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Listening Competence in Initial Interactions I: Distinguishing Between What Listening Is and What Listeners Do

Graham D. Bodie [a], Kellie St. Cyr [b], Michelle Pence [a], Michael Rold [a] & James Honeycutt [a]

[a] Department of Communication Studies, The Louisiana State University

[b] Department of Music and Theatre, Slidell High School

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Graham D. Bodie
Department of Communication Studies
The Louisiana State University

Kellie St. Cyr
Department of Music and Theatre
Slidell High School

Michelle Pence, Michael Rold, and James Honeycutt
Department of Communication Studies
The Louisiana State University

The impressions we form of others during initial interactions are powerful. These impressions are a product of various implicit theories — mental representations of people and actions. This article investigates the structure of implicit theories of listening used when forming impressions of others after an initial encounter. Specifically, three studies are reported that, together, iteratively build an empirical database of the attributes (what competent listening is) and behaviors (what competent listeners do) associated with effective listening in initial interactions. The results help construct an evidence-based, preliminary model that can be used to investigate the role and structure of implicit theories of listening.

Although there are countless ways to organize the vast, multidisciplinary field of listening research (Bavelas & Gerwing, 2011; Bodie, Worthington, Imhof, & Cooper, 2008), perhaps the most parsimonious classification is to divide the research based on underlying theoretical motivations. The first and largest class of research has attempted to develop and test *explicit* theories of listening, that is, deductive efforts to conceptualize the nature of listening (for review see Bodie,

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Correspondence concerning this article should be addressed to Graham D. Bodie, Department of Communication Studies, The Louisiana State University, 136 Coates Hall, Baton Rouge, LA 70803. E-mail: gbodie@lsu.edu

2009). A second and less robust research effort has been to discover *implicit* theories of listening or mental representations of listening that individuals hold in their cognitive systems. This literature shares a general interest with social cognitive research in discovering how "the organized thoughts people have about human interaction" (Roloff & Berger, 1982, p. 21) influence action (for reviews see Roskos-Ewoldsen & Monahan, 2007). Such research has discovered that both laypersons and professionals conceptualize listening in myriad ways (Halone, Cunconan, Coakley, & Wolvin, 1998; Imhof & Janusik, 2006; Witkin & Tochim, 1997); however, implicit theories of listening are moderated by individual and situational differences (Halone & Pecchioni, 2001; Halone, Wolvin, & Coakley, 1997; Imhof, 2003). Consequently, the implicit theories of listening people use when forming impressions of others likely vary as a function of the individual with whom and the situation within which the interaction takes place, making it necessary to investigate implicit theories of listening in various interaction environments (see also Roloff & Kellermann, 1984).

Though implicit theories of listening likely influence the impressions we form of all types of others in all types of situations, our interest lies within the context of initial interactions. When two individuals first meet, each is forming impressions of the other; indeed, "our impressions of others undoubtedly are formed primarily during our initial encounters with them" (Grahe & Bernieri, 1999, p. 253). It is during our initial encounters that we decide our preferences for future interaction, and our first impressions can strongly influence subsequent relational progression (Fiske & Taylor, 1991; Honeycutt, 1993; Kellermann & Lim, 1989). Not surprisingly, first impressions can influence a host of important outcomes in a variety of contexts from friendships and potential romantic relationships to more platonic relationships (e.g., supervisor-subordinate, healthcare provider-patient) (Metts & Grohskopf, 2003). Thus, investigating implicit theories of listening within initial interactions is applicable to a variety of applied settings and stands to inform a range of theories.

Empirical data suggest that our first impressions are related to the communicative competence we perceive about an interlocutor (Pavitt, 1981), and research exploring the structure and function of implicit theories of communication has been theoretically and practically fruitful (Honeycutt, 1993; Pavitt & Haight, 1986). Investigating implicit theories of listening also stands to contribute to theory building efforts by providing empirical evidence concerning the connections between various behaviors and their associated attributes, ultimately suggesting an explicit model of how people form impressions of others as good listeners. Likewise, this sort of investigation seems highly practical insofar as various listening attributes and behaviors fill the pages of our textbooks and training manuals oftentimes without a solid basis in empirical fact; if our training lacks empirical support we may be doing more harm than good (Bodie, 2010).

In sum, research on implicit theories of listening begins with an assumption now considered axiomatic in the social cognitive literature: when "people encounter novel phenomena, they generate plausible hypotheses to account for them and make them understandable" (Hewes & Planalp, 1987, p. 152; for review see Moskowitz, 2005). When forming impressions of others one internal source influencing judgments is the implicit theory of listening subscribed to by the individual observer. But do implicit theories of listening within initial interaction exist, and, if so, what is their nature? In particular, this article addresses the following question: what are the attributes (what listening is) and behaviors (what listeners do) associated with competence in listening, especially as they pertain to initial interactions?

ARE INITIAL IMPRESSIONS BASED ON LISTENING-RELATED TRAITS AND BEHAVIORS?

Past research exploring implicit theories of listening can be organized into two broad categories. The first category contains studies that utilize preexisting notions of listening derived from the scholarly literature to organize and classify people's listening conceptualizations. For example, Haas and Arnold (1995) asked 48 employees of a single organization to list attributes of a communicatively competent co-worker in one of several business-related situations (e.g., when requesting information, help). These attributes were then coded for descriptors of listening found in the extant literature (e.g., listens well, is open-minded). Although these results suggest that people use listening-related attributes to describe communicatively competent co-workers, the primary limitation of the Hass and Arnold study is the failure to ascertain whether traits such as "understanding," "patient," or "considerate" are related to competence in listening or, alternatively, to some other competency instead of or in addition to listening-related competency. Indeed, conceptualizations of listening found in the extant literature share much conceptual space with other competencies, some of which are similar to (e.g., message reception; Wyer & Adaval, 2003) and others of which are distinct from (e.g., empathy; Eisenberg, 2000) listening, per se (see Bodie, in press).

The second category of research that investigates implicit theories of listening consists of studies that inductively derive listening conceptualizations from participants who are asked to describe the listening skills and attitudes of an "effective listener" (Coakley, Halone, & Wolvin, 1996). This methodological strategy effectively deals with the aforementioned limitation; however, this strategy assumes that "effective listener" constitutes a unique schema that people use when evaluating others. The validity of this assumption should be questioned especially since listening is a multidimensional construct consisting of potentially dozens of subordinate attributes.

