

UNIVERSIDADE FEDERAL DE SANTA CATARINA
DEPARTAMENTO DE LÍNGUA E LITERATURA ESTRANGEIRAS

DEVELOPMENT OF INITIAL COMPETENCE IN LISTENING COMPREHENSION
(A TENTATIVE ANALYSIS)

TESE SUBMETIDA À UNIVERSIDADE FEDERAL DE SANTA CATARINA
PARA A OBTENÇÃO DO GRAU DE MESTRE EM LETRAS

AURINEIDE COSTA DA PENHA

FLORIANÓPOLIS, SC

BRASIL

FEVEREIRO DE 1984

M.A. THESIS

DEVELOPMENT OF INITIAL COMPETENCE IN LISTENING COMPREHENSION


(A TENTATIVE ANALYSIS)

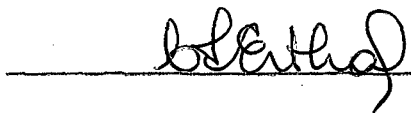
ESTA TESE FOI JULGADA ADEQUADA PARA A OBTENÇÃO DO GRAU DE
- MESTRE EM LETRAS -
OPÇÃO INGLÊS E LITERATURA CORRESPONDENTE E APROVADA EM SUA
FORMA FINAL PELO PROGRAMA DE PÓS-GRADUAÇÃO

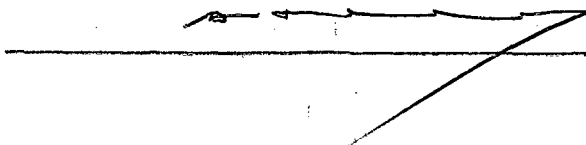


Prof. ARTURO UGALDE
Orientador

Apresentada à banca examinadora
composta pelos professores:







ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Grateful acknowledgement is made to the following persons:

Professor Arturo Ugalde, my adviser, for his useful comments and suggestions. My deepest thanks to him for his patience and dedication. The victory of the completion of my M.A. studies belongs to him also.

Professor Maria de Fatima Ramos Viana (U.F.C.) and Elza Pereira de Souza Lemos for their moral support; the professors of the M.A. program of the Federal University of Santa Catarina, notably among them the Coordinator Professor Hilário Bohn, for their courses; Professor José Pinheiro de Sousa and Maria Odirene N. de Almeida (U.F.C.) for having read my work and for having made useful comments.

I am also very grateful to the Federal University of Ceará and the Federal University of Santa Catarina for the opportunity they gave me to take this M.A. Course. I am particularly grateful to CAPES, for the scholarship.

Finally I thank God for enabling me to accomplish this study.

CONTENTS

	PAGE
INTRODUCTION.....	01
CHAPTER I - GENERAL REVIEW	
1.0. COMPREHENSION AND LEARNING.....	03
1.1. LISTENING COMPREHENSION.....	06
1.2. MEMORY DEVELOPMENT.....	09
1.2.1. SPEECH PROCESSING MEMORY.....	11
1.2.2. PRIMARY MEMORY.....	13
1.2.3. SECONDARY MEMORY.....	17
2.0. SUMMARY.....	18
CHAPTER II - THE RESEARCH	
2.0. SCOPE OF THE RESEARCH.....	21
2.1. WAYS OF TESTING LISTENING COMPREHENSION.....	22
2.2. SOME PROCEDURAL CRITERIA.....	23
2.3. THE MATERIAL.....	26
2.4. ANALYSIS OF THE DATA.....	27
CHAPTER III	
3.0. GENERAL CONCLUSION.....	58
3.1. PEDAGOGICAL IMPLICATIONS.....	62
BIBLIOGRAPHY.....	64
APPRAISAL.....	69
QUESTIONNAIRE.....	72
HAND OUTS FOR LISTENING COMPREHENSION.....	73

RESUMO

A falta de competência da habilidade da compreensão oral que a maioria dos nossos alunos apresenta no processo da aprendizagem de uma língua estrangeira, levou-nos a detectar as causas que concorrem para que esta habilidade seja entre as quatro (ouvir, falar, ler, escrever) a menos entendida.

Nós levantamos a hipótese de que as possíveis dificuldades que os alunos enfrentam nas tarefas da compreensão oral são causadas por: má interpretação fonética, complexidade da sintaxe, falta de uma esquematização que os alunos não possuem para desenvolver a compreensão auditiva, e, sobretudo, a falta de familiaridade com a língua, tendo em vista não terem sido expostos à mesma antes.

A análise baseou-se nas poucas bibliografias encontradas sobre o assunto, ressaltando entre elas o artigo de VIVIAN COOK "Cognitive Processes in Second Language Learning".

A análise realizada provou que a complexidade da sintaxe, a falta da codificação fonética e o desconhecimento total de certos itens da língua afetam o processo de compreensão oral.

ABSTRACT

The lack of listening competence found in the average students in our Brazilian schools led us to look into the causes which make this skill the one least understood of the four language skills.

We hypothesize that the possible difficulties the students face in listening comprehension tasks are caused by phonetic misinterpretation, syntactic complexity, and lack of schematic framework. We also emphasize that exposure to the language helps to develop the aural capacity to understand it.

The study is based on some bibliography related to the subject, notably among them Viviam Cook's article "Cognitive Processes in Second Language Learning".

The study undertaken has proved that syntactic complexity, lack of phonetic coding ability, and unfamiliar language items affect the process of listening comprehension activities.

INTRODUCTION

The listening comprehension ability has not yet been developed as an independent skill. Teachers in our schools have not taught listening comprehension explicitly through systematic well planned classroom and laboratory activities. They have been considering this ability as a mere adjunct to speaking. As a result, it has been the least understood of the four language skills.

Innumerable are the difficulties felt by the Brazilian students when faced with any kind of activity involving an aural passage. They lack listening competence and cannot make sense of what they listen. To build a scheme to process the information into some comprehensible form becomes a hard task in what they cannot accomplish. This can be due to the fact that the students have not been exposed long enough to various communicative situations to be able to cope with them. It may also be because of the limited memory capacity of the student for the target language. Memory plays an essential role in understanding a spoken language, it retrieves and stores the information for later recalling. The ability to remember may also influence the kinds of distinctions which must be made in vocabulary or in other aspects of semantics to show the characteristics of the cognitive system with the requirements for language performance.

The purpose of this study is to examine how first semester students of the English Program at the School of Letras develop their auditory ability to comprehend spoken English; to detect the difficulties they find with listening comprehension activities developed in the laboratory sessions; to observe their memory capacity to store information and the strategies used to achieve the various levels of listening comprehension.

We hypothesize the following sources for the possible difficulties the students face in listening comprehension tasks: 1) phonetic misrepresentation; 2) syntactic complexity; 3) lack of schematic framework. Also, there are innate perceptual strategies in each individual to develop listening comprehension skills, but most of the time the individual is not conscious of them; exposure to the language (when it occurs within a situation of meaningful use) helps to develop the aural capacity to understand the language. The students become better listeners when trained and acquainted as well with a variety of deliveries in speech; listening comprehension involves quite different skills from speaking or reading.

Chapter one presents a critical review of listening comprehension ability. Chapter two consists of the research itself and analysis of the data. Chapter three presents the general conclusion of the study. It also presents a pedagogical implication for a better accomplishment of the listening comprehension skill.

CHAPTER I

GENERAL REVIEW

1.0. COMPREHENSION AND LEARNING

The basic point of comprehension is that all humans, regardless of age try to make sense of the world around and within them. Making sense means comprehension. The way we comprehend is by relating new information to what we already know, by fitting it into what is called by Smith "our cognitive structure" (cf. Smith 1975:227). Learning, like comprehension, requires fitting new information into old, but learning also involves a reorganization of the cognitive structure to accommodate the new information. We cannot make sense of noise even immediately relating it to what we already know or reorganizing what we know so that the new information fits.

The biological limitations on one's ability to process information requires to chunk information rather than to process it by tiny bit. For instance, paying attention to tiny bits of visual information, say to letters, results in "tunnel vision", with a concomitant reduction in the amount of visual information one can process. Rigg (1976:447) says: "if four spaces between every letter are typed, s o r t o f l i k e t h i s, "one is forced to read letter by letter, it would take a great deal more time to get the message than when the letters of each word are put together and the word separated by spaces". Of course we don't read letter by letter, any more than we listen phoneme by phoneme. We are able to understand messages coming through our eyes and our ears because we guess what's coming to us and we sample the incoming signal to confirm our guess, changing our prediction when we cannot get confirmation.

It is known that it is common for different listeners to understand the same speech differently. The differences or disagreements are often brushed off as being nothing more than an evasion over semantics. "Different semantic interpretations occur because meaning is not inherent to any speech, text, or activity. Meaning is assigned by speaker, the listener, the writer, the reader, the participant, the observer" (Rigg 1976:448). And the basis for assigning meaning is always what is already known.

For Halliday, from birth onwards a person is surrounded by text. The term text according to him covers both speech and writing, and is 'quite neutral' as regard to style and content. It may be language in action, conversation, telephone talk, debate, dramatic dialogue, narrative fiction, poetry, prayers, inscriptions, public notices, monologue or anything else. He considers *meaning* and *choice* the essential properties of a text. One thinks of text first of all as words and sentences:

"and it is certainly encoded in words and sentences in just the same way as those words and sentences are further encoded into sounds or letters" (Halliday 1975:123)"

But he says that text is not made of sounds or letters; neither is it made of words, phrases or clauses. It is made of meanings, and encoded in wordings, soundings and spellings. Text is located at the semantic level. Thus a text is "a semantic unit, realized as (recoded in) lexicogrammatical units which are further realized as (recoded in) phonological or orthographic units" (Halliday 1975:123).

As choice text "represents a selection within numerous set of options; everything that is said presupposes a background of what might have been said but was not" (Halliday 1975:123-124). Thus a student of a second language must learn how to cope with what might have been

meant but was not in a text by the speaker. Halliday says:

"the microlinguistic acts or countless choice that the speaker makes as he goes along, are actually microsemantic acts; what the speaker is doing is meaning. A text then is a semantic structure that is formed out of a continuous process of choice among innumerable interrelated sets of semantic options" (Halliday 1975:124)

M.A.K. Halliday in his book Learning How to Mean (1975) says that the adult language involves a three level system. The language is not only meanings and sounds, but it has another level of coding in between, which could be a level of wordings. This means that besides semantics and phonology there is the need of a level of linguistic form, a 'lexico-grammar'. "The need for the lexicogrammatical level of coding intermediate between meaning and sound arises not merely because of the increased semantic load that the system has to bear, but also because there has to be a means of mapping onto one another meaning deriving from different functional origins. This is achieved by grammatical structure" (Halliday 1975:30).

Like a child, one of the steps the adult faces in learning a language is to learn to engage in and understand a dialogue as well. "Dialogue is a new concept for him and involves the adoption of roles which are social roles of a new and special kind, namely those which are defined by language itself" (Halliday 1975:30). Halliday refers to these as communication roles. And when the adult like the child starts to engage in dialogue he begins to build a grammar and vocabulary as well as he learns to interact linguistically in a limited number of ways. He learns to respond to an information or WH type question, to fill in a missing item such as 'what are you eating?'. He also learns to respond to a statement, not only repeating it but continuing the conversation by adding his own contribution. He learns then to initiate dialogue himself and clearly internalize the notion that language defines a set of social roles which are

taken on by the participant in the speech situation.

1.1. LISTENING COMPREHENSION

Teachers have falsely assumed that listening comprehension could develop all by itself if students were taught how to speak. Research done on the subject has provided further evidence in the sense that listening is not a mere adjunct to speaking but an independent skill that must be taught explicitly through systematic, well planned classroom and laboratory activities as well.

Since listening has been the least understood of the four language skills and consequently the least well taught, the majority of the students who begin to study English as a foreign language has shown that the major difficulties rely on understanding. These facts can be attested to by the additional lack of listening ability found in the average students in our Brazilian schools; such students lack listening comprehension competence when they listen to a lecture, hear a normal conversation carried out by native speakers, listen to radio news, a dialogue or any other form of listening activity. They cannot make sense of what they listen to. They have difficulties in building a scheme to process the information into some comprehensible form. This can imply that they have not been able to build up some strategies for decoding oral language because they have not been exposed long enough to various communicative situations to be able to cope with them.

Another problem observed in our classroom in connection with understanding of an aural passage, is the incapacity to remember the essential units of information of the text to be able to put these units together as a meaningful whole. The ability to understand or to produce sentences depends upon the ability to retain certain constituents of the message while processing others. In fact, without temporary storage

there seems to be no way for the students to speak or to understand the speech of the others.

