Moving forward in L2 listening instruction: focusing on learners’ difficulties in everyday situations

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The most sensitive topic of this and last year has been the flow of refugees into Europe. At the moment, many Finns appear to be very concerned about the possible problems that arise due to immigration. Because of the emerging anxiety, it would be important to discuss one of the key factors of successful integration: the continuous interaction between the migrants and the mainstream population (see National Core Curriculum 2012). In order to promote interaction in Finnish, it is necessary that L2 listening instruction is revised so that it meets learners’ needs in everyday situations.

The overarching aim of this study is to support revising of L2 listening instruction by raising awareness of the difficulties learners have when they talk with native speakers, the learners’ perceptions of what causes the difficulties in these situations, and the possible explanations for the difficulties. In this paper, I examine both the perceptions and the observations of listening difficulties in everyday situations, and the tentative explanations for these difficulties encountered. This paper draws on my ongoing PhD dissertation on L2 listening problems.

The data comprise questionnaire answers (n=202), interviews (n=5), individual listening tasks and stimulated recalls of Arabic Finnish learners with low and high educational background (n=12). The preliminary findings indicate that difficulties were most commonly linked to speech rate, colloquial language and unfamiliar words, likely due to learners’ ineffective decoding skills. Finally, I will discuss some pedagogical implications.


Keywords: listening comprehension, L2 listening, second language learning.