In the initial conceptualization of communicative competence by Wiemann (1977), for instance, listening was assumed to be a fundamental dimension upon which people make competency evaluations; however, in his model listening was not one-dimensional but instead consisted of several abilities to understand and be open-minded and supportive. In their thorough review of the communication competence literature, Spitzberg and Cupach (2002) identified two skill clusters — altercentrism and interaction management — that seem associated with listening; however, the term listening appears only once. Likewise, abilities as diverse as interaction involvement and conversational sensitivity likely share much in common with listening yet their conceptual similarity is only beginning to be investigated (Bodie, 2011, in press). Overall, the degree to which various attributes are connected in an organized cognitive schema called "good listening" is unclear. Although most agree that listening is not a unidimensional social skill, there is little agreement of the attributes that make up its multidimensionality (Brownell, 2010).

Moreover, past research has conflated listening attributes and specific behaviors that may signal good listening. In all past research, participants have listed a variety of items, some considered behaviors (e.g., asks questions, eye contact) and others considered traits (e.g., attentive, understanding). As noted by Pavitt and Haight (1985), the important distinction is between "beliefs expressing what an object 'is' (attributes) and beliefs expressing what an object 'does' (behaviors)" (p. 233). Indeed, listening scholarship and textbook treatments of listening alike have generated a laundry list of particular behaviors putatively associated with good and poor

listening (see Imhof, 2003). Some behaviors such as notetaking (Di Vesta & Gray, 1972) and eye contact (Argyle & Cook, 1976) have rather robust empirical support, whereas other behaviors such as paraphrasing (Weger, Castle, & Emmett, 2010) lack an empirical consensus as to their relationship to good or poor listening. In addition, research fails to provide the link between specific behaviors and superordinate traits leaving the literature on listening skills quite fragmented and void of a theoretical base (Bodie, 2009; Wolvin, 2010). Thus, in the studies that follow, we ascertain both what competent listening is (attributes) and what competent listeners do (behaviors) in initial interactions and stress that this distinction is important for future theory building and for efforts aimed at educating people about the importance of implicit theories of listening.

RESEARCH GOALS

Our impressions of others likely span several interrelated listening attributes such as responsiveness, understanding, interest, and attentiveness as well as attributes such as social relaxation that have little or nothing to do with listening (Wiemann, 1977). However, empirical evidence linking listening at the superordinate level to attributes at a more subordinate level is lacking (see Spitzberg & Cupach, 2002). That is, research to date has failed to ascertain the specific attributes associated within implicit theories of listening. As for the behaviors enacted by others, some of them are likely associated with lay notions of (in)effective listening, whereas others likely have little to do with listening-related impressions. The research reported below will tease out these behaviors and attempt to tie them to specific listening-related attributes.

In the first study participants are asked to list characteristics that lead to their evaluating others as competent communicators after an initial encounter. This strategy allows open-ended and unprompted elicitation of characteristics and does not assume a distinct schema for listening competence. To address the limitation of research reported by Haas and Arnold, participants are subsequently asked the degree to which listed characteristics are associated with competence in listening. Each subsequent study builds from Study 1 to develop an evidence-based, working model of the structure and potential functions of implicit theories of listening. The general discussion details our preliminary model and outlines future research.

STUDY 1

Past research exploring implicit theories of listening is limited by either (a) not assessing the relationship between participant-generated characteristics and ratings of listening competence (Haas & Arnold, 1995) or (b) assuming that a distinct schema for good listening exists (Halone et al., 1998; Halone et al., 1997). Thus, Study 1 seeks to generate a list of general traits and specific behaviors that participants readily associate with competent communication and to ascertain the degree to which any of them are related to impressions of good listening.

Method

Participants

Undergraduate students ($N = 352$; 209 female, 144 male) enrolled in Communication Studies courses at The Louisiana State University (LSU) completed this study as part of their research

requirement. Freshman ($n = 98$), sophomore ($n = 113$), junior ($n = 60$), and senior ($n = 80$) participants reported a mean age of 20.44 years ($SD = 3.55$), were primarily Caucasian ($n = 285$), and represented a variety of majors ($N = 9$).

Procedures

After completing informed consent procedures, participants were asked to imagine they were just introduced to "Alex" by a mutual friend. Participants were asked to have a five-minute retroactive imagined interaction (Honeycutt, 2003) and directed to think specifically about how they introduced themselves, the topics likely discussed, and how the conversation might end. They were then told to imagine that they believed Alex was a "communicatively competent" individual. Participants were then provided with up to 20 individual text boxes, one at a time, in which they were asked to list "one characteristic or behavior that you feel would contribute to you concluding someone in an initial interaction is 'communicatively competent.'" After they finished listing characteristics, the computer generated each response the participant had listed in the previous section allowing the participant to rate these responses on a 6-point scale bounded by *definitely a characteristic of listening competence* (6) and *definitely NOT a characteristic of listening competence* (1).

Results

Data Coding

There were 3,102 individual responses; the majority of participants (58%) listed eight or fewer characteristics. In order to generate a more parsimonious classification of listening characteristics, the open-ended responses generated by participants were read and re-read by the first and second authors. This open coding (Strauss & Corbin, 1990) led to the development of the coding scheme found in Table 1. Using the established categories, 78% of the data were codeable; other responses did not appear frequently enough to constitute more categories.

Two undergraduate research assistants were trained by the second author to use the coding scheme and classify each participant response into one category. On a random sample (10%) of the responses, coders agreed 83% of the time and obtained sufficient intercoder reliability using Cohen's Kappa (.81; Cohen, 1960) and, thus, independently coded half of the remaining data each. The frequencies for responses generated in each category are listed in Table 1.

Primary Analyses

Each typed response was replaced with its category number (see Table 1) to calculate a mean and standard deviation for the "relationship to listening competence" for each of the 13 substantive categories across all 20 possible boxes (see Procedure). Thus, for each of the 13 categories there were potentially 20 means and standard deviations each with a different sample size.[1] To generate an overall mean and standard deviation for each category, the third and fourth authors conducted a meta-analysis of the means and standard deviations for each

[1]For instance, the category "eye contact" was listed in the first box by 47 participants who generated a mean listening competence rating of 5.36 ($SD = 1.07$) and in the fourth box by 13 participants who generated a mean listening competence rating of 5.15 ($SD = 1.07$).

