



การสอนทักษะการฟังภาษาอังกฤษ เพื่อความเข้าใจ: กลวิธีการฟังแบบล่าง ขึ้นบน (bottom-up process) และกลวิธีการฟังแบบบนลงล่าง (top-down process)

Teaching English Listening Comprehension:
An Understanding of Bottom-Up and Top-Down
Process

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บทคัดย่อ

บทความนี้มีวัตถุประสงค์เพื่อนำเสนอแนวทางในการพัฒนาทักษะการฟังภาษาอังกฤษเพื่อความเข้าใจ โดยอาศัยหลักทฤษฎีที่เกี่ยวข้องกับกระบวนการคิดหรือการรับรู้ อันได้แก่ กลวิธีการฟังแบบล่างขึ้นบน (bottom-up process) และกลวิธีการฟังแบบบนลงล่าง (top-down process) จากการศึกษาพบว่าเมื่อนิสิตวิชาโทภาษาอังกฤษ ระดับปริญญาตรี ชั้นปีที่ 3 คณะมนุษยศาสตร์และสังคมศาสตร์ มหาวิทยาลัยทักษิณ จำนวน 10 คน ได้ฝึกฟังภาษาอังกฤษโดยใช้แบบฝึกหัดและกิจกรรมที่เน้นกระบวนการฟังแบบกลวิธีการฟังแบบล่างขึ้นบน และกลวิธีการฟังแบบบนลงล่าง นิสิตที่สามารถนำทฤษฎีดังกล่าวไปใช้ สามารถใช้ประโยชน์จากการฟังข้อมูลในเรื่อง การใช้พื้นที่ความรู้เดิม หรือความรู้ทั่วไป เพื่อเดาความหมายคำศัพท์ หรือเนื้อเรื่องได้เป็นอย่างดี ทำให้นิสิตสามารถเข้าใจเรื่องที่ฟังได้มากยิ่งขึ้น ในขณะที่นิสิตบางคน ยังประสบปัญหาในการนำทฤษฎีทั้งสองไปใช้ได้เหมาะสม ครูผู้สอนจึงมีบทบาทสำคัญในการพัฒนาทักษะการฟังของผู้เรียน โดยกระตุ้นให้ผู้เรียนได้หมั่นฝึกฝน และนำวิธีการจากทฤษฎีดังกล่าวไปปรับใช้ในกระบวนการเรียนรู้ทั้งในชั้นเรียน และนอกชั้นเรียนต่อไป

คำสำคัญ : กระบวนการฟังแบบล่างขึ้นบน กระบวนการฟังแบบกลวิธีการฟังแบบบนลงล่าง ทฤษฎีโครงสร้างความรู้

Abstract

This article aims to present various views from the experts regarding the two major cognitive processes, bottom-up and top-down. In the study, 10 undergraduate students who minor in English at the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences, Thaksin University were given listening exercises which focused on the bottom-up and top-down processes. The results showed that when the theories of bottom-up and top-down processes were actually applied to the listening tasks, satisfying results could be achieved. When the students knew how to implement the top-down process, they could make predictions about answers, which enhanced their comprehension. Likewise, when the listening practice involved the bottom-up process, students could make use of incoming information to help their understanding. By incorporating these two approaches in the listening activities, the learners were well-equipped before engaging the listening tasks. Thus, it is suggested that learners should be encouraged to make use of both bottom-up and top-down strategies in their listening, so that they will be able to develop their abilities and competence.

Keywords : Bottom-Up Process, Top-Down Process, Schema Theory

Introduction

Learners of a foreign language take a great deal of effort and time to acquire listening skills. That is why Brown and Yule (1995: 55) once stated that “If the ability to understand the spoken form of the foreign language is not acquired naturally, then it appears obvious that this ability must be taught.”