Pimsleur *et alii* (1977) believe that the problem of listening comprehension can be alleviated by devoting more class time to this skill. The assumption is that students who are not academically inclined and those turned off by language study find listening less stressful and less embarrassing than speaking. Because they enjoy listening activities, they tend to stay with the program longer. According to them, listening is a skill like reading in which one can realistically hope to acquire a fair degree of proficiency in two years of study; whereas proficiency in speaking generally takes much longer.

Pimsley *et alii* (1977), mention that the growing interest in teaching listening has created a demand for stimulating 'culturally authentic' recorded material. The assumption is that radio broadcasts, for instance, can fill some of the need, what cannot be prepared for is the sheer flow of words. They say that, when language is spoken at normal speed the foreign words reach the listener's ear so rapidly that they soon 'pile up', because of the short-term overloads, and the listener simply 'tunes out'. Thus, it is important to control this factor in order to reach listening comprehension more effectively.

For Snow and Perkins (Tesol 13/1 march 1979) the listening activities and materials must be neither too easy nor too difficult, but in an appropriate level in order to challenge the student to actively understand, form hypothesis, and try to clear up ambiguities. They say tha the listening comprehension materials become difficult to calibrate because no workable listening ability scale has been developed. But without any doubt listening comprehension materials must be meaningful and proposeful so that students can understand why they are doing a particular activity, how they are to

proceed with it, and what they are expected to do with it. With this in mind, one can design a set of listening comprehension materials which would be appropriate according to the level of the students, systematically improving their listening skills.

It seems that one of the crucial stages for acquiring listening comprehension in a second language is to develop a basic scheme for understanding. This allows the learner to have some improvement in the decoding of the speech flow, to help him recognize the words and their relations in the structure. Therefore, this implies that exposures is the first step in the language acquisition process; in other words, receptive skills either reading or listening are the skills that should be first developed to accomplish a better scheme for understanding. A study in delayed oral practice approach was done by Gary (1975), who experimented with elementary school children learning Spanish as a second language. Her 22 week experiment contained an experimental condition in which oral practice was totally absent for the first 14 weeks and for the first half of each lesson thereafter, and a control condition in which children from the start were required to speak immediately upon hearing the model utterance. Comprehension in the experimental condition was assessed by requiring a nonverbal gross motor response, such as nodding or pointing to object; in the control condition, subjects were required to repeat commands and questions after the teacher as well as to respond to them physically. Upon completion of the study Olmsted Gary found superiority of the experimental subjects in listening comprehension with no significant difference between groups in oral production, although the rate of the learning between the 146h and 22nd weeks appeared to favor the experimental condition, suggesting, perhaps, a latency effect in the transfer learning.

Judith and Norman Gary (1981) believe that concentration on production skills such as speaking during the early stage of language instruction retards language learning. They argue

that practice in speaking should be delayed and that early language instruction should emphasize developing substantial competence in listening comprehension or perhaps in reading comprehension before requiring learners to talk the new language. Several other researchers, using different models of nonvocal response in development of listening comprehension, have reported similar findings. Notable among them are: Asher (1965, 1969, 1972), Winitz and Reeds (1973, 1973), Sittler (1975), and Ingram, Nord, and Dragt (1974). These researchers and others have clearly demonstrated that the development of linguistic competence is enhanced when massive practice in listening comprehension precedes oral practice.

Discussing the subject of listening comprehension, Rivers (1968) proposes two levels of this ability: the recognition level and the selection level. At the first level the student deals with the identification of words and phrases, structural interrelationships, time sequence, logical and modifying terms, and others. At the second level or selection level the student seizes the elements of the speaker's language which seem to express the purposes of the speaker. It has been observed in our classroom that, at the recognition level, the student often has difficulty in retaining and processing what he hears. Perhaps, this happens because of the limited memory capacity of the student for the target language.

1.2. MEMORY DEVELOPMENT

In recent years increasing attention has been given to memory development, and perhaps it will be possible to reach a few conclusions about language development from the point of view of the developmental psychology of memory. In a listening comprehension study the presence of the immediate memory or short-term memory is fundamental. It represents, for example the first stage of processing between perception

and subsequent higher order processing. "It is largely oriented toward preserving transient features of environment long enough so that relatively slow mental processes have a chance to operate upon environmental input" (Olson 1973:146). Olson refers to short-term memory as the limited capacity store within the initial or terminal computations of perception or of production.

It is important to consider some things known about the ways in which adults remember. Miller (1956) in a paper on immediate memory, called attention to some basic characteristics of immediate memory. First that there is some upper bound on the number of information units we can retain in our immediate memory, and this upper bound is relatively small as the range of numbers that have been mentioned would indicate. Miller says that the advantages of a simple mechanical desk calculator, is that its immediate-memory span is not so severely restricted. According to him it is difficult for some of us to multiply two six-digit numbers in our heads while such feats are routine for calculators. The second point Miller makes is that there is flexibility as to what the five to seven information units in immediate memory can be. He says that if we encode our information cleverly we can store five to seven units of incredible richness while still constrained by the same overall restrictions on capacity. This means the ability to monitor or assess the state of this planning and the readiness to perform; and also the ability to integrate in real time the flow of information through immediate memory and retrieval of information from long-term memory.

Adults usually remember the name of a class rather than each of its members; they remember rules rather than examples of the rules, or they use other strategies which enable them to let a small unit of information stand for a procedure that can be used to generate a set or subset of the material that are to be remembered. Bloom *et alii* (1970) hypothesized that the nature of a cognitive system, like the

ability to remember, may also influence the kinds of distinction which must be made in vocabulary or in other aspects of semantics in order to announce the characteristics of the cognitive system with the requirements for language performance. Furthermore, difference in strategies for language acquisition may be related to characteristics of both short-long term memory organization.

1.2.1. SPEECH PROCESSING MEMORY

In listening comprehension activities memory is fundamental. Without memory there will be no retention of a given information. It is also in memory that the information is stored and processed for a later recalling.

A lot of students fail to understand the spoken language because they do not have a good memory to retrieve the information. Cook (1977) refers to different kinds of memory related to the cognitive process of learnings: the speech processing memory, the primary memory, the secondary memory, and the language memory. This framework is used by Cook in some of her experiment to show the importance they have in the second language learning process.

By definition, speech processing memory is the mental activity of storing part of the information and processing the rest of it while the sentence is being uttered. All language users have to face this process, otherwise it could be impossible for them to develop their ability to understand the spoken language.

Information becomes hard to retain when the speech processing memory is overloaded, that is, when there is too much information. Linguistic research in this area has established a strong correlation between speech processing memory (SPM) and syntax. In other words, the capacity the students have to grasp and understand the units that form the sentence and their relations is connected to their speech processing memory capacity.

Yngve (1960) says that some structures have "deeper syntax" than others. For instance a structure such as "his mother's brother's son's daughter's hat" is more difficult to process than "the hat of the daughter of the son of his mother". Savin and Perchonock (1965) claim that a sentence with more transformations takes greater memory capacity. Kimball (1973) says that syntactic complexity leads to a loss of comprehension; it does not matter in which language the sentence is spoken.

Cook (1975) hypothesizes in her experiment that comprehension errors are caused by perceptual strategies that resorted to when the normal capacity of speech processing is overloaded. She tested this hypothesis by the comprehension of the English relative clause, by native children, native adults and foreign adults. She found that these three groups tended to use the same strategy when the memory was too overloaded. This strategy was that the first Noun Phrase in the sentence was the subject and the first Noun Phrase after the verb the object. The syntax was wrongly interpreted and so was the comprehension. The following example "The cat the dog bites likes the horse" was interpreted as "The cat was biting the dog". It was also found that syntactic point gives problem to all three groups (native child, native adult and foreign adults) processing English. The difference between native adult and foreign adults or between child and native adults is one of degree rather than of kind. Syntactic complexity is easier to understand as speech processing memory expands. This was observed in native children's gradual improvement on the acquisition of certain structures. However, SPM works in the same way in all speakers of English, as to syntactic point. It depends on one's knowledge of syntax. The foreign learner's behavior is similar to that of a native adult because he has a more limited capacity for syntax speech processing than the native adult does.

Cook's experiment reveals that comprehension errors

depend on speech processing memory; when it happens to be too overloaded syntax errors occur. Thus when the student expands his speech processing memory better he becomes in his syntax approach of the language. His capacity for speech processing depends upon his capacity for syntax.

1.2.2. PRIMARY MEMORY

Primary or short-term memory is the type of memory involved in processing information for a short period of time; for instance, seconds. When the information has to be stored for a longer period of time then the secondary or long-term memory takes place.

In primary memory the subjects are required to immediately recall the words they hear. This is the typical experience in a language laboratory exercise where the students listen to a tape and then the teacher asks them to perform certain tasks. The students who are able to retain the information will cope with the problem in a successful way, those who cannot retain the basic information will fail.

Any new item presented to listeners remains for several seconds in the primary memory if it is not replaced or disturbed during that time by further new inputs. According to Stevick (1976:13):

"after any verbal input to the student's eyes or ears, there is a period of time this input may remain immediately and unconditionally available for re-examination and for any of a number of kinds of manipulation."

Cook (1977) points out two characteristics of primary memory: 1) that it basically processes information in terms of sounds (while in semantic information it is largely absent) and 2) that it is extremely limited in capacity and processes only 3 to 4 units of information at a time. One good example of primary memory in the language field is the case of interpreters and reporters, who normally produce their output in spoken words several seconds behind the

input that they receive.

There is very little information in relation to the development of children's primary memory:

"So far as child development is concerned, little is yet certain about how primary memory develops; capacity as measured in digits has, however, formed part of the classic tests of I.Q. (Binet and Simon, 1913) and shows an increase according to the mental age of the child; it has been established that up to the age of 5 children do not use sounds in primary memory (Conrad, 1971) but some type of visual coding (Conrad, 1972) Cook (1977)."

The question that we are mostly concerned with here is how the foreign learner's primary memory capacity works "if reduced in the second language, in what way this capacity is linked to his level of knowledge of the foreign language, and whether from the beginning the foreign language learner tends to use sound recording, like native adults, or some other form of coding, like native children" (Cook 1977:5). Lado (1965) gave some answers to these questions through a series of experiments in which various aspects of primary memory were researched in native adults and foreign learners. One of his conclusions was that memory span increases with mastery of language. Cook (1977) made the following experiment on primary memory with adult foreign learners of English. She divided the population into two groups: advanced and beginners. The subjects were asked to repeat strings of randomised digits. They started with a length of 4 and each time the student repeated the string correctly another digit was added up to when he made a mistake. Since his mistake could have been accidental, he was given one or two further strings of the same length. If he repeated 2 out of 3 correctly he went on to a longer string; if he was unsuccessful for 2 out of 3 the test finished. The intention was to establish the maximum number of digits that the students could repeat. The strings consisted of numbers from 1 to 9,

randomly jumbled with no number occurring more than once in a given string.

Cook's study aimed at investigating where the capacity for digits between these two groups with different knowledge of English was the same. She came to the conclusion that there was a little difference between these groups for digit capacity. While the beginners had 5.9 capacity for digits, the advanced presented a capacity of 6.7; the difference between them was 0.8. She also came to the conclusion that the foreign adult behaves like an adult not like a child as far as digit is concerned. The foreign adult has more capacity than a child for digits. While the child who already knew English showed a capacity in digit of 2 and 5 digits the foreign adult beginner with little knowledge of English showed a capacity of 5.9. When memory process is dependable on language, such as syntax, both children and foreign adults have the same difficulties. But when memory process is minimum dependable on language like digits for instance, the foreign adults present more capacity than a native child especially because they have a first language and can use the strategy of transference.

TABLE 1 - Maximum average capacity for digits

	Digits
Beginners	5.9
Advanced	6.7
Difference	0.8

The difference between the results of this experiment and that of the previous experiment provides the reason for distinguishing between speech processing memory and primary memory in a second language learning. The memory process depends on features of syntax, whereas primary memory has to do with remembering the vocabulary items in the new language without any further language coding.

1.2.2.1. What Form of Coding Foreign Adults Use in Primary Memory?

Cook (1977:) made another experiment with adult foreign learners of English (beginners + advanced) to establish the maximum span for strings of words of different types and also whether primary memory capacity in the foreign adult is affected by phonological and lexical coding. Nouns with homophones (H) and non-homophones (NH) were presented to the subjects. The H group were eight similar sounding nouns: "cat, bat, mat, bag, man, hat, tap". The NH group were dissimilar sounding nouns: "bus, spoon, fish, clock, horse, train, girl, hand". Randomised strings were constructed from these two sets, ranging in length from 3 to 8 and the identical method was used to arrive at the maximum memory capacity in each subject for H words and for NH words as was used to establish digit span.

