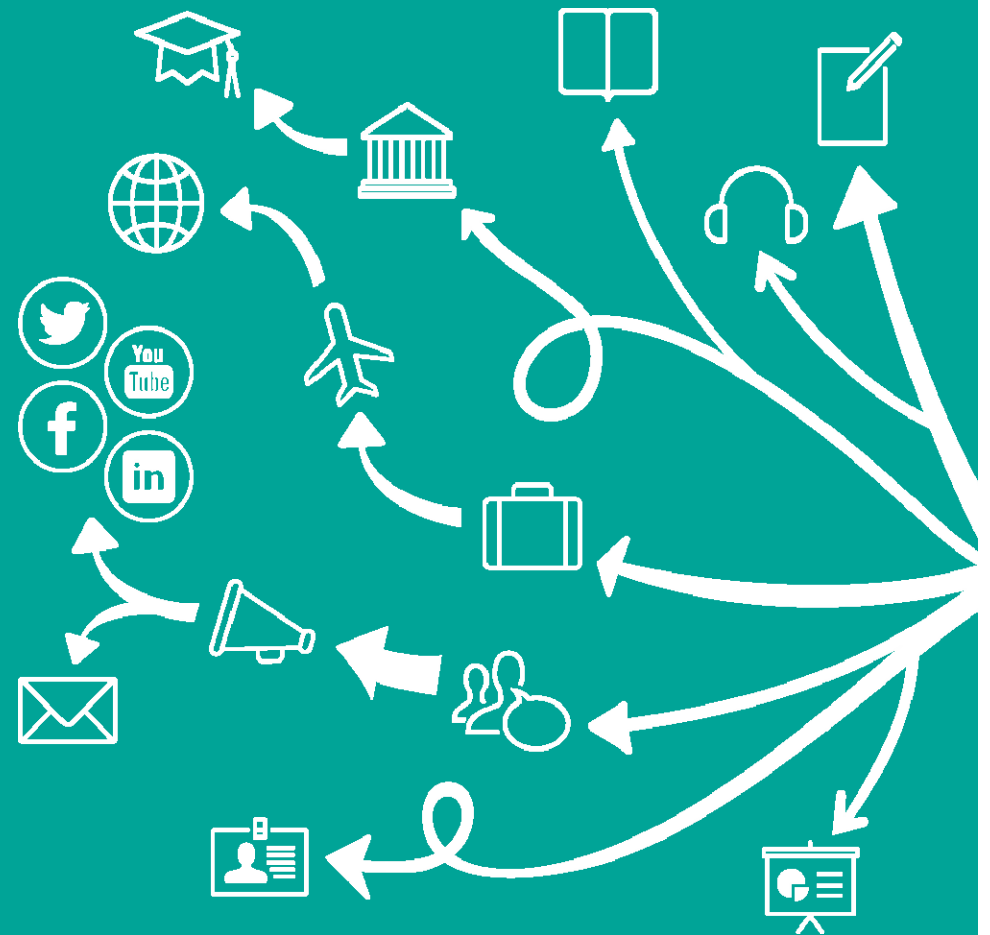

Understanding listening assessment

What every teacher should know



Ardeshir Geranpayeh
Research and Thought Leadership

Mark Elliott
Validation and Data Services

Cambridge English

Who are you?

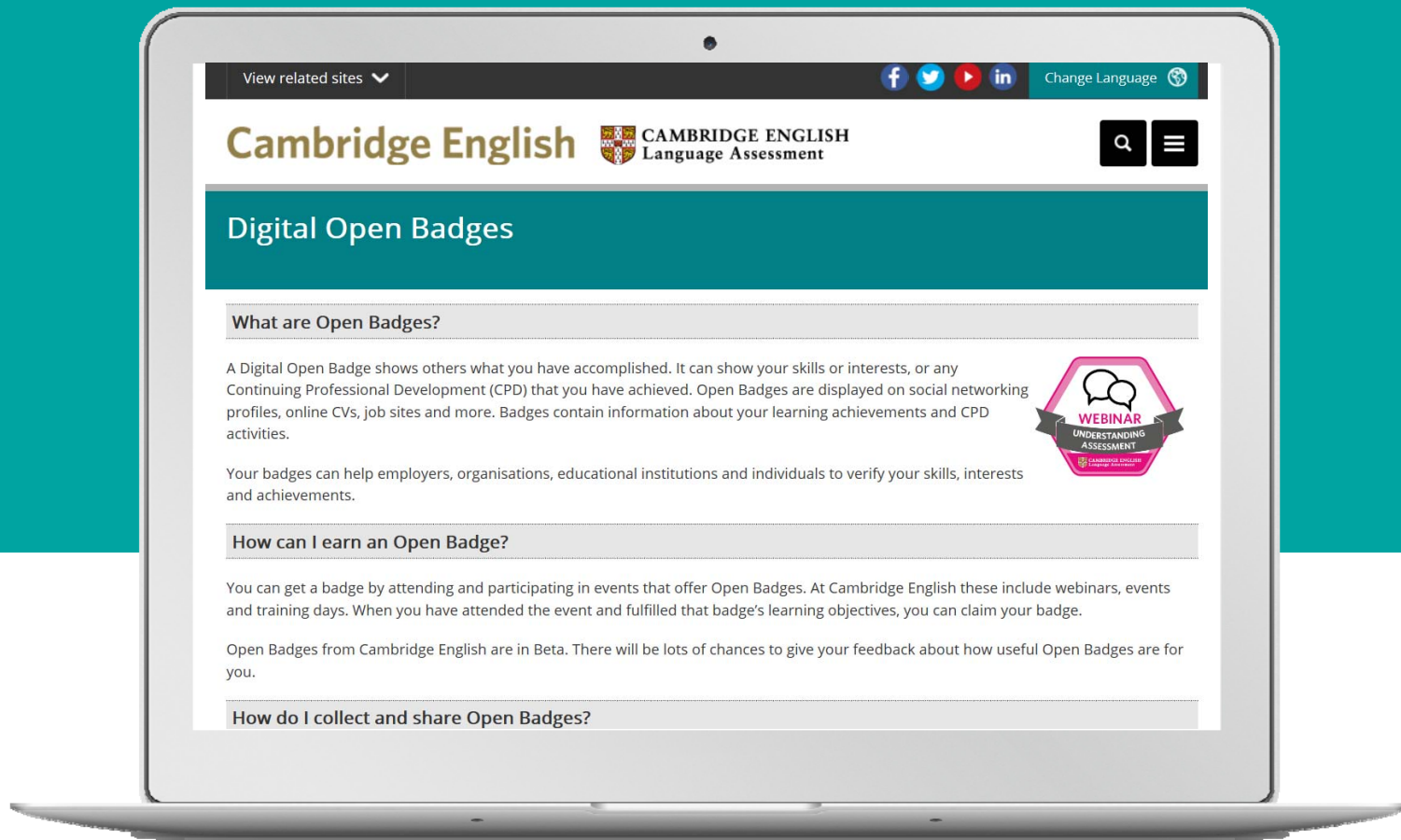
- A. I'm a teacher.
- B. I'm the co-ordinator/director of studies.
- C. I'm a learner.
- D. I'm a parent.