However, listening is often considered, by some people, a passive skill which cannot really be taught and, in a lot of cases, learners are discouraged to learn listening because they often find difficulty in grasping the meaning of the spoken language. It could be said that listening skills are relatively overlooked by some people. Listening, nevertheless, is certainly as important as the other skills. When a listener fails to understand the message, communication becomes unsuccessful (Underwood 1996:4). Thus, the need to know and have a better understanding about the underlying principles assisting listening comprehension is quite significant for both instructors and learners. It helps develop the learners’ ability in listening and builds up their confidence when encountering communicative situations. It also provides them with more exposure to the target language. Thus, a good understanding of the role of the underlying principles assisting listening comprehension is relatively significant for both instructors and learners. This paper will highlight the important approaches concerning listening and cognitive process, including schema theory, top-down and bottom-up processes. Examples are also used in order to illustrate the points.

I. Theoretical Background

The following section will provide crucial theoretical knowledge concerning the listening processes that are the main focus of attention in this paper. They are bottom –up and top–down processes and cognitive learning theory, known as schema theory. Moreover, it also covers a wide range of listening activities employed in the teaching of listening as well as the three listening activities that are pre-, while- and post listening.

1. Bottom-Up and Top-Down Processing

Theorists have defined “bottom-up and top-down processes” in various ways involving computer software, scientific theories or business management. In this paper, however, the definition of these words relates to the strategies of teaching and learning. As stated by Richards (1994 : 50-51), fluent listening depends on the use of both top-down and bottom-up processing. He has defined these two approaches as “bottom-up processing refers to the use of incoming data as a source of information about the meaning of a message”, And the meaning of top-down processing has been defined as “the use of background knowledge (schemata) in understanding the meaning of a message”.

Additionally, Swift, an expert writer in the field of ELT, also stated in her web blog, “Teaching Listening: Top down or Bottom up”, that

“the bottom-up approach sees comprehension as a matter of listener first decoding (or understanding) the smallest elements of what they hear—the sounds...The top-down approach starts from the opposite end: it sees understanding as starting from listener’s background knowledge of the non-linguistic context and of working down towards the individual sounds. Listeners will actively interpret what they hear in terms of their understanding of the situation and the world in general.”

According to the definition provided by Anderson and Lynch (1997 : 139-140), serial bottom-up model is defined as “a view of comprehension that assumes we understand speech by working through a series of stages, starting with individual sounds and gradually building up an understanding of the whole message” And “top-down processing is a use of global expectations about what someone is about to say to help you build up your comprehension of their message”.

Given the definitions above, it can be concluded that the bottom up is an approach used to learn the meaning of the message by analyzing the information received until the meaning is arrived at and comprehended.

To put it simply, listeners will use top-down process to activate their previous knowledge in order to figure out the meaning of a task while the bottom-up process is used when they try to use linguistic knowledge to comprehend.

The following examples described in Swift's blog, an ELT Notebook, demonstrate how these two approaches work in the listening process. In the bottom-up process, the listener will attempt to decode or understand the meaning of the sounds they hear. The meaning can be moving from recognition of individual sounds to recognition of the meaning of the whole sentence. For example, an American friend says "I like your hat." You will recognize these sounds--/h/ as being /h/, not /s/, /æ/ as being /æ/, not /u:/ and /t/ as being /t/, not /d/. These sounds are combined and later the individual word is decoded as /hæt/. When the words are then combined into sentences, you will work out the meaning of /hæt/ as in 'I like your hat. In the top-down process, on the other hand, listeners will actively interpret what they hear in terms of their understanding of the situation and the world in general. For example, suppose that your friend tells you.

"McKenzy brought me another present today. It was too late to save it so I buried it in the garden. I think I'm going to have to put a bell round his neck."

From the above sentences, Swift stated that the listener is not only just decoding the words, but he or she also has subconscious expectations forming in his or her mind based on the knowledge of the world without being aware of it. This is how the utilization of the background knowledge occurs.

