



CHAPTER I
INTRODUCTION

In the field of language teaching, many new methods are being experimented with in all parts of the world, and many of them have been considered successful. The general feeling pervading the profession at this time is one of widespread excitement and enthusiasm for a new approach. New theories are being outlined to challenge the older ones. The teacher is confronted with many basic philosophies. How does he choose?

The answer seems to be that at present he cannot, or should not. Above all, he should avoid the temptation to say, "this is the right method". If anything has been learned to date, it is that there is no single best method. Students are different, and they learn in different ways. Teachers are different and they teach in different ways. An effort must be made to provide as many different learning schemes as possible.¹

The present may be one of the most unusual periods the twentieth century has seen in the development of methods of language instruction. It is probably a time when there is the least agreement as to what method should be preferred. Many teachers also note that their students - especially adult students - find it difficult to learn through the ear alone.

¹ Kenneth Chastain, The Development of Modern Language Skills: Theory to Practice (Philadelphia, Pa: The Center For Curriculum Development, Inc., 1971), p. 154.

Clifford H. Prator² suggested that.

We must not forget that students are more important than methods. Instructional methods were devised to serve the needs of students; students were not devised as subjects to try out methods on. Much of the time that has been spent in considering theoretical questions of methodology might have been better spent in trying to discover precisely what language skills our students will find most useful after they finish our classes. We could achieve more relevance to student needs in our classes if we paid attention to the problem of motivation; and without strong motivation, the student of a second or foreign language never learns enough to make it worthwhile.

Many students of English as a second or foreign language find extended listening comprehension the most difficult to master of all the areas of language skill. This is probably due to the fact that they had little contact with native English speech. They therefore find themselves at a great disadvantage when attending lectures by native speakers of English, when taking lecture courses in university programs, and when sitting for the aural - lecture comprehension segment of such qualifying examinations as the Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL).

A student's deficiencies in listening comprehension are a particular handicap in the case of the overseas qualifying exams. First, he lacks experience in the aural comprehension of native

² Clifford H. Prator, "In Search of A Method," English Teaching Forum, Volume XIV, No. 1 (January, 1976), p. 8.

English speech. In addition, since the test - lecture is usually recorded, there are no extralinguistic cues (gestures and facial expression) to aid him in understanding the content of the lecture. Added to this is the fact that he may have no prior knowledge of the subject matter of the lecture.

The greatest weakness of students who go abroad is their inability to understand a native speaker's answers. In reading, the students are given guidelines which enable them to look for clues which will make reading easier and more enjoyable. They are taught to look for word families, to practice sensible guessing, etc. In other words, the text and the teacher teach for transfer. The students are required to make the jump from carefully controlled materials to more unstructured readings. The sequence is controlled in such a way as to avoid, if at all possible, the pitfalls in the path leading to reading comprehension. However, in listening comprehension, little assistance and very few guidelines are provided. It seems as if the assumption is made that the students will automatically learn to understand the spoken language without specific exercises and practice in that skill. The point being made is that many of the aids normally given in promoting reading comprehension can also be used to facilitate the improvement of listening comprehension skills.

Sara W. Lundsteen³ said that

³Sara W. Lundsteen, Listening Its Impact on Reading and the Other Language Arts (A Clearinghouse on the Teaching of English. 1111 Kenyon Road, Urbana Illinois, 1971), p. 3.

Reading may depend so completely upon listening as to appear to be a special extension of listening. Reading is normally superimposed on a listening foundation. The ability to listen seems to set limits on ability to read.

For the first language, in general the skills are being taught in the natural order of listening, speaking, reading and writing. In all facets of language learning and teaching, one of the key concepts is sequencing. Listening comprehension precedes and serves as a basis for speaking.

It does not necessarily follow that the second language should be learned in the same manner as the first. Any possible use of one to facilitate learning in the other should be made. The logical sequence from the teacher's viewpoint, and that of the students, is to proceed from receptive to productive skills even though Lundsteen gave her point of view as follows:

Nor does improvement in reading skill automatically result in growth in listening, though there could be some mutual reinforcement.⁴

In language learning, there seems to be a sequence of increasingly difficult and complex mental processes as the students progress toward the ability to use another language. First, the students must go through an initial stage of acquiring an elementary familiarity with the content of the material which they are to

learn. This initial competence is attained by means of the receptive skills, listening and reading.