Why are you here?

- A. I need evidence of Continuous Professional Development.
- B. I want to earn an Open Badge.
- C. I want to know more about listening assessment.
- D. Other



Digital Open Badges

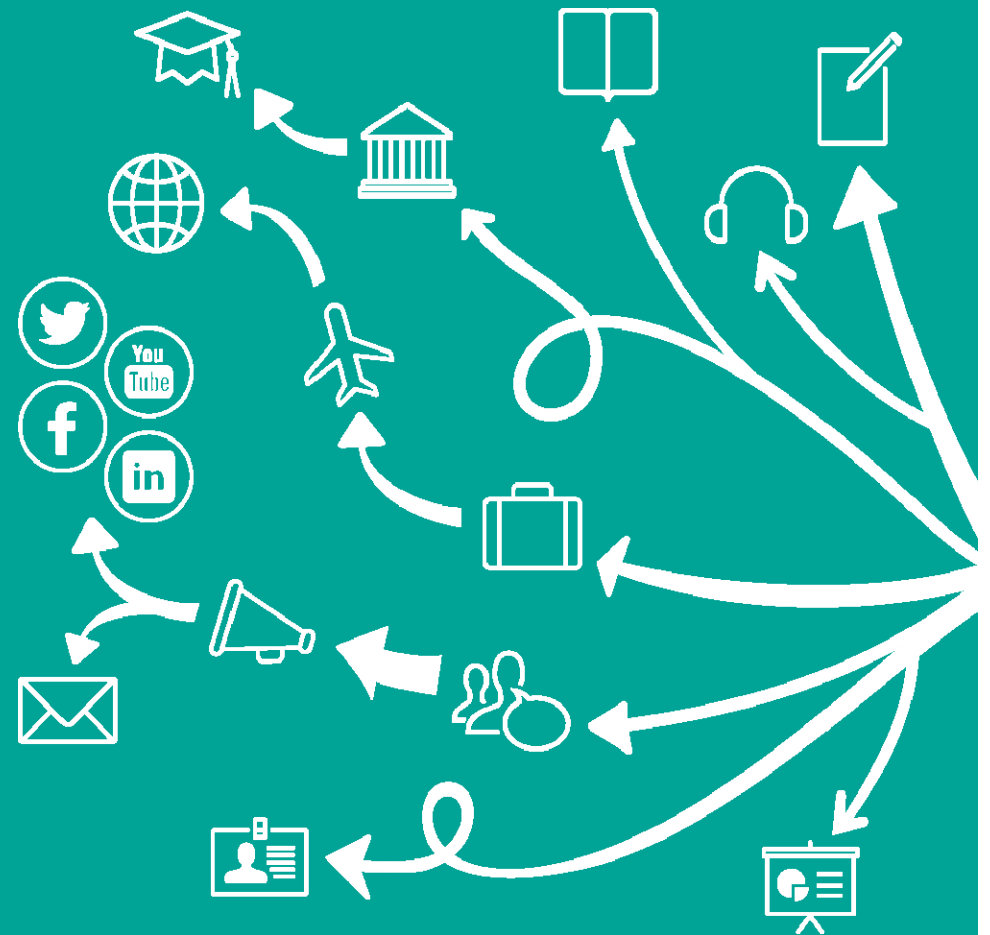


<http://www.cambridgeenglish.org/events/open-badges>

Cambridge English

Understanding listening assessment

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Our aim today

To answer these questions about listening comprehension and listening assessment



What is listening comprehension, and how does it differ from other skills?



What does a listener need to do?



Which cognitive & contextual factors affect the Listener?



What makes a listening comprehension item easy or difficult?

**What is listening
comprehension?**

How is it different
from other skills?



What is listening?

- What does a listener do? How do they turn a sound wave into a complex unit of meaning?
- How does a listener build 'comprehension'?

What makes listening different from reading?

What makes listening different from reading?

 Transitory: no record

What makes listening different from reading?



Transitory: no record



Happens in real time

- need to store while analysing
- need to carry forward information in the mind

What makes listening different from reading?

- ➔ Transitory: no record
- ➔ Happens in real time
 - need to store while analysing
 - need to carry forward information in the mind
- ➔ Speech rate not under listener's control

What makes listening different from reading?