The listener may think that McKenzie is a name and probably a friend. The present will be something nice. When hearing the second sentence 'buried it (the present)', he or she may be in doubt (Why did the speaker have to bury the present?) and have started to search consciously for the meaning and may figure out in the end. What assisted him or her in the understanding of the meaning was primarily from his or her knowledge of the world. Here are the examples of contextual knowledge. The listener may find out later that McKenzie is not a person when learning that the speaker is going to put a bell round his neck, so McKenzie could be an animal. Moreover, more meaning can be derived by realizing the fact that a bell can be used with pets such as cats or dogs and the speaker intended to tie the bell around its neck in order to prevent it from harming the other animals. Also, one common habit of a cat is to find the dead animals such as birds or mice which they have caught and may, in some case, bring it to the owner as "presents". Furthermore when hearing

the sentences, “It was too late to save it so I buried it in the garden”, it suggests that the present Mckenzy brought to the speaker could be a living thing such as an animal, however, it was too late to save the animal so he or she decided to bury it in the garden.

It can be said that the meaning is obtained by the knowledge of the world, not what is in the text. Fortunately, those who have a cat as a pet may find it easier to figure out the meaning while the others who have never owned a cat may have taken longer. This supports the idea that those who possess more background or previous knowledge are more likely to understand more than those who do not.

2. Cognitive learning theory : Schema theory

As the top-down strategy entails the activation or utilization of previous knowledge stored in long term memory called “schema”, it will be necessary to draw our attention to the schema theory, an information-processing model theory.

The meaning of schema was defined by Rumelhart as “an organized structure of knowledge consisting of past experience stored in our long term memory. It is the basis for learning and processing new information” (Rumelhart 1997 cited in Zeng 2007 : 33).

As previously stated, an understanding of some principles of this can be useful. It is worth considering for the teacher to prepare students or build up their schemata before giving them tasks. To activate schema in listening, it is necessary for the teachers to come up with pre-listening activities such as asking questions related to the content, explaining the cultural aspects, or providing the meanings some of important vocabulary. Zeng (2007: 33) pointed out that the teachers must bear in mind that activating students’ stored knowledge structure to enhance comprehension and creating new schemata are far more important than imparting new knowledge of the language system.

It may well be seen that the idea of activating schema in students is closely related to the top-down process. A good understanding of these principles can enhance comprehension. Providing sufficient knowledge input will be beneficial for learners as it will build up their confidence when they are doing listening exercises. Nonetheless, we should also be concerned that if

information does not fit a person's schema, it may be more difficult for them to remember and what they remember or how they conceive of it may also be affected by their prior schema (Mergel).

3. Listening Activities: Bottom-up and top-down listening

In this part, we will look at more details about the bottom-up and top-down processes employed in the teaching of listening with a wide range of activities.

3.1 Bottom-up listening

In the book written by Richards (1994 : 59), *The Language Teaching Matrix*, there are examples of exercises that involve bottom-up listening which will develop the learners' ability to achieve the listening skills. For example, the learners are able to retain input while it is being processed, to recognize word division, to recognize key words in utterances, to recognize key transitions in a discourse and to use knowledge of word-order patterns to identify constituents in utterance. In addition, they are more likely to recognize grammatical relations between key elements in sentences, to recognize the function of words stress in sentences as well as to recognize the function of intonation in sentences.

Such exercise might require the learners to do different tasks such as identify the references of pronoun used in a conversation, recognize if the sentence is active or passive, distinguish between sentences containing causative and noncausative verbs and identify major constituents in a sentence, such as subject and object, verb and adverbs. Furthermore, the learners might be required to complete tasks about distinguishing between sentences with and without auxiliary verbs, recognizing the use of words stress to mark the intonation focus of a sentence, distinguishing between sentences containing similar-sounding tenses, recognizing the time reference of a sentence and distinguishing between positive and negative statements.

The following examples illustrate how bottom-up process is used in the listening activity. **Example** Instruction : You are going to hear a group of three words. Put a cross (x) in box 1, 2, or 3 to show whether the first, second or third word is different from the other two. If they are all the same put a cross (x) in the box marked ⊕.

- | | | |
|----------|-------|------|
| 1. leave | leave | live |
| 2. bin | bean | bin |
| 3. keep | keep | keep |
| 4. is | ease | is |
| 5. sheep | ship | ship |
| 6. leak | leak | leak |

	1	2	3	A
1			x	
2		x		
3				x
4		x		
5	x			
6				x

The completed student's paper looks like this.