A solid foundation in the receptive skills serves as the basis for building the productive skills. Listening and reading provide the means of acquiring additional vocabulary and new language structures. Therefore, the teacher needs to be more careful to insure that the students have the means before he asks them to continue in language learning towards speaking and writing.

Encouraging new words and grammar to be learned in both listening and reading exercises and practicing the same forms in each of the language's productive manifestations enables the students to achieve a greater degree of language mastery than could ever be accomplished by insisting upon either oral or written activities alone.

The goal in listening comprehension is to be able to understand native speech at normal speed in unstructured situations. This statement does not imply an ability equal to that in the students' native language. For example, listening to a news broadcast or a lecture may occur quite independently of any spoken reproduction of the listening experience. Therefore the student of language needs to develop the capacity for listening as a skill in its own right. Indeed, for the student of a foreign language, accurate and intelligent listening is a necessity and it is the responsibility of the teacher to help him acquire this skill that provides the very foundation for learning and functioning in a language.

How can instructional programs in ESL/EFL best prepare students? One common approach has been simply to expose students

to large amounts of taped lecture material in the language laboratory accompanied by comprehension questions and then the students are required to read the same taped lecture material. Or we can have the students read the taped lecture material first and then let them listen to the taped lecture further so that the students will be able to comprehend faster.⁵

The visual presentation of language to which reading contributes results in quicker learning than aural presentation alone. Speech is indeed primary in a sense. But in certain teaching situations speech is definitely secondary, for example, in courses for students whose first need is to read and write the target language. In fact, reading and writing may positively speed up the spoken performance.

Just now it should be more obvious than ever that methods do succeed one another in the favor of teachers. No one of them remains in vogue for long. Suppose we are teaching a group of pre - medical students whose principal objective is to learn to read their textbooks in English. Shall we insist that they must also learn to speak the language? So it would be a great mistake to think that the same method is appropriate for achieving all the different objectives.

⁵ Robert C. Weissberg, "The Microlecture: Training in Extended Listening," English Teaching Forum, Vol. XII, No. 3 (July - September, 1974), p. 27.

If one really believes that objectives are an over - riding consideration, it would seem reasonable to follow in any given class whatever method has proven most successful in achieving objectives similar to those of that particular class.

The author believes that there should be some correlation between listening and reading skills and also thinks that reading before listening might possibly be used alternatively to listening before reading for teaching English comprehension so as to motivate the students and make the students understand what they are going to learn faster. The belief has inspired the author to undertake this study.

Purposes of the Study

General Purpose

The purpose of this study was to find out if there was a transfer between English listening and reading comprehension. The main reason behind this study was to find the most appropriate way to save the greatest amount of time in teaching the receptive skills.

Specific Purposes

The specific purposes of this study were:

1. To find out whether those students who have advanced ability in listening also have advanced ability in reading.
2. To find out if there were any order effects on the

receptive skills when tested with the same content material, e.g. the listening test first and the reading test second, and vice versa.

3. To determine the best technique to enable students to comprehend well, either with listening before reading, or with reading before listening, with the same content material.

Significance of the Study

The author of this study expected the following benefits from this study. **That:**

1. It would serve as the introduction to the use of reading comprehension prior to listening with the same material and that this technique would be much more economical in time, expense and energy in teaching comprehension.

2. It would provide a practical use of the above technique for English teachers at every level.

3. It would form the pioneer research in utilizing new procedures in teaching the receptive skills of the English language.

4. It would provide ideas for teaching the productive skills to those who are interested in it, and those who want to do more research in this field.

Delimitation of the Study

The scope of this study was as follows:

1. It was confined especially to 140 Thai first - year students (male), in King Mongkut's Institute of Technology in the academic year of 1975. They all had had at least 8 years' experience in studying English as a foreign language compulsorily and were grouped according to their abilities. They were studying Intensive English I and II.