- ➔ Transitory: no record
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 - need to store while analysing
 - need to carry forward information in the mind
- ➔ Speech rate not under listener's control
- ➔ Variability

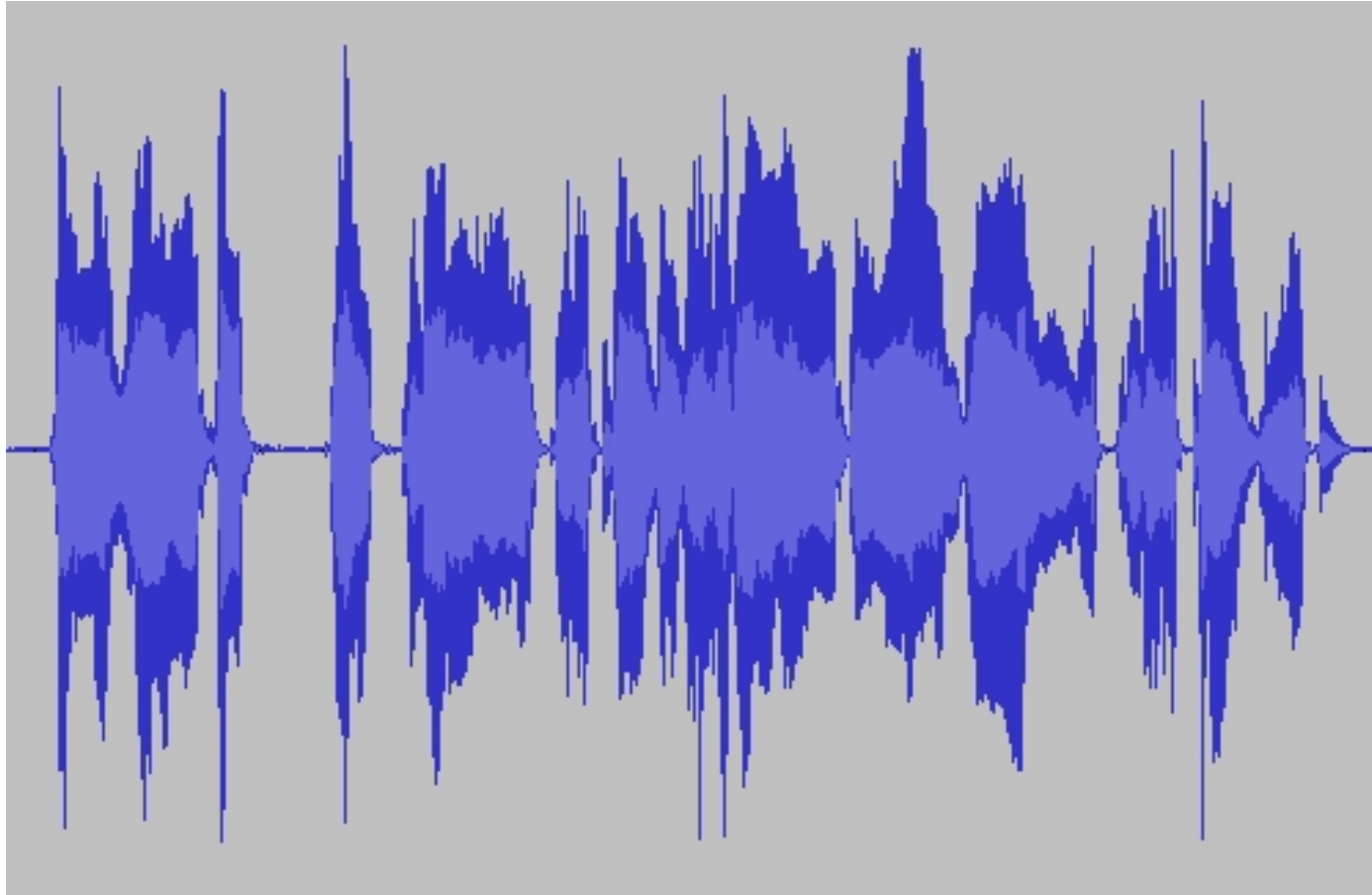
What makes listening different from reading?

- ➔ Transitory: no record
- ➔ Happens in real time
 - need to store while analysing
 - need to carry forward information in the mind
- ➔ Speech rate not under listener's control
- ➔ Variability
- ➔ Lack of gaps between words

