

RESEARCH ARTICLE

Listening for specific information through a bottom-up processing approach for B2 learners

G'ofurova Qurbongul Erkin Qizi¹

Supervisor: Tuxtajayeva Madina Ulugbek qizi²

¹O'zbekiston davlat jahon tillari universiteti, 3-kurs talabasi

²O'zDJTU, senior teacher, dotsent

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Abstract. Listening for specific information means identifying targeted details—such as dates, prices, names, times and quantities—in spoken discourse. B2 learners must decode connected speech in real time, not merely understand a topic. Drawing on second-language listening research, this article explains how bottom-up processing supports accurate recognition of sounds, word boundaries, stress, reduced forms and grammatical signals. It proposes a three-stage sequence moving from focused perception to communicative practice and independent use. The central argument is that bottom-up work should be purposeful and connected to meaningful tasks.

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1. Introduction

Listening is time-sensitive: learners recognise sounds, segment speech into words, interpret grammatical relationships and construct meaning while speech continues. Bottom-up processing moves from smaller linguistic units towards meaning and is especially useful when tasks require exact details (Field, 2003; Goh, 2000).

2. Bottom-up processing and specific information

Bottom-up processing begins with the acoustic signal and builds towards meaning. Learners attend to sounds, stress, word boundaries, lexical items and grammatical forms. Field (2003) highlights lexical segmentation as an important difficulty, while Goh (2000) identifies word recognition and attention failures. These findings support short, diagnostic activities that make connected speech easier to recognise.

3. Why B2 learners need focused listening practice

Fluent speakers may still struggle to decode speech accurately. Spoken input disappears, words connect, and listeners have little time to identify relevant details. Goh (2000) describes difficulties during perception, parsing and use of information; teachers should diagnose errors rather than assume every mistake reflects weak vocabulary.

A balanced lesson avoids both endless replaying and guessing from context alone. Learners need a clear target, a limited number of purposeful replays,

B2 learners can follow complex speech on familiar topics but may struggle with accents, rapid delivery, reduced forms and similar-sounding details. A learner may understand an announcement's topic yet confuse "fifteen" with "fifty" or miss a corrected departure time. Such errors may reflect inaccurate segmentation or recognition.

For example, a learner must accurately hear "six fifteen" in a travel announcement. In "Thursday—sorry, Friday," the listener must detect the correction and update the detail. Context supports interpretation but should not replace attention to the spoken signal.

time to compare answers and feedback on the sound or language feature that caused difficulty.

Listening should be taught, not only tested. Vandergrift and Goh (2012) support learner-centred listening development, while Renandya and Farrell (2011) discuss extensive listening. Focused bottom-up work should complement, not replace, broader exposure.

4. Principles for designing a B2 lesson

- **Clear listening purpose.** Tell learners which information they need, such as three departure times or two changes to a booking.
- **Realistic input.** Use short announcements, interviews, voice messages, service conversations and podcasts with natural but manageable delivery.
- **Selective attention.** Ask learners to listen for a small set of targets; specific-information listening does not require transcribing the entire recording.
- **Diagnostic feedback.** Identify whether an error came from sound discrimination, word-boundary recognition, vocabulary, grammar or attention.
- **Gradual release.** Move from guided recognition to information exchange and then to an independent task, reducing scaffolding as accuracy improves.
- **Meaningful outcome.** Make the details matter: learners use them to choose a route, confirm a booking, plan a meeting or solve a practical problem.

5. A three-stage classroom sequence

The sequence progresses from accuracy to meaning and independent use: pre-listening practises key signals, while-listening creates an information gap, and

post-listening transfers the skill to an independent task.

Stage 1: Pre-listening — "Sound-to-detail warm-up" (8–10 minutes)

The teacher prepares 8–10 short items linked to the topic: times, prices, dates, addresses and names. Learners distinguish similar forms (fifteen/fifty;

Tuesday/Thursday; can/can't), then practise phrases with connected speech and reductions. In pairs, they explain which sound or stress pattern helped them

decide. The aim is accurate recognition, not memorising vocabulary.

6. Communicative practice and independent transfer

Stage 2: While-listening – “Plan the journey” (12–15 minutes)

In pairs, Student A completes a travel grid with departure time, platform, price and a service change; Student B has different missing details. They listen to an announcement, complete their grids and ask each other questions. The pair must agree on a feasible journey, so accurate details have a clear purpose.

Learners record only target details and mark uncertain answers with a question mark. After pair-checking, they listen again to relevant sections while the teacher highlights number contrasts, stress, corrections and reduced forms.

Stage 3: Post-listening – “Voice-message mission” (10–12 minutes)

Learners independently listen to a short message about a changed meeting, appointment or hotel check-in. They note three to five requested facts and use them to send a confirmation or update a schedule.

After the first listen, they check answers against a transcript or replay and identify one detail they misheard.

7. Assessment and feedback

Assessment should measure both the accuracy of retrieved details and the process learners use to repair misunderstandings. A short rubric can award one point for each correctly identified detail, with separate feedback on numbers, names, times, word boundaries and grammatical endings. A second listen may be permitted during practice, but a final check should use a fresh or slightly different recording to determine whether the skill transfers beyond memorisation.

Teachers can keep an error log. Confused numbers suggest discrimination practice; missed words may require work on stress, reductions and boundaries;

misunderstood corrections may require attention to grammar and discourse markers. This helps teachers choose focused follow-up activities.

Feedback should be specific and actionable. Instead of saying “listen more carefully,” the teacher can say, “You heard the day correctly but missed the speaker’s correction,” or “The final consonant distinguishes the two options.” Learners should state what they will listen for next time. Reflection makes accuracy practice purposeful and helps students take responsibility for their development.

8. Discussion

Bottom-up processing helps B2 learners notice the linguistic details that carry exact information, but it is not a complete theory of listening. Context, purpose and metacognitive strategies also matter. Effective lessons combine accurate perception with meaningful communication and gradually reduce support.

The proposed activities are a teaching framework, not reported experimental findings. Teachers should evaluate them locally by comparing accuracy and recurring error types before and after practice.

9. Conclusion

Listening for specific information requires accurate recognition of details while speech continues. For B2 learners, bottom-up processing develops this precision through attention to sounds, word boundaries, stress, reductions and grammatical signals. Lessons

can move from controlled discrimination to information-gap communication and independent application. The approach works best when it serves a real purpose, includes diagnostic feedback and complements broader exposure to spoken English.

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