TABLE 1
Communication Skill Categorization Rubric, Study 1

Category	*Description*	*Examples*
1. Eye Contact ($n = 161$)	Statements that reflect the *behaviors* of looking, eye contact, or gaze.	"keeps eye contact," "eyes meet mine," "looks at me"
2. Questioning ($n = 59$)	Statements that reflect the behaviors of asking questions about the other person or in response to others speaking.	"asks questions," "asks about my interests," "asks simple questions"
3. Responsiveness ($n = 105$)	Statements that reflect the target's responsiveness.	"responds well," "nods head while I talk," "shows interest," "answers my questions appropriately," "gives relevant responses."
4. Understanding ($n = 173$)	Statements that reflect a demonstration of understanding or compassion.	"understanding," "caring," "compassionate," "demonstrates understanding," "open"
5. Listening ($n = 107$)	Statements that reflect the act of listening.	"listens," "good listener," "open to listening"
6. Pays Attention ($n = 119$)	Statements that reflect the recognition that target is paying attention.	"pays attention," "is attentive," "focused"
7. Clarity ($n = 64$)	Statements that reflect the target's ability to speak clearly, as well as the respondent's ability to understand.	"speaks clearly," "easy to understand," "enunciates," "speaks loud and clearly"
8. Conversational Flow ($n = 312$)	Statements that reflect behaviors indicative of a smoothness of conversation.	"contributes to the conversation," "doesn't dominate the conversation," "balance of conversation," "not awkward," "makes you feel comfortable," "quiet when I'm speaking," "can hold his end of the conversation," "generates discussion"
9. Intelligence/Competence ($n = 403$)	Statements that reflect a demonstration of the target's intelligence or competence.	"speaks with knowledge," "smart," "intelligent," "good vocabulary," "knowledgeable," "competent," "uses proper grammar"
10. Friendly/Polite ($n = 243$)	Statements that reflect a target with a warm or friendly personality.	"friendly," "smiling," "inviting," "welcoming," "personable"
11. Confident/Extraversion ($n = 209$)	Statements that reflect outgoing or confident personality or behavior.	"confident," "self-esteem," "speaks with confidence," "secure," "self-assured"
12. Nonverbal/Body Language ($n = 383$)	Statements that reflect the target's ability to use appropriate nonverbal behaviors such as gesturing and not fidgeting .	"gesture often," "speaks with hands," "body language," "appropriate proximity"
13. Humor ($n = 88$)	Statements that reflect the target's sense of humor.	"funny," "sense of humor," "makes jokes," "makes me laugh"
14. Unable to Code ($n = 676$)	Statements that did not appear to fit the other 13 categories and did not appear readily enough to validate an additional category.	"nonsocial," "awkward," "appearance"

category, placing more weight on means with more responses and less weight on means with fewer responses.

As seen in Table 2, participants indicated that the attributes "listening" and "pays attention" were quite characteristic of listening competence; the difference between listening and pays attention was statistically similar, $t\ (224) = 1.84$, $p = .07$, $r^2 = .02$. The next group consisted of the

TABLE 2
Meta-Analysis for Means and Standard Deviations for Each Listening Attribute Category

	Study 1				*Study 2*			
			95% CI				*95% CI*	
Category	*M*	*SD*	*Low*	*High*	*M*	*SD*	*Low*	*High*
Listening	5.73[a]	.52	5.63	5.83	—	—	—	—
Pays Attention	5.57[a]	.75	*5.44*	*5.70*	5.62[a]	.62	*5.52*	*5.72*
Responsiveness	5.31[b]	1.10	*5.10*	*5.52*	5.27[b]	.83	*5.14*	*5.40*
Eye Contact	5.05[b]	1.11	*4.88*	*5.22*	5.18[bc]	.98	*5.02*	*5.34*
Questioning	5.00[bc]	.96	*4.76*	*5.24*	5.11[bc]	.88	*4.97*	*5.25*
Understanding	4.75[c]	1.47	*4.53*	*4.97*	4.62[d]	1.17	*4.43*	*4.81*
Conversational Flow	4.28[d]	1.57	*4.11*	*4.45*	5.02[c]	.88	*4.88*	*5.16*
Friendly/Polite	3.92[e]	1.48	*3.73*	*4.11*	5.41[ab]	1.78	*5.23*	*5.79*
Intelligence/Competence	3.88[e]	1.68	*3.72*	*4.04*	3.04[f]	1.49	*2.80*	*3.28*
Confident/Extraversion	3.85[e]	1.57	*3.64*	*4.06*	3.06[f]	1.55	*2.81*	*3.31*
Nonverbal/Body Language	3.78[e]	1.78	*3.60*	*3.96*	4.73[d]	1.23	*4.53*	*4.93*
Humor	3.28[f]	1.34	*3.00*	*3.56*	3.01[f]	1.53	*2.77*	*3.25*
Clarity	3.30[f]	1.60	*2.91*	*3.69*	3.55[e]	1.50	*3.31*	*3.79*

Note. Means with different subscripts are statistically different at $p < .05$ within columns.

categories responsiveness, eye contact, and questioning followed by understanding. Ability to ensure a smooth conversational flow was slightly more related to listening competence than was friendly/polite, which was statistically different from the group containing intelligence, confidence, and body language. The last two categories, having a good sense of humor and clarity in speech, were not perceived to be characteristic of listening competence.

Brief Discussion

Study 1 sought to identify listening-related characteristics that people use when making competency judgments of others during an initial interaction. When asked, individuals reported a range of attributes (what listening is) and behaviors (what listeners do) that they putatively use when making competence evaluations. Attributes associated with competence in listening include vague notions of "listening well" and "good listener" as well as terms like "pays attention" and "remains focused," which were presented in just fewer than 4% of all responses. These two categories, "listening" and "pays attention," constituted just fewer than 10% of total responses and were the two categories rated the most characteristic of listening competence out of all 13 categories. Other categories that seem characteristic of listening competence include "responsiveness" (3.4%), "eye contact" (5.2%), "questioning" (1.9%), "understanding" (5.6%), "conversational flow" (10.1%), and "friendly/polite" (7.8%). Two of these categories, eye contact and questioning, contained only behaviors, whereas the other categories included attributes and behaviors.

Overall, participants indicated that when others in initial interactions, for instance, nod, show interest, maintain eye contact, ask questions, demonstrate understanding, do not interrupt, and smile, they are likely to view them as competent listeners; behaviors such as making jokes, using proper grammar, speaking with hands, and not fidgeting do not necessarily have much to do

with listening competence. Of course, these findings may not appear terribly earth shattering. Indeed, these results are in line with popular and textbook treatments of listening as well as several models of communicative competence. Nevertheless, these data help to provide empirical support for claims such as "listening involves paying attention" and "active listeners . . . communicate attention and understanding . . . [to their] conversational partners" (McCornack, 2010, Ch. 5) by engaging in behaviors such as eye contact and appropriate responding (Adler, Rosenfeld, & Proctor, 2006). Since, to date, linking specific attributes and behaviors to listening competence has been highly speculative and largely extrapolated from research on the clinician-patient relationship (Jones, 2011; Weger et al., 2010), this study provides some initial substance for such claims.

