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What Would a Unified Field of Listening Look Like? A Proposal Linking Past Perspectives and Future Endeavors

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Most reviews of "listening research" are narrow in scope, focusing only on research published by listening and communication scholars. Given that unique contributions to listening have been provided by scholars from disciplines as varied as psychology, anthropology, management, and linguistics, this review explores connections and divergences that span the academic landscape. After briefly introducing and reviewing listening related research from three primary areas—information processing, competent behavior, and individual differences—we offer a heuristic framework that ties these lines of study together and provides a structure for assessing and generating new listening research. A concluding section suggests lines of future investigation.

Listening is a multidisciplinary field. Scholars from a variety of disciplines such as psychology, communication, linguistics, anthropology, and management have studied listening from varied perspectives, incorporating relevant concepts and

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methods into their research and theory building. As a consequence, a fragmented and seemingly dizzying array of definitions, methodological approaches, and theoretical frameworks has arisen. Such diversity is not inherently negative. In fact, variations in perspective, viewpoints, and assumptions have helped reveal the complex nature of listening. At the same time, however, this diversity makes it difficult for scholars to make sense of the listening literature. As a field, we have reached that crucial point where we must begin to establish a common language and identify areas in need of further development. In sum, we need to begin providing answers to the following question: What would a unified field of listening look like?

While there are a number of ways of organizing a review such as this, we look at three areas—information processing, competency, and individual differences—that we believe best reflect listening research, past and present.[1] We also believe the article achieves several other purposes. First, it acknowledges the pioneers and scholars whose early questions provided the building blocks for current study. Second, it demonstrates a unity of thought across the research that may not be immediately apparent or appreciated. Although this approach may suggest a greater coherency than actually existed among researchers, the similarities and differences across perspectives may be useful to future listening theory building and research. Finally, this review extends beyond the traditional focus of listening literature reviews (e.g., Wolvin, Halone, & Coakley, 1999; Wolvin, in press) to introduce important contributions from other fields.[2] After briefly introducing each perspective, we offer an organizational framework to link these lines of study and to provide a structure for assessing and generating new listening research. A concluding section suggests areas of future investigation.

PERSPECTIVES ON LISTENING

Listening as Information Processing

Few empirical studies of listening were conducted in the first half of the 20th century (Duker, 1971), primarily owing to the dominance of behaviorism in psychology

[1]Taking a social scientific approach in our review, we assume that the prime component of science is understanding (Berger, 1977). Our critiques reflect this view. Also underlying the three perspectives is the assumption that listening includes a set of identifiable skills, attitudes, and/or cognitive abilities that can be objectively formulated, measured, and taught. Finally, all perspectives share the belief that listening is a multidimensional process (i.e., encoding, decoding, construction of meaning, participant relationships, etc.) that is much more complex than originally perceived (Roberts, 1988; Rubin & Roberts, 1987).

[2]The most current literature reviews have been limited to research published in the *International Journal of Listening* (Wolvin, Halone, & Coakley, 1999), or to research reflecting the International Listening Association's definition of listening (Wolvin, in press)—the process of receiving, constructing meaning from, and responding to spoken and/or nonverbal messages (ILA, 2007).

and related disciplines (for review, see Mills, 1998). The "cognitive revolution" (for reviews, see Miller, 2003; Greenwood, 1999), however, led to the rise of human information processing models.[3] First proposed by Broadbent (1958), these models gained significant support and were eventually appropriated by fields outside psychology including communication, discourse processing, and listening. From this standpoint, listening was conceptualized as information processing and viewed as a cognitive activity involving the selection (attention, perception), organization (interpretation), and integration (storage, recall) of information (Imhof, in press; Mayer, 2003).

The basic idea behind this approach is that humans can be thought of as complex information processors that operate through successive stages, each of which can be identified and studied in a systematic fashion (Proctor & Vu, 2006). Most models include at least three stages: perception, response processing, and response selection (Johnson & Proctor, 2004). Moreover, most models attempt to assess three important aspects of the human information processor: the time course of stages, the nature of stages, and the nature of the memory systems that connect stages and assist in information storage and retrieval (Massaro, 1987).

