

**TEACHING COMMUNICATIVE LISTENING IN ENGLISH LANGUAGE CLASSES:
THEORETICAL FOUNDATIONS, PRACTICAL STRATEGIES, AND PEDAGOGICAL
EFFECTIVENESS**

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English today occupies one of the leading positions in language programs worldwide. The continuously growing demand for fluency in English has compelled linguists and educators to search for more effective methods of teaching language skills, among which listening, reading, speaking, and writing are fundamental. In this article, we focus on listening comprehension as a crucial language skill within communicative competence. Listening instruction has undergone significant changes in recent years, and we examine some of these developments, their implications, and their impact on English language teaching [2].

In recent years, listening instruction has attracted greater interest than before. University entrance examinations, final assessments, and other standardized tests now frequently include a listening component, acknowledging that listening skills constitute a core element of second language acquisition [3].

Earlier approaches to listening regarded it as a process of mastering so-called micro-skills, or discrete skills. Among these, linguists identify such abilities as recognizing abbreviations and contracted word forms, as well as identifying cohesive devices and key words in a text [4]. It was assumed that these skills should form the central focus of instruction.

Later perspectives on listening were informed by developments in cognitive psychology, particularly the concepts of “bottom-up” and “top-down” processes in listening comprehension, as well as the role of prior knowledge and schemata in understanding spoken texts. Consequently, listening came to be viewed as a process of interpreting the input rather than merely decoding it. At the same time, linguists uncovered new insights into the nature and structure of spoken discourse. Their research demonstrated that written texts read aloud cannot serve as an adequate basis for developing the skills required to process authentic discourse in real time. Thus, contemporary views on listening emphasize the active role of the listener, who is considered a participant in the listening process, employing various strategies to facilitate comprehension, monitoring, and evaluation [5].

In recent years, listening has been increasingly regarded not only in terms of comprehension but also as a means of language acquisition. Since listening can provide a substantial portion of the input necessary for understanding foreign speech, as well as the data learners receive during language study, an important question arises: how does attention to the language heard by the listener facilitate second language learning? In this regard, the issue of conscious awareness of linguistic form emerges, along with the consideration of how an individual function such as “noticing” may constitute part of the process through which learners incorporate new word forms and structures into their developing communicative competence in a foreign language.

With respect to the listening process itself, two perspectives can be distinguished: listening as comprehension and listening as acquisition. Listening as comprehension is the conventional way of conceptualizing the nature of listening; in many textbooks and methodological guides, the

terms “listening” and “auditory comprehension” are treated as synonymous. This perspective is based on the assumption that the primary function of listening in second language learning is to facilitate the acquisition and understanding of spoken discourse. In this article, we examine precisely this view of listening [7].

To understand the nature of the processes involved in listening, it is necessary to consider certain features of spoken discourse and the challenges it presents to listeners. Spoken discourse differs significantly from written discourse, and these differences add several dimensions to our understanding of how auditory input is processed. For example, spoken language typically occurs instantaneously. The listener must process it immediately, often without the opportunity to replay or rehear the message.

Spoken discourse often appears very rapid to the unprepared second-language listener, although speech rate varies considerably. Monologues may contain up to 160 words per minute, while ordinary conversation may reach 220 words per minute. The perception of faster or slower speech usually depends on the number of intra-clausal pauses employed by speakers. Unlike written discourse, spoken discourse generally unfolds in real time and frequently exhibits features such as contracted forms and abbreviations, functional fillers, various interjections, repetitions, and other devices of oral communication. Compared to the hierarchical structure of written language, spoken discourse is characterized by a more linear organization. Whereas the sentence serves as the unit of organization in written discourse, spoken discourse consists of both short and extended utterances, often comprising two or more reduced clauses. Most utterances rely on simple conjunctions or fillers. Spoken texts are also highly context-dependent, presupposing shared background knowledge. Finally, spoken texts may be delivered with a variety of accents, ranging from standard to non-standard, regional, and non-native varieties.

As noted above, there are two distinct approaches involved in the comprehension of spoken discourse: bottom-up and top-down processes. The bottom-up process refers to the use of incoming linguistic input as the basis for understanding a message. Speech comprehension begins with the received input, which is analyzed through successive levels of organization—sounds, words, sentences, texts—until the meaning of the spoken discourse is attained. In this framework, comprehension is regarded as a process of decoding [5].

Lexical and grammatical competence in the target language is crucial, as it provides the foundation for the bottom-up process. Learners scan the input for familiar words, while grammatical knowledge is employed to establish relationships among sentence elements. To process texts effectively in a bottom-up manner, learners must possess a broad vocabulary and a solid understanding of sentence structure. Exercises designed to develop bottom-up listening skills enable learners to: – retain input during listening; – recognize word and sentence boundaries; – identify key words; – detect significant shifts in discourse; – recognize grammatical relationships among key elements in sentences, while using stress and intonation to determine the functions of words and sentences.

Many traditional listening activities are oriented toward bottom-up processing: dictation, multiple-choice questions following a text, test tasks, and other exercises requiring careful and detailed recognition and processing of input, based on the assumption that all necessary meaning is contained within the input itself [5].

