

LISTENING TECHNIQUES UNDERPINNING LANGUAGE LEARNING

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Abstract

The present article explores the use of 'listening techniques', genuine language learning tools meant to sharpen English students' linguistic skills, while strengthening their confidence, too. Similarly, by integrating 'language shadowing' into their study routine, not only will learners speed up the process of language acquisition, but they will also gain a more structured perspective on their linguistic studies. Likewise, 'the shadowing technique' benefits learners in more than one way, including pronunciation, vocabulary expansion and the assimilation of grammar patterns.

Keywords: refining English learners' listening skills; the shadowing technique; top-down and bottom-up listening activities; dictogloss; to bolster learners' confidence.

Resumen

El presente artículo explora el uso de técnicas de comprensión oral, auténticas herramientas para el aprendizaje de idiomas, pensadas para mejorar las habilidades lingüísticas de los estudiantes de inglés, y, al mismo tiempo, reforzar su confianza. Asimismo, al integrar la técnica de imitación lingüística en la rutina de estudios, los estudiantes no solo acelerarán el proceso de adquisición del idioma, sino que también obtendrán una perspectiva más estructurada de sus estudios lingüísticos. De manera igual, la técnica de imitación beneficia a los estudiantes, de distintas maneras, incluyendo la pronunciación, el enriquecimiento del vocabulario y, también, la asimilación de estructuras gramaticales.

Palabras clave: perfeccionamiento de las habilidades de comprensión oral de los estudiantes de inglés; la técnica de imitación; actividades de comprensión oral – «de arriba abajo» y «de abajo arriba»; dictoglosia; reforzar la confianza de los estudiantes.

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1. Premises

We are of the opinion that listening skills are instrumental in acquiring a foreign language and, therefore, English students should be trained accordingly to integrate a variety of listening techniques into their study routine. Also, we deem necessary to raise their awareness of how beneficial listening techniques like *language shadowing*, *top-down* and *bottom-up processes* as well as *dictogloss* truly are, enabling learners to gain a wealth of knowledge, which will stand them in good stead.

2. Building Up English Listening Skills

Two of the most common reasons why English learners fail to capture the gist, let alone the details when listening are seemingly the ‘speed’ and the ‘accent’. However, the list of Keith Taylor¹ (2025) is a more comprehensive one, containing nine setbacks which usually prevent students from decoding an audio resource; such deterrents range from ‘vocabulary and rhythm to the messy realities of false starts and fillers’.

Also, Taylor’s list places ‘lexical coverage & formulaic language (chunks)’ first, emphasizing ‘why’ such an aspect ‘matters’, what ‘classroom reality’ uncovers and what measures should be taken to facilitate a better understanding of the audio resource in question.

Transitioning from the act of merely picking up ‘individual words’ to actually recognising ‘chunks’ of language and common ‘phrases’ prompts English learners to enhance their listening skills given that such lexical items lie at the heart of real language, and therefore they ‘carry meaning and help listeners follow the flow of a conversation’. With a view to working with an extensive vocabulary, activities are designed in accordance with their time frame, i.e. specific pre-listening, during listening, and post-listening ones, all of which are likely to offer additional information to learners alongside an enlarged perspective so that they will grow more confident to navigate the wealth of sounds and vocabulary of the English language, and also get to rely on stronger linguistic ‘anchor points’.

To continue, Taylor (2025) includes within the list other common barriers which arise in the way of a fruitful understanding of audio

¹ www.eslbase.com, Keith Taylor. ‘9 Real Reasons Learners Struggle with Listening and What You Can Do about Each’, 2025



materials; such obstacles are customarily rather disheartening for English learners, making them question how long and, more importantly, how demanding a process this linguistic endeavour will be: 'connected speech & weak forms', 'speech rate & pausing', 'accent variety', 'background knowledge (schema)', 'cognitive load & working memory', 'language rhythm and sentence stress', 'false starts & repairs' as well as 'discourse markers & fillers'. (*Ibid.*)

When building up learners' listening skills, 'speech rate & pausing' requires special attention. As Taylor argues, 'it's not only speed' that creates confusion among English students; if we are to address the issue of students' inability to cope with their listening tasks, then we will have to consider helping students to identify 'where one idea ends and the next begins', with a series of activities, audio transcript-related, providing an in-depth punctuation analysis. Having English learners properly trained to compare a punctuated transcript with the corresponding audio will enable them 'to listen for meaning group', interspersed with significant pauses rather than 'just words', an approach which definitely refines their listening skills, while also leading to the 'authentic speech' feeling 'less overwhelming'.