The results showed that the average capacity for NH words in beginners was 4.5 and in advanced 5.0. Both beginners and advanced remembered less NH words than digits. The average capacity for H words was 3.5 in beginners and 3.7 in advanced. Both beginners and advanced remembered less H words than NH words. The difference between beginners and advanced was therefore 0.8 for digits 0.5 for NH words, and 0.2 for H words. The first of this difference is statistically significant whereas the last two were not. From these studies we can conclude that primary memory capacity varies according to the type of item involved: capacity for digits is greater; capacity for NH is second greatest; capacity for H words is least. This supports the assertion that foreign adults, even beginners use more phonological coding in primary memory than young native children.

TABLE II - Maximum average capacity for different strings (Experiment I and II).

	Digits	Non-Homophones (NH)	Homophones (H)
Beginners	5.9	4.5	3.5
Advanced	6.7	5.0	3.7
Difference	0.8	0.5	0.2

In 1964 Conrad showed that native adults use phonological coding in primary memory because they are more likely to confuse letters with similar sounds than letters with similar shapes, regardless of whether the letters are presented orally or visually. He also showed that children develop phonological coding at the age of 5.

This problem of confusing letters with similar sounds is very common and it is presently observed in our adult foreign students at Federal University of Santa Catarina. For instance they confuse the H words such as "sheep and ship", "meat and meet", "it and eat", "year and ear", and so forth. Only when they start using these words in a communicative way and become more familiar with the language as do their mistakes gradually disappear.

Maybe the foreign adults use more phonological coding in primary memory because they have their first language available for their memory process.

1.2.3. SECONDARY MEMORY

By definition, secondary or long term memory is the type of memory that processes information for a longer period of time than seconds. This kind of memory is believed to store information in terms of semantic networks and meanings. This implies that lexical items are not stored as isolated items but are organized in consistent trends of syntagmatic or paradigmatic associations.

Psychological work in secondary memory (Kintsch, 1970, Runelhart, Lindsay and Norman 1972, Atkinson and Shiffrin 1968) confirm this approach. Ervin (1961) says that children present syntagmatic word associations linking for instance "blue" and "sky", and the adults present paradigmatic associations linking for example "blue" and "red". Rossi (1964) Denney and Ziobrowski (1972) say that the difference between adult and child associations relies in the amount of clustering the adult gives to words and also the form of clustering employed. The foreign language learner seems to be able to choose among alternative memory strategies as he develops his language capacity. Stolz and Tiffany (1972) made some experiments and showed that changing from syntagmatic to paradigmatic associations can be a result of the function of the frequency of occurrence of the items: adults present syntagmatic associations to "rare words" compared to "familiar words". Perhaps foreign language learners may present similar behavior because the words are relatively unknown to them.

Cook (1977) did an experiment to detect if adults cluster words more as they gradually become more familiar with the foreign language. The results of this test showed that beginners remember fewer words than advanced students correctly; in clustering behaviour they do not differ significantly from advanced students. With this experiment Cook came to the conclusion that increasing knowledge of the second language does not help too much the adults in clustering vocabulary.

SUMMARY

For developing listening comprehension, it seems that between the productive skills and receptive skills the latter should be the one that the students should face first. This implies that the learners would be exposed to the oral language familiarizing with the sounds and learning how to discriminate them. The listening process demands from the

learner special concentration on the foreign language sounds, or words, to identify them as distinctive, and then store them in memory so that they can later be recalled within the framework of chunks of information which belong together as a message. Thus it is very important that the learner develop some phonetic coding ability to transform auditory input into meaning. This process serves to input the integrated structure of language in human memory on the level of recognition.

Initial delay in oral production provides greater concentration on the amount of learning for listening comprehension. Research done in this area shows that development in linguistic competence is enhanced when massive practice in listening comprehension precedes oral practice.

The nature of a cognitive system, may be influenced by the kinds of distinctions which must be made in vocabulary or in other aspects of semantics. Difference in strategies for language acquisition, such as the ability to remember may be related to characteristics of speech processing memory, primary memory and secondary memory.

Memory is essential in developing listening comprehension. Without memory nobody can retain or store the information for later recalling. Remembering is often said to be a reconstructive process; people remember passages by piecing together what information they can retrieve, adding outside information and making corrections wherever necessary to get them to make sense.

The kinds of memory mentioned in this work reveals that there are specific memories that fit specific tasks when testing listening comprehension. Speech processing memory requires among other things an ability to correlate syntax and meanings. This facilitates the memory processing. However, syntactic errors can occur when the memory is too over-loaded. Primary memory tends to preserve verbatim content where the knowledge of the language is not required .

Psychologists have traditionally studied primary memory (short-term memory) by asking people to recall digits, letters, or unrelated words. Secondary memory tends to preserve meaning. Information is often represented as a network of propositions. The contrasts between primary memory and secondary memory has been demonstrated in retrieval time as well.

In remembering, the students retrieve bits and pieces from memory in order to reconstruct the information given in a sentence that they can claim to have heard or read before.

These aspects of memory, phonetic coding ability, and syntactic complexity interact mainly during the students' development of listening comprehension. Special attention should be devoted to them in any analytical study of errors in listening comprehension of a foreign language.

CHAPTER II

THE RESEARCH

2.0. SCOPE OF THE RESEARCH

The purpose of this study is to examine how students of the initial stage of *Letras* English Program of the Federal University of Santa Catarina (first semester students) develop their auditory ability to comprehend spoken English: we will try to detect the difficulties they find with listening comprehension activities developed in the laboratory sessions; and observe their memory capacity to store information and the strategies used to achieve the levels of listening comprehension.

The present framework was used as a reference to trace errors found in the students' listening comprehension tasks. A questionnaire was administered to find out the student's background in the foreign language. It was found that their knowledge of the language was elementary acquired mostly in high school where the aim of English teaching is mainly translation. Then, an initial test was given at the beginning of the course in order to determine the level of comprehension of the spoken language the students had. During the semester the students attended two hours of laboratory sessions per week in order to develop their listening skills. Since it is thought that there are innate perceptual strategies in each individual that help to develop listening comprehension skills, but most of the time the individual is not conscious of them, a sheet of paper was handed to them trying to make them conscious of the difficulties and facilities they faced in each activity. An appraisal of the students' final competence at the end of the semester was done by using the same initial test for comparing and evaluating the students' progress during the semester.

It is convenient to clarify that in our study we were

not concerned with the testing of memory per se. We mentioned memory as an element of essential importance in developing listening comprehension. In a communicative situation the use of memory is needed to store the information while other bit of information is being uttered. In that way the students have to select the important items from the message and retain them in their memory. Thus they arrive at an overall understanding of what is being said.

2.1. WAYS OF TESTING LISTENING COMPREHENSION

Listening comprehension is tested by various means. Chastain (1976:287-293) said that with listening comprehension one is able to: 1) discriminate between one significant sound and intonation patterns of the language; 2) perceive an oral meaning; 3) keep the communication in mind while it is being processed and 4) understand the contained message. These four components of listening comprehension are listed in ascending order of difficulty and complexity. In a general sense, the learner first learns to discriminate between sounds before he can make sense out of a stream of sounds or hold a series of them in his memory; familiarity with the sounds and intonation patterns of the language facilitates the successful accomplishment of each. At the communication level, however, other factors are involved. After the message has been perceived and held for processing, understanding depends upon one's knowledge of intonation, voice quality, vocabulary, morphology and syntax.

Chastain considered these items above as valid when testing those components of language for which they were designed. With regards to perception he thinks that there exist better ways of testing it. However, he says that testing perception, without also requiring the learner to remember to some extent what he has heard, is problematic. He suggests that perhaps the best or most adequate way is to test perception and auditory memory at the same time in the same item.

The most common way we can find out whether a student or the interlocutor understands a message is by his reaction to the message. This reaction is usually given in the form of response which is expressed through some sort of oral manifestation. The problem with the answers of a beginner is that he does not process the necessary elements in the vocabulary or the grammar to articulate as cohesive answer. So sometimes we receive as an answer bits or chunks of information which the learner has put together in an attempt to respond to the problem or question. If we judge the level of comprehension by the grammatical correctness of the structures used to provide an answer, we might be making a mistake assuming that the incorrect grammatical version equates with an incorrect 'comprehension'. This problem arises because an objective interpretation of the student's real comprehension is obscured by the fact that the limitations the learner has in the productive skill are taken as limitations of the comprehensive skill for decoding the message.

"Understanding oral communication implies that the listener is able to comprehend the total message being conveyed by the speaker. Under normal circumstances a native speaker comprehends the ideas being expressed without paying conscious attention to the language itself. During the comprehension process he is almost entirely oblivious to the linguistically significant features of the code that enable him to glean the message being conveyed. In fact focusing on linguistic elements of communication tends to slow down comprehension or impede communication altogether". (Chastain 1973:81).

2.2. SOME PROCEDURAL CRITERIA

In this piece of research answers with syntactic errors but correct comprehension were considered adequate. We were more concerned with the cognitive aspect of the exercise rather than the syntactic. "From a communicative point of view, correct language is language which calls least

attention to itself, i.e., language which promotes maximum communication" (Chastain 1979:

The criteria for analyzing the answers was on the basis of: 1) *Adequate comprehension* (A) (the answers which presented a correct information of the question). For example, in test four, the first question was: "What is the report about?". The answer to this question was: 'about sports'. Some students answered 'about athletes'. It was considered adequate or correct answer since the text was a report interviewing three athletes. 2) *Partial comprehension* (P) or half correct answers (the answers which gave partial information about the question). In test six the first question was: 'What is the text about?'. The answer to this question was supposed to be 'Jane's and Elizabeth's plans for travelling'. Some students only answered 'the travel'. The answer was not syntactically complete but it was semantically appropriate to the context. What seemed to happen was that the students did not know how to express this idea in correct syntax. 3) *No comprehension* (N) - We labelled as non-comprehensive those answers which presented no pertinent information about the questions as well as, those which remained unanswered.

From Chastain's suggestions concerning aspects involved in testing listening comprehension, we considered that the following have been the most representative for our purposes.

- 1 - Recognition of vocabulary
- 2 - Sound discrimination and intonation (recognizing language).
- 3 - comprehension of syntax (assigning the correct interpretation to the relations established by words in sentence structure).
- 4 - Ability to organize decoded meanings in a hierarchical order of importance (main ideas and secondary ideas).

- 5 - Capacity to infer meaning from contextual information in spite of unknown words.

From our personal experience in language teaching, and as a result of extensive discussions on the subject through the courses in UFSC M.A. program, we postulate the following list of hypothetical sources for possible difficulties the students face in listening comprehension tasks:

- 1 - *Phonetic misrepresentation*: lack of clear correspondence between the actual pronunciation of items and the students mental representation of pronounced words. This might lead students to interpret verb forms for noun forms or words meaning one thing for others which are totally different.

- 2 - *Syntactic Complexity*

- a) over-load of embedding of individual items
Ex.: I have a converted country cottage
(test one)

- b) over-load of embedding of clauses
Ex.: The cat the dog bites likes horse
(Cook 1977)

- c) over-load of embedding of prepositional phrases
Ex.: The cottage is about three miles from the little village of Great Paxton out in the country and it stands about a hundred yards from a river (Text one).

As one can see this is a particular case of memory over-loading and it results in an entangled interpretation of relations.

- 3 - *Lack of schematic framework* - which is caused by the presence of unfamiliarity with the word items which are crucial for establishing meaning relations. Inductive reasoning ability is important when the learners do not know the meaning of words. That is, the ability to infer from the way in which different words and grammatical constructions are utilized in the foreign language, for discourse purposes.

2.3. THE MATERIAL

The materials evaluated to check the students' comprehension consisted of a set of five tests which took place at different stages of the regular course. The tests were prepared by the teaching staff and they were based on recorded tapes of the comprehension section of the Abbs and Freebairn's book, "Building Strategies". These exercises were given at the language laboratory. The first tape consisted of a description of a place where people lived. It expanded from type of housing to location, and geographical location. The information was presented in the form of an interview where people involved described where they lived. The second tape consisted of a conversation between two persons talking about their impressions of the place where they lived and where they worked. The third tape was a report about athletes at the Olympic Village in Los Angeles. The fourth tape consisted of a telephone conversation between people about renting a flat. The fifth and last tape was an interview with two people about their holiday plans.