From : Hubbard, P. et al (1994 : 231), *A training course for TEFL*, Oxford: Oxford university press.

In this exercise, students will heavily rely on the decoding of sounds in order to discriminate the differences between the three words they hear. The recognition of individual sound possibly brings out the meaning afterwards.

3.2 Top-down listening

In the top-down approach, there are exercises that help develop the learner's listening ability. For example, the learners are able to use key words to construct the schema of a discourse, plans and schema from elements of a discourse, to infer the role of participants in situation, the topic of a discourse, the outcome of an event, or the cause or effect of an event. Besides, they also learn to infer unstated details of a situation, the sequence of a series of events, comparisons, to distinguish between literal and figurative meanings as well as facts and opinions.

The exercise might require the learners to do the tasks for example, listen to part of a conversation and infer the topic of the conversation, look at pictures and then listen to conversations about the pictures and match then with the pictures, listen to conversations and identify the setting, read a list of key points to be covered in a talk and number them in sequence while listening to the talk, read information about a topic, then listen to a talk on the topic and check whether the information was mentioned or not. Moreover, they might be required to read one side of a telephone conversation and guess the other speaker's responses; then listen to the telephone conversation (Richards 1994 : 60-61).

The following examples show of listening activities which include the top-down listening strategies. It is noted that many of top-down listening are appropriate for the higher level of learners.

Example Instruction: Listen to the recording and answer the questions

Transcript

On the evening of December 23rd we were waiting in the front room which looked very nice and warm. We only use it when people come, or perhaps in summer, for it too cold, but now we had the fire going in the open fireplace. We were waiting for a farmer and his wife who lived in Cornwall. My wife had been evacuated during the war, and since our marriage they've sent a chicken each Christmas and I've given them a bottle of sherry.

1. The story takes place _____.
 - a. on a summer evening
 - b. on a cold day
 - c. on a warm night
 - d. just before Christmas
2. The family uses the front room _____.
 - a. as their living room
 - b. when they have visitors
 - c. only in summer
 - d. on in winter
3. They were waiting for _____.
 - a. some friends
 - b. some relations
 - c. some business acquaintances
 - d. their children

From Fowler, W.S. *First Certificate English 4: listening comprehension* cited in Ur, Penny (1996: 137).

This exercise requires deduction or the use of background knowledge to assist in the understanding of the text. For example, listeners are given information by hearing "December 23rd" This suggests that the story takes place during the week of the coming festival, Christmas. They should make use of this information to help answer item number one. Moreover, they are given the history of the relationship between the family and the visitors and are asked to identify their relationship. Thus, being able to apply background knowledge to use in this exercise will surely reward learners.

The above exercise requires learners to listen and suggest what the speaker might do. This kind of activity is often more appropriate for learners at a high level of language proficiency. They need to put in a great deal of effort to use the information they hear to help find out the answer. A lot of prediction, experience, and world knowledge are utilized as listeners activate his or her schema for the story.

4. The Three Listening Activities

4.1 Pre-listening activities

Pre-listening activities are useful for the learners because they help focus the students' mind on the topic by narrowing down their expectation about the content. Moreover, in this stage, learners are encouraged to make use of schema- the existing background knowledge relating to the topic. By activating the schema, learners will be asked questions relating to the content, and be encouraged to predict the content of the topic. Zang (2006 : 29) points out that pre-listening activities primarily have two goals: to help to activate students' prior knowledge, build up their expectations for the coming information and to provide the necessary context for the specific listening task. The important part of pre-listening stage is to make sure that listeners know what they are going to do or what is required of them. Having them listen to the text directly without knowing anything at all can cause some students to switch off or abandon the whole exercise.

Pre-listening activities can consist of a whole range of activities (Underwood 1996 : 31).

- the teacher giving background information;
- the students reading something relevant;
- the students looking at the pictures;
- discussion about the topic or situation;
- a question and answer session;
- written exercises;
- following the instructions for the while-listening activity;
- consideration of how the while-listening activity will be done.

Below are some sample questions that can be used in pre-listening activities.

