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MA ELT
Teaching of Listening and Speaking Skills (ENG 514)
MC [REDACTED]
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Assignment No. 1

Q.1 The content of an English course for beginners will vary greatly according to the age of the learners, their purpose for learning, their educational background and previous experience with English, and whether they are learning in a foreign or second language context. Keeping this in mind, discuss teaching and learning of speaking and listening skills for beginners by giving the FIVE Principles for Teaching Beginners as discussed in your course.

Solution:

Five Principles for Teaching Beginners are:

Principle 1: Focus on Meaningful and Relevant Content

The main purpose of learning a language is to use it in a practical life. Keeping this point in mind the main focus should be on language that the learners can use quickly for their purposes rather than on too much grammar explanation or on words that are not directly useful. What a beginners need at initial stage while learning a language. Firstly beginners learn to introduce themselves and to tell something about them. To meet these need learners must learn some basic sentence to take the start to learn the language. Here are some simple sentences that can be learnt very early in a course so that the learners can use them straight away. They can introduce themselves by telling their name like My name is _____. or some basic information like I come from __,Live-in____,My address is_ etc.

Principle2: Maintain Interest Through a Variety of Activities

Interest is the key tool for the better learning for the students. Lack of interest in the class creates embracement for the learners and they fail to get the required knowledge. To maintain learners' interest, activities need to be short and varied, and to involve the learners in responding to or using the language. There are some simple ways to keep learners interested in learning. They include doing activities that involve movement which keep interest alive of the students. Secondly we can use real objects and pictures to catch the attention of the students. Moreover we can plan trips outside the classroom, for example, a trip to a local supermarket linked to a simple food search game which can make practical involvement of the students. Additional tools to maintain interest are to use songs and simple chants in between other more demanding activities

Principle3: Avoid Overloading Learners with Too Much New Language

Grammar is considered one of the boring and difficult tasks for the beginner

learners. There is usually little need to focus on grammar in the early parts of a course for beginners. Instead Modules should focus on learning set phrases and words. Teachers often make the mistake of introducing too much new language without giving learners enough opportunities to gain control over this language. A simple rule to keep in mind is “learn a little, use a lot”. To apply the principle of “learn a little, use a lot”, the body words need to be practiced in a variety of ways. These could include picture games, information transfer activities, action games (“Simon says . . .”), and bingo.

Principle4: Provide Plenty of Comprehensible Input

Comprehensible input is necessary for learning. To ensure that input can be understood requires the use of visual aids and contextual support for new language including pictures, gestures, mime, objects, and experiences out of class. Teachers also need to think carefully about the language they use in class with the aim of keeping their talk simple but not simplistic or ungrammatical. One way to do this is to always use one form for one meaning.

Principle5: Create a Friendly, Safe, Cooperative Classroom Environment

There is strong evidence that anxiety influences learners’ willingness to communicate in a second language (e.g., Yashima, 2002). Therefore, it is particularly important that, in the early stages of learning a second language, learners have successful, low stress learning experiences. By paying attention to the first four principles, there is a very good chance that these experiences will be plentiful, and that the teacher will already be meeting this fifth principle. Some of the factors that contribute to a positive beginners’ classroom are variety, movement, physical comfort, frequent interaction, successful language experiences, and opportunities for learners to experiment and make mistakes without penalties.