**What does
a listener need
to do?**

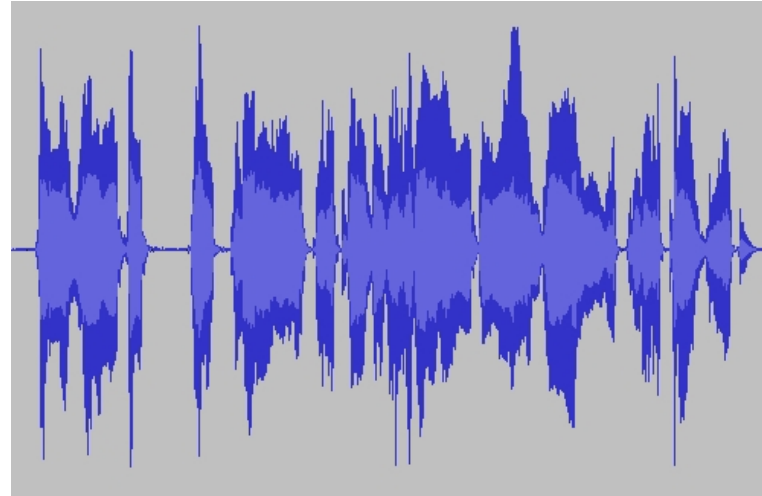
Getting from a
sound wave to
meaning





phonemes

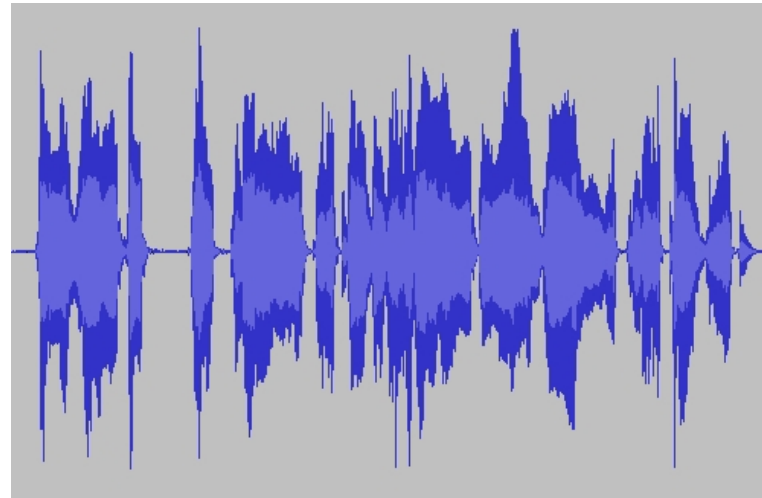
ð ʌ r



syllables

ɪŋ ðə

phonemes



syllables

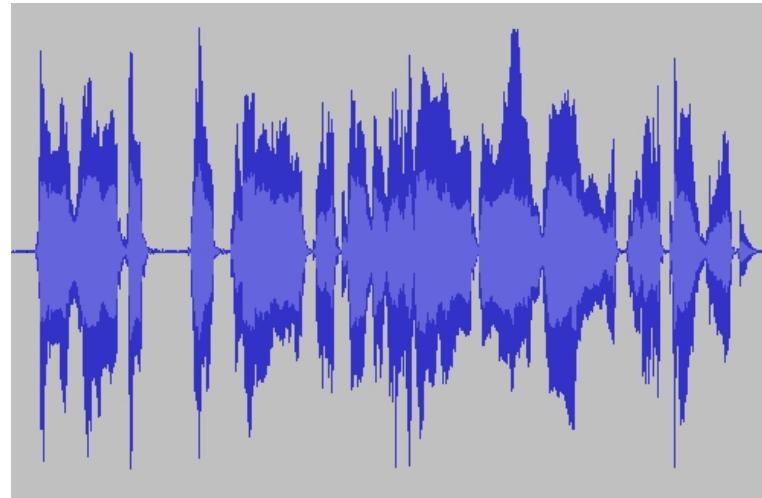
DECODING



the

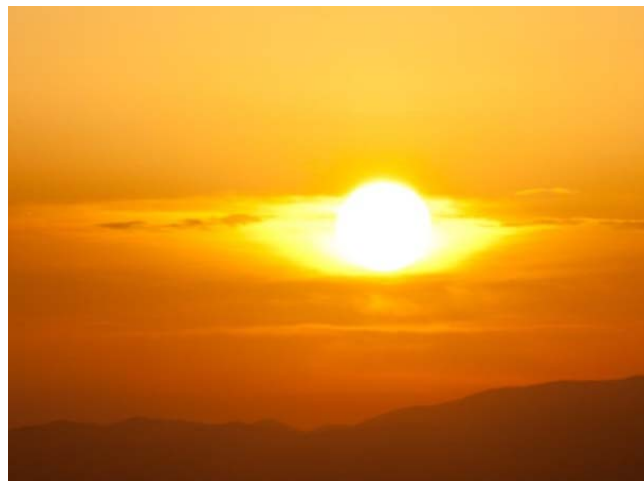
rising

phonemes



syllables

DECODING



The sun is rising.

Cambridge English

What is decoding?

- Translating input into the sounds of the language
- Searching for words which match or nearly match these sounds



an OUTPUT: a string of words

Word meaning

- You hear the following. What does it mean?

Word meaning

- You hear the following. What does it mean?

[raɪt]

Word meaning

- You hear the following. What does it mean?

[raɪt]

- A. /raɪt/ a letter
- B. /raɪt/ turn
- C. /raɪt/ answer

What does a listener need to do?

What does a listener need to do?

1. Recognise a grammar pattern in the string of words.

What does a listener need to do?

1. Recognise a grammar pattern in the string of words.
2. Fit a word to the words surrounding it.

['hevi]

[tʒ:n]

What does a listener need to do?

1. Recognise a grammar pattern in the string of words.
2. Fit a word to the words surrounding it.

['hevi]

[tʒ:n]

PARSING

OUTPUT: a BARE proposition (a literal abstract idea)

What does a listener need to do?

MEANING CONSTRUCTION

What does a listener need to do?

MEANING CONSTRUCTION

LANGUAGE



The sun is rising.

What does a listener need to do?

MEANING CONSTRUCTION

LANGUAGE

The sun is rising.



What does a listener need to do?

MEANING CONSTRUCTION

LANGUAGE

The sun is rising.



What does a listener need to do?

MEANING CONSTRUCTION

LANGUAGE

The sun is rising.



- Add meaning (world knowledge)
- Handle information (relevant? important?)



**Which cognitive
& contextual
factors affect
the Listener?**



Cognitive processing

(adapted from Geranpayeh & Taylor 2013)

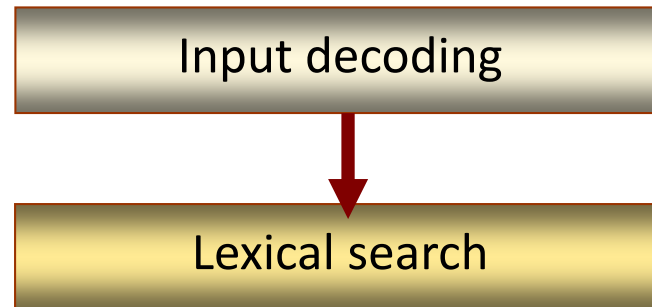
Cognitive processing

(adapted from Geranpayeh & Taylor 2013)