Early research in the communication discipline reflected this view. These studies assumed a linear model of communication, whereby a source sends a message to a recipient whose job is simply to decode that message. Based on Nichols' (1948) definition of listening—the successful retention of information presented orally—researchers developed several tests of listening comprehension (e.g., Brown & Carlsen, 1955; Dow, 1955). In subsequent research, they attempted to find relationships between listening comprehension and other cognitive constructs such as inductive reasoning and general mental ability (Kelly, 1965; Spearrit, 1962).

While this approach was useful in understanding how individuals listen during lectures or situations requiring simple retention, this definition of listening ultimately relegated listening to "the acquisition of information" (Bostrom, 1990, p. 24), leading to an emphasis on measurement at the expense of theory building. Listening as comprehension also led to problems in assessment (Bostrom & Waldhart, 1983; Rubin & Roberts, 1987; Watson & Barker, 1988). For example, the test taker's level of literacy, critical thinking, and recall can confound measures of comprehension. Likewise, comprehension is subjective and variable, and the ability to generalize test findings to everyday life was limited. Most importantly, listening as comprehension did not address fundamental processes of inference or meaning making (Fitch-Hauser, 1984, 1990).

[3]Although early theorists (e.g., William James) recognized the importance of human cognition for psychology, the scientific study of cognition was largely ignored in favor of behaviorism. Behaviorists did not deny the existence of mind, but simply rejected the study of cognition, claiming it was unscientific.

Eventually, this simplistic and linear notion of listening began to be replaced by a more sophisticated view, that is, one that acknowledged the multidimensional nature of listening. As outlined above, listening as information processing is a cognitive activity involving the interpretation, storage, and recall of information. Goss (1982) provided a model in which listening and speaking/response bridged the storing and retrieval of information. Goss's model allowed researchers to study listening without regard to the "goodness" or "effectiveness" of listening. In this sense, listening is a spoken language perception problem that depends on individual ability to decipher and segment it into meaningful parts.

Most current definitions of listening (e.g., ILA, 2007; Wolvin & Coakley, 1996) reflect the assumptions of human information processing. It was also primarily through human information processing models that listening eventually found a place in the broader study of communication. However, it remained a classical linear model, with the "message sent" viewed as more important than the "message received" (Schramm, 1954). In contrast, discourse processing has a broader focus, conceptualizing listening as a process whereby a person: (1) selects information, including the effects of schemata and attention regulation; (2) organizes and interprets information based on prior knowledge, motivation, and cognitive and metacognitive strategies; and (3) integrates and responds (see van Dijk & Kintsch, 1983).

Discourse processing research often focuses on written discourse, which differs qualitatively from aural communication. Little research has addressed whether these findings can be generalized to spoken language and to authentic, naturally occurring speech. Research in this area, however, has helped listening scholars identify a number of factors intuitively related to listening processes: attention/perception, decoding/interpretation, working memory, long-term/schematic memory, and response preparation. In fact, most of these factors (e.g., attention, decoding, interpretation) have consistently been included in descriptions and stages of listening (e.g., Brownell, 2002; Wolvin & Coakley, 1996), while others (e.g., memory) are seeing a renewal of interest (e.g., Janusik, 2005; Worthington & Fitch-Hauser, in press).

To date, little research from this perspective has directly assessed listening. For example, psychological studies generally focus on signal detection or word recognition, assuming that information is a homogenous phenomenon. As a result, the nuanced nature of information processing in the context of ongoing conversation is left underdeveloped theoretically and underappreciated pragmatically. Although some work has been conducted in this area (Bostrom & Waldhart, 1980; Janusik, 2007), much remains to be done.

Listening as Competent Behavior

Our second perspective centers on descriptions of listening as competent behavior and is placed within the framework of communication competency models

(Spitzberg & Cupach, 1989). This research focuses on overt behavior, the measurement of listening as interactive (i.e., individuals both listen and speak), and the relationship between communicators (Kirk & Miller, 1986). Communication competency has its conceptual roots in classical rhetoric, which taught the strategic use of communication to accomplish specific objectives (Spitzberg & Cupach, 1984). Later linguistic models (Chomsky, 1957; Hymes, 1971) provided a basic framework for understanding listening competency. For example, Hymes (1979) conceptualized listening competency as communicators' perceptions that they have the knowledge and ability to use appropriate listening patterns in a given situation. Within this perspective, competency is defined as the ability to choose among available behaviors to successfully accomplish goals during a communication episode (Wiemann, 1978; Wiemann & Backlund, 1980).

