

Chapter Eight

Teaching Students to Comprehend Spoken English

Q/ What does the act of listening include?

Active Listening

Processing what We hear

The purpose of Listening

- (Active Listening): It includes paying attention to explanations, questions,

And opinions when we participate in face to face or telephone exchanges, we need to be receptive to others. Even when we listen during one way exchanges for example, while listening to lectures, radio dramas, films, we are active.

Active listening is even a part of our intrapersonal communication in which we pay attention to our own thoughts and ideas. For example, consider the time you talked to yourself. “Where did I put my keys? Oh! There they are!”

- Processing of what we hear

Q/ What are the processes of comprehending spoken English?

- 1- Bottom-up processing: refers to decoding a message that the listener hears through the analysis of sounds, words, and grammar.

For example: imagine that Joe is a tourist in a foreign country. He is staying at the Federal Hotel, and he wanders away to see some local sites, only to discover he is lost. Joe then decides to approach someone, whom he asks, “Excuse me, couldja tell me howta getto to the Federal?”

Point of view, the person listening to Joe arrives at meaning by identifying specific words relevant to the message (such as recognizing that “Federal” is a hotel), recognizing strings of sounds and being able to segment them (e.g.. recognizing that couldja is two words, could you, and that howta getto is how to get to).

- 2- Top-down process: refers to using background knowledge to comprehend the meaning of a message. This can be in three forms:

- Previous knowledge about the topic_ for example, knowing the hotels in the tourist area.
- Situational knowledge for example, knowing there are lost tourists in the area who frequently ask for directions.
- **Schemata** or plans about the overall structure of events and the relationship between them. For example, when someone who looks lost approaches you in a tourist area and says, “Excuse me,” you can predict this person is about to ask for directions, location, or something related to being a tourist.

Notes:

Schemata relates especially to our real-world experiences and the expectations we have, based on our experiences, about how people behave.

Schemata also includes being able to predict a topic in discourse and infer a sequence of events.

- The purposes of listening:
 - 1- Interactional function: It focuses on creating harmonious interaction among individuals. As a social phenomenon, interactional use of language centres on such safe topics as the weather, food, and beautiful things. These topics are neutral, or non-controversial and they promote agreement between speakers and listeners.
 - 2- Transactional function: It focuses on the content of the message. Emphasis is on transferring information, it is important for the listener to comprehend the content of the speaker's message. Topics vary from context to context and can include almost any content.
 - 3- Q/ What kinds of listening activities do EFL/ESL teachers use?
 - 4- Identifying Linguistic features
 - 5- Sentence stress
 - 6- Minimal pairs

The aim of activities that focus on identifying linguistic features is to make students more aware of linguistic features of spoken English. As such, they centre on bottom-up processing.

1- The idea of activity

1.(sentence stress) is to show students what sentence stress is and how it influence the rhythm of spoken English. For example, after listening to and marking He's terrific actor, students can see that major words (nouns, main verbs, adverbs, adjectives) receive stress while minor words (pronouns, determiners, articles, prepositions) do not.

2- To do activity

2. (minimal pairs) the teacher can use any minimal pair (two words that differ only in one sound), making the selection based on sounds that are new or problematic for students. For example, Liver; River.

Responding to Requests and commands

Total Physical Response (TPR)

Listen and respond activities highlight bottom-up processing because the listener listens to identify specific words and grammatical command structures. One type of activity is Total Physical Response (TPR).

Q/ There are many possible commands that students can practice, how can we create these commands?

To create commands, we simply need to select “action” verbs, such as stand up, sit down, walk, skip, stop, touch, pick up, put down. These verbs can be combined with nouns and other words to make up commands.

The goal of interactive listening activities is to focus students’ attention on how they can maintain social interactive relations. Both bottom-up and top-down processes can be a part of these activities, depending on the design.

- 1- Chat activity: The idea is for students not only to work at comprehending the interaction, but also to consider what “safe” topic is and how the interaction is maintained. In this activity, students view videotaped segments of interaction in different settings.
- 2- Eavesdropping activity: is another way to focus students’ attention on the function of listening during conversations. The goal is to teach students the value of listening in on conversations and a few strategies for doing so.
- 3- Matching activity: students can be asked to match others’ nonverbal behaviors, including head nods, gestures, and facial expressions. The goal is to show the value of observing the behaviors others use as they listen, as well as to focus students’ attention on their own use of nonverbal behavior during a conversation.