2. The selection of subjects was made on the basis of the above criteria, with regard given to the subjects' learning achievement, intelligence quotient, health, motivation and other psychological variables.

3. The study was purposely aimed at measuring students' English listening and reading comprehension by utilizing two tests: one was for listening and the other was for reading. Fifteen passages were used in both listening and reading, but there were two other kinds consisting of five different passages each that could be used separately for listening and reading. Therefore, there were to be twenty passages in listening and reading.

4. The twenty passages for listening comprehension were read and recorded by a female native speaker. The author controlled the laboratory conditions for the listening comprehension test.

5. Multiple - choice items were used as the test type with four alternatives for each item .

6. The 140 students were divided into four groups according to their abilities. Group I had to perform the listening test before the reading test; group II had the reading test only; group III performed the reading test, followed by the lis-

tening test; and group IV received only the listening test.

Basic Assumptions

This study had the following basic assumptions:

1. The multiple-choice comprehension tests for both listening and reading utilized at K.M.I.T. during the first semester and in this study were suitable to the subjects' abilities in the areas of grammatical content, structures, vocabulary, the cultural background of the English language and readability.

2. The multiple-choice tests utilized at K.M.I.T. and in this study were reliable because they were standardized and had been tested for a second time, with all items being analyzed statistically in the pilot study.

3. The testings were reliable because the examinees followed the same test instructions.

Hypotheses

The author made the following hypotheses:

1. There should be a transfer in ability from listening to reading as well as from reading to listening.

2. Those who were good at listening, would also be good at reading, but those who were good at reading, were not necessarily good at listening.

3. The technique in which the subjects performed reading before listening would give more effective results than

the technique of allowing listening before reading.

Imperfections in the Study

It is possible that certain portions of this study suffer from minor imperfections. Such imperfections might have arisen partly because of the subjects' unfamiliarity with the procedures in testing, and partly because of **the inadequacy of the students' auditory memory span** (in the listening test).

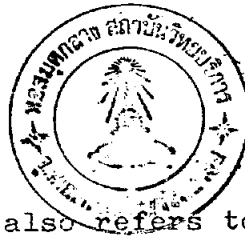
All the passages in the test were narrative. There was no dialogue in the test for listening, nor in the test for reading.

Furthermore, imperfections might possibly have been caused by a lack of very serious attention on the part of some subjects when performing the tests in the pilot and in the main studies.

Definition of Terms

Transfer⁶: Refers to an occurrence if the acquisition of an assignment (material B) is influenced by the previous learning of another assignment (material A). The influence of the assignment learned first on that learned second, may be an improvement (positive transfer) where its effect is the more emphatic the greater the similarity between

⁶ H. J. Eysenck and W. Arnald R. Meili, Encyclopedia of Psychology, Vol. III (Hefder KG, West Germany, 1972), p. 347.



learning assignments. It also refers to the influence from listening to reading or vice versa.

Listening comprehension test : Refers to a 20 - item test with four alternatives or distractors for each item. This is the standardized test which was used for measuring the subjects, listening comprehension ability in English.

Reading comprehension test : Refers to a 20 - item test with four alternatives or distractors for each item. This is the standardized test which was used for measuring the subjects, reading comprehension ability in English.

Testing groups : Refers to the 140 subjects (first year students) divided into four groups of 35 subjects per group selected according to their abilities. Group I. had to perform the listening test before the reading test; group II had the reading test only; group III performed the reading test before the listening test; and group IV received only the listening test.

Multiple - choice test : Refers to two kinds of tests, one for listening, the other for reading. Each test had 20 items, 15 items with four alternatives for each item which were used for both listening and reading comprehension tests, and five items with four alternatives for each item which were used only for the reading test.

Correlation : Refers to the method of correlating the scores of the four tested groups : the scores of the students when tested listening before reading, the scores of the examinees who were tested in reading only, the scores of the students when tested reading before listening and the scores of the examinees who were tested in listening only.

King Mongkut's Institute of Technology : Refers to the official institution which offers 5 year studies to engineering students, located in Thonburi, Thailand.

First year student : Refers to an engineering student studying in the first year in King Mongkut's Institute of Technology, Thonburi.

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