It was not until the late 1970s that listening competency began to be addressed as something other than comprehension. During this period, listening instruments began measuring how nonverbal behaviors such as kinesics and vocalics can substantively affect attention, convey meaning, and alter perceptions (Jones & Mohr, 1976; Pearce, 1971). At the same time, scholars began exploring listening performance in specified contexts such as business and education (e.g., Brownell, 1985; Rubin & Feezel, 1986). This research found listening competency related to a variety of factors, including attentiveness, memory, and understanding. Likewise, research has linked listening competency to employee motivation, higher performance reviews, and overall job performance (Monge, Bachman, Dillard, & Eisenberg, 1982; Sypher, 1984). Thus, fundamental to this perspective is the view that an identifiable set of skills, attitudes, and abilities can be formulated and taught to improve individual performance.

The effect that relationships can have on behavioral choices in the listening process is another central component (Duran, 1983; Harrigan, 1985; Spitzberg & Hurt, 1987). Ultimately, competency is judged by the other person in the relationship (Rhodes, 1987), and these judgments can vary across contexts. Listening competency, then, involves the impression or judgment on the part of both participants concerning the appropriateness and effectiveness of communication behavior in specified contexts (Rubin, 1990). Reflecting this viewpoint, many of the studies and measurements of listening competency go beyond individual, self-report measures to include other reports, third-party assessments, and critical incident techniques (Rubin & Feezel, 1986; Wellmon, 1988). In fact, the distinctive feature of assessing competence is captured empirically in the locus of measurement issue: Who should rate listening?

Based on the above framework, three assumptions regarding listening competency can be formed (Bentley, 1997). First, competency is perceptual (Wiemann, 1978; Spitzberg & Cupach, 1984). Within this perspective, the achievement (or lack thereof) of interaction goals determines the appropriateness

and effectiveness of listening behavior. Second, competency is contextual. Not only do situational realities and constraints determine the "appropriateness" and "effectiveness" of behavior, but perceptions of competence also are bound by the context of a particular relationship. Thus, impressions of competence are based on the relational history as well as the actual behavior (Chomsky, 1965; Duran, 1983; Roloff & Kellermann, 1984). Finally, competency is functional—people accomplish listening goals, whether intentional or unintentional (Bowers & Bradac, 1982; Cooley & Roach, 1984; Wiemann, 1978).

Of course, researchers must address how to translate these assumptions into reliable and valid measures. Spitzberg's (1988) criteria provide us with a beginning point. Spitzberg starts with the premise that competency instruments must be designed within a particular theoretical framework and for particular theoretical purposes. Second, measurement should deal principally with overt behaviors and the instrument should be primarily interactive. Third, the instrument should be both context- and population-free and focus exclusively on communication competency. In this way, the instrument will come nearer to providing a comprehensive assessment of the quality of communication behaviors in general. Fourth, the instrument should be systematically designed and validated and generate sufficient reliability to warrant further use.

Despite the number of performance driven studies, the bulk of work from this perspective is atheoretical, approaching communication from a skills perspective and often focusing on training programs, thus violating Spitzberg's first criterion. As a result, there is no unified framework that can be used to organize and evaluate the competency skills currently identified by researchers. One notable exception is the development of the Organizational Listening Survey (OLS) (Husband, Cooper, & Monsour, 1988). The OLS was derived from Spitzberg's (1981) two-factor model of communication competency and focuses on impressions of listening behaviors within actual relationships with people who interact over time. It also identifies behaviors that allow individuals to interact appropriately and effectively in various contexts (Cooper & Buchanan, 2003; Cooper, Seibold, & Suchner, 1997). The initial model tested listening competency in terms of accuracy, that is, behaviors that confirm understanding of the message and support behaviors affirming the other person. Results indicate that effective listening behaviors reliably can be identified and understood in targeted relationships (e.g., peers, superior/subordinates) and specific contexts (e.g., classroom, workplace).