Furthermore, English learners' 'background knowledge' is also indicative of their listening performance because 'listening isn't' merely a matter of 'decoding'; on the contrary, it's a highly more complex an undertaking, which involves learners' ability to predict based on the so-called 'top-down processing'; in short, 'activating' their previously stored 'knowledge of a topic' in order to support their understanding. Similarly, "How likely is it nowadays to question the listening skills, particularly from a professional standpoint? While acknowledging that there is a major difference between 'hearing' and 'listening', listeners fail, sometimes, to remain committed throughout the listening process. What exactly prevents them from mastering the listening skills in a constantly changing communication climate?" (Iliescu, 2023: 311)

Additionally, we should acknowledge, too how much of an impact 'cognitive load & working memory' exert on an overall successful comprehension of listening tasks. When engaged in listening activities, learners find themselves struggling to decide whether to focus more on 'decoding' or 'remembering', since tackling both outweighs their

competences. Consequently, to ensure comprehension won't collapse, we have to carefully determine whether a particular listening task is matching or not English learners' level. To succeed in having 'learners' engaged throughout listening tasks, and also fostering their 'capacity to handle more demanding' activities, exercises should be layered and 'the cognitive load' controlled. In a nutshell, listening tasks should be designed in accordance with learners' language confidence, reflecting the way in which English students gradually 'develop' their 'stamina'.

Likewise, when facing 'natural conversation', English learners can be puzzled about the high frequency of 'false starts and repairs' permeating it. All too often, 'English is' not 'spoken in neat, textbook sentences'. Instead, 'speakers often begin a sentence, stop, and start again or' change idea 'halfway through'. (*Ibid.*)

Having pointed out that, problems arise for learners engaged in listening tasks as 'they end up focusing on the abandoned sentence' rather than pondering 'the final meaning'.

3. What Is Shadowing?

'Listening to podcasts is (...) great for' learners' listening skills. 'The shadowing technique' can be easily employed by English students, intent on improving their listening performance.

Defined as 'a language learning technique', shadowing is designed to cover two activities, simultaneously, if possible. In short, learners are trained to 'repeat an audio just after' they 'hear it'; consequently, learners behave "like an 'echo' or a 'shadow', hence the name 'shadowing' ". Therefore, English students 'listen to the words and then say them back out loud'.

Once learners are introduced to the shadowing technique, we can also raise students' awareness of how it closely connects to their aim to refine English speaking skills. Having mentioned that, it's also worth breaking the process of shadowing down into its components, suggested by Ramsay Lewis² (2025): a) 'find an audio', b) 'listen to the audio first', c) 'shadow the audio with a transcript' – seemingly, 'this (...) easier version of shadowing' suits 'beginners or lower-intermediate English learners', or d) 'shadow

² www.leonardoenglish.com, Ramsay Lewis. 'What Is Shadowing and Why Should You Use It to Improve Your English Speaking Skills?', 2025



without a transcript', an activity during which students' focus 'is on mimicking the sounds; it's not so much on what is being said'.

Additionally, English learners can be provided with other insights into shadowing like: 'active learning' – the longer learners remain focused throughout the activity, the better their understanding becomes; 'short duration' – typically, this activity spans between '10 and 15 minutes'; the need to 'repeat a few times' – English learners should acknowledge how beneficial is to them to keep practising the same 'piece of audio' or 'the same passage' between '2 and 4 times'. (*Ibid.*)

A final recommendation of this guide refers to learners' need to make sure they 'like the audio', i.e. learners should 'find content that' sparks their curiosity 'or that' triggers their interest.

Arguably, shadowing enables English learners to 'develop all the physical aspects of fluency', which include 'pronunciation, prosody, and rhythm of English'.

4. Integrating the Shadowing Technique into Language Learning Routine

As Kendall Hurley³ (2025) maintains, the list below illustrates 'the structure laid out' by the linguist and polyglot, Alexander Arguelles: 'choose' the 'audio resource' – English learners should factor in various aspects when deciding what audio resources to use, aspects such as: their language level and the extent to which the audio resources match it, and whether or not the audio resources under consideration also have a transcript. Therefore, if wondering what kind of audio English learners should be listening to, the answers include 'audio books read by a native speaker in' their 'target language', 'podcasts in' their 'target language', as well as 'videos featuring native speakers', considered greatly instrumental to bolster learners' confidence with regard to speaking English as they are thus enabled 'to see the language being used in context'.

'Practise in' their 'native language first' is another recommended step for English learners, willing to hone their language skills. What's more, shadowing addresses the likelihood that learners won't feel at ease initially, if asked to simultaneously speak and listen. Consequently, before

³ www.fluentu.com, Kendall Hurley. 'An Introduction to the Shadowing Technique', 2025



practising it with English, they are advised to read a text aloud, in their native language, 'slightly slower than normal, for two or three minutes'. Next, students are to 'play back the recording and try to repeat after it'. Such exercises, we learn, are primarily aimed at making students practise speaking and listening at the same time.