To cope with these listening comprehension tasks the students listened to the tape at their own pace trying to configurate meaning from what they heard and understood. There was no time limit imposed on the tasks. The difficulty was measured on the basis of incomplete answers, wrong answers

and "blank" answers. The student could use all the language lab available (equivalent to an effective use of approximately 35 minutes of repeated exposure). Since time was up after the 45-minute-lab session, the students had the opportunity to return to earlier material at any time and concentrate their attention upon particular difficulty encountered. The students had these tasks as regular activities of the lab sessions required by the course.

2.4. ANALYSIS OF THE DATA

EXPERIMENT I

The text of this listening comprehension exercise was the following:

JENNY : I'm living in a student hostel in London. London's in the south east of England.

INTERVIEWER: How long have you been living in London?

JENNY : Well, for the past two years.

INTERVIEWER: And where have you lived while you've been there?

JENNY : In a hostel in Bayswater.

David comes from the northwest of England.

INTERVIEWER: Where do you live?

DAVID : I live in a flat, it's a flat, actually. I live in Southport, a place called Southport. It's a seaside town, it's a reasonably large town, situated on the coast near Liverpool, in the north of England.

Mary lives in the country.

INTERVIEWER: Could you tell me where you live?

MARY : I live at a little village called Great Paxton.

Great Paxton is in I think you would call it East Anglia - about 20 miles from Cambridge. I have a converted country cottage. The cottage is about 3 miles from the little village of Great Paxton out in the country and it stands about a hundred yards from a river.

The first speaker came from London city Southeast of England and lived in a student hostel. The students had to make similar notes about the other two people David and Mary. They had to write down the kind of home, location and geographical location corresponding to David's and Mary's information. The following answer sheet was provided:

Listening to 3 people from different parts of Britain talking about where they live. The first speaker comes from London. Look at the notes about her. Make similar notes about the other two people.

<u>HOME</u>	JENNY	DAVID	MARY
a flat			
a house			
a hostel	student		
a cottage	hostel		
<u>LOCATION</u>			
in a large town			
in a city			
in a suburb	London		
in a small town	city		
in a village			
in the country			
in the mountains			
near the sea			
<u>GEOGRAPHICAL LOCATION</u>			
In the NW N NE			
W E of Britain South east			
On the SW S WE			
		coast	of England

The structure of this answer sheet provided the student with some background information (schematic framework) which they used in order to concentrate on particular data. The students did not have to answer in full sentences. They had to give just two-word answers only aiming at the concept. The background information provided some clues to help the students concentrate on the specific items given as alternatives. For example, for home the choice was 'a flat', 'a house', 'a hostel', 'a cottage'. For location the alternatives were 'in a large town', 'in a city', 'in a suburb', 'in a small town', 'in a village', 'in the country', 'in the mountains', 'near the sea', etc. It was essential to clarify some of these concepts before the students approached the task; so the meaning of different types of places could be clear in their minds to make a reasonable choice. There is no way a student can recognize for example that somebody lives in a village unless he has a clear idea of what that is, in order to be able to supply a reasonable answer. Sometimes there are certain references in a discourse (schematic framework) which help the listener understand the notion or concept that is being presented. We will call this "redundant contextual reference". At other times, there is no other additional reference to the point in question besides the mere mention of the word referring to the notion or concept itself. In this case the student is only left with the identification of the phonetic symbol of one individual item as it is pronounced. This restricts the comprehension range. It is essential for the students to have the correct pronunciation in his head in order to match the phonetic symbols with the concept.

Synthetic complexity leading to loss of comprehension was felt through this first text. One can observe this in Mary's turn of speaking; She says 'I have a converted country cottage'. These two adjectives "converted" and "country", qualifying cottage, distracted the real key-information word,

'cottage', as an answer to the kind of home where Mary lived. Another example, also in Mary's interview, was noticed when she says 'Great Paxton is in - I think you could call it - East Anglia'. The embedded clause obscured the recognition of the place which was very far from the proposition 'in'. Some ambiguities presented in Mary's speech confounded the students for answering the question related to her home location in a clear fashion. In her interview she says 'I live at a little village called Great Paxton', 'The cottage is about three miles from the little village of Great Paston out in the country...'. The answer related to the location where she lived could be 'in a village' or 'in the country', since these two alternatives were presented among the others on the answer sheet. The information given in Mary's interview was surrounded by other elements that made it hard for the students to understand and solve most of the items related to geographical location.

The schematic frame given on the answer sheet for the students to follow in item II (location in Jenny's part) was not clearly correlated with the alternative for the students to choose in the same item. The schematic frame provided the phrase "London city" as an example of location. As alternatives the students had: 'in a large town', 'in a city', 'in a suburb', 'in a small town', 'in a village', 'in the country', 'in the mountains', 'near the sea'. As one can see the name of a specific place such as 'London city' induced the students to wrongly assume they also had to specify the name of the place itself. That is why there appeared peculiar answers such as 'Texas city'.

Anyway this type of answer provided some insight to evaluate the students comprehension in the sense that they thought Texas was a city in England. This has to do with the student's knowledge of the world. A further comment on this type of difficulty can be related to the fact that proper names, become a serious obstacle for understanding

because they are usually interpreted as syntactic elements (such as auxiliaries or prepositional elements) which are not understood) of the sentence which is being decoded , instead of considering them as noun forms, referring to *one place* for example.

See Table I for the results:

TABLE I

TEST ONE	STUDENTS													
David's Home	1 A	2 A	3 A	4 A	5 A	6 A	7 A	8 A	9 A	10 A	11 A	12 A	13 A	14 A
David's Location	A	N	N	N	A	N	A	A	A	A	A	N	A	A
David G.Location	P	P	P	N	P	P	N	P	P	A	P	P	P	A
Mary's Home	A	A	A	A	N	P	A	A	A	A	N	A	N	A
Mary's Location	A	A	A	N	A	A	A	A	A	A	A	A	A	A
Mary's G.Location	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N
T O T A L	A=4 P=1 N=1	A=3 P=1 N=2	A=3 P=1 N=2	A=2 N=4 N=2	A=3 P=1 N=2	A=2 P=2 N=2	A=4 N=2 N=1	A=4 P=1 N=1	A=4 P=1 N=1	A=5 N=1	A=3 P=1 N=2	A=3 P=1 N=2	A=3 P=1 N=2	A=5 N=1 N=2
T O T A L %	75	58,3	58,3	33,3	58,3	50	66,6	75	75	83	58,3	58,3	58,3	83,3

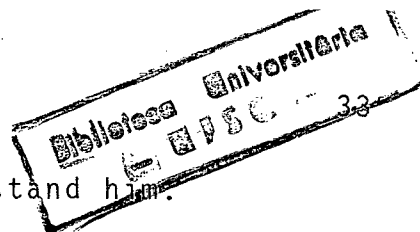
The results of the test showed that 100% of the answers related to David's home were adequate (A) or correct. The easiness of the item seems to be related to the student's familiarity with the word 'flat'. They recognized and processed this answer with no difficulty. The higher number of incorrect answers, of answers with no comprehension (N) was in the section related to Mary's Geographical location which got 14 answers with no information about the question (100% of the answers showed no comprehension.)

From these results we can conclude that the item which had the greatest score of adequate answers (A) was the one

related to home. The word 'flat' was known to the students and they could identify the vocabulary. The item which got the second greatest score of adequate answers was the one related to location. In the perspective of difficulty provided by the students, they said that it was the identification of words referring to location associated with forms as 'to live' which provided the clues from them (schematic framework). The item which presented less adequate answers was the one related to geographical location. The students claimed that they did not know the words related to geographical location in English such as North, South, East, West, Northeast, Southeast, etc. The similarity in phonetics between the words Northeast and Northwest made the students confuse these two concepts (Phonetic misinterpretation).

In the test, students 10 and 14 achieved a level of comprehension equivalent to 83,3%. They got 5 adequate answers and 1 answer with no comprehension. Students 1, 8, 9, obtained 75% of comprehension. They presented 4 adequate answers, 1 answer with partial comprehension and 1 answer with no comprehension. Student 7 presented a performance of 66,6% of comprehension. She got 4 adequate answers and 2 answers with no comprehension. Students 2, 3, 5, 10, 11 and 12 had a performance of 58,3% of comprehension. They had 3 adequate answers, 1 answer with partial comprehension and 2 answers with no comprehension. Student 6 had a performance of 50% of comprehension. She got 2 adequate answers, 2 answers with partial comprehension, and 2 with no comprehension. Student 4 showed the lowest performance of comprehension 33,3%. She got 2 answers with adequate comprehension and 4 answers with no comprehension. The majority of the students showed 50% comprehension of the total test.

The difficulties the students felt in doing this listening comprehension task were mainly lack of vocabulary about the exercise and the difference in the speed rate presented by the speakers on the tape. David, for example ,



talked too fast for the students to understand him.

The facilities the students felt in developing this listening comprehension exercise consisted of the previous knowledge of the meaning of the words they knew. When their schematic knowledge was clear the exercise was easier to solve. Content words, such as the verb 'to live' became of decisive importance to lead them to the solution of the problem. Similarities between certain English words and Portuguese words helped in the identification of concepts through association. The transparent words sometimes brought up the answer to the question.

Few students were able to do the exercise before 45 minutes. Most of them had to listen to the tape many times in order to understand and retain the information provided in the tape.

EXPERIMENT II

The second listening comprehension activity consisted of a situation in dialogue form:

Dialogue

At the Cooper's house before dinner.

BARBARA: Do you like working at Weston, Rod?

ROD : Yes, very much. The job's interesting and the people there are very friendly.

BARBARA: And do you mind living in a hostel?

ROD : It's all right, but I want to find a flat of my own soon. Where do you live, by the way?

BARBARA: In a flat on the other side of the city, in an old part of Bristol. What do you think of Bristol?

ROD : I like it. It's a beautiful city and the countryside around here is lovely. How do you like Bristol?

BARBARA: Well, it's my home town, of course. I think it's a bit depressing in winter, but it's nice in spring and autumn. Do you know many people yet?

ROD : No, not many. Unfortunately.

BARBARA: Well, would you like to come and have a look round the shoe shop one day? In fact, what about coming next saturday at lunch time? We close at one o'clock.

ROD : Thanks. That's a great idea. Why don't we have lunch together?

BARBARA: Fine. I'm not so keen on big lunches, but we could have something light.

ROD : Good. That's fixed, then.

PEGGY : Come on you two. Dinner's ready.

The dialogue did not show too much syntactic complexity. For instance, when Barbara asked Rod what he thought of Bristol 'What do you think of Bristol?', his answer was not surrounded by irrelevant items which generally represent an extra-load to the comprehensive system. Rod's answer was 'I like it'. Only then he gave other bits of information about Bristol such as that 'it was a beautiful city' and 'the country side around there was lovely'. There was no need to filter the information related to the question with a great strain of perceptive processes since it could easily be retained in the short-term memory.

If the information provided by the speaker is clear and the length of the structures is under reasonable control the retention of the main information is facilitated because the sequence of sounds can be perceived almost totally as opposed to only partial sounds. When the word items are not clearly deciphered the information becomes obscure. (Phonetic misinterpretation). (The beginner generally has to abstract a high content of information from each sequence of sounds). If the exposed information is too "encapsulated" (syntactic

complexity) the student is unable to retain the sentential elements of the preceding sequences. Thus, the new cycle that flows together with additional data blurs the perception of continuing information. The learner understands bits of what he hears but he is not able to correlate what he understood.

This dialogue provided practice in the aural identification of words or groups of words, phonology and structural patterns used in every day language.

Eight questions about this dialogue were prepared for the students. These questions contained 50% of WH questions and 50% of multiple choice items with a 'schema' for them to develop the exercise.

English Course
First Semester (phase)
Florianópolis 11/05/82

Student's name: _____

Answer the questions below according to the dialogue.

Rod works at Weston Aeronautics. He and Barbara are talking at the Cooper's house before dinner.