Implicit in the discussion of competency are issues associated with information processing, including accuracy and comprehension. Unfortunately, the emphasis on skills and training has overshadowed research efforts necessary to identify elements of listening competency. The consequence may be that the skills being taught in training programs do not fully capture the range of behaviors that comprise listening competency.

Listening as Individual Difference

Over the last two decades a variety of fields, including communication, health, marketing, and psychology, have explored the effects of individual differences on behavior. The increasing emphasis on this area of study reflects a growing awareness of how such differences may affect communicative interactions (Bouchard, 1993; Kagan & Snidman, 2004). Much of this research has focused on personality-based differences. Whether global (e.g., need for cognition) or more situational (e.g., communication apprehension), personality traits are believed to have motivational qualities that predispose individuals to act or not act in certain ways (Daly, 1987; Steinfatt, 1987). However, not all individual differences are personality based. For example, cognitive complexity was one of the first psychological constructs examined by listening scholars, in part because of its implications for information processing (Beatty & Payne, 1984). Cognitive complexity has been linked to a number of communication-related skills associated with perception, message generation, and message reception (Burleson & Caplan, 1998).

Cognitively complex individuals have more abstract, more organizationally complex, and better developed cognitive schemas about social information, which reflects the greater number of links among the elements composing their schemas (see Burleson & Caplan, 1998; Fiske & Taylor, 1991; Hoffman, 1992). They are generally better at attending to, encoding, interpreting, and recalling messages and conversations (Beatty & Payne, 1984; Neuliep & Hazleton, 1985, 1986). Ultimately, compared to those who are less complex, individuals high in cognitive complexity appear to be more sophisticated listeners.

Another area of individual difference is listening style preference (Watson & Barker, 1992; Watson, Barker, & Weaver, 1995). Although different situations place different demands upon the listener, listening "habits" influence how people typically approach listening (Langer, 1980). Thus, we may listen differently depending on our preference for people-, action-, content- or time-oriented listening (Watson & Barker, 1992; Watson et al., 1995). Interest in listening preferences has spawned a great deal of research, most linking the four preferences to a variety of personality characteristics, including personality type (Weaver, 1998; Villaume & Bodie, 2007; Worthington, 2003), empathy and conversational sensitivity (Chesebro, 1999; Weaver & Kirtley, 1995), and communication and receiver apprehension (Bodie & Villaume, 2003; Sargent, Weaver, & Kiewitz, 1997). Fewer studies have addressed the "contextual fit" between listening preference and the listening situation or how individual listening styles may adapt to changing contexts (Chesebro, 1999; Imhof, 2004; Worthington, 2001).

Empathy and empathetic listening have been the focus of other research in this area (Chesebro, 1999; Weaver & Kirtley, 1995). Certainly, empathy is central to relational listening and building relationships with others. Some researchers

distinguish between elements of empathy such as empathetic responsiveness and sympathetic responsiveness (Weaver & Kirtley, 1995) while others do not (cf. Bommelje, Houston, & Smither, 2003). Such distinctions are important because empathetic response style appears to vary with personality type. For example, highly empathetic individuals tend to have a high degree of sociability. Highly social individuals tend to engage in greater perspective taking and, as a result, are better able to express sympathetic responses to others. Thus, sociability has implications for listening. What we attend to, our ability to decode and interpret information, may be affected by our degree of sociability.[4]

Similarly, communication apprehension (CA) and receiver apprehension can affect our listening. Previous study suggests CA is associated with general social anxiety (Beatty, Heisel, Hall, Levine, & LaFrance, 2002), and that it has a variety of sources such as generalized anxiety and conditional anxiety (McCroskey, Beatty, Kearney, & Plax, 1985). The apparent relationship to general social anxiety means some individuals will feel greater anxiety in communication situations than others will. People high in CA can become so fixated on how others may evaluate their speaking abilities that even when they possess the ability, skill, motivation, and knowledge to communicate effectively with others, their anxiety interferes with their ability to do so. Research suggests that CA also affects how we listen, including our social relations and conversational skills (McCroskey, Daly, Martin, & Beatty, 1998). Persons high in CA become so focused on their personal communicative performance that they disregard or discount the importance of listening to others. Consequently, these anxious individuals may find their ability to decode, judge, and remember a message compromised.