STUDY 2

Although Study 1 provides some substance to support otherwise dubious claims, as an initial exploration, it has several limitations. We address two specific limitations in Study 2. First, the categories found in Table 1 were composed of several related characteristics and behaviors. Thus, although the relationship between each *response* and listening competence was determined by participants, the relationship between each *category* and listening competence was ultimately determined by us, the researchers, as opposed to participants themselves. Thus, we attempt to cross-validate these results with an independent sample of participants. Second, although several participants listed specific behaviors (what listeners do), they more often listed attributes (what listening is). Although useful when charting attributes more or less associated with competence in listening, relying on broad data provides little knowledge regarding the relationship between specific behaviors and attributes and the degree to which certain behaviors should, for instance, be stressed in books and training programs as essential to making a good listening impression. Thus, we sought to uncover specific behaviors associated with listening-attributes.

Method

Participants

Undergraduate students ($N = 150$; 112 female, 48 male) enrolled in Communication Studies courses at LSU completed this study as part of a research requirement. Participants reported a mean age of 20.29 years ($SD = 2.21$), were primarily Caucasian ($n = 136$), and represented 13 academic majors. All class ranks were represented: freshman ($n = 30$), sophomore ($n = 63$), junior ($n = 40$), and senior ($n = 26$). No participants had signed up for or completed Study 1.

Procedures

After providing informed consent, participants were randomly assigned to one of six conditions and directed to a computer where all materials were presented. Participants were then asked to list specific behaviors that might lead them to think someone was understanding ($n = 24$), a good listener ($n = 24$), responsive ($n = 24$), paying attention ($n = 26$), enabling conversational flow ($n = 27$), or friendly ($n = 25$). Each participant was provided with eight total boxes they

could use to list behaviors and told they could use as many or as few as needed. After listing specific behaviors, the computer generated each response the participant had listed in the previous section, and the participant rated those characteristics and behaviors as more or less related to listening competence (1 = *definitely a characteristic of listening competence;* 6 = *definitely NOT a characteristic of listening competence*).

The second part of the study directed participants to an online survey where they completed a scale assessing the relationship of the categories coded in Study 1 to listening-related impressions. Specifically, participants were asked to assess the degree to which 12 of the 13 substantive categories established in the coding rubric of Study 1 are "related to impressions of the other person as a listener"[2] on a scale from 1 (*has nothing to do with impressions of listening*) to 6 (*has very much to do with impressions of listening*).

Results

Validating Study 1 Results

Table 2 presents the descriptive statistics for the 12 categories from Study 1 assessed with this independent sample of participants. To aid in the interpretation of these data, we used the 95% confidence intervals from Study 1. Means for the validation sample that fall within the Study 1 confidence interval (CI) suggest similarity in perceptions, whereas means that fall outside of these intervals suggest differing perceptions of the association between an attribute and listening competence (see Masson & Loftus, 2003).

Using this criterion, seven categories fell within the predicted range suggesting that participants in both studies found pays attention, responsiveness, eye contact, questioning, understanding, humor, and clarity equally related (or not) to listening competence. Three categories achieved means outside and higher than the upper limit of the CI suggesting that participants in Study 2 found conversational flow, friendliness, and nonverbal/body language to have more to do with impressions of listening than did participants in Study 1. Similarly, two categories achieved means outside and lower than the lower limit of the CI suggesting that participants in Study 2 found intelligence and confidence to have less to do with impressions of listening than did participants in Study 1. Indeed, comparison of confidence intervals for these five categories (conversational flow, friendliness, nonverbal/body language, intelligence, and confidence) across the two studies shows no degree of overlap. Overall, seven of the 12 categories achieved a similar relation to listening competence as found in Study 1 suggesting partial validation for our coding scheme. Perhaps one reason that the other five categories differed is that the various behaviors that constitute these broad categories have different relations to listening competence.

Specific Behaviors Related to Broad Listening Attributes

Participants provided a total of 712 open-ended responses across all six attributes used to elicit responses (e.g., listening, pays attention). After reading through these responses several

[2]Since participants were asked to rate how characteristics are associated with listening, having them rating "listens well" seemed unnecessary.

times, the first and third author each concluded that many of the responses did not constitute behaviors. For instance, participants listed broad traits such as "caring," "compassionate," and "outgoing" as well as vague characteristics such as "listens well" and "engages in conversation." By defining behaviors as "specific actions a listener can accomplish in an interaction that may be related to one or more characteristics or traits," 365 specific behaviors were retained for coding. After reading these behaviors several times and discussing the frequency of occurrence and specificity desired in a coding scheme, the first and third authors generated the coding rubric found in Table 3.

An undergraduate research assistant was trained by the third author to use the coding scheme and classify the behaviors. On a random sample of the responses (17.8%; 65 total responses), they obtained sufficient inter-coder reliability ($\alpha = .76$; Krippendorff, 2007) and, thus, independently coded half of the remaining data each. The frequencies for responses generated in each category are listed in Table 4. Using 19 substantive categories, 95% ($n = 346$) of the specific behaviors were able to be coded.

Table 5 presents the behaviors in six groups that correspond to the statistical similarity in mean ratings for each behavior. The groups can be interpreted as more to less related to listening competence with the final group (F) having very little to do with listening competence. From these data it appears that a wide range of specific behaviors are perceived as related to listening competence.

Brief Discussion

Study 2 was conducted with two primary goals. First, we sought to validate ratings of attributes as characteristic (or not) of listening competence. Results from participant ratings in this study were quite similar to those found in Study 1. In particular, participants in each study found pays attention, responsiveness, eye contact, questioning, and understanding equally (and highly) related to listening competence; participants in both studies rated humor and clarity as equally unrelated to listening competence. Although five of the categories were rated either more (conversational flow, friendliness, and nonverbal/body language) or less (intelligence and confidence) characteristic of listening competence in this study as compared to results from Study 1, perhaps participants had different specific behaviors in mind when making these judgments.