1. Asking questions to activate previous knowledge related to the content.
 - 1.1 Have you ever been abroad? Where? When?
 - 1.2 What do you normally do when going to the restaurant?
 - 1.3 List types of leisure activities people do.
 - 1.4 Describe your memorable advertisement.
 - 1.5 What do you know about people living in the desert?
2. Encouraging prediction about the content.
 - 2.1 Can you guess who the winner is?
 - 2.2 What can you tell about their relationship?
 - 2.3 From the picture, what might they do?
 - 2.4 Why is the girl laughing at the man?
3. Reviewing vocabulary
 - 3.1 What do the following words mean?
 - 3.2 What is the meaning of the vocabularies in the box?
 - 3.3 Which of the following words does not belong in this group?

4.2 While-listening activities

While-listening activities are what students are asked to do during the time they are listening to the text. The purpose is to help learners develop the skill of eliciting messages from the spoken language (Underwood 1996 : 45). Here, listeners will be engaging in the listening because they are required to do the exercise at the time of listening. In this stage, they will try to verify the predictions and check for guesses. Types of questions and contents used in while-listening activities will vary depending on listeners' level of competency. Teachers, however, must bear in mind that the activity given should not be too demanding. Requiring listeners to do many different things at the same level may distract them from the listening and they may feel overwhelmed with the tasks assigned. It is suggested that activities which mainly rely on previous knowledge are often not appropriate for while-listening activities because the learners' level of knowledge can vary within a group. So those who have more knowledge are more likely to succeed than those with less experience (Underwood 1996 : 47).

Additionally, other skills such as writing should be used to a limited extent. Generally speaking, it is unfair for learners if they have to write long answers while listening because it seems that they are not allowed to merely concentrate on spoken language, which is the primary goal. A long piece of writing can be saved for post-listening activities.

Examples :

1. Matching the words with the pictures or listening with visuals
2. Filling in the missing information, graphs or charts
3. Distinguishing between fact and opinion, true or false
4. Completing cloze exercises
5. Taking notes
6. Listening for the gist
7. Following a route on a map

4.3 Post-listening activities

“Post-listening activities embrace all the work related to particular listening texts which are done after the listening is completed” (Underwood 1996: 74).

Follow-up questions are used in post-listening activities to make use of the information being heard and assess the students’ performance and comprehension. Moreover, sometimes they can be used as an extension of the work done at the pre-listening or while-listening stage. At this stage, the other skills can be integrated in the activity. For example, listeners may be required to do writing, speaking or reading which is relevant to the listening text.

Examples:

1. From the listening, what could be the possible solutions to the problem?
2. Discuss with your partner about the ending of the story? Do you like it? Why or why not?
3. Write an essay about the topic.
4. Read the script and find the adjectives about people’s personality.

II. Implementation

In this part, it is necessary to mention the bottom-up and top-down processes and when they were actually integrated and employed in the classroom. Listening activities which primarily emphasized the two aforementioned approaches were experimented on ten students who minor in English. They are in their third years of study and currently taking the course, English Oral Communication¹ at the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences, Thaksin University in the academic year of 2013. Listening exercises were taken from *Improve Your IELTS Listening and Speaking Skills* by Barry Cusack and Sam McCarte and *Listening Carefully* by Jack C. Richards.

Part I

Listen to the prizes in a lottery. What were the winning numbers ?
Circle the correct number for each prize.

Seventh prize	151	150	115
Sixth prize	1707	1770	1777
Fifth prize	91	19	90
Fourth prize	390	309	319
Third prize	55	53	59
Second prize	1990	1999	1099
First prize	14	40	44

From : Richards, Jack. C. *Listen Carefully*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, (2007 : 1).

The first exercise involved a bottom-up strategy which required the listeners to listen and choose the number they heard. In this exercise, the students heavily relied on the decoding of incoming sounds and differentiated the sounds that were alike such as nineteen and ninety. The recognition of individual sounds possibly led to the correct answers. Undoubtedly, all students got correct answers in this exercise as it was my intention to opt for activities which were success-oriented so as to boost the students' confidence and were more appropriate for their level of English.