- 1) What does Rod think about his job at Weston? _____

- 2) Where does he live? _____
- 3) Barbara lives: a) in a hostel () b) in a flat ()
c) in a cottage near Bristol () near the University
d) at the Coopers' house ()
- 4) Where does Barbara come from? _____
- 5) Barbara thinks Bristol is: a) interesting in winter ()
b) depressing () c) a beautiful city () d) nice in spring ()
e) rainy in winter ()

- 6) Barbara wants Rod: a) to find a flat() b) to have a big lunch ()
c) to visit the shoe shop() d) to work in Weston ()
d) to have lunch at one o'clock.
- 7) Rod wants Barbara: a) to visit his job () b) to have lunch with
him () c) to have something light() d) to fix dinner ()
e) to close at one o'clock ()
- 8) How many people participate in this dialogue? _____
-

The multiple choice questions were number 3, 5, 6, 7. These questions required some memory load and associative skills between phonetic and written form. Question 3 was looking for the kind of home Barbara lived in. The schematic framework in question five was connected with Barbara's opinion about Bristol. The reference used was related to words denoting impressions such as 'interesting', 'depressing', 'beautiful', 'nice', etc. The fifth word provided in the choice was the word 'rainy' which has a negative connotation in relation to weather conditions; in this way it belonged together with the group of negative impressions. Question number 6 was trying to find out Barbara's plans for Rod ; several activities were suggested as an answer. Finally the last multiple choice question number 7 was asking about Rod's expectations about Barbara. Several alternatives were given such as 'to visit his job', 'to have lunch with him', 'to have something light', 'to fix dinner', and 'to close at one o'clock'. Between the alternatives there were some distracting ones. WH-question number 1 was simply asking for Rod's impression about his job which could be answered in terms of 'good', 'bad', 'marvellous', 'excellent', etc . Question number two was asking for the place where Rod lived. Question number four looked for another location, the place where Barbara came from, and question number eight asked the students to recognize the number of people involved in the dialogue. See table 2 for the results.

TABLE II

Test 2.

Questions	STUDENTS													
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14
First	A	A	A	A	P	N	N	A	P	N	N	A	P	A
Second	A	N	A	A	A	A	A	A	N	A	A	N	N	A
Third	A	A	A	A	A	A	A	A	A	A	A	A	A	A
Fourth	A	A	P	P	A	A	A	A	N	A	A	A	P	A
Fifth	A	P	A	P	N	A	N	A	N	N	A	N	A	A
Sixth	A	A	A	A	N	N	N	N	A	N	N	N	N	A
Seventh	A	N	N	A	N	N	N	A	A	N	N	N	N	A
Eighth	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	A
T O T A L	A=7 N=1	A=4 N=3	A=5 N=2	A=5 N=1	A=3 N=4	A=4 N=4	A=3 N=5	A=6 N=2	A=3 N=4	A=3 N=5	A=4 N=4	A=3 N=5	A=2 N=4	A=8
TOTAL %	87	55	68	75	40	50	37	75	40	37	50	32	35	100

It was thought at first that the students would perform better in the answers with a schematic framework than in the WH-questions. But in this task this was not the case since the number of answers with adequate comprehension did not show a significant difference between the two kinds of questions. What really seemed to affect the answers was the vocabulary. When the words were familiar to the students they remembered them easily. Redundant information did not seem to be significant for the simplification of listening task. Recognition of vocabulary item seemed equally important.

Among the eight questions, the one which got 100% of answers with adequate comprehension was the third one. This can be due to the fact that all the choices presented in this question used familiar vocabulary to the students such as 'flat'.

It was easy for them to remember known words than to predict the meanings of the unknown ones. The question which presented a high score of answers with no comprehension (N) was number eight. At first we thought that this occurred because the students did not have a scheme to follow. But looking at another question of the same type this hypothesis was not confirmed since questions with similar degree of difficulty scored a high number of answers with adequate comprehension (A). The occurrence of a high score of answers with no comprehension (N) in this item was mainly because during the development of the dialogue the third person just appeared once, at the end of the dialogue. Thus the students could not distinguish her as a participant in the dialogue. We could believe that the main source for the difficulty was the lack of integration of the third speaker in the dialogue, who only intervenes in the end with a short statement.

The results of the test showed that among 14 students, 6 accomplished a comprehension above 50%, 6 showed a comprehension below 50% and only 2 students accomplished 50% of the aural comprehension task. Student 14 presented a good performance presenting 100% of comprehension of the dialogue. Student number one presented 87% of comprehension; she scored 7 answers with adequate comprehension and in 1 answer she showed no comprehension. Student 8 presented 75% of comprehension of the listening activity; she answered six answers with adequate comprehension (A) and two answers showed no comprehension (N). Student four also presented 75% of comprehension of the dialogue. Student number three had a performance of 68% of comprehension. She had five answers with adequate comprehension, one answer with partial comprehension, and two with no comprehension. Student two presented 55% of comprehension; she had four answers with adequate comprehension. Students six and eleven presented 50% of comprehension having four answers with adequate comprehension and four answers with no comprehension. Student five and nine showed 40% of

comprehension with three answers with adequate comprehension, one with partial comprehension, and four answers with no comprehension. Students seven and ten presented 37% of comprehension with three answers with adequate comprehension and five with no comprehension. Student thirteen had 34% of comprehension with one answer with adequate comprehension, one with partial comprehension, and four answers with no comprehension. And finally student twelve presented 32% of comprehension of the dialogue with three answers with adequate comprehension and five answers with no comprehension.

The difficulties the students seemed to face in this aural activity consisted of speed rate, vocabulary and their incapacity to infer the meaning through the association of concepts. They considered speed rate a trouble because they had not before been exposed to the language spoken by a native. The facilities they encountered were the known words that helped them to develop a better accomplishment of the task. When the vocabulary was familiar to them they were able to identify the situations presented to them. Sometimes the context helped to develop a fair comprehension of it but not very significantly.

EXPERIMENT III

The third listening comprehension activity consisted of a report about athletes in the Olympic Village in Los Angeles. Details about the speakers involved in this report were given as well as the situation itself.

ANOUNCER: And in today's 'sportsworld' we have a special report from Karen Finch who is with the athletes in the Olympic Village in Los Angeles.

The line's clear. Can you hear me Karen? (FX crackly line - BBC news report from US).

KAREN : Fine, Barry, just fine.

ANOUNCER: Great. So here is Karen Finch with her report from the Olympic Village.

KAREN : Well, I have three athletes with me in the studio. First Bo Lundquist.

BO : Hej!

KAREN : Bo is a cyclist and he's here with the Swedish team. This is your first Olympics, isn't it, Bo?

BO : Yes, it is.

KAREN : And how do you feel about it?

BO : Happy, very happy.

KAREN : Let's talk about training schedule, Bo. I imagine it's pretty hard.

BO : Yes, it is. I get up at five...

KAREN : Five! And do you start training then?

BO : Well, I have a cup of coffee first. I start training at about five-thirty. You know, it's quite cold then.

KAREN : Right! I'm sure it is. When do you finish training, Bo?

BO : Well, I practise cycling on the track for about two hours. Then I have a short break for breakfast. After that, I do exercises for another few hours. I suppose I finish about midday.

KAREN : So you're free after twelve. What do you do then?

BO : You mean, what do I do in my spare time?

KAREN : Right.

BO : Well, we usually go swimming down at the beach in Malibu for the afternoon. That's all. I go to bed early. I want to win a gold for Sweden.

KAREN : Well, I hope you do. Thank you, Bo Lundquist. Next

with me in the studio is a British girl. She's a member of the swimming team. European champion in free style - Anne Cole. Hello, Anne.

ANNE : Hello.

KAREN : Anne, you heard Bo Lundquist talking about his training programme. Tell me about yours. For example, do you get up so early?

ANNE : Well, not quite so early. I get up about six-forty-five.

KAREN : Do you start your training straightaway, Anne?

ANNE : No, not exactly. I have a very light breakfast at seven and I try to get to the pool by half past.

KAREN : I see. How long do you train for?

ANNE : All day.

KAREN : You mean you swim all day?

ANNE : (laughs) Oh, no! I swim for about four hours - have lunch and then do track work and body strenghtening exercises in the afternoon. I suppose I train until four o'clock in the afternoon.

KAREN : That's a long day.

ANNE : It's all right.

KAREN : What about your free time? What do you do?

ANNE : Well, I like to relax when I'm training, so I read a lot and watch a lot of television - I like American TV. I sometimes go dancing at the Olympic Club.

KAREN : Dancing?

ANNE : Yes, but I go to bed early on most nights.

KAREN : Thank you, Anne, and good luck to you. Finally, here's Bob Maley . Bob's a long distance runner - the American 3000 meters champion.

The text involved both recognition and selection level of aural comprehension. I mean recognition level because the students were involved with recognition of words that named persons and places such as name of the reporter and the place where the report was made. And also recognition of phrases in their structural interrelations of sequence of time such as in item ten of the test. In the selection level the students had no extract from the communication those elements which seemed to express the intentions of the speaker or those elements that fit with their intentions. At first this was done only through short statements such as 'can you hear me Karen?' 'Fine, Barry, just fine.' Then the student had to extract essential events from the communication which occupy part of his mental organizational capacity and retain some of these events in short-term-memory in order to relate them with other elements such as those in Bo's schedule of activities. When the flow of information is overloaded the students need to make a temporary stop in order to organize the data and match certain types of signs with the provided schema. This reduces their capacity of recycling the information. In a long sequence such as when Bo and Anne were telling about their scheduled activities the elements that for the learners were still highly informative were uttered in a rapid sequence for their capacity to absorb them. This probably resulted in some cases in phonetic misinterpretation. Generally the result was that they lost the essential elements of the message as in item 6 and 10. It is hypothesized that when the learner interprets key information wrongly from the beginning, he wrongly anticipates the intention of the message, and does not decode other elements which are important for the purpose of the speaker. As the students become familiar with types of difficulties their ability to retain longer sequences in a message improves.

This text was an appropriate one since it did not present too much complexity both in the semantic and syntactic

aspects. However, items 6 and 10 presented major difficulties due to this "overloading-of-information" factor discussed above.

Since the report was too long for the students, Bob Maley's part in the interview was omitted.

The answer sheet contained eleven questions. Two of them presented schematic frames for the students to identify the items in question.

ANSWER SHEET

Answer the following questions:

THIS IS A REPORT

- 1) What is the report about? _____
- 2) Who is the reporter? _____
- 3) Where is the report made? _____
- 4) Who is the first person to be interviewed? _____
- 5) Where is he from? _____
- 6) Fill in Bo Lundquist's training schedule, specify his activities according to his version:
 - 5:00 a.m.
 - 5:30 a.m.
 - 7:30 a.m.
 - 12.00 (midday)
- 7) What does he usually do in the afternoon? _____
- 8) Who is the second person to be interviewed? _____
- 9) What time does she get up? _____
- 10) Specify what activities she has at the following time:
 - 7:00 a.m.
 - 7:30 a.m.
 - 11:30 a.m.
 - 2:00 p.m.

11) What does she do during her free time? _____

The first question involved general comprehension question, the recognition of the topic of the tape. The second question required that the students recognize the name of the reporter. The third question expected the students to recognize the place the report was made. The fourth question asked for the name of the first person interviewed on the report. The fifth asked for the place where the first speaker was from. Question number six gave a schematic framework with a schedule for the students to match with Bo's activities. Question number seven looked for his activities in the afternoon. Question eight asked for the identification of the second person interviewed on the report. Number nine was related to a time reference. Question ten had the same frame as number six; the students had to specify the activities of the second speaker with the time given in the answer sheet. And the last question was connected with the second speaker's leisure time. See table III for the results.

The third and fourth answers revealed 100% of adequate comprehension (A). These questions were related to recognition of place and recognition of people interviewed respectively. The reference to 'Los Angeles' seemed to be an important clue for the students. In question four the proper name was extremely hard to recognize (phonetic misrepresentation) in spite of the fact that the name appeared again under question six. Question five showed the highest score of incorrect comprehension (N) (equivalent to 100%). It is important to point out the fact that although question three and question five were related to information about places (where is the report made? and where is he from?), the percentage of answers was totally inverted. Number three obtained 100% of correct responses and number five was equivalent to 100% of incorrect responses (N). The problem here seems to be

TABLE III

Questions	Students													
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14
First-recog. topic	A	A	A	A	-	A	A	N	-	A	A	-	A	A
Second-recog. interviewer	P	A	P	P	-	P	P	N	-	A	P	-	A	P
Third-recog. place	A	A	A	A	-	A	A	A	-	A	A	-	A	A
Fourth - recog. people interviewed	A	A	A	A	-	A	A	A	-	A	A	-	A	A
Fifth - recog. place	N	N	N	N	-	N	N	N	-	N	N	-	N	N
Sixth-recog. activities+match time + act.	A	N	A	N	-	P	N	P	-	N	A	-	P	A
Seventh - recog. activity	A	P	A	A	-	A	N	A	-	N	N	-	P	A
Eighth- recog. of people interviewed	N	N	A	P	-	A	P	P	-	P	P	-	P	P
Ninth - recog. activity	A	A	A	A	-	A	N	A	-	A	N	-	A	A
Tenth-match time + activity	P	P	A	N	-	P	P	A	-	P	N	-	P	A
Eleventh - recog. activity	A	A	A	N	-	A	A	A	-	A	A	-	A	A
TOTAL	A=7 P=2 N=2	A=6 P=2 N=3	A=9 P=1 N=1	A=5 P=2 N=4	-	A=7 P=3 N=1	A=4 P=3 N=4	A=6 P=2 N=3	-	A=6 P=2 N=3	A=5 P=2 N=4	-	A=6 P=4 N=1	A=8 P=2 N=1
TOTAL %	65	56	82	47	-	66	39	56	-	56	47	-	58	74

related to the fact that "Los Angeles" is easily recognized by Brazilian students as the name of a place in English. Whereas, the name "Sweden" is totally undistinguishable. The main difficulty was typically a lack of phonetic perception because some answers included other references to places such as 'Philadelphia' and several had the expression "little village".