Input decoding

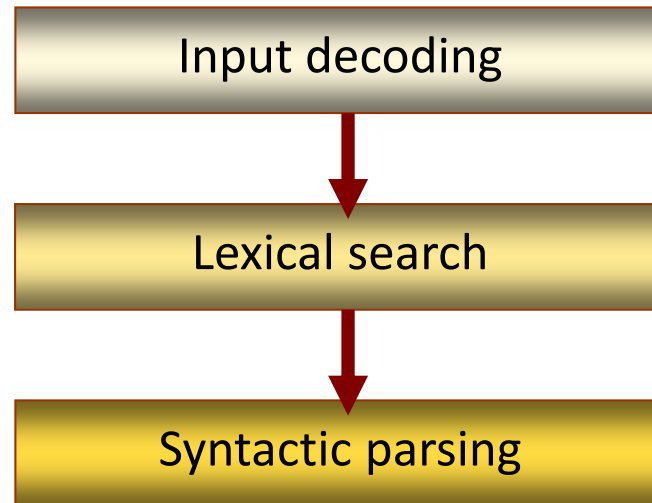
Cognitive processing

(adapted from Geranpayeh & Taylor 2013)



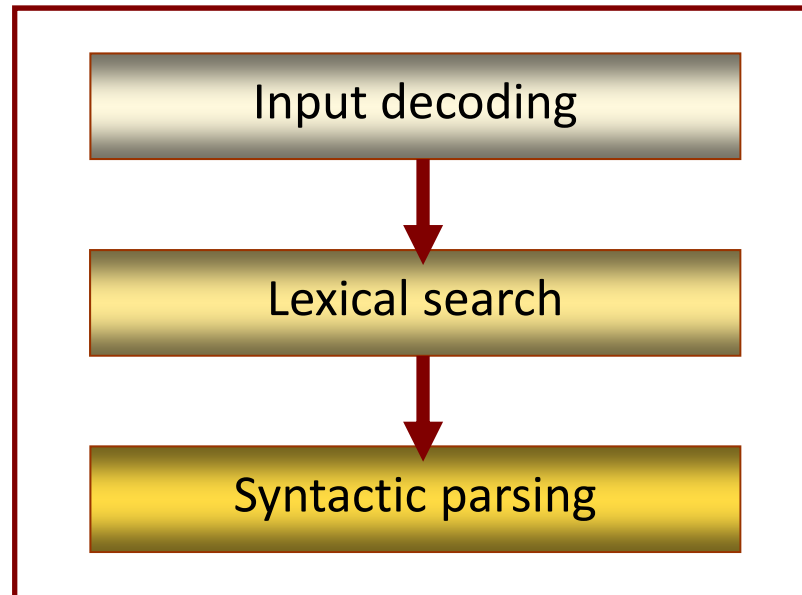
Cognitive processing

(adapted from Geranpayeh & Taylor 2013)