Thus, the second purpose of this study was to investigate specific behaviors that are more or less associated with listening competence and with specific listening-related attributes. When looking at the behaviors listed for each specific listening-related attribute (e.g., understanding, responsive), we can begin to ascertain the degree to which particular behaviors are more indicative of particular attributes. For the category understanding, behaviors coded as *offers advice, opinions, perspectives, and personal experience* were listed 25.6% of the time. Although only one other behavior, *eye contact*, was listed more than 10% of the time in the understanding category, other behaviors indicative of perceptiveness were listed with moderate frequency. Specifically, *subject appropriate responding* and *extended responding* both constituted 9% of the behaviors listed in this category. It appears that when engaged in an initial interaction people who establish and maintain eye contact, interject themselves and their viewpoints, and respond appropriately are likely to be viewed as understanding which, in turn, leads to the impression they are a good listener.

TABLE 3
Coding Rubric for Specific Behaviors, Study 2

Category	*Description*	*Examples*
1. Eye Contact	Statements that reflect the behaviors of looking, eye contact, gaze, etc.	Makes eye contact Focuses on me and not anything else Looks you in the eye
2. Head Nods	Statements that reflect the behaviors of nodding, head nods, etc.	Nodding head Nodding at appropriate times Nods in understanding
3. Asks Questions	Statements that reflect the behavior of asking questions	Asks questions about what I say Asks questions about statements I make Asks me questions on the same topic
4. Facial Expressions	Statements that reflect behaviors referencing the face	Uses nonverbal communication such as facial expressions Makes appropriate facial gestures to the topic Uses facial expressions to show interest
5. Focused Body Language/Position	Statements that reflect behaviors of body language that seems to help the person "focus" or "be attentive"	Body facing speaker Is facing me and seems engaged Body position is faced towards you
6. Hand Gestures	Statements that reflect behaviors that indicate the person is using hand gestures to help the conversation move forward	Uses hand movements Mannerisms like talking with their hands
7. Smiles/Laughs	Statements that reflect behaviors that indicate the person is smiling and/or laughing during the conversation	Laughs at jokes Smiles There may be smiling or laughter Laughs when I tell jokes
8. Tells Jokes/Is Witty	Statements that reflect behaviors that indicate the person tells funny jokes or is quick witted	Person is humors because he tells good jokes Do not try to tell jokes that are inappropriate Tells inappropriate jokes
9. Verbal and Physical Composure	Statements that reflect behaviors that indicate the person is calm and collected; includes silence, pausing, clarity in speech, and body language that is "relaxed" (but not focused)	Doesn't fidget No awkward pauses Speaks clearly

(*Continued*)

TABLE 3
(Continued)

Category	*Description*	*Examples*
10. Paraphrasing	Statements that reflect behaviors that indicate the listener is repeating back what the speaker said	Repeating back and paraphrasing what the speaker said Paraphrase what the speaker said Repeats back what you said
11. Extended Responding	Statements that reflect behaviors that indicate the listener is responding with "more than simple phrases" such as "yes" and "uh-huh"	The person says full statements instead of short statements like yes or no Elaborates on topics being discussed Builds on what I have said
12. Back Channel Responding	Statements that reflect behaviors that indicate the listener is responding with simple statements like "yeah" to keep the conversation going	They say things like "yeah" and "right" while you are talking Says things like "yes" and "uh-huh" while someone else is speaking
13. Self-Disclosure	Statements that reflect behaviors that indicate the person discloses about him or herself	Openly tells me their name. Tells me about their favorite activities Gives information about themselves
14. Interrupting/Changing Subject	Statements that reflect behaviors that indicate the person is or is not letting the other finish speaking or is staying on topic (is not changing the subject)	Do not interrupt me Does not cut me off in a conversation does not stray away from topic or try and change the subject
15. Offers Advice, Opinions, Perspectives, and Personal Experience	Statements that reflect behaviors that indicate the person is offering advice, a personal opinion, a personal experience, or story in response to what was just said	Has an opinion on what is said Adds own opinion Tells a story that pertains to the conversation at hand
16. Subject Appropriate Responding	Statements that reflect behaviors that indicate the person is responding to the topic or what was just said in an appropriate or relevant manner	Responds with feedback on subject When responds he says something that pertains to what I was talking about Keeps the conversation flowing by bringing up relevant topics
17. Answers Questions	Statements that reflect behaviors that indicate the person is answering questions posed in the conversation	Answering questions asked by the other person Being able to answer specific questions asked
18. Finding Common Ground	Statements that reflect behaviors that indicate the person can find common topics or relate to things each person can discuss and find interesting	Talks about shared areas of understanding Finding common ground with the person I'm talking too Relates to things that both communicators are aware of
19. Conversation Initiation	Statements that reflect behaviors that indicate the person can start a conversation, introduce him or herself, etc.	initiated conversation after mutual friend was gone initiates conversation

TABLE 4
Relationships of Specific Behaviors to Listening Competence and Frequency of Behaviors for Each Listening Attribute, Study 2

Codes Developed in Study 2 for Specific Behaviors	*M*	*SD*	*95% Confidence Interval*		*Categories Investigated from Study 1*						
			Low	*High*	*U*	*GL*	*R*	*PA*	*CF*	*F*	*Total*
Answers Questions	5.83[a]	.45	*5.47*	*6.19*	0	1	4	0	1	0	6
Back Channel Responding	5.60[a]	.40	*5.25*	*5.95*	1	0	1	2	0	1	5
Eye Contact	5.45[a]	.64	*5.30*	*5.60*	5	17	14	23	8	7	74
Paraphrasing	5.33[ab]	.71	*4.53*	*6.13*	1	1	1	0	0	0	3
Asks Questions	4.88[bc]	.98	*4.49*	*5.27*	2	4	5	6	4	3	24
Subject Appropriate Responding	4.68[c]	.39	*4.52*	*4.84*	4	6	5	2	6	0	23
Focused Body Language/Position	4.67[c]	.38	*4.51*	*4.83*	1	7	6	6	1	0	21
Head Nods	4.67[cd]	.69	*4.40*	*4.94*	3	7	7	8	0	1	26
Extended Responding	4.55[cd]	.56	*4.30*	*4.80*	4	6	0	1	8	1	20
Interrupting/Changing Subject	4.53[cd]	1.31	*3.87*	*5.19*	1	4	3	3	4	0	15
Finding Common Ground	4.50[cd]	1.52	*3.28*	*5.72*	2	0	0	0	4	0	6
Facial Expressions	4.33[cd]	.23	*4.20*	*4.46*	2	4	2	2	1	2	13
Smiles/Laughs	4.27[de]	.87	*3.96*	*4.58*	2	1	4	2	3	18	30
Offers Advice, Opinions, Perspectives, and Personal Experience	4.27[de]	.86	*3.90*	*4.64*	11	4	1	2	0	3	21
Verbal and Physical Composure	3.91[e]	.44	*3.74*	*4.08*	1	3	5	4	12	1	26
Tells Jokes/Is Witty	3.75[e]	.59	*3.42*	*4.08*	1	0	1	0	6	4	12
Hand Gestures	3.25[f]	.35	*3.01*	*3.49*	0	2	4	0	1	1	8
Conversation Initiation	3.00[f]	.78	*2.46*	*3.54*	1	0	1	0	0	6	8
Self-Disclosure	2.40[f]	.28	*2.15*	*2.65*	1	0	0	0	0	4	5
Total Number of Behaviors	—	—	—	—	43	67	64	61	59	52	346

Notes. U = Understanding; GL = Good Listener; R = Responsive; PA = Pays Attention; CF = Conversational Flow; F = Friendly.

