

THE ROLE OF BOTTOM-UP AND TOP-DOWN LISTENING PROCESSES IN LISTENING

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Abstract: *There are two major process in learning listening skill. In 'real-life' listening, our students will have to use a combination of the two processes, with more emphasis on 'top-down' or 'bottom-up' listening depending on their reasons for listening. Learners can be asked to compare their answers in pairs, before listening again to check. While listening a third time, they could write what they hear, before reconstructing the complete sentences in pairs or groups. By comparing their version with the correct sentences, learners will become more aware of the sounds of normal spoken English, and how this is different from the written or carefully spoken form. This will help them to develop the skill of recognising known words and identifying word divisions in fast connected speech.*

Keywords: *bottom-up process, top-down process, authentic listening, in classroom activities, how can we increase our listening.*

As we know listening is major aspects in learning language. During learning this skill we based on our knowledge. Two processes are involved in listening. Top-down listening uses background knowledge and contextualizes words to aid comprehension. Bottom-up listening uses sounds, words, and other small units to create meaning. These processes are complementary; listening for

only the big picture but not the details can be as ineffective as trying to understand every single word your lecturer says.

Top-down vs. bottom-up listening Imagine the following situations:

Over lunch, your friend tells you a story about a recent holiday, which was a disaster. You listen with interest and interject at appropriate moments, maybe to express surprise or sympathy.

That evening, another friend calls to invite you to a party at her house the following Saturday. As you've never been to her house before, she gives you directions. You listen carefully and make notes.

How do you listen in each case? Are there any differences? With the holiday anecdote, your main concern was probably understanding the general idea and knowing when some response was expected. In contrast, when listening to the directions to a party, understanding the exact words is likely to be more important – if you want to get there without incident, that is!

The way you listened to the holiday anecdote could be characterised as top-down listening. This refers to the use of background knowledge in understanding the meaning of the message. Background knowledge consists of context, that is, the situation and topic, and co-text, in other words, what came before and after. The context of chatting to a friend in a casual environment itself narrows down the range of possible topics. Once the topic of a holiday has been established, our knowledge of the kind of things that can happen on holiday comes into play and helps us to 'match' the incoming sound signal against our expectations of what we might hear and to fill out specific details. Do you ever get your students to predict the content of a listening activity beforehand, maybe using information about the topic or situation, pictures, or key words? If so, you are already helping them to develop their top-down processing skills, by encouraging them to use their knowledge of the topic to help them understand the content. This is an essential skill given that, in a real-life listening situation, even advanced learners are likely to come across some unknown vocabulary. By using their knowledge of context and co-text, they should either be able to guess the

meaning of the unknown word, or understand the general idea without getting distracted by it.

Other examples of common top-down listening activities include putting a series of pictures or sequence of events in order, listening to conversations and identifying where they take place, reading information about a topic then listening to find whether or not the same points are mentioned, or inferring the relationships between the people involved.

Top-down listening strategies

Before lecture, review and predict lecture topics

- Review assigned material
- Consider how new information will relate to previous lectures
- During lecture, identify the organization pattern (i.e., problem/solution, literature review, etc.)

- Note the number of main topics being covered and how they are related

- Listen for phrases that introduce, summarize, or shift topics

After lecture, continue to engage with the topic

- Review your notes for any information that is incomplete
 - Go to friends or go to office hours with questions about information you missed.
- Bottom-up processing happens when someone tries to understand language by looking at individual meanings or grammatical characteristics of the most basic units of the text, (e.g. sounds for a listening or words for a reading), and moves from these to trying to understand the whole text

Bottom-up listening strategies

Focus on stressed words

- Listen for longer, louder words (usually nouns, verbs, adjectives, and adverbs). These words carry the most important information.

Pay attention to repeated terms and pauses

- Take these as cues for possible key points in the lecture

Keep going

- Avoid trying to understand every word. In spoken language, not all words are important nor are they always grammatical.

In real-life listening, our students will have to use a combination of the two processes, with more emphasis on top-down or bottom-up listening depending on their reasons for listening. However, the two types of listening can also be practised separately, as the skills involved are quite different. The following procedure for developing bottom-up listening skills draws on dictogloss, and is designed to help learners recognise the divisions between words, an important bottom-up listening skill. The teacher reads out a number of sentences, and asks learners to write down how many words there would be in the written form. While the task might sound easy, for learners the weak forms in normal connected speech can make it problematic, so it is very important for the teacher to say the sentences in a very natural way, rather than dictating them word-by-word.

In conclusion, Successful listening depends on the ability to combine these two types of processing. Activities which work on each strategy separately should help students to combine top-down and bottom-up processes to become more effective listeners in real-life situations or longer classroom listening.

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