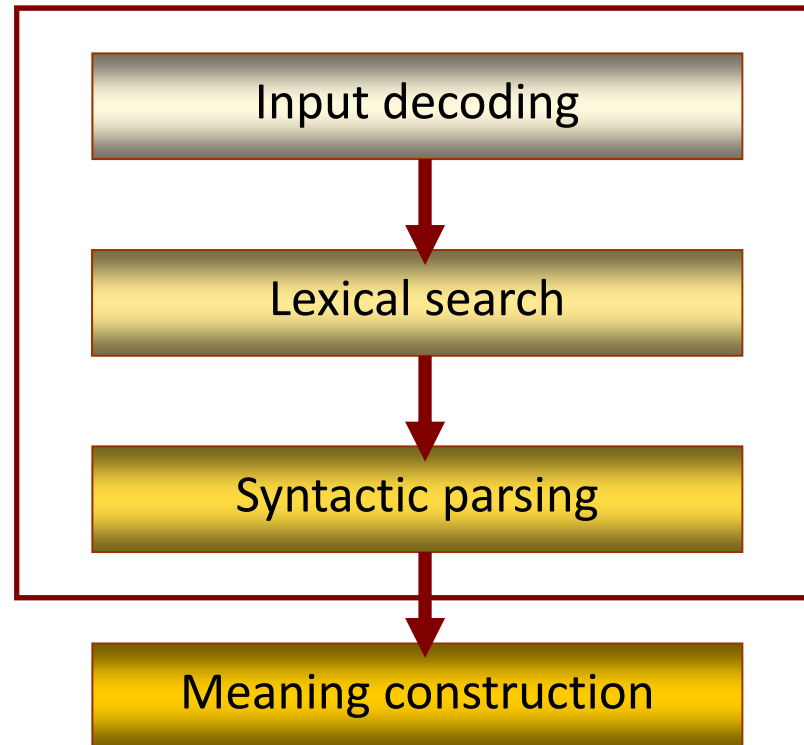
Cognitive processing

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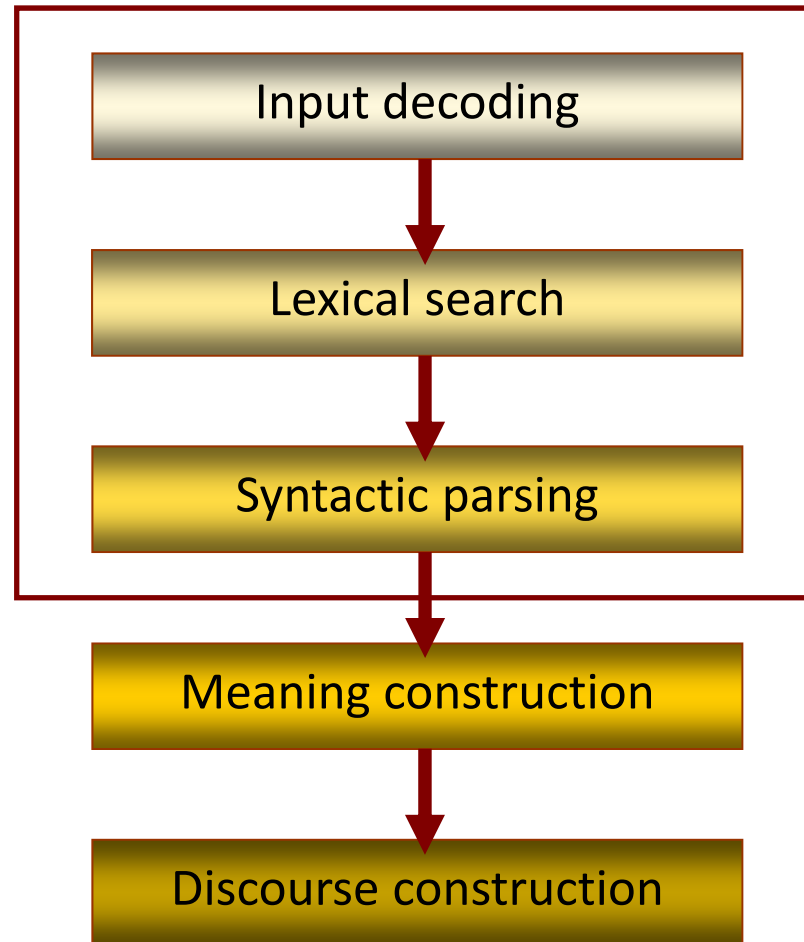
Cognitive processing

(adapted from Geranpayeh & Taylor 2013)



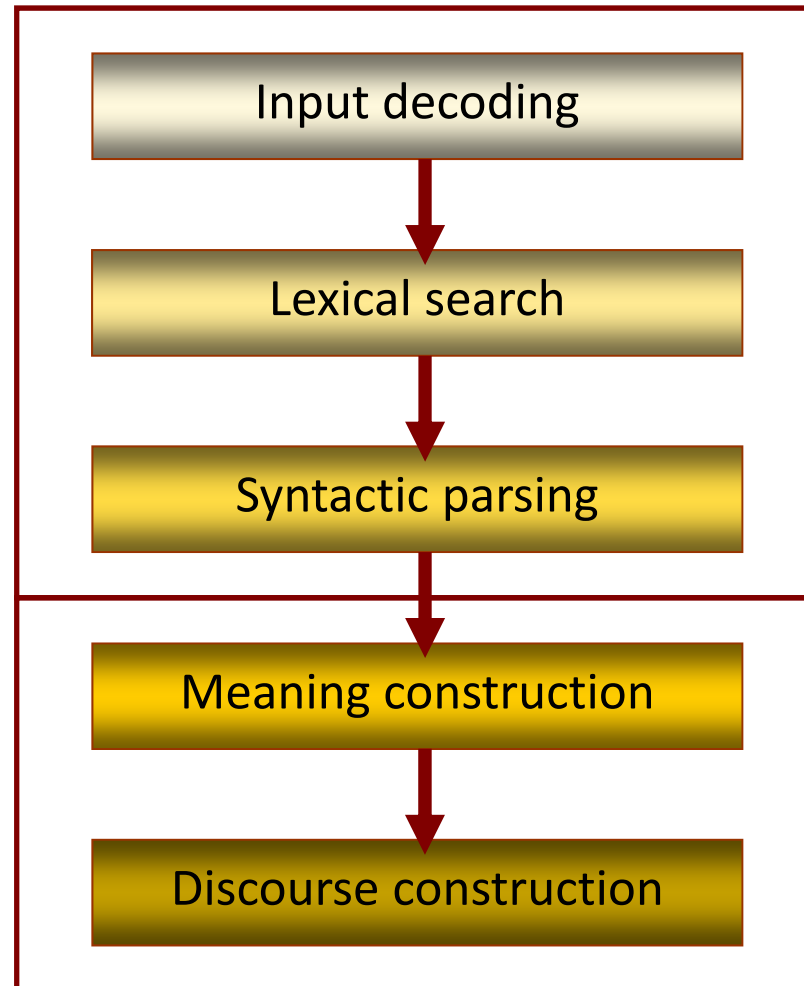
Cognitive processing

(adapted from Geranpayeh & Taylor 2013)



Cognitive processing

(adapted from Geranpayeh & Taylor 2013)



**What are the
challenges for
the L2 listener?**



The L2 listener: decoding and parsing

- Approximate phonological values
- Limited vocabulary
- Word recognition not automatic/not interconnected
- Limited grammar
- Grammar patterns not automatically recognised.

The L2 listener: meaning building

- Cultural misunderstanding
- Lack of pragmatic knowledge
- Focus on decoding that limits the ability to carry forward information
- Incomplete representation of what has been heard already
- Inability to connect ideas

Listening as an online process

- Evidence from listening psychologists suggests that listeners do not wait until the end of an utterance before working out its meaning.
- It seems that they analyse what a speaker is saying at a delay.

Listening and the CEFR

Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR)
 Can Do statements: Listening comprehension self-assessment
 (Council of Europe 2001:26)

C2	C1	B2	B1	A2	A1
I have no difficulty in understanding any kind of spoken language, whether live or broadcast, even when delivered at fast native speed, provided I have some time to get familiar with the accent.	I can understand extended speech even when it is not clearly structured and when relationships are only implied and not signalled explicitly. I can understand television programmes and films without too much effort.	I can understand extended speech and lectures and follow even complex lines or argument provided the topic is reasonably familiar. I can understand most TV news and current affairs programmes. I can understand the majority of films in standard dialect.	I can understand the main points of clear standard speech on familiar matters regularly encountered in work, school, leisure, etc. I can understand the main points of many radio or TV programmes on current affairs or topics of personal or professional interest when the delivery is relatively slow and clear.	I can understand phrases and the highest frequency vocabulary related to areas of most immediate personal relevance (e.g. very basic personal and family information, shopping, local area, employment). I can catch the main point in short, clear, simple messages and announcements.	I can recognise familiar words and basic phrases concerning myself, my family and immediate concrete surroundings when people speak slowly and clearly.

