***Mohammed Kheidher University of Biskra***

Faculty of Language Arts & Foreign Languages Department of Foreign Languages

Branch of English Language Arts & Education Level: 3rd year

Course : Didactics (TEFL) (Instructor) Dr. SEGUENI LAMRI

 **LANGUAGE SKILLS**

**Objectives *:*** *By the end of this tutorial, you will be able to :*

1. Define the different language skills ;
2. Outline their characteristics ;
3. Classify the different language skills;
4. Promote students’ awareness of the different skills.

**Terminology Used in the Tutorial** :

Ability, capacity, competence, competency, skill, input, output, receptive and productive skills, strategy. sub-skills, listening, reading, speaking, writing.

**1. A language teaching model**

 Classroom activities can be divided into two main categories: those that give the students language input, and those which encourage them to produce output. When acquisition or conscious learning takes place, language is being put into the students’ brain. The ability to retrieve these items makes it possible for the learners to produce and use the language they have stored in their brains. Learners will have to combine the items got in the stage of input in the next stage of language learning which is called the stage of output. A further distinction in input stage must be made between two different types: roughly-tuned input and finely-tuned input. The former is language at a level slightly above the students’ abilities. The latter is language selected very precisely to be at exactly the students’ level. Language output can be divided into two subcategories. In the first, practice, students are asked to use new anguage in different contexts. The aim is to the consolidation of the target structure in the ext stage of output: communication output. It is more important for the students to use the target language items in situations in which they have to select ppropriate language from the total language store. So classroom activities can be divided into two large areas: those that are concerned with language input (where students receive new language) and those that foster language output (where students are forced to use any of the language they have

learnt).

**1.1. Input**

**1.1.1. Roughly-tuned Input**

 It is this kind of input that helps students to acquire new language. Input of this type can come from various sources such as teacher’s talk in the class, any reading passages from newspapers or from any other sources etc. Much of this teaching will involve students in receptive skills (reading or listening) to achieve some kind of purpose. Teachers will ask their students to read a text so that they can extract two or three pieces of information. Reading or listening texts that are roughlytuned do not only train the students to read and listen but they will make it possible for students to acquire new language.

**1.1.2. Finely-tuned Input**

 Finely-tuned input is language which has been selected for conscious learning.Such language is introduced to the learners at the so-called presentation stage where students are couraged to employ the cognitive strategies. During the presentation stage the teacher selects the language for the students with a certain linguistic aim and insists on accurate production of the new item.

**1.2. Output**

**1.2.1. Practice output**

 A teacher who is responsible for his students’ conscious learning will want to ensure that the students can use the language presented in the input stage, and he will do it by rganising practice activities for them. According to Harmer (Harmer 1985: 34-37) practice output marks a half-way stage between input and communication output. Practice output is a way of encouraging students to use language they have recently learnt in a realistic way. Students’ errors and mistakes will be corrected accurately when they occur.

**1.2.2. Communication output**

 This term refers to activities in which the students’ main purpose is to complete some kind of communication task. It is an instrument of communication rather than an end in itself. Instead of concentration on accuracy at this stage the focus will be on the success of communication.Students’ mistakes and errors must be corrected only gently or delayed to prevent students from getting inhibited.

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|  I**NPUT**  |  **OUTPUT** |
|  **ROUGHLY -TUNED** above students’ level, authentic material |  **PRACTICE** accurate reproduction stage each error is corrected controlled/semi-controlled practice |
|  **FINELY -TUNED** according to students’ level | **COMMUNICATIVE** free practice with gentle or delayed correction |

 Output and input mutually affect each other. According to Harmer (2003) when a student produces a piece of language and sees how it turns out, that information is fed back into the acquisition process. Output becomes input. The input can take various forms. It can come from the teacher, from the students themselves and from other students. Teachers can provide feedback not just when a student finishes a piece of work but also during the presentation as teachers can offer ongoing support as prompters or as a resource as well.The circle of input and output (Harmer 2003: 250) Brown (1994) argues that the process of language acquisition is similar to a tree grown in your garden. The rain clouds of input stimulate seeds of predisposition (genetically transmitted processes). But the potency of that input is dependent on the appropriate styles and strategies that a person puts into action (represented as soil). Upon the germination of language abilities (not all the seeds of predisposition are effectively activated), networks of competence (like underground roots, cannot be observed from above the ground) grow stronger as the organism actively engages in comprehension and production of language. The resulting root system (inferred competence) is what we commonly call intake.