A third step that English learners are invited to consider in relation to their listening competences is to 'just listen and focus on the sounds'. In practice, students should only 'listen' to the audio resource in question 'in their target language' several times, 'without reading any transcript or speaking aloud'. Such a task, seemingly, is meant to ensure that students 'focus on the sounds' alone, considering the words to themselves in a quiet fashion, irrespective of whether or not they are aware of what those words mean.

We deem fit for English learners to see how much of an essential part of language shadowing is 'walking around while listening to and repeating' their 'audio resource'. This exercise may be demanding, at first; yet, when assimilated to English learners' routine, it will enable them to stay focused on rehearsing pronunciation, while also giving them a clear sense of study discipline. Needless to remind students that perseverance is pivotal to learning a foreign language.

Likewise, English learners choosing to shadow are to intertwine sounds with meaning, i.e. 'listen and repeat while reading their mother tongue's transcript', thus completing their pronunciation practice with semantic insights so that they gain a better perspective on the audio resource. Having highlighted that, once learners have rehearsed pronunciation, they'll shift their focus on matching sounds with meaning by 'going back to the start of' the 'audio passage and shadow while reading the (...) translation of' their 'book or transcript'.

'Listen and repeat while reading the English transcript' (Hurley, 2025). Once learners have reached this stage, they 'will be reading the' English 'words as' they 'speak them'. What's more, when fulfilling this precise activity as an integral part of the shadowing technique, English students could easily overlap the original text with its corresponding translation; this might be the case as long as the audio is played slow enough for students to consider, almost simultaneously, the English text alongside its translation.



As the Latins claimed, *repetitio est mater studiorum*, i.e. repeat daily for *practice makes perfect*. Given the fact that 'language shadowing requires daily effort and dedication', and despite the fact that integrating this technique into language learning routine may initially come as a rather assiduous exercise, English students, if truly intent on fast-tracking their language learning process, will undoubtedly welcome it. Also, by showing that they are receptive to the use of language shadowing, not only will English learners speed up the process of language acquisition, but they will also gain a more structured perspective on their linguistic studies as well as in-depth language competence.

Were learners to integrate shadowing into their language learning routine, they would 'be able to work on and start to improve many different parts' of English along the way. By the same token, shadowing is seemingly beneficial to learners in more than one fashion, beginning with pronunciation and moving forward to both vocabulary expansion and the assimilation of grammar patterns.

What's more, the shadowing technique is a multilayered approach to the process of language learning as it prompts students to not only enhance their pronunciation skills, but to also 'develop' their 'muscle memory and' be 'able to have common phrases or collocations' on their speed dial.

5. Top-Down and Bottom-Up Listening Strategies

If we explore the concepts underpinning the way in which English students assimilate listening texts or audio resources, we are bound to learn that 'top-down strategies focus on the' overall concept and global meaning of either 'a listening text' or any given audio resource. Additionally, it's worth reinforcing that 'top-down strategies' are connected to how much students know 'about the topic' and how familiar they are with 'the functional and situational language common to certain exchanges' as well as with the specific phrases, expressions, idioms, or collocations for 'the particular topic or situation'. In contrast, 'bottom-up strategies' refer to 'listening for details', and therefore 'involve tasks that focus on understanding at a sound or word level.'



According to Adrian Tennant⁴, the listening skills of English learners can be sharpened by having them engaged in a series of activities such as: 'listening bingo' – a two-fold activity, combining top-down tasks, i.e. 'predicting vocabulary based on what,' they 'already know about the topic' with a bottom-up process, that is listening to the audio to determine whether they have correctly anticipated the use of particular words or phrases. Likewise, another practical solution to refine English students' listening performance is 'dictogloss'. This activity, based on interweaving bottom-up and top-down processes, demands learners to carefully listen to an audio, or to a text being read in order 'to note down all the words they can remember,' particularly keywords. On top of that, the audio should be played several times, for students, initially by themselves, and afterwards, working in pairs, to pick up as many words and phrases as possible, having them also prepared to compare notes so that they finally manage 'to build (...) the text' in question. In the same vein, Tennant's 'practical ideas' to bolster English learners' confidence touch upon the usefulness of listening-related 'gap-fill' exercises, 'a standard bottom-up approach'.

6. Exploring Top-Down and Bottom-Up Listening Activities

In our view, it's essential for English learners to understand that 'in reality, fluent listening normally depends on the use of both processes operating simultaneously'⁵. What's more, they should acknowledge the fact that they 'often revert to their knowledge of the topic and situation when faced with unfamiliar vocabulary or structures,' which amounts to employing a top-down approach 'to compensate for difficulties' entailed by the bottom-up approach.