Listening and the CEFR

A1

I can recognise familiar words and basic phrases concerning myself, my family and immediate concrete surroundings when people speak slowly and clearly.

Listening and the CEFR

C2

I have no difficulty in understanding any kind of spoken language, whether live or broadcast, even when delivered at fast native speed, provided I have some time to get familiar with the accent.

**What makes a
listening
comprehension
item easy or
difficult?**



**What makes a listening test item
easy or difficult?**

What do you think?

Contextual factors: recording content

- Linguistic complexity
 - grammar
 - vocabulary

Contextual factors: recording content

- Linguistic complexity
 - grammar
 - vocabulary
- Content knowledge

Contextual factors: recording content

- Linguistic complexity
 - grammar
 - vocabulary
- Content knowledge
- Nature of information

Contextual factors and the CEFR

A2

*Can understand enough to be able to meet needs of a **concrete** type ...*

Contextual factors and the CEFR

A2

*Can understand enough to be able to meet needs of a **concrete** type ...*

C1

*Can easily follow complex interactions ... even on **abstract**, complex, unfamiliar topics.*

Speakers: speech rate

- Speech rate naturally affects listening difficulty.
- Speech rate is an important consideration at lower levels (up to B1) but less so at higher levels (B2 and above).

Speakers: variety of accents

Should a listening test include
a variety of accents?

Disadvantages of including a variety of accents

- Familiarity with different ‘non-standard’ accents can be a random factor.
- Listening is about more than input decoding.

Advantages of including a variety of accents

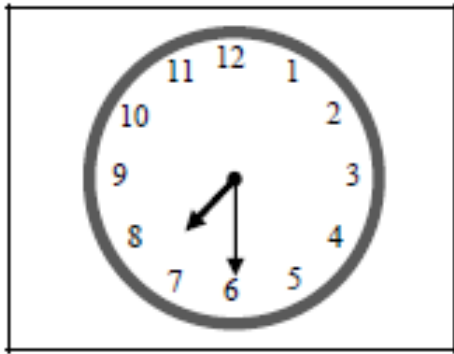
- Can result in positive washback effect in the variety of accents used in preparation material such as coursebooks
- May be important for some tests

Example items

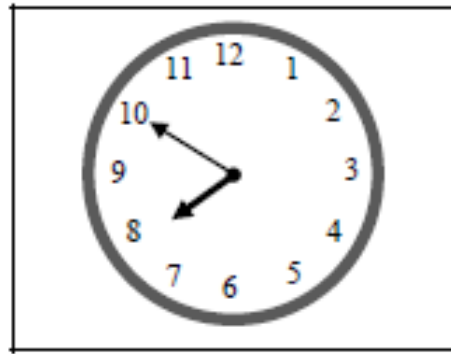
- What cognitive processes do the following tasks require?
- What makes them easy or difficult?

Example item 1

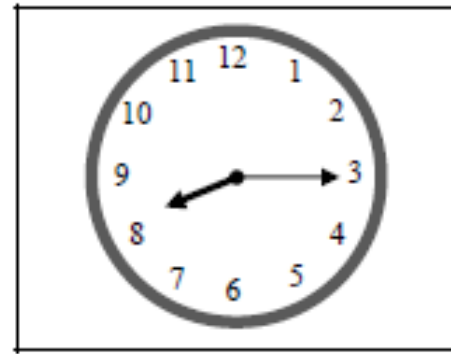
5 What time will they leave home?



A



B



C

1. What level of learners do you think this task is best suited to?
2. Why does the item have visual options?
3. What cognitive processes does the item target?
4. What sources of difficulty are there in the item?

Woman: Paul, when do you want to go? It's seven thirty already.

Man: **Be ready at ten to eight – we should leave then.**

Woman: You booked the table for eight fifteen, didn't you?

Man: Yes, and we mustn't be late.

Example item 2

Extract Two

You hear part of a radio programme in which a reporter called Toby Beesley is talking about a museum located in a castle.

- 3 Toby thinks that the people running the museum have not installed modern technology because
- A they are unwilling to do so.
 - B they lack the means to do so.
 - C they've not been allowed to do so.
- 4 He recommends this museum to people who appreciate
- A an uncomplicated display.
 - B a traditional approach.
 - C comfortable facilities.

1. Why do the items have text options?
2. What cognitive processes do the items target?
3. What sources of difficulty are there in the items?

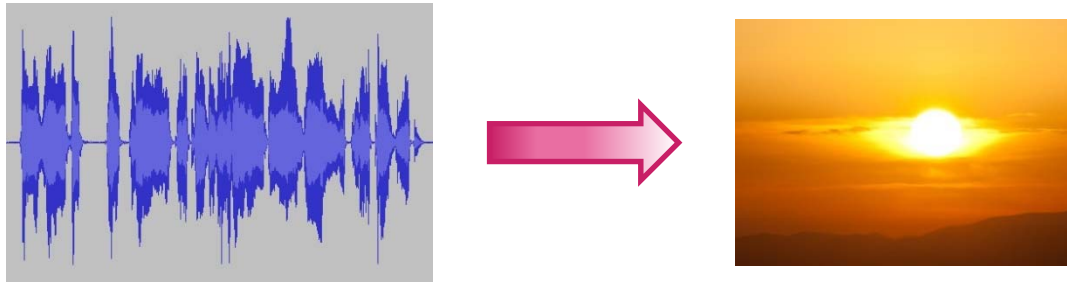
Example item 2

1. Why do the items have text options?
2. What cognitive processes do the items target?
3. What sources of difficulty are there in the items?