Receiver apprehension (RA) qualitatively differs from CA in that it arises in reaction to incoming messages. RA influences some persons on a larger scale (i.e., across differing contexts), and to a larger degree than it does others. It is essentially a cyclical process, with apprehension arising from concerns either that a message may be misunderstood or that a topic is too complicated (Clark, 1989; Wheeless, 1975). This apprehension makes it difficult to concentrate; decreased concentration then affects our ability to process incoming information, negatively affecting the ability to comprehend. RA can arise when individuals face new information or new situations (i.e., primary anxiety), when we face what we believe is complex or conflicting information (i.e., secondary anxiety), or when we feel our logical skills are challenged (i.e., communication logics) (Preiss & Wheeless, 1989). In each case, the ability to listen successfully is affected.

[4]Although certainly relevant, the more than five decades of research on client-centered therapy originally developed by psychologist Carl Rogers are not reviewed here because there is little empirical data to support most theoretical claims associated with "active listening."

As reflected above, research into individual differences in listening is quite varied, often emerging from research in communication and in psychology. However, conceptual and methodological differences often make study outcomes difficult to compare. For example, previous studies have utilized dissimilar measures of personality and temperament (e.g., Eysenck Personality Questionnaire, Kiersey Temperament Sorter, Hogan Personality Inventory) and listening style (Watson et al., 1995; Pearce, Johnson, & Barker, 2003). Study findings generally reveal weak to moderate associations between listening constructs and the individual difference under study. Taken as a whole, research in this area suggests that many of these constructs may be interrelated, working in tandem to affect our listening processes. However, with few exceptions (Bodie & Villaume, 2003; Villaume & Bodie, 2007), most of this research has studied personality characteristics in isolation. People do not possess a "single" individual difference; they are multifaceted, reflecting numerous personality, temperament, and learned qualities. Thus, researchers must use more sophisticated techniques when examining the contributions that various individual differences may make to both general listening processes and to specific listening skills.

Summary of Perspectives

The current review highlights a number of similarities across these three perspectives. Unfortunately, much of the published listening research appears as independent endeavors, with few attempts to "pull together" these works with the broader goal of developing comprehensive listening models or theory. If the field of listening is to grow and mature, it is time to direct our efforts toward this greater goal. This is the focus of our next section.

AN ORGANIZING FRAMEWORK

Given the diversity of listening research, we suggest taking an approach that learning theorists and researchers have found to be particularly fruitful, namely the use of a heuristic model to organize and integrate past and present research findings, and to help identify areas that have been either under-researched or ignored (cf. Biggs, 2003). Figure 1 presents a model that includes three main components corresponding to the three perspectives previously reviewed: listening presage (listening as individual difference), listening process (listening as information processing), and listening outcome (listening as behavior). This model depicts listening as a composite behavior and identifies relevant variables assumed to be critically important to the process. This model depicts listening as a composite behavior and identifies relevant variables assumed to be critically important to its function. We expand on each component of the model in the following sections.