Those participants assigned to generate behaviors for *good listening* most often listed *eye contact* (EC) followed by *focused body language/position*, *head nods*, *extended responding*, and *subject appropriate responding*; these three behavior categories constituted nearly two-thirds of the behaviors listed. EC was also the most frequently listed behavior for both the *responsive* and *pays attention* attributes, constituting 21.9% and 37.7% of those categories, respectively. When looking at the behaviors individually, EC was the most elicited, showing up in 21% of all responses. Indeed, EC constituted more than 10% of all behaviors listed in each of the six listening attributes assessed. It appears that EC is a key listening-related behavior potentially associated with a range of specific listening-related attributes. Indeed, this finding suggests that some behaviors (like eye contact) are more indicative of listening competence in general because when enacted they elicit more subordinate listening-related attributes than do other behaviors.

The final two categories of *conversational flow* and *friendliness* seem to be most readily associated with *verbal and physical composure* and *smiles/laughs*, respectively. Other behaviors that

TABLE 5
Relationships of Specific Behaviors to Listening Competence by Statistically Similar Groups, Study 2

A	*B*	*C*	*D*	*E*	*F*
Answers Questions					
Back Channel Responding					
Eye Contact					
Paraphrasing	Paraphrasing				
	Asks Questions	Asks Questions			
		Subject Appropriate Responding			
		Focused Body Language/Position			
		Head Nods			
		Extended Responding			
		Interrupting/Changing Subject			
		Finding Common Ground			
		Facial Expressions	Facial Expressions		
			Smiles/Laughs		
			Offers Advice, Opinions, Perspectives, and Personal Experience	Offers Advice, Opinions, Perspectives, and Personal Experience	
				Verbal/Physical Composure	
				Tells Jokes/Is Witty	
					Hand Gestures
					Conversation Initiation
					Self-Disclosure

appear to contribute to impressions of *good conversational flow* are *eye contact* (13.6%), *extended responding* (13.6%), *subject appropriate responding* (10.2%), and *tells jokes/is witty* (10.2%). Other behaviors that appear to contribute to impressions of others as *friendly* are *eye contact* (13.5%) and *conversation initiation* (11.5%). Thus, individuals who maintain verbal and physical composure as well as eye contact and who respond, perhaps in humorous ways, are likely to be perceived as enabling conversation flow, whereas smiling and maintaining eye contact combined with initiating the conversation likely lead to impressions of friendliness.

STUDY 3

Study 2 asked what competent listeners *do* in initial interactions. Our first goal for Study 3 is to replicate the mean ratings of listening competence for each behavior. We then ask an additional question, namely, what is the perceived relative importance of these behaviors to impressions about listening? It is likely that people place more weight on some behaviors and less weight on other behaviors; this study provides an initial glimpse into those weightings. Finally, we seek to ascertain the degree to which each behavior is related to each of the six listening-related attributes. Since Study 2 participants were only assigned to one of the six attribute conditions, our discussion above about the relationships among behaviors and attributes is only speculative. A more complete exploration is conducted in this study and asks participants to think of how each behavior is associated with each of the six attributes allowing for perceptual contrast (Sherif, Taub, & Hovland, 1958) not allowed in Study 2.

Method

Participants

Undergraduate students ($N = 313$; 131 female; 180 male) enrolled in Communication Studies courses at LSU completed this study as part of a research requirement. Freshman ($n = 77$), sophomore ($n = 101$), junior ($n = 69$), and senior ($n = 62$) participants reported a mean age of 20.59 years ($SD = 2.24$), were primarily Caucasian ($n = 242$), and represented 16 different academic majors. No participants had completed prior studies.

Procedures

Participants reported to the Communication Studies Research Laboratory and, after providing informed consent, answered three questionnaires, the order of which was randomized. The average completion time was approximately 30 minutes.

Measure to Validate Study 2 Ratings

One questionnaire asked participants to assess the degree to which the 19 substantive behaviors established in Study 2 are "related to impressions of the other person as a listener" (1 = *has nothing to do with listening;* 6 = *has very much to do with listening*).

Ranking Behaviors

Participants were also asked to rank the 19 behaviors with 1 being the most important and 19 being the least important listening-related behavior.

Relating Behaviors to Attributes

Instructions to this questionnaire presented participants brief descriptions of the six attribute categories (e.g., understanding, good listener). After reading these descriptions, participants were asked to think about each behavior and the degree to which each behavior is associated with each attribute (1 = *this behavior is not at all related to this attribute;* 6 = *this behavior is very much related to this attribute*).

Results

Validating Study 2 Results

Table 6 presents the descriptive statistics for the 19 behavior categories. To aid in the interpretation of these data, we used the 95% CIs from Study 2, which are reported in Table 4. The following categories fell within the predicted range: *asks questions, interrupting/change the subject, finding common ground, appropriate facial expressions, conversational initiation,* and *hand gestures*. Five categories achieved means outside and higher than the upper limit of the CI suggesting that participants in Study 3 found *subject appropriate responding*; *extended responding*; *offers advice, opinions, perspectives, and personal experience*; *verbal and physical composure*; and *self-disclosure* to have more to do with impressions of listening than did participants in Study 2. Similarly, eight categories achieved means outside and lower than the lower limit of the CI suggesting that participants in Study 3 found *answers questions, eye contact, paraphrasing, focused body language and position, smiles/laughs, back-channel responding, head nods,* and *tells jokes* to have less to do with impressions of listening than did participants in Study 2. Interestingly, behaviors above the CIs were categories that referenced verbal responding, whereas behaviors below the CIs, with the exception of *tells jokes*, were nonverbal behaviors.

