

ADVANTAGES OF TOP-DOWN AND BOTTOM-UP APPROACHES IN ENGLISH LANGUAGE LISTENING

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Abstract

In the modern methodology of English language teaching, top-down and bottom-up approaches can frequently be heard among language teachers and researchers. Top-down and Bottom-up approaches: what is the difference? This article presents the results of investigations on the two approaches of listening. Furthermore, activities that entail top-down and bottom-up approaches are suggested. Top-down processing refers to the use of background knowledge to understand the information the listener receives. Bottom-up approach happens when the listener analyzes the sounds, words, and/or grammar of the oral speech they listen to. To improve the listening quality of the learners, the teacher and researcher needs to have an idea what these two strategies mean and in what situations to use each one.

Keywords: top-down, bottom-up, listening, processing, context, background knowledge, dictogloss, connected speech, comprehension.

Introduction

The English language is formally introduced to the students in Uzbekistan since they start school. However, today many preschools offer English as a foreign language lessons and clubs to the children of 3-7 ages as preparation for school. Pupils acquire this language focusing on four major skills step by step. Listening and speaking are mastered first. Reading and writing are emphasized later when they are able to show these skills in their mother tongue well.

Listening: Bottom-up and top-down. The learners, whether they realize it or not, are expected to combine the two listening strategies in "real-life" situations, concentrating more on "top-down" or "bottom-up" listening based on their listening objectives. Consider these cases:

Your friend tells you a tale of a recent vacation that went horribly wrong during lunch. You pay attention with curiosity and speak out when necessary, perhaps to express astonishment or sympathy.



Another acquaintance phones you later that night to invite you to their place for a party the coming Saturday. He provides you directions because you've never gone to his place before. You pay close attention while making notes.

How should you listen in each situation? Do you notice any variations? Your main worry with the holiday narrative was probably comprehending the basic premise and realizing when a reaction was anticipated. Contrarily, if you want to reach a party safely, it is probably more crucial to focus on the specific words being said when listening to the directions.

Literature Review

Top-down listening could best describe how you took in the holiday narrative. This speaks about utilizing prior information to decipher the message's significance. Context, or the situation and subject, and co-text, or what occurred before and after, make up background knowledge. The range of potential topics is already constrained by the context of informal conversation with a friend.

According to the studies by British Council (retrieved January 15, 2023), our understanding of the kinds of events that can occur while on vacation comes into play once the subject of a holiday has been determined. This knowledge enables us to "match" the incoming sound signal against our expectations of what we would hear and to fill in specific details. In contrast, comprehension is attained by segmenting and decoding the acoustic signal when listening to directions to a friend's residence. Here, the ability to distinguish between individual words in a stream of speech becomes increasingly crucial if we are to recognize things like a street name or a bus stop instruction.

In actuality, effective hearing typically requires both processes to be active at once. Imagine conversing with your buddies in your native tongue in a busy bar. Depending on what you know about the subject and what has previously been stated, it is likely that you "estimate" the content of significant portions of the conversation. In this method, you focus further on top-down processing to compensate for the sound signal's instability, which creates a barrier for bottom-up processing. Relative to this, when confronted with remotely familiar terminology or structures, second-language listeners frequently turn to their prior understanding of the subject and context, compensating for bottom-up processing challenges by adopting top-down processing. On the other side, top-down processing will also be severely constrained



if a listener is unable to interpret anything she hears, as she won't even be able to determine the subject of the conversation.

The findings of the research conducted by Ardini (2015) shows that 90% students feel difficulty in processing bottom-up approach since it requires the good awareness of grammar, phonetics, and, most importantly, pronunciation while 10% finds top-down more challenging. Investigations by Tsui and Fullilove (1998) on reading and listening comprehension have looked at how proficient and less proficient readers/listeners use different processes. While some studies have discovered that less-skilled readers/listeners lack bottom-up processing abilities, others have uncovered evidence to the contrary, claiming that less-skilled readers/listeners really lack bottom-down processing skills.