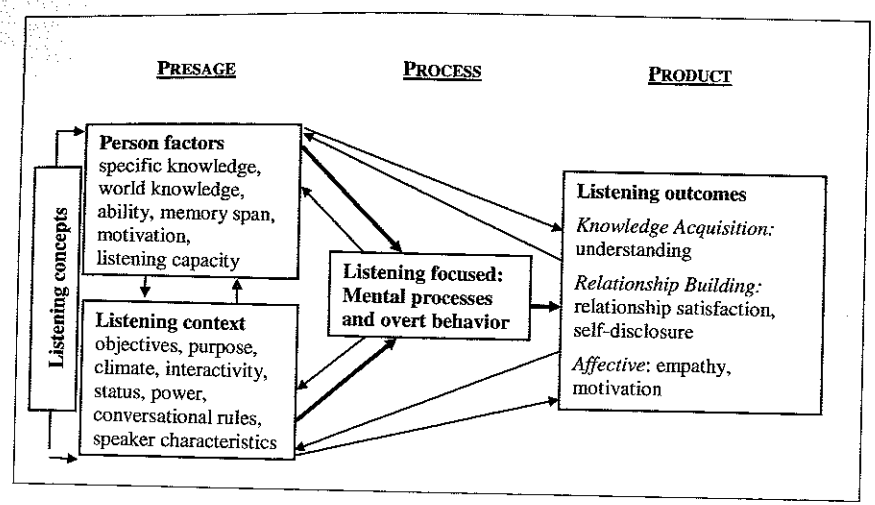

FIGURE 1 Systems model of the listening process (Imhof & Janusik, 2006).

Listening Presage

First, listening can be described as a function of personal and contextual preconditions (i.e., presage). These preconditions are influenced by one or more listening factors (Imhof & Janusik, 2006) that are activated based on felt need in particular situations. In other words, the listener first makes a decision (conscious or unconscious) (Kellermann, 1992) about whether listening should be initiated and the manner in which the allotment of attention and expenditure of energy should be orchestrated. This decision is influenced by several assessments. For example, the listener may assess whether the situational context suggests "easy" listening, such as listening to music, or "challenging" listening, such as listening to a lecture on a new topic. The course of action the listener chooses depends on the evaluation of the current listening task as more or less demanding.

It is here that personal and contextual presage become relevant. Personal factors determining the listening process include trait-like competencies and skills as well as state characteristics, affecting motivation and situational perceptions and decisions. We can hypothesize that trait characteristics and state variables may change the listening process, since it develops in response to situational demands. The same would hold for contextual presage, which includes those aspects that define a situation (e.g., the persons present in a situation, the type and purpose of the interaction) (Giles & Coupland, 1991). As a result, the outcome of the listening process may take on specific qualitative and quantitative characteristics. Accordingly, the amount of information exchanged and retained, the kind of relationship established, and the resulting affective outcome (e.g., emotions, moods, general affect) depend on the resources available and allocated to the listening task. Thus, the direct effect from presage to outcome is included as the listening process may not fully mediate these effects.

Listening Process

The listening process is conceptualized both as covert mental behavior and as overt behavior. As covert mental behavior, we appeal to the human information processing literature and assume there is some universal set of stages and processes that individuals traverse when presented with aural information. As indicated by recent advances in discourse processing research and theorizing, these processes are both (a) top-down and bottom-up as well as (b) controlled and automatic. First, listeners do not form impressions based merely on language elements such as the phonemes, morphemes, words, sentences, or paragraphs, of the speaker (bottom-up), because no information can be processed without the use of schema based processing (top-down). In other words, we assume that listeners are biased information processors relying on prior knowledge, prior conversational units, and relational history to interpret spoken language. Second, while much of the processing required to understand and respond to oral speech is automatic, it can be controlled under certain conditions. The transfer of information from working to long-term memory provides one example of effortful control. The specific linguistic, paralinguistic, and conversational gist that is transferred, stored, and recalled can be a controlled process, depending on individual motives and conversational goals.

We previously suggested that attention/perception, decoding/interpretation, working memory (WM), long-term/schematic memory (LTM), and response preparation were the processes most directly relevant to listening as an information processing task. Although a thorough model development is beyond the scope of the present article, we present the following four stages as a potential springboard to future theory building.

Attention

Attention has obvious implications for listening, as it reflects motivational properties that distinguish listening as an active process separate from the more passive notion of hearing. As Broadbent (1958) highlighted, our perceptual system "filters" out irrelevant information and possibly even stores some of this information in case it becomes relevant at subsequent points in the conversation (Deutsch & Deutsch, 1963; Treisman, 1960). We need tests for memory transfer and retrieval, most likely under laboratory conditions, to understand fully how our perceptual system manages this process in ongoing conversation.