As a follow-up analysis, we conducted a Principle Axis factor analysis with Varimax rotation on the set of listening behaviors. This analysis generated two interpretable factors that explained 40% of the item variance. The first factor ($\alpha = .76$) contained six nonverbal behaviors ($\lambda s > .40$), namely, back channel responding, eye contact, appropriate facial expressions, smiles/laughs, verbal and physical composure, and hand gestures. The second factor ($\alpha = .73$) contained five verbal behaviors all of which were indicative of a direct verbal response ($\lambda s > .40$): *answers questions, asks questions, subject appropriate responding, extended responding,* and *offers advice, opinions, perspectives, and personal experience*. A paired-samples *t*-test revealed that the verbal responding factor ($M = 4.92$, $SD = .71$) was rated as more indicative of listening competence than the factor representing nonverbal responding ($M = 4.07$, $SD = .92$), $t\ (311) = 16.83$, $p < .001$, $r^2 = .21$.[3]

[3]The effect size for the paired-samples t-test was computed using the means and standard deviations as opposed to the t-value. This method takes into account that the paired means are correlated, in this sample, at a magnitude of .42. The unadjusted effect size was .48.

TABLE 6
Descriptive Statistics for Cross-Validation of Behavior Categories, Study 3

Behavior	*M*	*SD*	*95% Confidence Interval*	
			Low	*High*
Responds with something that pertains to what I was talking about	5.07[a]	.99	*4.96*	*5.18*
Answers questions	5.01[ab]	.99	*4.90*	*5.12*
The person elaborates on topics being discussed instead of answering with short statements like yes or no	4.95[ab]	1.16	*4.82*	*5.08*
Offers advice, opinions, perspectives, and personal experience	4.90[bc]	1.13	*4.78*	*5.02*
Asks questions	4.90[bc]	1.05	*4.78*	*5.02*
Maintains eye contact	4.74[cd]	1.24	*4.60*	*4.88*
Does not interrupt or change the subject	4.64[de]	1.35	*4.49*	*4.79*
Tries to find common ground	4.54[ef]	1.14	*4.41*	*4.67*
Paraphrases what I say	4.42[fg]	1.35	*4.27*	*4.57*
Maintains focused body language and position	4.35[g]	1.26	*4.21*	*4.49*
Engages in appropriate facial expressions	4.30[g]	1.23	*4.16*	*4.44*
Maintains verbal and physical composure (e.g., Doesn't fidget, no awkward pauses, speaks clearly)	4.27[g]	1.29	*4.13*	*4.41*
Smiles or laughs	3.85[h]	1.45	*3.69*	*4.01*
Engages in back channel responding (saying uh-huh and yeah to signal they understand you)	3.83[h]	1.48	*3.67*	*3.99*
Engages in head nods	3.71[hi]	1.46	*3.55*	*3.87*
Gives me information about him or herself	3.50[ij]	1.43	*3.34*	*3.66*
Initiates the conversation	3.47[j]	1.57	*3.30*	*3.64*
Employs hand gestures	3.36[j]	1.44	*3.20*	*3.52*
Tells jokes	2.88[k]	1.42	*2.72*	*3.04*

Notes. Means with different subscripts are significantly different at $p < .05$; results available upon request.

Ranking Behaviors

Table 7 provides the mean rankings for all 19 behaviors along with the ranking frequencies. Kendall's coefficient of concordance, although statistically significant, χ^2 (16) = 795.50, $p <$. 001, was quite low, $W = .17$, indicating a large amount of disagreement in the order of rankings. Indeed, the large standard deviation values suggest that some actions are easily interchanged in terms of importance ranking. Interestingly, based on comparisons of top 10 versus bottom nine rankings, six of the top seven behaviors are direct, verbal behaviors, whereas most of the nonverbal behaviors were located in the bottom seven — a finding similar to the rating data presented above. Specifically, the first seven behaviors had an average of 2.5 times more top 10 rankings than rankings between 11 and 19.[4] The last seven behaviors had an average of

[4]The average percentage ratio of top 10 to bottom 9 rankings was 72/28; the range was from 79/21 (asks questions) to 66/34 (answers questions).

TABLE 7
Ranking of all 19 Behaviors, Study 3

			Rank							
	Total Sample (N = 298)		*1*	*2*	*3*	*4*	*5*	*6–10*	*11–15*	*16–19*
Behavior	*M*	*SD*	*N*	*N*	*N*	*N*	*N*	*N*	*N*	*N*
Maintains eye contact	7.08	4.93	44	34	11	23	22	87	58	19
Responds with something that pertains to what I was talking about	7.21	4.84	20	34	23	37	22	93	43	26
The person elaborates on topics being discussed instead of answering with short statements like yes or no	7.39	5.18	38	26	30	16	22	84	48	34
Asks questions	7.63	4.43	16	20	27	11	28	135	38	23
Offers advice, opinions, perspectives, and personal experience	7.91	5.49	29	30	26	26	26	60	65	36
Does not interrupt or change the subject	7.95	4.82	23	18	31	22	18	90	75	21
Answers questions	8.65	4.67	11	11	20	22	26	107	72	29
Tries to find common ground	9.13	4.48	12	17	17	21	12	89	104	26
Maintains verbal and physical composure (e.g., Doesn't fidget, no awkward pauses, speaks clearly)	9.61	4.97	7	16	19	14	15	98	85	44
Maintains focused body language and position	10.11	4.78	7	12	16	15	12	85	111	40
Smiles or laughs	10.35	5.45	23	12	6	18	10	79	83	67
Initiates the conversation	10.62	6.28	39	11	14	2	14	58	64	96
Engages in appropriate facial expressions	10.77	4.33	3	6	8	10	13	94	117	47
Gives me information about him or herself	11.16	5.36	5	20	13	10	6	68	96	80
Paraphrases what I say	11.48	5.72	12	10	11	15	16	60	73	101
Engages in back channel responding (saying uh-huh and yeah to signal they understand you)	12.25	5.28	5	8	9	13	10	64	83	106
Engages in head nods	12.49	4.89	3	6	9	9	10	57	99	105
Employs hand gestures	13.99	4.19	1	4	4	5	4	41	109	130
Tells jokes	14.22	4.85	0	3	4	9	12	41	67	162

1.9 times more rankings between 11 and 19 than top 10 rankings.[5] The middle-most behaviors had roughly the same number of top 10 as 11 through 19 rankings. Perhaps, then, certain verbal behaviors are interchangeable with other verbal behaviors, whereas nonverbal behaviors might be interchangeable with other nonverbal behaviors.