In the interview sheet where the students make an introspection of the difficulties found in the tasks they said that they could recognize the words in isolation but when they were put together in a sentence they did not get the meanings (problems in sound and intonation discrimination affected the perception of the message). This circumstance is also reflected in questions 6 and 10 where the recognition of activities to be matched with time seemed to be the hardest to solve.

The students believe that previous training in recognition of vocabulary items in contextual speech becomes indispensable to help them in the listening comprehension tasks. The acquisition of vocabulary demands more than written exposure to familiarize students with the items. Accompanying laboratory exercises to supplement the reading tasks integrate the receptive reading skills with the oral skills. Redundant information facilitates the recognition of a text. In language communication redundancy becomes extremely necessary because although some parts will not come out clear, the additional contextual reference will simplify the task. Thus in the acquisition of a foreign language, our perceptual difficulties, which are sometimes obscured due to this lack of redundancy, are under major strain.

EXPERIMENT IV

The fourth listening comprehension activity presented communicative interaction through a telephone conversation. Two persons were deciding about the renting of a flat.

Listen to the telephone conversation between Paul Blake and Rod Nelson:

ROD: 367 594. Rod Nelson speaking.

PAUL: Oh, hello. My name's Paul Blake, I'm ringing about the flat.

ROD : Oh, yes. You saw my ad in the newsagent's, did you?

PAUL: That's right. This morning. Have you had many callers? It's Saturday, and I thought, you know, there would be a lot of people asking...

ROD : No. You're the first. But I only put the ad in this morning. So...

PAUL: Oh, good. Could you tell me something about the flat?

ROD : Well, there's quite a big sittingroom - and a kitchen.

PAUL: What about bedrooms?

ROD : Oh, there are two bedrooms - one big and one a bit smaller, but it's quite nice.

PAUL: I see. So I'd have my own bedroom?

ROD : Yes. The flat's upstairs flat - on the top floor of the house. You know, somebody else lives downstairs. But all my rooms are on the same floor.

PAUL: Er... what about the rent? How much is it exactly?

ROD : Well, I pay thirty pounds a week.

PAUL: Thirty pounds!

ROD : Yes, but I thought I would pay eighteen pounds and ask the other person to pay twelve. Because, you know, er,

because I've got the big bedroom. That seems only fair.

PAUL: I suppose so. What do you do?

ROD : Work. Down at Weston Aeronautics. I'm an electrical engineer. I come from Canada. Came over a few weeks ago. What about you? What do you do?

PAUL: I'm studying, actually, at the Poly, Polytechnic. Naval engineering and maths. It's OK.

ROD : Sounds interesting. Look, why don't you come round and see the flat? Then you can make up your own mind. It's better than trying to talk about it over the phone.

PAUL: Yes, er - may I come round and see it straightaway - like, now, this morning?

ROD : Well, actually, it's a bit difficult for me this morning. I've got to go out.

PAUL: Well, may I come and see it this afternoon? At about three?

ROD : Yes, do. Three would be fine for me.

PAUL: What's the address?

ROD : 57 Bath Road.

PAUL: Oh, I know Bath Road. It's quite near where I live now. By the way, does the landlady or landlord live downstairs?

ROD : Yes, Mr and Mrs Ingrams. They're OK. Anyway, the flat has its own entrance. You go round the back and up some steps. You only need one key in fact.

PAUL: I see.

(Telephone pips)

PAUL: Oh, there are the pips.

ROD : Right! See you later this afternoon. Bye!

PAUL: Cheers.

Telephone conversations provide helpful training to develop aural comprehension of the kind of discourse used in these situations. The objective is simply to expose the students to a more informal type of discourse in which the characters use the common, repetitive forms of transaction in oral language. This sample provided some insights about the structure of conversation where speakers take turns; and there are also many instances of short pauses and overlaps. Conversation is made up of "units which are recognizable as either incomplete or possibly complete and the next speaker can begin as soon as the current speaker has reached a possible completion" (Cowthard 1977:55).

The listening task consisted of ten WH-question about this telephone conversation.

Rod rented a flat and decided to share it with someone because the rent was too high.

Answer the following questions:

- 1) Who called Rod? _____
- 2) What did he want? _____
- 3) Did Rod have many callers? _____
- 4) How is the flat? How many bedrooms does it have? etc _____

- 5) How much rent does Rod pay a week? _____
- 6) How much does the other person have to pay for his room? _____

- 7) What does Paul do? _____
- 8) Will Paul see the flat in the morning? _____

- 9) What's Rod's address? _____
- 10) Who are Mr and Mrs Ingrams? _____

The first question demanded identification of the caller. The second question aimed at identifying the situation. The third question referred to the number of calls Rod had received. Details about the flat and the actual cost of the rent were required in the fourth question. In the fifth question the students had to reveal the actual amount Rod paid for the flat and in question number six they should find out the rent Rod was demanding to be paid in order to share expenses. Information about the caller's occupation was the topic of question seven. The eighth question was meant to discover whether the students had grasped that the caller was interested in the flat and willing to make arrangements to see the place. The ninth question was connected with the address of the flat and the last question directed the students' attention towards other people referred to in the text. The context provided enough background to discover who they were. Table four reflects the student's performance.

The highest score of adequate answers (A) was found in number two. The explanation for these results correlates with the idea that familiar vocabulary has an important incidence in correct answers. The most difficult questions were three and ten; in spite of the fact that the answer to question three was simply negative "NO, YOU'RE THE FIRST", the number of answers reveal that there were five wrong interpretation (N). One possible explanation for these results might be that the students could not distinguish between Paul's and Rod's interaction. Question ten had six inadequate answers (N); the information seemed to be obscured by other elements. When, the main information comes surrounded by others (syntactic complexity) which do not answer the question the identification or retention becomes more difficult.

TABLE IV

QUESTIONS	STUDENTS													
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14
First	N	-	A	-	-	A	N	A	-	N	-	-	-	A
Second	A	-	A	-	-	N	A	A	-	A	-	-	-	A
Third	N	-	N	-	-	N	N	A	-	N	-	-	-	A
Fourth	A	-	A	-	-	P	P	A	-	P	-	-	-	A
Fifth	P	-	A	-	-	P	A	P	-	A	-	-	-	A
Sixth	N	-	N	-	-	N	P	A	-	P	-	-	-	A
Seventh	A	-	A	-	-	N	N	A	-	N	-	-	-	P
Eighth	A	-	A	-	-	N	N	A	-	N	-	-	-	A
Ninth	N	-	A	-	-	A	N	A	-	N	-	-	-	A
Tenth	N	-	N	-	-	P	N	N	-	N	-	-	-	N
TOTAL	A=4 P=1 N=5	-	A=7 N=3	-	-	A=2 P=3 N=5	A=2 P=2 N=6	A=8 P=1 N=1	-	A=2 P=2 N=6	-	-	-	A=8 P=1 N=1
TOTAL %	41	-	71	-	-	23	22	81	-	22	-	-	-	81

After analyzing the results of experiment four I realized that a different type of formulation of the question could provide more revealing facts about the student comprehension of the kind of interaction that happens in telephone calls. For example, instead of asking "Who called Rod?" which is the kind of question that already defines for the student the roles of 'caller' and 'called', I could have asked "Who called who?". The first turn which appeared in dialogue provides the actual form which a telephone call has. That is, the person who receives the call provides the number of his telephone first (367594) and then identifies himself and adds the expression "speaking". On the second turn of the dialogue the other speaker identifies himself (Oh, Hello, My name is

Paul Blake). This should be enough for the students to be able to identify the roles. The following line in the dialogue provides redundant information which reinforces the fact that Paul Blake is the caller (I'm ringing about the flat). This also provides the students with some specific information about the actual procedure in initiating a telephone conversation. There is a characteristic contrast with the Brazilian way of starting a conversation where the caller neither provides the phone number nor identifies himself but just asks for the person he wants to talk to.

Another question which I could have asked is: How did Paul Blake find out about the flat? This could have been a very good question because the answer had to be inferred from the interrogative form with the question tag 'you saw it add in the newspaper, did you?'

The major difficulty the students faced in developing this test was vocabulary, because they were not familiar with words naming "money" such as "pounds". Also they were not able to follow a continuous flow of speech spoken by a native and were left to guess the meaning of the items from the context. Because of this they considered the speed rate too fast making comprehension impossible sometimes.

EXPERIMENT V

The fifth activity included an interview of two persons talking about their holiday plans.

Listen to these people talking about their holiday plans:

INTERVIEWER: Now where are you going to go for your holidays?

JANE : Uh, our destination is Paris.

INTERVIEWER: And how are you going to travel?

JANE : We're going by the sleeper to King's Cross, then

across London to Victoria down to Folkestone, on the steamer across the channel and then by train to Paris.

INTERVIEWER: So it's train all the way?

JANE : Train and steamer.

INTERVIEWER: And how long are you going to spend there?

JANE : A week.

INTERVIEWER: And where are you going to stay in Paris?

JANE : Not far from the Moulin Rouge, at a hotel where we have bed and breakfast.

INTERVIEWER: And what are you going to do whilst you're there?

JANE : Sightseeing. We're going to Versailles - we have got that booked - and we've got a trip on the Bateau Mouche and we have various other things, such as Notre Dame, Sacré Coeur, Tuilleries, that we want to go to.

INTERVIEWER: Now you're going on holiday shortly. Where are you going to go?

ELIZABETH : To Winnipeg. Manitoba in Canada

INTERVIEWER: And how are you going to travel there?

ELIZABETH : We'll take a car to the airport, and then fly Air Canada to Winnipeg, and then we have a 500 mile drive across to Banff in the Rockies.

INTERVIEWER: And how long are you going to spend there?

ELIZABETH : Just under three weeks, from the 15th of December to the 2nd of January.

INTERVIEWER: And where are you going to stay in Banff?

ELIZABETH : When we first get there we'll be staying with a family - friends that stayed with us in the summer in this country.

INTERVIEWER: And what are you going to do whilst you're there, then?

ELIZABETH : Uh, when we're in Winnipeg, we'll just be visiting friends and relatives but when we're in Banff , we'll be skying. There are some hot water springs, so we'll go swimming and we're going to go across to America as well for a week.

This was the text which presented more unknown words to the students. Thus it demanded a higher amount of concentration for decoding the sentence structure. Particularly difficult was the recognition of proper names related to places, a problem which appeared in previous tasks. (Phonetic misrepresentation). Proper name such as Paris, King's Cross, London, Victoria , Folkstone, Moulin Rouge, Versailles, Bateau Mouche, Notre Dame, Sacré Coeur, Tuilleries, Winnipeg, Manitoba, Canada, Banff , seemed to complicate relations and the comprehension of the text (50%). Proper names present difficulty even to native speakers.

During the acquisition process of a foreign language, a lot of sequence of sounds have fewer probabilities of occurrence for the beginner, and as a result they are not well interpreted. On the other hand, other sequences (never heard before), furnishes a sequence of noise. The beginner's capacity to distinguish the sequence slightly familiar from those unknown ones can also be affected by the emotional tension and also by the anxiety that generally follows the experiences of the aural comprehension in a foreign language.

The answer sheet given to the student had ten questions about the place where people would go, how they would go, how long they would stay, where they would stay, and what they would do on their holliday specifically. Some questions about vocabulary item was previously given to the students before facing the task.

Two persons are interviewed about their plans. Jane speaks first and then Elizabeth.

