LanguagEd

New year's resolutions: speaking and listening lesson (B2/C1)

1. What are your resolutions for the new year?

2. How likely are you to keep them?

3. We're going to watch a video from American comedian Ellen DeGeneres. Watch the video and answer the questions:

a) What does Ellen ask the audience at the beginning of the video?
b) Why is January 1st not a great time to make resolutions?
c) What resolutions did Ellen's Facebook fans make?

4. Now we're going to talk about the contribution of background knowledge to our listening comprehension. Watch these two sections of the video: 00.00-00.09 and 2.10-2.25. Why does the audience laugh?

Teacher's notes

Question 1 is ideal for a brainstorming session.

Question 2 can be used to revise the use of "likely" in a sentence ("I am likely/unlikely to…/it is unlikely that I…"): let the students try to answer, then recast their utterances and focus on the form on the board.

Question 3 can be used as guide to the first and second listen. Play the video at least twice and activate the subtitles if needed.

Question 4 develops the students' metacognition in relation to listening by asking them to reflect on the role of background knowledge in their comprehension. In the first excerpt, 00.00-00.09, the audience laughs because Ellen asks "how many of you kept them [i.e. your resolutions]?": this is predicated on the widely known assumption that people are bad at keeping resolutions. In the second excerpt, the audience laughs because Ellen DeGeneres is famously gay, so giving up men is of course something that would come easy to her.

Students often struggle to understand why they fail to understand when they listen and as a result end up blaming the speaker (they speak too fast!), the accent or other factors they have no control over. Helping them pinpoint the various factors, like background knowledge, that contribute to listening comprehension, helps them feel more in control of their listening and understand their learning.