The Development of Teaching Materials according to Language Skills:
Speaking and Listening

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The teaching of Korean as a foreign language is currently gaining much more attention in institutions of higher education than a decade ago. Yet we still commonly find a teaching and its materials based on the formal aspects of the language, i.e. structural knowledge of Korean although various methodologies of foreign language classrooms have been introduced and adopted in Korean teaching for the last decade or so.

At the same time, the need of teaching Korean as a foreign or second language has brought along the need to establish clear objectives that are different from the traditional ones. Although each institution has its own curriculum goals and objectives, it has been commonly believed that the main purpose of foreign language education is the development of the four different language skills, listening, speaking, reading and writing. Foreign language educators also believe that learners need to enhance their proficiency in each skill, i.e. the ability to function with each skill in real life situations.

With the proficiency goal in mind, this paper discusses the development of teaching materials that help adult language learners to learn and acquire listening and speaking skills more effectively. Some characteristics of listening and speaking will be discussed first, and the major principles of effective instructional materials will be explained.

Listening

Most learners of foreign languages find that listening is the most difficult skill.1) This is often because learners try to understand every word of what the speaker says and feel under unnecessary pressure to understand it within the limited time. When listening to the speaker in a conversation, it is easier for the learner to understand because he/she can ask questions to the speakers and check the meaning instantly. However, listening to a news report or any longer passage without interaction with the speaker is obviously much more challenging to the learners. Often students say they do not know what the news person is talking about, although they knew all the words and the grammatical rules they hear.

1) Listening is the skill that often distinguishes non-heritage learners from heritage ones quite clearly. Heritage learners who grew up in the target language environment often retain high level of listening skills whereas non-heritage learners often find listening the most challenging skills if not speaking skills. The addressed learners in this paper are mostly non-heritage learners although the discussions in this paper all apply to heritage learners too.
Since listening involves understanding variety of aspects of the language, repetitive listening in the Lab might not be always an effective way to enhance students’ listening skill. Listening involves understanding a speaker’s pronunciation and intonation with accent, grammar and vocabulary use, and grasping his meaning. An able listener is capable of doing these things simultaneously. Willis (1981:134) lists a series of micro-skills of listening, which she calls enabling skills. They are:

- predicting what people are going to talk about
- guessing at unknown words or phrases without panic
- using one’s own knowledge of the subject to help one understand
- identifying relevant points; rejecting irrelevant information
- retaining relevant points (note-taking, summarizing)
- recognizing discourse markers, e.g., Well; Oh, another thing is; Now, finally; etc.
- recognizing cohesive devices, e.g., such as and which, including linking words, pronouns, references, etc.
- understanding different intonation patterns and uses of stress, etc., which give clues to meaning and social setting
- understanding inferred information, e.g., speakers' attitude or intentions.

Listening to and understanding speech involves a number of basic processes, some depending upon linguistic competence, some depending upon previous knowledge that is not necessarily of a purely linguistic nature, and some depending upon psychological variables that affect the mobilization of these competence and knowledge in the particular task situation. The listener must have a continuous set to listen and understand, and as he hears the utterance, he may be helped by some kind of set to process and remember the information transmitted. His linguistic competence enables him, presumably, to recognize the formatives of the heard utterance, i.e. to dissect out of the wave form of the morphemes, words, and other meaning-bearing elements of the utterance.

Speaking

Unlike listening, speaking is a productive skill which requires learners to have structural knowledge as well as appropriate vocabulary. Many non-heritage learners also find speaking another most difficult skill to acquire or to learn.\(^2\) When listening, learners usually focus on vocabulary and meaning rather than structure, whereas speaking requires all the accurate knowledge

\(^2\) Heritage learners often expresses that speaking also is more difficult skill than listening or other skills mainly because they lack the lexicon at the appropriate level not because they don’t have correct grammatical knowledge. Of course, some heritage learners find reading or writing more difficult than speaking depending on their backgrounds.