

UNIT 2 LEARNING AND TEACHING MODERN FOREIGN LANGUAGE SKILLS

2.4 DEVELOPING LISTENING SKILLS

Listening is a complex process which involves several skills: students have to listen for the main idea as well as for specific details; they have to predict and then check their predictions, understand the speaker's real meaning, emotions and opinions; they have to infer relationships between speakers, or identify the context in which the conversation takes place.

Teachers can use different sources of listening material: news programs, interviews, poems, songs, advertisements, extracts from plays, speeches, lectures, telephone conversations, informal dialogues. Students will be more motivated and interested if the listening practice is varied and authentic. Authentic spoken texts which have not been specially prepared for language learners are particularly useful because they allow learners a greater degree of independence when confronted with listening to the foreign language in a real world context. Authentic texts are easy to find since they are delivered via technologies like radio, television/video, the Internet or CD-ROM.

It is highly advisable to use recordings/video lasting no more than 10 or 15 minutes and significant for the lesson or subject which is being taught. If the length goes beyond that time, students don't concentrate so easily on the document and the whole learning task becomes more difficult.

In the process of listening comprehension, listeners use both bottom-up and top-down processes. Listeners use **top-down process** when they use their schemata, that is their prior knowledge, to understand the meaning of a text. A very common top-down listening activity is predicting the content of a listening beforehand, using information about the topic, pictures, or key words. Listeners use **bottom-up process** when they use their linguistic knowledge to understand the meaning of a text; they build meaning from lower level such as sounds, words, grammatical relationships to lexical meanings in order to arrive at the final text.

Listening lessons should be divided into **three main stages**.

- **Pre listening**, during which teachers prepare students to listen.
- **While listening**, during which teachers focus students' attention on the listening text and guide their understanding of it.
- **Post listening**, during which teachers help students integrate what they have learnt from the text into their existing knowledge