Decoding/Interpretation

Decoding and interpretation are clearly related to early, and continued, interest in comprehension. This stage involves the assessment of naturally occurring, "in-the-moment" speech for its literal content while, possibly simultaneously, assessing its meaning in a given context. Research by Holtgraves (2002) shows that metaphors, for instance, are not processed literally. Instead, they are processed on a completely figurative level—with instantaneous recognition of their illocutionary as well as perlocutionary force. Protocols, in which individuals assess the meaning of metaphors and their literal interpretations while response time and brain wave activation are simultaneously measured, should prove fruitful in our efforts to learn more about this stage of listening.

Memory Systems

Although scholars have developed several models of memory and debate the number of systems we have and what functions they perform, at least two systems are important to the listening process: working memory (WM) and long-term memory (LTM). More importantly, people seem to be limited in the amount of information they can hold active at a one time (Miller, 1956). While conversational turns are short and generally adhere to the limits of our information processing system, we are often faced with situations requiring the need to hold large amounts of information in WM before responding. In addition, there are times when LTM is important to our ability to make sense of speech in given contexts (e.g., understanding rules associated with the context). We undoubtedly use information stored in LTM to understand ongoing speech, and, given that we process language faster than most people can speak, we are most likely transferring information from WM to LTM as the conversation unfolds.

The role of memory in listening recently has received greater attention, as listening scholars have come to recognize more fully its relationship to information processing. For example, Janusik (2005, 2007) recently proposed a measure of conversational listening grounded in a multiple component model of memory (Baddeley & Hitch, 1974), which looks at the role of both information processing and storage in listening. Her instrument, the Conversational Listening Span (CLS), is a "measure [of] the number of items that one can hold active, can paraphrase, and can respond to in the course of a conversation" (Janusik, 2007, p. 144). With the CLS, the overall conversational meaning is analyzed in contrast to traditional span tasks that examine specific words or phrases. This work holds great future research potential.

Response Preparation

Finally, response preparation occurs when individuals use their previously stored and currently activated knowledge to ascertain how to engage the speaker.

These may be backchannel responses, or individuals may offer other "appropriate responses" such as remaining silent, asking a question, offering a solution, or providing emotional support. Some of this information is likely to be pulled automatically from LTM, but novel situations may place added strain on our capacity to respond appropriately. Studying this phenomenon in different types of conversations may prove useful.

Overall, previous research in information processing suggests that at least five factors are relevant to listening in an ongoing conversation. The relationship among these elements is likely stage-like and reflexive, allowing for partial information transmission between stages as well as for a stage to cease operating when necessary. Likewise, the system is most likely some derivative of a parallel processing system whereby decisions are made in individual stages (McClelland & Rumelhart, 1988); however, a central executive may be necessary to explain how people can both memorize statements within dialogue and "get the gist" of a conversation as well. While we can utilize methods such as reaction time and cued and free recall, we also will need to develop new and innovative means of investigating these aspects of listening.

In addition to covert mental processes, listening as process also can be conceptualized as overt behavior. When we engage in conversational listening, our actions and reactions are interpreted by others, both as a sign of effective listening and as a sign that we are truly engaged. For instance, interpretive or empathic listening research highlights various behaviors that indicate support (Arnett & Nakagawa, 1983; Bostrom & Waldhart, 1980). Similarly, the workplace conception of listening used by Lewis and Reinsch (1988) refers to an interrelated set of activities, including attentiveness, nonverbal behavior, verbal behavior, perceived attitudes, and behavioral responses. Within specific contexts such as organizations and schools, effective listening behavior may be directly related to positive outcomes such as successful job performance, improved interpersonal relationships, and motivation (Brownell, 1987). Thus, not only does the covert mental activity of information processing appear to impact particular outcomes, but so too does the overt behavioral process of listening.

Listening Product

The last part of our model incorporates the varied outcomes of listening presage and listening process. In this model, we view outcomes in terms of knowledge acquisition, relationship building, and affect, although other concepts also may be relevant. As noted earlier, the literature on listening comprehension can inform most theorizing related to knowledge acquisition. Research in the area of second language lecture comprehension also may be useful. For instance, in his review of that literature, Flowerdew (1994) shows that variables such as speed of

delivery, accent, and lecture interactivity can influence the amount of information retained from lectures by English as Second Language learners.