 Notice that several factors distinguish input from intake. Through the use of further strategies the affective abilities, coupled with the feedback we receive from others (note the tree trunk),

 We ultimately develop full flowering communicative abilities. The fruit of our performance (output) is of course conditioned by the climate of innumerable contextual variables. At any point the horticulturist (teacher) can irrigate to create better input. This is not the kind of extended metaphor that one can prove through empirical research. (Brown 1994: 295)

**2. Classification of language skills**

 The process of language teaching can be subdivided into two major stages: the

input stage and the output stage. Receptive skills, in which people extract meaning

from the source they read or hear, belong to the input stage. Based on the input received they will speak or write their thoughts. This phase will belong to the so called output stage of language learning. Language skills can be classified according to the medium as well. Listening, speaking and interpreting belong to the oral skills, while reading, writing and translating can be categorised as written skills. While listening, speaking, reading and writing are simplex skills interpreting and translating presuppose several sub-skills so they are usually defined as complex skills. (Bárdos: 2005: 21)

**2.1. Receptive Skills**

 The two receptive skills are reading and listening. There are several similarities between teaching them so the general description to be given here applies both to listening and reading. Though reading and listening are receptive skills it does not mean that the reader or the listener is only a passive participant of communication,as both skills involve active participation. Reading and listening are sources of both finely- and roughly-tuned input.

**2.1.1. Reasons for reading and listening**

 We can divide reasons for reading and listening into two broad categories instrumental and pleasurable listening or reading. We can speak about instrumental reading or listening when we want to achieve some clear aim. For example, we read instructions on a machine because we want to know how to operate it. A brochure is read if tourists need some pieces of information about a spot of interest etc. Pleasurable reading or listening takes place for pleasure.People read magazines or listen to a talk on the radio to while away their free time.

In both types of reading/listening readers/listeners are interested in the topics either because they find them useful or because they find them interesting.

**2.1.2. Sub-skills of Receptive Skills**

 According to Harmer (2003) the processes we go through when reading a short story or listening to a poem are likely to be different from those we use when we are looking for some data in a manual or we want to know how to operate a machine. The use of these different skills will depend on what we are reading or listening for. While reading a text we use the following sub-skills:

- **identifying the topic** – readers and listeners are able to identify the topic of a text very fast with the help of their techniques of how to get into the idea of what is being talked/written about. This identifying ability makes it possible for them to process the text more effectively.

- **predictive skills** – having identified the topic both readers and listeners guess what is being written or talked about. They try to predict what is coming.Their subsequent reading or listening helps them to confirm their expectations of what they have predicted.- skimming – this term means to get a quick idea of the gist of a text while running your eyes over it. It is very useful for the teachers to ask their students to have a quick look at the text before lunging into it for detail to get some specific pieces of information.

- **scanning** – this term means reading or listening for specific information. In contrast to reading and listening for gist we often read or listen to a text because we need specific details. For example, we want to read about the weather or we want to extract some facts from the news.

- **extensive reading** – means reading/listening for pleasure. We use this type of reading/listening while reading an interesting model or a short story or an article taken from a popular paper etc.

- **intensive reading** – means reading/listening for detailed information.Sometimes we read/listen to a text in order to understand everything we are reading in detail. We use this technique when we want to understand instructions or directions or when we are preparing for an exam.

- **interpreting texts** – this sub-skill is used by readers/listeners if they want to understand the meaning of words beyond the literal meanings. Successful interpretation of this kind depends on shared schemata between the speaker and the listener and the writer or the reader. The question ‘Can you tell me the time?’ is notto be answered in the following way: ‘Yes, I can.’ but the reply must refer to a time expression such as ‘It’s nine o’clock.

- **inferring opinion and attitude** – a good reader/listener will know from various clues he receives, whether the writer or speaker approves of the topic he is discussing, or whether his opinion of the person he is describing is favourable or not. It is based on the recognition of linguistic style.