By contrast, the top-down approach to listening involves learners applying their background knowledge to comprehend the meaning of the message. Whereas the bottom-up process moves from language to meaning, the top-down process proceeds from meaning to language. Background knowledge may take various forms: prior knowledge of the discourse topic, situational or contextual knowledge, or knowledge represented as “schemata” or “scripts”—generalized frameworks of events and relationships.

Much of our understanding of the world consists of knowledge about specific situations, people we encounter in different contexts, and awareness of their goals, tasks, and strategies for achieving them. In addition, we possess knowledge of thousands of topics and concepts, along with their associated meanings and interconnections. By applying this prior knowledge of objects,

concepts, people, and events to a specific statement on a given topic, comprehension of spoken discourse during listening often occurs through top-down processing. The actual discourse serves to confirm expectations and fill in details during the interpretation of the spoken message [1].

Exercises based on the top-down process of listening comprehension develop learners' ability to perform the following actions: – use key words to construct a discourse schema; – perceive the situation in general terms; – identify the roles of participants and their communicative goals; – determine causes or consequences; – infer unspecified details of the situation; – anticipate questions related to the topic or context.

The following activities are designed to foster top-down listening skills: – learners generate a relatively large number of questions for which they expect to hear answers in the listening text; – learners compile a list of items or concepts they already know about the topic, as well as those they wish to learn more about, then listen to the text and compare; – learners read one speaker's part in a dialogue, predict the response of the other speaker, then listen and compare; – learners review a list of key questions expected to be addressed in the listening text, then listen to identify which were mentioned; – learners listen to part of a story, complete it, then listen again and compare endings; – learners read news headlines, predict the events, then listen to the news and compare [6].

In real-world listening, bottom-up and top-down processes typically operate simultaneously, with the predominance of one approach depending on the listener's familiarity with the topic and content, the density of information, and the type and purpose of listening. For instance, an experienced chef listening to a radio program in which another chef describes a chicken recipe may compare the recipe with his own, focusing on similarities and differences. In this case, the top-down process predominates. Conversely, a novice chef listening to the same program may attend closely to each step in order to record the recipe, requiring a deeper bottom-up listening process.

A typical sequence of listening tasks in contemporary instructional materials consists of three stages—pre-listening, listening to the main text, and post-listening—and integrates activities that combine bottom-up and top-down approaches. The pre-listening stage prepares learners for both processes by activating prior knowledge, predicting textual events, and analyzing key vocabulary. During listening, learners focus on comprehension through exercises requiring selective attention. The post-listening stage usually involves comprehension checks and may require learners to express opinions on the topic. It may also include bottom-up processing if the teacher and learners analyze specific sections of the text that were not fully understood, engaging in micro-analysis of features such as contractions, ellipsis, and other characteristics of spoken discourse.

Successful listening instruction can also be examined through the lens of strategies employed by listeners. Whether learners focus primarily on content or also on the process of listening raises the question of listening strategies. Strategies may be defined as deliberate methods of actively managing the listening process, designed to ensure learners' engagement.

Linguists distinguish two types of strategies:

1. *Cognitive strategies*—mental activities related to the processing and storage of incoming information for subsequent retrieval in working or long-term memory. These include: (a) listening (perception of linguistic and non-linguistic input); (b) memorization and storage (retention of input in working or long-term memory); (c) retrieval and use (extraction of information from memory for application).

2. *Metacognitive strategies*—conscious or unconscious mental activities that perform executive functions in managing cognitive strategies. These include: (a) evaluation (assessment of one's knowledge and available resources prior to listening tasks); (b) monitoring (determining the effectiveness of performance during the task); (c) self-evaluation (assessing effectiveness after task completion); (d) self-regulation (testing the efficiency of linguistic resource use) [4].

There exist various frameworks for integrating listening strategies into classroom practice. One of the most widely used and comprehensible models of listening instruction in foreign

language (English) classes consists of the following steps: Step 1. Pre-listening. Learners, working in pairs, predict possible words and phrases they may hear. They record their predictions, which may include several words in their native language. Step 2. First listening. While listening to the text, learners underline or circle the words or phrases (including equivalents in their native language) that they correctly predicted. They also note any new information they hear. Step 3. Pair discussion. Learners compare their understanding with their partners and explain how they arrived at comprehension. They identify the parts of the text they did not understand or hear and mark those requiring attention during the second listening. Step 4. Second listening. Learners listen to the previously unclear sections and take notes on any new information. Step 5. Whole-class discussion. The instructor facilitates a discussion to ensure that learners have correctly understood the text.

In recent years, various studies and theoretical perspectives have prompted a reconsideration of approaches to listening in foreign language learning, as well as a reevaluation of listening pedagogy itself [6]. A method grounded in the cognitive understanding of listening emphasizes the ways in which listening relies on different types of knowledge—linguistic, cultural, and contextual—and highlights the necessity of assisting learners in comprehending and applying both bottom-up and top-down processes in listening instruction, as well as in employing effective listening strategies.

Effective approaches to listening instruction must clearly distinguish between teaching and testing, while providing learners with targeted practice in applying appropriate listening skills for specific listening purposes, depending on their needs and proficiency levels.

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