

# Teaching English as a foreign or second Language

## Chapters Summary

By  
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### Chapter 8 Summary

#### Teaching Students to Comprehend Spoken English

##### What does the act of listening include?

To answer the question, three aspects of listening should be focused on including active listening, the processing of what we hear to make sense out of it, and two purposes for listening.

##### 1. Active Listening

Listening is not a passive activity. Rather, listening places many demands on us. Active listening is even a part of our intrapersonal communication in which we pay attention to our own thoughts and ideas.

##### 2. Processing What We Hear

Another aspect of listening is the way we process what we hear. There are two distinct processes involved in comprehending spoken English: **bottom-up processing** and **top-down processing**. Bottom-up processing refers to decoding a message that the listener hears through the analysis of sounds, words, and grammar, while top-down processing refers to using background knowledge to comprehend a message.

##### 3. The Purposes of Listening

In addition to bottom-up and top-down processing, we can consider **Interactional** and *transactional functions* of language. When language is used to fulfill an interactional communicative function, the focus is on creating harmonious interaction among individuals. As a social phenomenon, interactional use of language centers on such safe topics as the weather, food, and beautiful things. These topics are neutral, or non-controversial, and shift quickly. Because these topics are non-controversial, they promote agreement between speakers and listeners, which in turn creates a harmonious relationship. Unlike interactional use of language, transactional use focuses attention on the content of the message. Emphasis is on transferring information, and unlike interactional uses of language, 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.

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### What Kinds of Listening Activities Do EFL/ESL Teachers Use?

An understanding of top-down and bottom-up processes of listening and of the transactional and interactional functions of language provides an awareness of what listeners do as they listen, and this knowledge is useful when we consider the listening activities we have students do in our classrooms. Here are some of the activities we can use to provide EFL/ESL students with a variety of listening experiences.

1. **Identifying Linguistic Features:** The aim of activities that focus on identifying linguistic features is to make students more aware of the linguistic features of spoken English. As such, they center on bottom-up processing. Since the aim is to provide chances for students to develop their perceptual abilities, little attention is given to transactional or interactional purposes. One activity is to give students practice in listening to the way sounds blend in spoken English. The teacher (or a tape-recorded voice) says a phrase, such as *didja*, followed by a sentence, such as *Didja go to the store?* The student then identifies the written version.
2. **Responding to Requests and Commands :** 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), teachers begin by demonstrating the commands, doing them with the students. The teacher can also reduce anxiety by giving commands to the whole class, then to small groups of students, and finally, after the students have lots of practice, to individual volunteers.
3. **Interacting as a Listener :** 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. One such activity is called Chat. Students view short videotaped segments of interaction in different settings- for example, at the dinner table, the fitness center, a grocery store, the checkout counter. The idea is for students not only to work at comprehending the interaction, but also to consider what a "safe" topic is and how the interaction is maintained. To accomplish this, as Students view the videotape, they can: check off those topics that were discussed from a list of possible topics follow along with a written script, highlighting the things listeners do to keep the conversation going (e.g. using head nods and encouraging remarks, such as *wh-huh*, *What else?* And *No kidding!*

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Complete a set of multiple choice and true/false questions about the interaction (e.g. True or False? Josh likes to chuckle to show he is listening.

- 4. Comprehending Extended Speech:** Transactional in nature, comprehension activities center on comprehending stories, extended speech, and lectures. There are many possible comprehension activities. One that can be used with beginners and more advanced students is a picture-ordering activity that includes listening to a story and then putting pictures in the order of the events in the story. Students can also draw their own pictures. For example, students can view or listen to a weather forecast and, under the relevant days of the week, draw pictures that represent the forecast.

#### How Do EFL/ESL Teachers Use Media to Teach Listening?

There are many ways in which EFL/ESL teachers can make use of media in their listening classes. Radio, for example, offers songs, advertisements, talk shows, and drama. Television offers an abundance of materials: quiz shows, comedies, reality shows, soaps, cartoons, documentaries, educational programs, news, weather forecasts, movies, award shows, and commercials.

#### What Problems Do Some EFL/ESL Teachers Have in Teaching Students to Comprehend Spoken English?

Problems some EFL/ESL teachers face include the following:

##### 1. The outdated listening lab problem

**Problem:** The "Outdated Listening Lab" Problem EFL/ESL teachers may find themselves in a traditional listening lab sitting at their carrels and listening to tapes, rarely speaking with classmates. In these types of programs, the role of the teacher in the listening lab is to broadcast a program to the whole class. The teacher acts as a monitor, listening in on students, And furnishing answers to listening exercises. This traditional approach doesn't always produce the best results. Students complain that it is sometimes boring, and that they do not necessarily gain much from the experience. Teachers complain that there is little opportunity to interact with students on an individual level or to provide them with practice in listening to authentic English used as a means to communicate meaning between people.

**Solution:** However, it is possible to transform a lab from a traditional one into a place where students can work actively on developing their listening abilities while also making use of the uniqueness of the lab system. For example, Lab

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time can also be devoted to allowing students to select their own listening materials. Here, the teacher acts as a resource by helping students select materials that will be comprehensible and of interest. The advantage of this activity is that it teaches students to take responsibility for their own listening development, and they can work at their own paces and levels. The disadvantage is that such an individualized system does not match all students' learning styles and expectations as to what a listening lab is. Because of these advantages and disadvantages, teachers may want to use a fraction of the scheduled lab time as an open lab or include both regular and elective labs.

### **2. The "How can I judge the authenticity of commercial EFL/ESL listening materials?" problem**

Truly authentic listening experiences focus on varieties of pronunciation and intonation. Authentic listening also includes hearing a variety of grammatical structures, not just one or two said over and over again-the use of fragments or sequences of loosely connected words and clauses, rather than well-formed sentences. It also includes interruptions and two or more people speaking at once (rather than each person taking a distinct turn), as well as one speaker dominating the interaction, lots of attention signals (such as Mmmmm and Uh-huh), and different examples of background noise.