Top-down listening activities. By asking English learners 'to predict the content of a listening activity beforehand', based on 'information about the topic or situation, pictures, or keywords,' 'their top-down processing skills' are being developed given that learners start using their overall 'knowledge of the topic' in order to grasp the content. 'Top-down listening activities' also ask English learners to order a number of pictures 'or

⁴ www.onestopenglish.com, Adrian Tennant. 'Listening matters: top-down and bottom-up listening'

⁵ www.teachingenglish.org.uk, _____. 'Listening: Top-down and bottom-up'



sequence of events,' to listen to conversations and highlight 'where they take place', to read information on a specific topic, and afterwards, listen in order to verify whether the same aspects are covered as well as to infer 'the relationships between the people involved'.

Furthermore, to gauge English learners' listening performance and have them grow ever more confident, we deem appropriate to ensure that students fully understand the theoretical notions of 'bottom-up' and 'top-down' approaches as well as the clear distinction that the two entail. Having underlined that, 'top-down listening (...) refers to the use of background knowledge' to decode what the message conveys. By the same token, it's worth pointing out that 'background knowledge consists of context, that is, the situation and topic, and co-text, in other words, what came before and after'. Conversely, bottom-up listening is characterised by the fact that 'comprehension is achieved by dividing and decoding the sound signal bit by bit'. Consequently, the bottom-up listening places emphasis on 'the ability to separate the stream of speech into individual words'. (*Ibid.*)

Bottom-up listening activities. Nonetheless the relatively recent paradigm shift in terms of 'EFL listening materials', meaning that a much greater attention is given to 'developing top-down listening processes' as opposed to bottom-up listening activities, the latter type of listening activities is still singled out as extremely helpful when it comes to enable English learners to navigate the many 'linguistic elements of what they hear' so that they become better equipped to practise 'their top-down skills'.

English learners' ability to recognise 'known words' and identify 'word divisions in fast connected speech' hinges on them honing first their bottom-up listening skills.

6.1. Bottom-Up Listening Exercises, Pivotal to Language Acquisition

A basic exercise for a traditional bottom-up approach to listening is represented by 'fill in the missing words', an exercise 'done naturally' when the recordings played include conversations 'at normal, natural levels of intonation'. Conversely, when doing this exercise 'unnaturally, learners will hear sentences spoken at reduced levels of intonation', yet 'with greater clarity.' On top of that, 'higher-level beginners' are likely to benefit considerably from 'the naturally spoken discourse'; 'lower-level beginners', instead, are more at ease when listening to 'slowed and clearly articulated



speech'. Providing learners with either some context, or with 'the possible vocabulary', related to the audio resource that they will listen to, is always a great idea, since it 'will help build a more solid schema when they approach the bottom-up listening activity'⁶.

Besides, 'fill in the missing words' exercises, specific to 'the traditional bottom-up approach to listening' also include 'identification exercises' such as 'identifying divisions', which means that students should acquire the competence 'to distinguish blurred boundaries'; 'word-count exercises', amounting to 'another blur-reducing activity'; 'dictation', which can cover a range of exercises demanding English learners to 'identify nouns', 'actions' as well as 'descriptors'. (*Ibid.*)

Bottom-up listening exercises are still relevant today, despite being 'viewed as basic and (...) probably 'outdated in modern times' by a given number of teachers. Nonetheless such an assessment, 'helping lower-level English language learners' to equally enhance their listening abilities, and gain insights into 'how English is spoken' is likely to build up their confidence. Once the foundation of listening skills' acquisition has been laid out, and, if English learners stay focused on practising the language, encouraged by 'enough feedback, they'll be able to get into more top-down activities'.

7. Dictogloss, a Great Language Learning Tool

Dictogloss, this 'type of supported dictation'⁷ is designed as an activity during which 'the teacher reads a short, curriculum-related text several times and the learners try to produce their own as close to the original as possible'. What's more, we should reinforce the fact that 'the ideal dictogloss text is at a language level slightly above that of the learners, but with familiar subject content'. This being underlined, dictogloss may as well prompt learners to discover 'some new vocabulary or sentence structures'.

Along the same lines, dictogloss is described as a great 'language learning tool' because it equally impacts 'the four' language learning skills – 'speaking, listening, reading and writing' and it asks 'learners to listen, talk, collaborate, take notes, redraft and present orally'. (*Ibid.*)

⁶ www.ontesol.com, 'The Basics of the Bottom-Up Approach'

⁷ www.bell-foundation.org.uk, 'Great Idea: Dictogloss'



Conclusion

We maintain that the use of listening techniques may pave the way for bolstering English learners' confidence and enhancing their language skills. In the same vein, these listening techniques are designed to engage students in a range of listening activities, which enable them to navigate the complexity of English pronunciation.

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