In the classroom setting

The learners will need to combine the two listening strategies in real-world listening, placing more emphasis on top-down or bottom-up listening depending on their listening objectives. However, because the two types of listening require very distinct skills, they can also be practiced individually in the lesson.

To assist them, instructors might urge students to adopt both bottom-up and top-down to aid in their comprehension of a material. For instance, in a reading comprehension exercise, students utilize their familiarity with the genre to anticipate the contents of the text (top down) and their grasp of the affixation to infer meaning (bottom up).

Activities involving top-down listening

Have you ever challenged your pupils to anticipate what will be said during a listening activity, perhaps utilizing details about the subject or context, images, or key words? If so, by encouraging them to use their prior knowledge of the subject to aid in their comprehension of the information, you are already assisting them in developing their top-down processing abilities. This is an important ability since even expert learners may run into some unfamiliar language in a real-world listening setting. They should be able to deduce the meaning of the ambiguous word or comprehend the primary point without becoming sidetracked by it by leveraging their understanding of context and co-text.

Top-down processing is seen as an efficient method of processing language since it gets the best use of person's contributions to the conversation. Example: To get



students to apply top-down processing, ask them to guess what a newspaper story might be about based on the headline or first phrase.

Laying a set of images or a sequence of happenings in order, listening to conversations and defining the locations where they occur, reading information on a subject and then listening to see if the same points are mentioned, or implying the connections between the people involved are additional examples of common top-down listening activities.

Bottom-up listening exercises

Recently, top-down listening procedures have been emphasized in EFL listening resources. Given that students must be able to listen successfully even when confronted with foreign vocabulary or grammatical structures, there are good arguments in favor of this. However, if the learner only comprehends a small portion of the incoming signal, then being aware of the context might not be enough for her to comprehend what is going on, and she may quickly get disoriented. Low-level learners may, of course, simply lack vocabulary or language proficiency at this point, but most teachers are aware of the scenario in which higher-level pupils struggle to recognize familiar terms in a fast-moving, connected stream of speech.

The linguistic components of what they hear can be understood by learners through bottom-up listening exercises, allowing them to use their top-down skills to fill in the blanks. The following bottom-up listening process, which is based on *dictogloss*, is made to assist students in recognizing the boundaries between words, a crucial bottom-up listening ability. The students are asked to estimate the amount of words in each sentence after the teacher reads it out. Although the exercise may appear simple, weak forms in typical connected speech can be confusing for learners, thus it is crucial for the teacher to speak the sentences naturally rather than dictating them word-for-word.

Some suitable sentences are:

- I'm coming home late.
- Would you like some tea?
- Let's have noodles!
- I'd better return as soon as possible.
- She shouldn't have deceived us.
- What are you doing, mom?
- There aren't any pupils here.



- It's quite a long way.
- What shall we present today?
- Can you tell her I called?

Before listening again to verify, teachers can ask students to compare their responses in pairs. They could write down what they hear during a third listening session before putting the sentences back together in pairs or groups. Learners will gain a better understanding of the sounds of typical spoken English and how they differ from the written or carefully spoken form by comparing their version with the proper sentences. They will gain the ability to recognize known words and determine word divisions in fast connected speech as a result.

Conclusion and future implications

Bringing these two types of processing is essential for effective listening. Activities that focus on each method independently should assist students in combining top-down and bottom-up processes to become better listeners in extended classroom discussions or real-world settings. When a person uses background knowledge to anticipate the meaning of the words they will listen to or read, top-down language processing takes place. Instead of starting with the actual words or sounds (bottom up), they form expectations about what they will read or hear, and as they listen or read, they affirm or reject these assumptions. It is necessary for English language teachers to include different activities and tasks to practice these two listening strategies in the English lessons. Based on the studies stated above, further researches into this matter, can be recommended for ELT researchers in Uzbekistan. Especially, the use of the two strategies in academic listening of the students in Higher education would be advantageous.

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