The other two outcomes, relationship building and affect, are more speculative, given the lack of systematic research addressing these issues. In terms of relationship building, listening textbooks are filled with speculations and conjectures as to the impact of "good" and "bad" listening on relational outcomes as well as how men and women listen in different ways. Unfortunately, the research cited in support for many of these claims is based on methods or samples that preclude generalizing to larger populations (e.g., Covey, 1989; Tannen, 1990; see Goldsmith & Fulfs, 1999). Thus, future research should include a systematic evaluation of claims made about listening. Finally, while affect has been the focus of much psychological research, it is typically examined as an input variable as opposed to an outcome (e.g., Forgas, 1995). The model presented here allows for affect to act as an influence on listening as information processing but also addresses it as an outcome of listening presage and process.

In sum, the model presented in Figure 1 allows us to organize the previously reviewed perspectives and to locate the investigated variables within a larger, more coherent theoretical structure. For example, the current review highlights previously studied elements of the presage (e.g., communication and receiver apprehension, cognitive complexity). Based on this model, it is now possible to derive additional testable hypotheses (e.g., the impact of receiver apprehension on the resulting affect in a listening situation). More importantly, the model provides a heuristic lens through which to view the future of theory building and testing within a more unified field of listening.

However, the following important caveat should be noted: The model presented here is preliminary and should be critiqued and tested. While the initial work of Imhof and Janusik (2006) provides a foundation for discovering the listening concepts most relevant across situations, the processes by which different concepts are activated should be explored. For example, future work on listening presage needs to evaluate and identify the individual and situational variables most likely to influence listening processes and outcomes. In addition, models of the listening process should also be generated and tested. We provide a start toward this development by identifying several information processing stages likely to be most relevant to listening. However, research is needed in several important areas:

1. how predispositions affect specific listening process stages,
2. what particular outcomes will arise from certain processing constraints, and
3. clarification of the nature of activation that takes place in order for listening concepts to influence motivation and ability.

Finally, research should attend to the multiple outcomes of the listening process. Such work could start by testing claims lacking sufficient empirical evidence.

Taking into account these challenges, it is likely that listening research, at least in the immediate future, will continue to be an interdisciplinary endeavor.

CONCLUSION

By most accounts, listening as an area of scientific inquiry is in its early adolescence. As indicated at the beginning of this essay, listening research has borrowed concepts and constructs from a variety of fields and areas, resulting in commentary, consternation, and occasional conflict among listening scholars. These intellectual debates often reflect varied approaches taken by listening scholars, which carry differing definitions, methods, and theoretical frameworks. As the listening field grows and matures, listening scholars must begin addressing, and hopefully resolving, these controversies. Thus, the field's greatest strength is also its greatest weakness, that is, its willingness to apply concepts from related fields. The challenge for listening scholars, then, is to integrate these different approaches, to recognize the contribution and limitations of these various viewpoints to listening research, and to begin building useful theories of listening processes and outcomes using the strengths of varying perspectives. We end this paper asking the question that originally inspired it: What would a unified field of listening look like? Only future research and theorizing will tell.

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State of the Context: Listening in Education

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Educational listening research in the last 80 years covers a broad spectrum. Early research investigated the amount of time spent listening. Later studies identified students' comprehension of oral material. Aspects most often researched fall into the following categories: listening elicitation, listening benefits, and listening instruction. Because instructors must meet the needs of a variety of student listening and learning styles, a significant amount of listening research investigates listening and learning preferences. This research emphasizes the need to identify successful teaching strategies to help teachers elicit effective listening. Teachers have long believed that students who listen better are better students, and research seems to corroborate that effective listeners achieve academic success. Few schools offer listening instruction, and even in courses where listening is supposedly emphasized, only 7% of the time is devoted to listening. The impact of listening instruction is ambiguous despite anecdotal evidence suggesting that instruction improves listening. Listening instruction is especially scarce in primary and secondary schools notwithstanding the fact that listening is linked to both literacy and academic success.

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