students to misinterpret the macro idea of the text as in the case of the subjects in Jung's (1999) study. Considering that students' schemata are one of the important elements to create connection between the listener and the text (as indicated by studies such as Markham & Latham, 1987; Long, 1990;

Schmidt-Rinehart, 1994; Chiang & Dunkel, 1992; Teng, 1998), teachers should use listening texts that enable students to use their schemata as a scaffold to listening comprehension if they choose not to do pre-listening activities as recommended by the abovementioned researchers. As suggested by Nunan (2002), it is beneficial to teach students the top-down processing skills so that students can use what is within their knowledge to comprehend the listening text.

According to Brown and Yule (1983) schemata are organized background knowledge, which lead us to expect or predict aspects in our interpretation of discourse. Teichert (1996) conducted an empirical study on English native speakers learning German at the university level. The study compared learner performance in listening comprehension when multiple advance organizers such as illustrations, brainstorming and questions plus video and audio tape were used as opposed to neither the advance organizer nor the video or audio tape were used. It was discovered that experimental group that was exposed to pre-teaching activities outperformed their control counterparts in their listening scores. This finding indicates that pre-teaching activities is an effective strategy to enhance second language learners' top-down listening skills because it allows them to infer the existing knowledge to the new input. According to Jung (2003) top-down processing allows readers and listeners to develop expectation about the text structures and meaning through using prior knowledge as part of the comprehension process. Learners would employ real-life experiences and various types of schemata in top-down processing to predict subsequent discourse.

In the Arabic language, it is commonly believed that conceptualizing the meaning of aural text is not only a matter of linguistic knowledge (lexical, semantic, phonological and syntactic), but also non-linguistic knowledge (knowledge of context, topic or general knowledge).

Pre-listening activities would pave the way for ASL learners to effectively utilize their linguistic knowledge, adopting appropriate cognitive and metacognitive skill and guessing the meaning through the context of the task. According to Sara Al-Alili (2009) pre-listening activities would prepare learners and activate their background knowledge regarding unfamiliar topics. In her experimental study, Sara (2009) found that pre-listening activities play a significant role in enhancing learners' understanding, motivation and prediction of the listening text.

Communicative Listening Approach

Nunan (2002) proposed that teachers employ communicative listening activities that are reciprocal in nature rather than using the non-reciprocal ones. By making it communicative, students will have some control over the lesson. By personalizing the content of the listening task, students will be able to bring their knowledge and experience to the task. This can be done by providing extension tasks where learners have to provide the content on their own. For example, after listening to the text, learners have to prepare interview questions or responding in writing to a situation. This way, listening activities are more student-centered where students have to be actively involved and the use of language can still be maximized in a listening lesson.

It is well known that in communicative approach irrespective of the target language, learners play active role in the learning process. In this approach, the instructor is just a facilitator of communicative processes and not a controller or a dominator of the process. He/she is a participant, a motivator and an observer (Qian, 2013). In this approach, the teachers will decrease the proportion of the time spend on communicative processing and devote the tangible time on monitoring students' performance and giving feedback on the learners' progress. Therefore, learners would be active participants, negotiators, interactors, capable of giving

as well as taking, they are performers and listeners, they engage in classroom activities based on cooperative rather than individual work (Qian, 2013). Hence, in contradiction with the traditional approach in which the instructors fully dominate the teaching process with little input or no input from learners, Arabic language experts (Katbi, 2000; Sueraya & Che Hassan, 2013) advocate and strongly encourage instructors to adopt communicative approach to gear a conducive atmosphere that can nurture the learners' Arabic skills. The traditional method of teaching and learning the Arabic language was believed to contribute to students' language competency and partially contribute to the decay in their proficiency.

In contrast to the traditional method, the communicative approach strives to alternate the predominant roles between teacher and students in class activities. As was previously mentioned, the ultimate goal of communicative approach lies not only in instructing learner on how to use linguistic form correctly, but also in teaching them how to use language appropriately within different situations. According to Min (2012), previous studies on listening skill are either focus on instructing skills or concentrate on building up students' comprehension capability, rather than introducing communication concepts, let alone put the communicative teaching strategies into full play in listening teaching activities.

On the other hand, many empirical studies have indicated the impact of prior knowledge in listening comprehension and recall of main idea from audio text. Markham and Latham (1987) found that prior knowledge that is defined in term of cultural and religious background affected learners' listening comprehension of English language. Based on their findings, learners identify themselves with a particular religious tradition such as Islam, Christianity or religion-neutral background recalled more main ideas from the passage dealing with their own tradition, were more

likely to introduce their own elaborations to what they have heard and introduced fewer distortions of the listening passage. Additionally, Long (1990) in his empirical study discovered that English speaking college Spanish learners showed better listening on a monologue about a familiar topic than on unfamiliar one. These findings indicated the significance of familiarity of the topic to the comprehension, recalling main ideas and acquiring vocabulary.