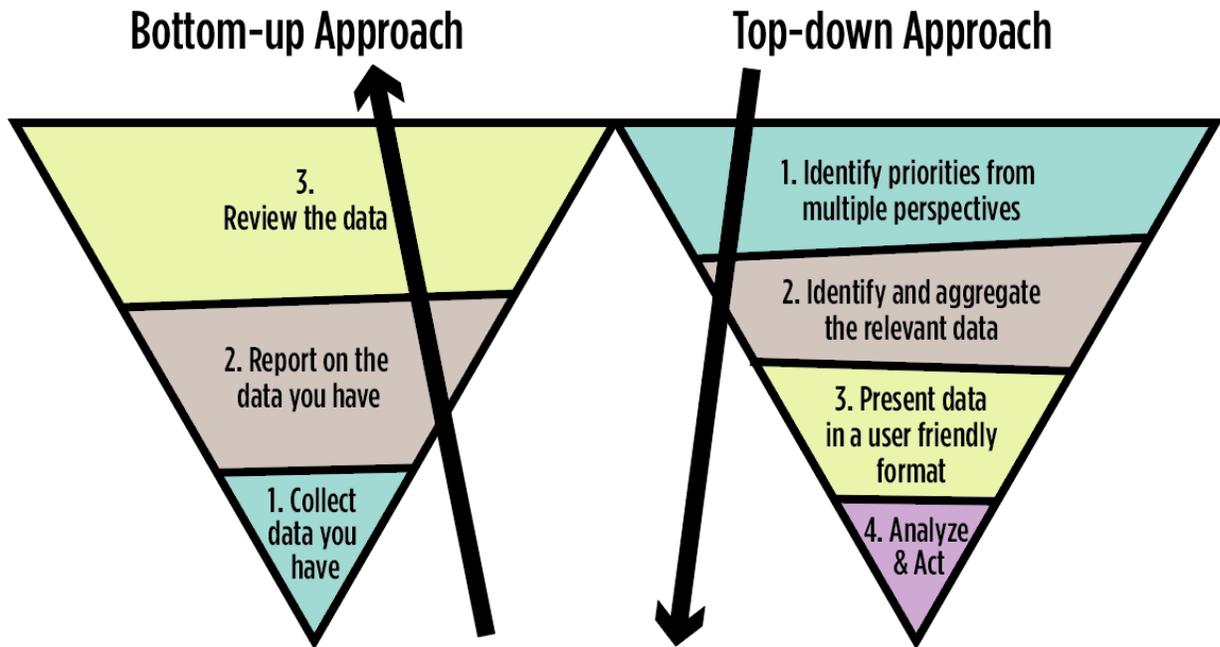
Q.2 Write a note on the ‘Bottom-up’ and ‘Top-down’ listening processes. Also, give THREE examples each of top-down and bottom-up processes from your course.

Solution:

Listening was traditionally seen as a passive process by which the listener receives information sent by a speaker. More recent models view listening as a much more active and interpretive process in which the message is not fixed but is created in the interactional space between participants. Meanings are shaped by context and constructed

by the listener through the act of interpreting meaning rather than receiving it intact (Lynch and Mendelsohn, 2002: 194).

Listening Processes



Bottom-up Processes

These are the processes the listener uses to assemble the message piece-by piece from the speech stream, going from the parts to the whole. Bottom up processing involves perceiving and parsing the speech stream at increasingly larger levels beginning with auditory-phonetic, phonemic, syllabic, lexical, syntactic, semantic, propositional, pragmatic and interpretive (Field, 2003: 326). Like a top-down teaching approach, which takes a macro view of a subject first, a bottom-up teaching approach begins with the component parts of a subject, and gradually builds up to the whole. For example, in an ESL class, a bottom-up approach would begin with things such as phonics, letters, vowels and syllables, which are the building blocks of language. It's only after students have mastered these specific rules and systems that they move on to speaking and reading.

Examples of bottom-up processes

Bottom-up strategies are text based; the listener relies on the language in the message, that is, the combination of sounds, words, and grammar that creates meaning. Bottom-up strategies include

- listening for specific details
- recognizing cognates (equivalents)
- recognizing word-order patterns

Bottom-up Processing

Analysis of the stimulus begins with the sense receptors and works up to the level of the brain and mind.



Letter "A" is really a black blotch broken down into features by the brain that we perceive as an "A."

Top-down Processes

A top-down teaching style focuses on providing students a large view of a subject, immersing them in the big picture without explaining the components that make up the subject. For example, in an English as a Second Language class, a top-down approach would begin by immersing students in all aspects of learning English immediately, including writing, reading and pronunciation. Students would not be taught the intricacies of vowels, nouns and pronouns first, instead they would be plunged into the totality of learning English and then gradually learn the building blocks that make up the English language.

Top-down processes involve the listener in going from the whole—their prior knowledge and their content and rhetorical schemata—to the parts. In other words, the listener uses what they know of the context of communication to predict what the message will contain, and uses parts of the message to confirm, correct or add to this. The key process here is inferencing.

When we put these two types of processing together we see listening not as a single skill, but as a variety of sub-skills.

It is possible to make sense of a spoken message by drawing cues from context and picking up a few key words, but without attending to the grammatical form of the message. In other words, comprehension is possible without noticing.

Examples of top-down processes

Listening strategies are techniques or activities that contribute directly to the comprehension and recall of listening input. Listening strategies can be classified according to how the listener processes the input. Top-down strategies are listener based; the listener taps into background knowledge of the topic, the situation or context, the type

of text, and the language.

Top-down strategies include

- listening for the main idea
- predicting
- drawing inferences
- summarizing