- 1) What is the text about? _____
- 2) Where is Jane going? _____
- 3) Can you guess the meaning of the word sleeper? _____

- 4) What is a steamer? _____

- 5) Where is Jane going to stay in Paris? _____

- 6) How is she going to travel? _____
- 7) How long is she going to spend there? _____
- 8) Jane is going to do several things there: Mark the correct activities:
 - a) swimming in the lake ()
 - b) skiing in the mountains ()
 - c) visiting places ()
 - d) selling books ()
- 9) Where is Elizabeth going to go? _____
- 10) How is she going to travel? _____

The first question was about general comprehension of the interview. The task consisted of finding out the general topic. The second question inquired about the place Jane was going to. The third question was for the students to guess the meaning of the word sleeper. The fourth question was meant to identify the meaning of the word steamer. The fifth question wanted information on the place Jane would stay in Paris. Question number six implied discovering how Jane would travel. Question number seven aimed at explaining the length of Jane's stay in Paris. Question number eight was a multiple choice naming four alternatives about what Jane would do in Paris.

Question number nine investigated on where Elizabeth would go, and question number ten asked for Elizabeth's means of transportation. See table five for the results.

TABLE V

QUESTIONS	STUDENTS													
First-recog. of topic	1 A	2 A	3 A	4 P	5 A	6 -	7 P	8 A	9 -	10 -	11 A	12 A	13 A	14 A
Second-recog. of place	A	N	A	A	A	-	N	A	-	-	A	A	A	A
Third-identification of word	N	N	A	N	N	-	N	N	-	-	N	N	N	N
Fourth- identif. of word	N	N	N	N	N	-	N	N	-	-	N	N	N	A
Fifth- recognit. of place	N	N	A	N	P	-	N	N	-	-	N	N	A	A
Sixth	N	N	P	N	N	-	N	P	-	-	N	N	P	A
Seventh	A	N	A	A	N	-	N	A	-	-	N	N	A	A
Eighth - identif. of activities	A	A	P	A	P	-	A	P	-	-	A	A	P	P
Ninth - identif. of place	A	N	A	A	N	-	N	A	-	-	A	A	A	A
Tenth	N	N	N	N	N	-	N	N	-	-	N	N	N	A
TOTAL	A=5 N=5	A=2 N=8	A=6 N=2	A=4 N=5	A=2 N=6	-	A=1 N=8	A=4 N=4	-	-	A=4 N=6	A=4 N=6	A=5 N=3	A=8 N=1
TOTAL %	50	20	62	41	23	-	10	42	-	-	40	40	52	81

The questions that got the highest score with no comprehension were the third, the fourth and the tenth. Questions three and four dealt with vocabulary items and the students

had trouble in identifying the meaning of the words 'sleeper' and 'steamer'. These word items were unknown to them but they could have predicted their meanings from the context. This did not happen. This confirms a tendency found in the previous tasks. When the students are familiar with the words they retain and remember the information easily. The answer to question ten seemed to have too much information and this made the students lose entirely the comprehension of the item. Questions one and two got the highest score of answers with adequate comprehension. Number one was a question about the general comprehension of the text and it is easier to tell the topic or theme of any text spoken or written than to give details about it. Question two had as an answer 'Paris', and this concept seemed to be real easy to identify and remember because it has similarities with Portuguese in pronunciation; in spelling it has the same written symbol.

Seven students had a performance of comprehension below 50%. One showed a performance of 50% and three presented a performance of 52%, 62% and 81%.

This test was the one the students found the hardest because it presented the more unfamiliar words than the others. The students complained about that and said that it made difficult the retention of the information given on the tape. Comparing this test with the others it was the one which presented a lower score of answers with adequate comprehension. The student's difficulties consisted mainly of vocabulary, and the recognition of proper names such as the ones naming cities.

The repetition of certain words helped them to understand some of the text such as the repetition of the word travel which led them to identify the topic of the text.

CHAPTER III

3.0. GENERAL CONCLUSION

From the five tests given in sequential stages during the first semester of English of the Letras course of the Federal University of Santa Catarina (UFSC) to a group of 14 students in an attempt to research the major problems in relation to listening comprehension, several important factors should be taken into consideration. The listening comprehension tasks demand a series of mental processes by which the beginner foreign language learners try to interpret sequential units of sounds which had to be reconstructed and interpreted into some meaningful form. Understanding the sequences implies on the one hand on a process of identification of phonetic nature involving a) recognition of vocabulary ; b) sound discrimination and intonation, and on the other, c) a capacity to infer meaning from contextual information in spite of unknown words. All these processes configurate the initiation of what is called the construction stage (H.Clark and E. Clark 1977). The information which is extracted by these means is stored in the short-term memory for a second step of the construction stage which is syntactic in nature and implies on a correlation of the word items inside a sentential structure. At this point the learner begins to organize the message into sentences (syntactic decoding).

This construction stage corresponds to Harnday's lexico grammatical system and belongs in the grammatical level, a level where sounds are interpreted into words and words into phrases.

The second stage is concerned with how listeners utilize this interpretation for registering the information in terms of answers, questions, orders, promises, expectations, etc. This stage, called the utilization stage (H. Clark and

E. Clark 1977) corresponds to Halliday's stage of choice which presents a selection within numerous sets of options presented in a text and belongs with the level of discourse interpretation. The interpretation of the message is achieved through an interaction of both the construction stage (grammatical decoding) and utilization stage (discourse interpretation). This interaction is reflected in the ability to organize the sentence structures in a hierarchical order of importance within the schematic framework of the text structure.

The research revealed a very strong correlation between the two stages mentioned above. The framework used to trace the source of listening comprehension errors namely 1) phonetic misinterpretation, 2) syntactic complexity and 3) lack of schematic framework was quite useful for this purpose.

The data showed that when the students were confronted with unfamiliar language items there seemed to appear some sort of mental blocking. In many cases the decoding task was abandoned and the problem unanswered. The students did not seem to resort to alternative strategies such as predicting via contextual information. In spite of the fact that the schematic framework appeared more or less clear to them, these alternative decoding strategies did not seem to operate. This may be due to the fact that they did not have vocabulary enough to understand what was being suggested or asked through the schematic frame.

Syntactic complexity with over-load of embedding elements, embedding prepositional phrases and embedding clauses contributed for the student's non-retention in memory the main information. The presence of discontinuous constituents such as in "Great Paxton is in I think you call it East Anglia", interrupted the continuity of the mental process because of too much speech. Too many self-embedding elements,

clauses or prepositions were confusing because by the time the students reached the end of the uttered sentence it had become hard for them to relate the items and construct the semantical meaning of the sentence in memory. Kimball (1973), Bever (1970) and Watt (1970) proposed that listeners are subject to special constraints on memory. Listeners try to minimize memory load, according to Kimball, by relying on and trying to attach each new word to the constituent that came just before. As one can see, the syntactic approach can account for certain difficulties in listening comprehension. Difficulties arise from syntactic sources - from self-embedding, missing relatives pronouns, discontinuous constituents and the like. The syntactic aspects of the language sometimes causes problems because the listeners most of the time make use of function words to understand the information. And function words must be identifiable from their sounds alone in order to be used. This turned out to be a problem to the students because they had difficulty in identifying them in actual speech.

Phonetic misinterpretation led the students to confuse words such as 'Northwest' and 'Northeast' causing misinterpretation of the information about geographical location. This may have happened because they had not been exposed or trained before to the spoken language and their mental representation of the pronounced words did not correspond to their actual pronunciation. It was noticed that words phonetically similar to Portuguese such as 'Los Angeles', 'Paris', etc, constituted no problem since they are easily recognized by Brazilian students because of their similarity with the target language. However, words such as 'Sweden' presented difficulties for the students to recognize and retain in memory because they differ phonetically from the Portuguese word 'Suécia'. Identification of proper names turned out to be another serious problem to the students. In a general sense, sound

and intonation discrimination affected the perception of the message although recognition of words in isolation was possible but when they were put together in the sentence, the semantic meaning was not caught. This led the students to identify ambiguously some content words and build some propositions wrongly. They lacked the ability to infer the meaning of words when they were utilized in the foreign language for discourse purposes (lack of schematic framework).

It was also felt that the difference in speech deliveries and speed rate affected the process of comprehension. This can be easily explained: 1) the students were not familiarized with the English sounds; 2) native speakers generally speak their words quickly, especially function words; 3) speech is sometimes full of incomplete words. As a result, the information became sometimes hard to be understood although the students were able to understand what they heard but at the same time unable to construct semantically what was heard because the words reached their ear so rapidly that they soon stacked.

Each experiment presented different kinds of difficulty to the students when facing the listening comprehension tasks. However, lack of vocabulary was the one common to all the experiments. This indicates that that the basic element to develop the listening comprehension ability is to have basic vocabulary to make sense of the string of the words heard. This implies that the students should be trained in listening skills by being exposed to the language first in order to develop other abilities. When the students know the meaning of the words they easily store them for later recalling.

3.1. PEDAGOGICAL IMPLICATIONS

Understanding of spoken language cannot simply be left to take care of itself. The consequences of its neglect quickly show up in classroom and notably outside of it when the students no longer have any control over what is said to them.

A basic scheme for understanding can be developed first, by trying to provide the learners with phonetic and intonational training to familiarize them with the sound and intonational patterns of the target language. This allows the learners to have some improvement in the decoding of the speech flow, to help them recognize the words and their relation in the structure. Secondly, by exposing the learners to some of the most frequent syntactic arrangements in English, through exercises and regular classroom activities, through structural exercises with reading passages, laboratory sessions, etc. At this stage the learner develops some covert processing strategies to transform foreign auditory input into meaning. The basic components of this scheme seem to be a minimum knowledge of vocabulary and some degree of insight concerning the organizational structure into the target language. By practicing listening or receptive activities, at least twice a week, the learners will be acquainted with a certain amount of new word sounds and consequently their vocabulary will be increased. Our schools should devote more class time to the listening skill, since a skill as complex as listening comprehension depends upon an acquired series of more specialized supporting bases, as some of those discussed before in this study.

It is convenient to remember however, that mere exposure of students to the sounds of a foreign language is not sufficient. As suggested earlier, a successful aural comprehension course must satisfy at least three essential

conditions: 1) the language material presented to the students must convey meaning from the very first hour of instruction; 2) a provision must be made for a student's response which will verify comprehension of each utterance or short passage immediately after delivery; this response does not have to be vocal; 3) students must be challenged to problem-solving and guess at the meaning of unfamiliar elements in a foreign utterance on the basis of context and other cues in the given linguistic environment (the ability to infer).

In presenting standard rates of speech, we are mindful that speed of rate is only one factor that affects comprehension. We recommend that teachers speak at normal rate from the start - but that they train themselves to pause more frequently than they would in normal conversation. Other factors such as motivation, context, grammatical complexity, and familiarity of vocabulary are of great importance in the achievement of the listening ability. We just hope that research progress and pedagogic advices of theories emerge to show how to control several factors to make us far more efficient than we presently are at teaching students to understand a foreign language. We believe the chief factors to control are rate of speed, rate of pausing and syntactic and semantic familiarity. Listening comprehension, virtually unexplored until recently, is the last of the fundamental language skills to receive serious attention, and the one which we hope to see great progress in the coming years.

BIBLIOGRAFIA

- ABBS, Brian *et al.* *Building Strategies - teacher's book*, strategies 2. Longman Group Limited, London, 1979.
- ABRAHAM, Roberta. *Structure and Meaning*. Newbury House Publishers, Inc. Rowley, MA, 1979.
- ALLEN, Harold; CAMPBELL N., Russel. *Teaching English as a Second Language*. McGraw-Hill Publishing Company Ltda., India, 1972.
- ASHER, James J. 1965. The Strategy of the Total Physical Response: an application to learning Japanese. *IRAL*, 3, 4.
- _____ 1969. The Total Physical Response Approach to Second Language Learning. *Modern Language Journal*, 53, 1:3-7.
- _____ 1972. Children's first Language as model for second Language Learning. *Modern Language Journal*, 56, 3:133-139.
- ATKINSON, R.C., and SCHIFFRIN, R.C., 'Some Speculations on Storage and Retrieval Processes in Long-Term Memory', Technical Report nº 127, Institute for Mathematical Studies in the Social Sciences, Stanford University, California (1968).
- BELASCO, Simon. 1967. The Plateau; or the case for Comprehension the "Concept" Approach. *The Modern Language Journal*, 51-2.
- BOLINGER, Dwight. *Aspects of Language*. Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, Inc. USA, 1975.
- BROWN, Gillian. *Listening to Spoken English*. Longman Group Limited, London, 1977.
- BRUMFIT, C.J. and JOHNSON K. *The Communicative Approach to Language Teaching*. Great Britain, Morrison & Gibb. Ltd., London and Edinburg, 1979.
- BYRNE, Donn. *Teaching Oral English*. Longman Group Ltd., Burnt Mill, Harlow, Essex, 1976.

