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About Methods of Testing Listening Comprehension Skills at Non-Linguistic Faculties

The solution of the problem concerning testing speech skills requires first and foremost the choice of an approach according to which it will be solved. Testing listening comprehension skills at Non-Linguistic Faculties is realized in compliance with an interactional approach.

The level of listening comprehension mastery is defined by means of measuring listening skills as testing targets. These testing targets are classified on the basis of a level approach to text comprehension.

An extensive level of input text comprehension is tested by dint of measuring the following skills: a) to define its theme; b) to define its main idea; c) to single out its main points.
A detailed level of input text comprehension is determined by testing such skills as: a) to pick out its subthemes; b) to distinguish between its major and minor information; c) to establish logical ties between its elements.

An interpretive level of input text comprehension is considered to be attained if a student is able: a) to make conclusions on it, taking into consideration implicit information; b) to estimate its content, taking into account implicit information.

Texts for listening tests are selected in accordance with such criteria: a) correspondence to situations and topics of professional communication; b) authenticity; c) comprehensibility; d) novelty and cognitive value of information; e) feasible length; f) limitedness of informative saturation.

All the above mentioned positions are the fundamentals of methods of testing listening comprehension skills at Non-Linguistic Faculties, which presuppose creating a test item pool, constructing a useful test aimed at measuring the level of students listening skills during a thematic cycle, developing the technology of testing during the process of study.

Test items for determining extensive, detailed and interpretive levels are included in the pool. Their quantity and contents depend on testing targets, i.e. listening skills. Test items are constructed with the use of ten testing techniques: 1) "Sentences completion", 2) "Matching", 3) "Information transformations", 4) "Answers to questions", 5) "Ranking", 6) "Finding and correcting mistakes", 7) "Information assessment", 8) "Dictation", 9) "Recollecting information", 10) "Note-taking". All these techniques correspond to certain testing targets. Such correspondence was revealed with the aid of analysis of mental and verbal operations creating the basis of the above mentioned techniques and possible ways of determining listening skills level. Test items piloting was conducted for making this correspondence more precise.

A useful test is a necessary prerequisite for successful testing. The development of a useful test includes its planning, matrix constructing and piloting.

A useful test directed at measuring the level of students listening skills during a thematic cycle is applied in the process of study according to the technology worked out on a cyclical and thematic principle and with taking into account graded character of text comprehension.

Devised methods of testing listening comprehension skills provide effective feed-back for the management in the process of study and thus promote efficacious teaching of listening.

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"Vertical" Context in the Formation of Theme Concept: A Cognitive Aspect

The modern linguistics is characterised by investigating the language units in cognitive and linguocultural aspects, which is connected with general anthropological trend in modern sciences.

The theme concept of a publicistic text is studied from the linguocultural aspect, which is represented by the "vertical" context that exists alongside with the horizontal context (the linguistic surrounding of a definite language unit that helps define the meaning of a word or a phrase), and represents the "background knowledge" of a reader, i.e. the knowledge of historic events, prominent figures of government or military men who influenced the flow of history, the profound knowledge of literature (both ancient and contemporary), the skills to differentiate the pieces of art. Thus the "vertical" context consists of allusions, quotations, proverbs – so various kinds of installed ideas uttered by the great people in different times or created by common people, the mentioning of geographical names in the connection with the crucial battles or extraordinary events.

The most wide-spread sources of allusions and quotations are Bible (Koran), ancient myths, classical literature, such sources which are extremely valuable and of great importance for mankind.

The problem is found in the way a reader understands/interprets a piece of "vertical" context, because the peculiarity is that the author presupposes that an allusion, a quotation or a proverb is recognizable and understandable by the reader and it is introduced without further explanation and sometimes even without translation into the author's language. A modern reader has certain difficulties in understanding and decoding all the installed ideas, especially when the precedent text is too ancient as it represents the spiritual values of that period and only the high degree of interest to clear out the real sense of the author's intention