Part II

Some letters in the English alphabets sound alike. For example p rhymes with g and a rhymes with j. Complete the lists below with the remaining letters of the alphabet in English.

a b c d e f g h i j k l m n o p q r s t u v w x y z

List 1: a,

List 2: b,

List 3: f,

List 4: i,

List 5: q,

List 6: r, o, w, z (None of these rhymes with any other letters)

From Cusack, B. and McCarte, S. *Improve Your IELTS Listening and Speaking Skills*. Oxford: McMillan, (2007 : 73).

This warming exercise was designed to prepare the listeners to be familiar with the sounds of English letters which can be alike or different. After being given enough time to complete the list of each sound, they then listened to the recording to check their answers. The exercise involved the implementation of a bottom-up approach when the listeners would listen and distinguish between the sounds. In other words, they needed to decode the sounds in order to differentiate between them and classify those which were alike into the same group. An ability to distinguish between sounds would assist comprehension in the next listening exercise. This activity showed that all of the students found it easy to accomplish the task and most got correct answers. Warming activities would help the students integrate bottom-up and top-down processing by engaging them in active and meaningful pre-listening tasks. They were now prepared for the form-filling task.

Listen to a person leaving a message on an answering machine.
Complete the form below.

Telephone message	
(1) Date :...(Tue 4 th)...	(2)Time ...(2.30 p.m.)...
(3) Message for: (Susan).....	
(4) Message from: ... (Jane Smith)...	
(5) Caller's number: (01 324 781 205).....	
(6) Message:	
Leave the BD present at this address.....	
... (18, Grosvenor Crescent, Southwark JG8 2AE).....	

From Cusack, B. and McCarte, S. *Improve Your IELTS Listening and Speaking Skills*. Oxford: McMillan, (2007 : 73).

Before the listening activity, the students were encouraged to make predictions about the types of information they would hear and fit in the blanks, such as numbers, dates, person's names, etc. The activation of world knowledge, or top-down processing gave the learners more clues, and enabled them to anticipate the type of information for each blank. While the recording was being played, the learners were utilizing a bottom-up approach as they concentrated on recognizing the sounds when the speaker spelt out the place names and numbers.

From the study, the results were analyzed by using the percentage of students who correctly answered the test item. The results, in order of success, were as follows: number 5 (70%), 1 (70%), 6 (60%), 3 (50%), 4 (40%), and 2 (20%). It can be concluded that the higher the percentage, the easier the item for them. The students could do well when listening to numbers, dates and short names. Moreover, when engaging in a longer name of place which was spelt out, 60% of the students got it correct. By having correct spelling of "Grosvenor Crescent, Southwark", it suggested that the students used the bottom-up approach in completing the task quite well.

However, there were some students (20%) misunderstood and put the words “Grosvenor” or “Southwark” in the wrong place as they assumed that it could possibly be a person’s name. It can be stated that those who had misplaced answer did not use the top-down process efficiently. The prediction of answer or world knowledge may not be effectively implemented here.

In addition, a closer observation revealed that many students (60%) gave wrong answer about the postcode in item no.6. Instead of writing “JG8 2AE”, they simply put “JGH 2AE” as the answer. This showed that the students had difficulty in differentiating between similar sounds “eight” /eɪt/ and “h” /eɪf/. Also, it suggested that the listeners had a little knowledge about the postcode system of that country. In the United Kingdom, a postcode is split into two parts and each contains both letters and numbers such as CB2 8RU or CM20 2JE. If the listeners had learned about this fact, they would not have chosen “H” instead of “8” in their answers as it did not follow the format of the mentioned postcode system. Thus, background knowledge could really assist in listening comprehension if it was utilized efficiently.

After listening, the students were asked about the attitudes towards their listening skills. Most of them said that listening is a difficult and problematic skill to be learned for various reasons. For example, they were not used to hearing the accent of English native speakers who also spoke really fast, which made it difficult for them to catch the words and comprehend them. Moreover, 50% admitted that they did not know some vocabulary in the text. So it surely affected their understanding of the message.