- CARROL, John B. In: Marina Burt; Heidi Dulay and Mary Finocchiaro. *Wiewpoints on English as a Second Language: "Characteristics of Sucessful Second Language Learners"* (pp 1-7). New York , N.Y. Regents Publishing Company, Inc. 1977.
- CHASTAIN, Kenneth D. The Audio Lingual Habit Theory Versus the Cognitive Code-Learning Theory: Some considerations. *IRAL* , Vol. II/2, May 1969: 97-106.
- _____. *Devellopping Second Language Skills: theory to practice*, 2nd ed. Chicago: Rand MacNally 1976.
- _____. Testing Listening Comprehension Tests. *TESOL Quartely* , Vol. 13/1, March 1979:81-87.
- CHOMSKY, Noam. *Language and Mind*. Harcourt, Brace & World, I Cc. USA, 1968.
- CLARK, Herbert H. and CLARK, Eve V. *Psychology and Language* . Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, Inc., USA, 1977.
- CONRAD, R. 'Acoustic Confusions in Immediate Memory'. *British Journal of Psychology*, 55, 75-84 (1964).
- _____. 'The Chronology of the Develöpmnt of Covert Speech in Children'. *Developmental Psychology*, 5, 398-405 (1971).
- _____. 'Form and Color as short-therm memory codes in pre-school children'. *Psychonomic Science*, 27, 225, 226 (1972).
- COOK, Vivian J. *Cognitive Process in Second Language*. *IRAL* , Vol. XV/7, February 1977:1-18.
- DENNEY, N.W., and ZIOBROWSKI, M. 'Developmental Changes in Clustering Criteria'. *Journal of Experimental Child Psychology*, 13, 275-282 (1972).
- DILLER, Karl C. *Generative Grammar, Structural Linguistics, and Language Teaching*. Rowlery, Mass.: Newbury House, 1971.

ERVIN-TRIPP, Susan. Is Second Language Learning like the first? *TESOL Quarterly*, 8.2:111-128, 1974.

_____. Changes With Age in the Verbal Determinants of Word Association. *American Journal of Psychology*, 74, 361-372 (1961).

HALLIDAY, M.A.K. *Learning How to Mean*. Edward Arnold(Publishers) Ltd., London, 1975.

KAVANA, James F. and NATTINGLY, Ignatius G. *Language by Ear and by Eye*. The Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) , 1972.

KIMBALL, J., 'Seven principles of Surface Structure parsing in natural languages, cognition", 2,15-47 (1973).

KINTCH, W., *Learning, Memory and Conceptual Processes* (1970).

MILLER, G.A. 'The magical number seven, plus or minus two; some limits on our capacity for processing information', *Psychology Review*, 60, 81-97 (1956).

MOORE, Timothy E. *Cognitive Development and The Acquisition of Languages*. Academic Press. New York. San Francisco, 1973.

OLMSTED GARY, Judith. 1975. Delayed oral practice in initial stages of second language learning. In M.K. Burt and H.C. Dulay (eds.) *New Directions in Second Language Learning, Teaching, and Bilingual Education*, D.C.: TESOL.

_____. 'Caution: Talking may be Dangerous to your Linguistic Health'. February 1981: Pp-3-13, *IRAL*, Vol. XIX/1.

PAUL PIMSLEUR *et al.* In: Marina Burt; Heidi Dulay and Mary Finocchiaro. *Viewpoints on English as a Second Language: "Speech Rate and Listening Comprehension"* (Pp 27-34). New York, N.Y. Regents Publishing Company, Inc. 1977.

- POSTOVSKY, Valerian A. In: Marina Burt; Heidi Dulay and Mary Finocchiaro. *Viewpoints on English as a Second Language: "Why Not Start Speaking Later?"* (Pp 17-25) New York, N.Y. Regents Publishing Company, Inc.
- REVEL, Jane. *Teaching Techniques for Communicative English*. Illustrations the Macmillan Press Ltd., London, 1979.
- RIGG, Pat. "Comprehension and Learning": A Conceptual Framework for Teachers. December 1976: Pp 445-449, TESOL, Vol 10/4.
- RIVERS, W.M. 1966. Listening Comprehension. *Modern Language Journal*, 50,4:196-204.
- _____. 1968. *Teaching Foreign Language Skills*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- ROSS, E. 'Development of Classificatory Behavior', *Child Development*, 35, 137-142 (1964).
- SPIRINTHALL, Richard C. and SPIRINTHALL, Norman A. *Educational Psychology: a developmental approach*. Addison-Wesley Publishing, Inc. Reading Mass., 1974.
- STEVICK, Earl W. 1976. *Memory, Meaning, and Method: Some psychological perspectives on language learning*. Rowley, Mass.: Newbury House.
- STOLZ, W. and TIFFANY, J., 'The Production of "Child-like" Word Associations by Adults to Unfamiliar Adjectives', *Journal of Verbal Learning and Verbal Behavior*, 11, 38-46 (1972).
- WILKINS, D.A. *Second-language learning and teaching*. Edward Arnold Publishers Ltd., Hill Street, London, 1975.
- WINITZ, Harris and REEDS, James A. 1973. Rapid Acquisition of speaking. *IRAL*, 11/4:295-317.

WINITZ, Harris and REEDS, James A. 1975. Comprehension and problem solving as strategies for language training. The Hague: Mouton S. Co., Paris: N.V., Publishers.

YNGVE, V., 'A model and hypothesis for language structure', Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society, 104, 444-446 (1960).

APPRAISAL

The progress of 14 students was compared and evaluated during one semester. Their final competence at the end of the semester's work consisted of a post-test which included the same initial test they took. Some students attended all the laboratory sessions and took all the tests. However, other students were absent to some lab sessions and did not take some of the tests. See table six for the results-

TABLE VI

STUDENTS	FIRST TEST	POST-TEST
1	A=4 P=1 N=1	A=4 P=2 -
2	A=3 P=1 N=2	A=2 P=1 N=3
3	A=3 P=1 N=2	A=3 P=1 N=2
4	A=2 - N=4	A=3 P=1 N=2
5	A=3 P=1 N=2	A=5 - N=1
6	A=2 P=2 N=2	A=3 P=1 N=2
7	A=4 - N=2	A=2 P=1 N=3
8	A=4 P=1 N=1	A=6 - -
9	A=4 P=1 N=1	absent
10	A=5 N=1	A=5 N=1
11	A=3 P=1 N=2	absent
12	A=3 P=1 N=2	A=3 P=1 N=2
13	A=3 P=1 N=2	A=2 P=1 N=3
14	A=5 N=1	A=4 N=2

In general, the results showed that the students who attended all the lab sessions, either presented the same score they had in the first test or improved their listening comprehension. Student number one attended all the lab sessions and showed some improvement since she presented comprehension in all items. She did not score any N in the Post-test as had happened in her first test. Student 2 did not take test 4 and lowered to three the answers with no comprehension as well as the answers with adequate comprehension were lowered to two, in the Post-test. Student 3 took all the tests and presented the same score in both tests. Number 4, although she did not take test four she improved in her Post-test. She decreased the number of answers with no comprehension (N). Student 5 did not take two test numbers 3 and 4; However she showed a considerable progression on the Post-test. Among six items she presented adequate comprehension in five items and just one answer was not understood scoring a N. Student six did not take test five and presented three adequate answers on the Post-test while in the first test she had presented just two. Number 7 presented worse results in her Post-test than in her first one. Although she had been present in all lab sessions she did not show any improvement in her tasks. May be this is due to her lack of interest in the subject. In the first test she presented four adequate answers and two answers with no comprehension. In the Post-test she presented two adequate comprehension, one answer with partial comprehension and she also lowered to three the number of answers with no (N) comprehension. Student 8, showed a great improvement in listening comprehension in the Post-test. All the six items were adequately answered; while in her first test she presented four answers with adequate comprehension. Student 9 seemed to have given up the course since she did not take tests 3, 4, 5 and the Post-test. Student 10 did not take one test number five but she presented the same score in both tests five adequate answers and one with no comprehension. Student eleven is in the same situation

as student number nine. She did not take test four and the Post-test. Student 12 presented the same score in both tests although she missed tests 3 and 4. Student 13 did not take test number four. She presented a better accomplishment in the first test than in the Post-test. She scored three answers with adequate comprehension in the first test while in the Post-test she scored just two. She lowered to three the number of answers with no comprehension. Student 14, although the best student in all tests and in class, presented a better accomplishment in her first test. She lowered to two the number of answers with no comprehension.

DEPARTAMENTO DE EXPRESSÃO E COMUNICAÇÃO
GRADUAÇÃO EM LETRAS-INGLÊS

- 1) Nome _____
- 2) Sexo _____
- 3) Já estudou inglês? Sim () Não ()
- 4) Quanto tempo?

- 5) Onde?
Colégio Particular () Escola pública () Centros de Línguas ()
- 6) Que nível?
() Básico () Intermediário () Avançado
- 7) Quais eram basicamente os objetivos do ensino de Inglês na escola que você estudou?
() Tradução () Compreensão escrita () Falar () Compreensão oral
() Compreensão de leitura () Outros
- 8) Quais as habilidades mencionadas no item sete (pergunta anterior) que constituiu dificuldades para você?
() Tradução () Compreensão escrita () Falar
() Compreensão Oral () Compreensão de Leitura () Outros
- 9) Como você considera o seu conhecimento da Língua Inglesa:
() Fraco () Regular () Bom () Ótimo
- 10) Já morou nos U.S.A. ou em outro país cuja língua falada é o Inglês?
() Sim () Não
- 11) Quanto tempo?

UFSC

ENGLISH COURSE

FLORIANÓPOLIS 29/04/82

STUDENT'S NAME _____

As perguntas abaixo têm a finalidade de conscientizá-los como a compreensão oral foi desenvolvida.

1. Você tem que resolver três problemas:

- a) tipo de moradia (casa, apartamento, etc)
- b) lugar onde está situada a moradia (cidade, vila, no campo, etc)
- c) localização geográfica da moradia (norte, sul, leste, oeste, nordeste, sudeste, etc)

2. Você solucionou as três situações acima mencionadas?

Sim _____ Não _____

Quais você solucionou? a. _____ b. _____ c. _____

3. Como você chegou à solução do problema a? _____

Como você chegou à solução do problema b? _____

Como você chegou à conclusão do problema c? _____

4. Tente lembrar que tipo de dica você utilizou para solucionar os três problemas: a, b, c.

Apareceu na fita algo que o(a) levasse a solucionar a resposta?

Sim _____ Não _____ O quê? Caso você não se lembre, ouça a fita novamente.

UFSC

ENGLISH COURSE

FLORIANÓPOLIS 11/05/82

STUDENT'S NAME _____

As perguntas abaixo têm a finalidade de detectar as dificuldades e facilidades no desenvolvimento da compreensão oral pelos alunos da primeira fase.

- 1) Você entendeu o diálogo? _____
- 2) Escreva como você conseguiu responder suas respostas; explique-as uma por uma.
- 3) Escreva suas dificuldades encontradas na compreensão deste diálogo.
- 4) Escreva o que para você tornou fácil a compreensão do diálogo.

UFSC

TURMA T 117

LLE 111

ANO / SEM 82/1

FLORIANÓPOLIS, 18.05.82

As perguntas abaixo têm a finalidade de detectar as dificuldades e facilidades encontradas no desenvolvimento da compreensão oral.

1) Você acha que evoluiu sua capacidade de compreensão oral com as aulas da das no laboratório, ou para você sua compreensão oral continua sendo a mesma do início do semestre?

Por que evoluiu? Por que não evoluiu?

2) Como você identificou o assunto da fita ouvida?

3) Escreva suas dificuldades nesta fita ouvida?

4) Escreva suas facilidades nesta fita ouvida.

5) De um modo geral o que vem sendo a sua maior dificuldade e facilidade no desenvolvimento da sua compreensão oral?

UFSC

TURMA T 117

LLE 111

ANO/SEM 82/1

FLORIANÓPOLIS, 27.05.82

- 1) Quais as estratégias perceptuais que você utilizou na compreensão deste exercício?
- 2) O que mais dificultou para você reter (armazenar) as informações dadas neste exercício?
- 3) Enumere suas dificuldades e facilidades na compreensão deste exercício.
- 4) Você pode dizer através de que exercício de comunicação este exercício se desenvolveu? Qual a dica?