Nonetheless, this is not to say that non-reciprocal listening activities should not be conducted in the classroom. As indicated by Nunan (2002), teachers can still use non-reciprocal listening activities such as listening to answering machine messages etc when it suits the listening purpose like listening for specific information, listening to a procedure, directions or sequence where these activities are meant to sharpen students' basic listening skills before students can function in more communicative listening activities. Since the main objectives of assessment is to enhance the quality and quantity of learning processes through accurate information and necessary cues, therefore, providing Arabic language learners with pre-listening activities will accelerate the achievement of that objective.

Assessment

Assessment has been defined in various ways, but all the definitions connote that it is a kind of judgment used in the learning processes to determine the strengths of the learner and his/her weaknesses. In other words, the assessment is used to improve learning and teaching processes. According to many practitioners (Cohen & Swerdlik, 2005; Kubiszyn & Borich, 2007) assessment is more than a mere assigning the grade and giving marks to the learner, but in addition to that to identify the learner's strengths and weaknesses so the strengths can be enhanced and the sources of the weaknesses can be eliminated. Hence, assessment whether summative or formative is not a punishment but rather a

constructive way to assist learners to learn and identify how much they have learnt. More precisely, assessment is a method of gathering information about how students are processing, approaching and reacting in real life tasks in a particular field (Jung, 2001). Therefore, Arabic language instructors should view assessment of listening skill in such a way. They should provide all available facilities to assist learners to acquire this important skill and assessment should be aligned with classroom teaching.

Therefore, when assessing listening, it is important to provide listening support to learners (Chin-Shyang & Read, 2006). It necessary to give learners some pre-listening activities that serves as an orientation (Underwood, 1989) before learners are asked to carry out any listening task. This is especially crucial when authentic texts are used to assess a listening performance. This is because L2 learners face difficulties in understanding natural speech in the target language due to limited knowledge and experience (Chin-Shyang & Read, 2006). Thus, the pre-listening activities will help activate background knowledge and provide context of interpretation of the listening topics (Buck, 1995) and help learners use the pre-listening experience to form “hypothesis-information, prediction and inferencing” (Mendelson, 1995, p. 140) about the topic. This will make students less anxious about the test and thus increases the validity of listening test results (Chin-Shyang & Read, 2006).

Part of the pre-listening activities could be pre-teaching some vocabulary that is critical to listening comprehension (Field, 2002). The pre-listening activity may also include pre-teaching sentence structures, previewing questions, pre-listening to relevant topics and pre-discussing relevant topics (Buck, 1995). Allow learners to pre-listen twice to relevant topic by having a question preview session in between or before hearing the topic for the first time (Chin-Shyang & Read, 2006).

Studies have indicated that pre-listening activities may produce better result because they provide necessary listening support (e.g., Sherman, 1997) especially to low proficiency learners. Again, considering that in this context the listening test is for low proficiency learners, studies (e.g., Chaudron, 1983; Bern, 1995) have indicated that besides repeating input, the repetition should be focused on nouns that this type of learners can use as “the most easily perceptible device” (Chin-Shyang & Read, 2006, p. 379). Furthermore, Cervantes and Gainer (1992) found that learners were able to cope with syntactically complex text by providing support such as repeated listening. As Chin-Shyang and Read (2006) emphasized, input can always be repeated more than two times depending on learners’ needs.

Therefore, by providing a non-test situation through pre-teaching vocabulary, for example, may help learner to deal with text propositional level understanding and the pre-listening experience may enable learners to close comprehension gap by activating prior knowledge for a more global understanding of the text (Stahl, Jacobson, Davis, & Davis, 1989). As indicated by Clerehan (1995) and Olsen and Huckin (1990), L2 learners’ difficulties in understanding L2 listening texts at the propositional and discourse levels.

Hence, teachers may choose to use either simplified input or authentic input but accompanied by repeated listening (Cervantes & Gainer, 1992) together with the abovementioned listening support (pre-listening activities) to carry out a more equitable listening performance assessment. As was previously mentioned, since the main objective of assessment is to enhance the quality and quantity of learning acquisition through providing accurate information and necessary cues, providing Arabic language learners with pre-listening activity would accelerate fulfilling that objective.

Conclusion

There are many ways to approach the teaching of listening in Arabic as an L2. However, many researchers have come to a consensus that in order to increase students' ASL listening comprehension, it is imperative that teachers expose learners to the authentic features of real life speeches such as pause fillers, facilitation device, compensation device, the differences between reading and spoken texts and increase their awareness in these areas. Findings of studies are also inclined towards the use of authentic listening

materials so that what learners are exposed to in the language classroom may help them function in real life situation due to their familiarity with authentic speeches. However, teachers must also be aware of the importance to provide appropriate listening support to make listening assessment more valid and equitable across L2 learners. To enhance the authenticity of listening lessons, teachers are also encouraged to move towards communicative type of listening activities because more often than not, listening and speaking are two associated online activities in real life situation.

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