- Woman:** In this city we're all very proud of our castle, but how many of us can say, hand on heart, we've been round its museum? Well, yesterday we sent our reporter Toby Beesley to the Castle Museum to see what it's like.
- Man:** At the entrance you're greeted by a notice describing it as the largest, most comprehensive city museum in the world. But many of its galleries are still very traditional with exhibits in glass cases. **They quite deliberately avoid technological gadgetry in terms of CD ROMS and holograms, etc., because, we're told, that wouldn't fit the dignity of the castle.** Apparently, no one's saying that those things are in themselves undignified, but rather that they don't sit very comfortably in what's also a historical building. **So this is a must for people who love the rather dusty quiet of a conventional exhibition with plenty of notices in a range of small print to peer at.**
- Woman:** Thanks to Toby for that. And now here's Sophie, to tell us about the weekly farmers' market ...

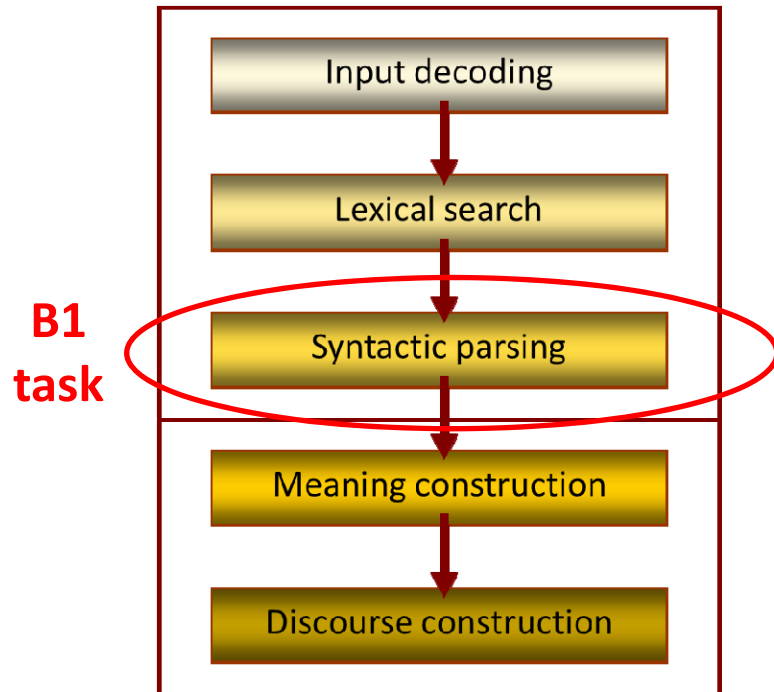
Summary – what is listening?

- Listening is the process of turning sound waves into meaning.



- Listening poses particular problems for learners because it makes heavy demands of their working memory.
- Listening can be broken down into a set of interacting cognitive processes.
- As listeners progress, processing become more efficient and finally automatic.

Summary – how can we test listening?



- Listening tests need to elicit cognitive processes appropriate to the target level.
- The CEFR provides contextual information which helps us design appropriate tasks.
- A variety of factors affect difficulty in addition to cognitive processing demands – these need to be controlled carefully.

Further information



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Helps you assess which stage you are at in your professional development and work out where you want to get to next

➔ **Webinars**

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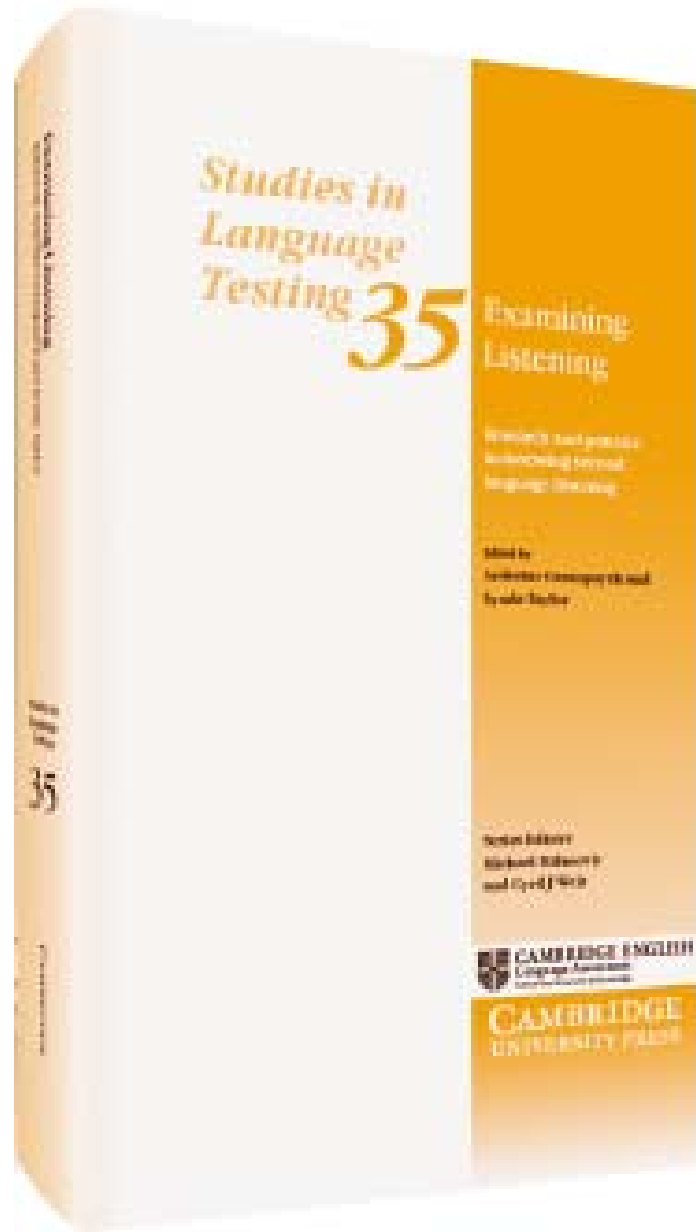
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