As a whole, I was relatively satisfied with the results. I was delighted to see the learners put full effort into tasks and attentively discuss their answer with partners. Moreover, the students showed their enthusiasm and determination for the tasks they were doing. This is a good sign showing that, even though the learners are not competent at listening, they could be possibly motivated and cultivated through the use of different listening activities comprising bottom-up and top-down strategies.

III. Discussion

Having been teaching English language for years, I must admit that teaching listening comprehension is one of the most difficult tasks for many teachers. Part of the reason is because helping students becoming effective

listeners cannot be done overnight. Evidently, lots of practice is required and it takes time for learners to be successful. More importantly, students themselves must have motivation to learn and realize how listening skills are important to them. From my own observation, students who have relatively low level of English proficiency are discouraged to develop their listening skills because, when taking part in listening activities, they seem frustrated and confused. As a result, many of them just “switch off” their ears and convince themselves that they cannot understand what is being said and finally give up. This is probably called “mental block”, an attitude depriving the learner’s confidence and patience in learning.

Thus, it is essential for teachers to help the less able students to build up more confidence in the first place. The teachers should convince them to change their attitude that not understanding is OK. The improvement is acquired over time and they must not expect immediate success. Furthermore, students should be exposed to English as often as possible, just for short periods, maybe ten to fifteen minutes each time. Start with something simple by encouraging them to listen to graded materials, songs, listening exercises on the internet etc. Of course, this entails a great deal of work but it is worth trying, even if they don’t understand anything at first. If students continue practicing, their listening comprehension skills will greatly improve.

Another way to help students improve their listening skills is that teachers should opt for listening exercises that are success-oriented to enhance students’ confidence in their listening ability. Applying the bottom-up approach could be useful as it is appropriate for learners at a basic or low level of language proficiency. Once they acquire better skills, the level can be adjusted upward. For example, teachers might start by using a simple exercise such as having listeners listen and distinguish between sentences with and without auxiliary verbs, recognize if the sentence is active or passive, identify sequences markers, and so on. When they are successful at this level, it is possible to extend the level of difficulty. The top-down process can be employed in the next step. They may well be asked to listen to part of a conversation and infer the topic of conversation, complete the story, identify the setting etc.

The study in the previous section shows that when the theories of the bottom-up and top-down processes are actually applied in the listening tasks, satisfying results can possibly be achieved. When the students know how to

activate the top-down process, they can expect or make predictions about the answer they will hear, which enhances their comprehension. In the study, many students answered correctly when they were able to make predictions about the types of answer that would fit in each blank. However, some students got incorrect answers because they could not make a connection between world knowledge and what they were listening to. As a result, the prediction of answer or world knowledge was not effectively implemented by some students. When the listening practice involves the bottom-up process, students could make use of incoming information to help their understanding by engaging in a pre-listening task that told them to differentiate between the sounds.

Having realized the value of the bottom-up and top-down processes when doing listening activity in the class, I tried to incorporate these approaches into the activities as much as possible when time allows. The satisfying results may not obviously show in an instant, but it was worth trying. At least, students have more opportunity to engage in different kinds of listening activities and it may motivate them to carry on practicing.

In short, it could be said that these two listening processes are beneficial for learners as they are important approaches that teachers can use to help their students acquire more ability and competency in listening skills.

IV. Conclusion

It would be beneficial if the teacher could incorporate the two mentioned processes, bottom-up and top-down, in the teaching of listening. As stated by Richards (1994: 52), “If the listener is unable to make use of top-down processing, an utterance or discourse may be incomprehensible. Bottom-up processing alone often provide an insufficient basis for comprehension”. Nonetheless, Flowerdew and Miller have mentioned that the use of bottom-up and top-down process may vary with different groups or individuals. Some individuals may prefer to rely on top-down processes, while others may like to focus on bottom-up processes. At the level of the group, beginners are more likely to heavily rely on the basic bottom-up skills of decoding. However, the more advanced learners who have already mastered the linguistic and grammatical knowledge are likely to emphasis on the development of top-down skills. Thus, the teacher has a significant role in designing classroom activities to be appropriately applied with different types of learners.

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