**2.1.3. Methodological Principles for Teaching Receptive Skills**

 Listening is the skill that children acquire first. When students start to acquire a foreign language they can pick it up in many ways. They have a lot of extracurricular sources (songs, films, native speakers, etc) at hand. The same refers to reading, students can benefit from walking in the street when they read various boards or signs written in English as well as English food labels at supermarkets.

 The reading process can be subdivided into to stages: decoding and interpreting.When we speak about teaching receptive skills we have to emphasize the importance of choosing an age-relevant, interesting or useful content which is practicable in everyday life. Let us focus on the content, purpose of reading/listening and the expectations of readers and listeners.

**2.1.3.1. The content of the texts**

 As it has already been mentioned, we can distinguish instrumental and pleasurable reading/listening. In instrumental reading the usefulness of texts is very significant so we can say that the texts must meet the requirements of communicative language teaching ccording to which the texts must be experiential which means they should contain very useful and practicable words and expressions for everyday life. Authentic texts must be used so that the learners should not have any difficulty decoding brochures, manuals, instructions in the target country. To meet the demands of pleasurable reading and listening we have

to choose stories, articles, novels, etc which are age-relevant and which deal with the problems of the target group of learners. The category of interest includes reading and listening for enjoyment, pleasure and intellectual stimulation. People read/listen to language because they have a purpose for doing so. The purpose may be to discover how to operate a hot-drinks machine or to have a pleasurable reading. The purpose may be to find out what has been happening in the world.

**2.1.3.2. Methodological Steps of Developing Receptive Skills**

 In a lesson when the teacher’s aim is to develop receptive skills the first step to do is to introduce the topic of reading/listening. So the first step to do is planning a warm-up activity. When we want our students to read a text about London for example, we are supposed to show a picture of London or to present a song about the capital of Great Britain etc. Here we have to exploit the following characteristic of language users, he will have expectations about what he is going to read/hear before he does so. A reader who sees the headline ‘Storm in the Houses of Parliament’ expects to read about a political debate in the British Parliament.

 So,when we choose a text we are to activate the predictive skills of our students. The learners are expected to extract the specific information from the text and they are expected to find out one or two facts. That is the reason why we always have to set pre-reading/pre-listening tasks before reading or listening. At this stage the teacher aims to focus the tudents’ attention on certain facts mentioned in the reading/listening.

 The next purpose of the teacher will be to sustain the students’ attention while they are reading/ listening to the extract. As a while reading/listening task a teacher can ask the students to underline certain words or phrases or on hearing certain facts or data the students can clap or raise their hands. After reading/listening to a text the students are expected to do some post reading/listening tasks. They have to get the general picture which means that they have to infer the opinion or attitude of the writer or the speaker. The ability to infer opinion and attitude is largely based on the recognition of linguistic style and its use to achieve appropriate purposes.

 Another post reading/listening task for the teacher can be to make students deduce meaning from context. The point is that the deducing of meaning is important for a language user who will often mean unknown words and we will try to train students in the same way to guess the meaning of unknown words. Teachers can make students recognise discourse markers, styles and registers as well. It is important for the teachers to develop students’ discourse competence in addition to their linguistic/grammatical competence as well. Teachers are also expected to focus on the intercultural aspects of language teaching. This is the way how social-linguistic competence of students can be developed. For example, London can be compared to Budapest as a post-reading/listening task. On requiring our students to use synonyms, antonyms and circumlocution the teachers can develop students’ strategic competence as well. This is the way how we can develop reading/listening skills in a communicative way.

 Bloom's Taxonomy has been one of the most influential books in planning reading tasks and has been widely used by American educators in planning their teaching programme. The following categories can be used to develop students’ thinking skills while they are reading a story. This is the way how teachers can make reading a story a holistic activity. Category Thinking process cues

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**Knowledge** (remembering and retaining) Say what you know, what you remember.

What happened in the story?

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**Comprehension** ( interpreting and understanding) Describe in your own words, say what it means, explain, compare,relate. Why did it happen that way!

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**Application** (making use of the story) How can you use it? Where does it lead to? What would you have done in a situation like this?

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**Analysis** (taking apart) What are the parts, the order, the reason, the solutions. Which part

did you like best?

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**Synthesis** ( putting together) Develop, create in your own way What did you think of the story!

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**Evaluation** (judging and assessing) How would you judge it? Will it work?

 In: Bloom, B. S. (1956)