Relating Behaviors to Attributes

Table 8 shows the mean ratings for each behavior by the rated attribute. *Good listening* was used as the comparison category; that is, behavioral rating patterns for each attribute were compared against the good listening category. To do this, a series of repeated measures ANOVAs were

[5]The average percentage ratio of top 10 to bottom 9 rankings was 34/66; the range was from 20/81 (employs hand gestures) to 45/55 (engages in appropriate facial expressions).

TABLE 8
Rating of all 19 Behaviors by Six Listening-Related Attributes, Study 3

	GL		*PA*		*R*		*U*		*CF*		*F*	
Behavior	*M*	*SD*	*M*	*SD*	*M*	*SD*	*M*	*SD*	*M*	*SD*	*M*	*SD*
Responds with something that pertains to what I was talking about	4.74	1.34	4.78	1.33	4.93	1.35	4.40	1.51	4.54	1.48	3.74*	1.66
The person elaborates on topics being discussed instead of answering with short statements like yes or no	4.59	1.42	4.75	1.41	4.96*	1.36	4.51	1.52	4.45	1.58	3.93*	1.68
Offers advice, opinions, perspectives, and personal experience	4.49	1.43	4.67	1.41	4.87*	1.40	4.77*	1.42	4.50	1.55	4.60	1.60
Paraphrases what I say	4.47	1.49	4.58	1.49	4.49	1.42	4.01*	1.65	3.91*	1.57	3.25*	1.69
Does not interrupt or change the subject	4.41	1.58	4.26	1.53	3.69*	1.66	3.71*	1.66	4.05*	1.66	4.21	1.58
Answers questions	4.27	1.44	4.75*	1.29	4.99*	1.38	3.90*	1.68	4.12	1.43	3.31*	1.73
Tries to find common ground	4.17	1.45	4.31	1.49	4.36	1.42	4.42*	1.54	4.46*	1.45	4.64*	1.46
Maintains eye contact	4.16	1.40	4.55*	1.44	3.82*	1.56	3.42*	1.58	3.36*	1.63	3.78*	1.64
Asks questions	4.14	1.46	4.40*	1.40	4.80*	1.33	3.85*	1.57	4.39*	1.47	3.65*	1.65
Engages in appropriate facial expressions	4.07	1.35	4.17	1.41	4.25	1.46	3.83*	1.54	3.78*	1.59	3.95	1.59
Maintains verbal and physical composure	4.04	1.43	4.22	1.49	3.86*	1.51	3.50*	1.53	4.09	1.58	3.78*	1.63
Maintains focused body language and position	3.95	1.40	4.16	1.51	3.66*	1.48	3.33*	1.50	3.42*	1.56	3.81	1.70
Engages in head nods	3.75	1.47	3.85	1.46	4.04*	1.49	3.46*	1.53	3.37*	1.53	3.46	1.64
Engages in back channel responding	3.59	1.58	3.70	1.59	4.08*	1.61	3.43	1.68	3.81	1.60	3.30	1.66
Smiles or laughs	3.54	1.52	3.93*	1.44	4.16*	1.47	3.61	1.57	3.76	1.55	4.91*	1.53
Employs hand gestures	3.22	1.53	3.48	1.51	3.89*	1.57	3.22	1.59	3.70*	1.53	3.46	1.57
Gives me information about him or herself	3.19	1.55	3.55*	1.57	3.98*	1.57	3.26	1.57	4.22*	1.49	4.58*	1.51
Initiates the conversation	3.15	1.65	3.50*	1.64	3.81*	1.57	3.21	1.69	4.17*	1.60	4.69*	1.52
Tells jokes	2.94	1.50	3.10	1.40	3.49*	1.49	2.83	1.52	3.88*	1.47	4.72*	1.49

Notes. GL = Good Listening; PA = Pays Attention; R = Responsive; U = Understanding; CF = Conversational Flow; F = Friendly; Means marked with an asterisk indicate a statistically significant ($p < .008$) difference between the respective attribute and good listening for that behavior.

run; the repeated factor had six-levels, one for each attribute. Each of these analyses returned a significant multivariate effect that accounted for between 10% and 40% of the variability in ratings of a particular behavior across attributes. For each behavior, five follow-up tests were run, comparing mean behavior ratings between each attribute and good listening separately.[6] Across all analyses, a pattern emerged that indicated particular behaviors were related to specific listening-related attributes. Those behaviors that were at least somewhat related to each of the attributes included each of the verbal responding behaviors. Several behaviors were only indicative of one or two attributes. Specifically, engaging in *back-channel responding* and engaging in *head nods* were primarily associated with *responsiveness*; *tells jokes* was primarily associated with *friendly*; and *conversation initiation* and *self-disclosure* were primarily associated with *conversational flow* and *friendliness*.

When these data (Table 8) are compared with behaviors listed with relative frequency by participants in Study 2 (Table 4), patterns are replicated for *eye contact, smiles/laughs, verbal and physical composure,* and *offers advice, opinions, perspectives, and personal experience*. Specifically, *eye contact* was primarily associated with *pays attention*, and secondarily with *responsiveness*; *smiles/laughs* with *friendly*, followed by *responsiveness* and *pays attention*; *verbal and physical composure* with *pays attention* and *conversational flow*; and *offers advice, opinions, perspectives, and personal experience* to all attributes, but primarily *understanding* and *responding*.

To gain added insight into these data we fit a two-factor (verbal/nonverbal) model separately for each of the attributes assessed in this study. Fit statistics indicated a well-fitting model for each attribute (CFIs $> .90$, SRMRs $< .06$, RMSEAs $< .08$); thus, a composite verbal responding and a composite nonverbal responding variable were created for each attribute ($.63 < \alpha < .84$; $M = .74$). As seen in Table 9, with the exception of the attribute *friendly*, participants rated verbal responding as more indicative of that respective attribute than nonverbal responding.

Brief Discussion

Study 3 sought to (a) validate the relationships between each listening-related behavior identified in Study 2 and listening competence, (b) assess the relative importance of these listening-related behaviors to impressions about listening, and (c) ascertain the degree to which each behavior is related to each of the six listening-related attributes originally found in Study 1. The first two goals were achieved by having participants (a) rate the degree to which each behavior category established in Study 2 was related to impressions about listening and (b) rank these behaviors for their importance to forming impressions about others' listening. In general, results from these two methods produced an interesting similarity, namely that verbal behaviors were consistently perceived as having more to do with listening impressions than non-verbal behaviors. Results from the ranking data additionally suggest substantial individual variation in the importance afforded to behaviors suggesting a pathway through which individual differences in the elicitation of implicit theories of listening may operate. That is, some individuals may be more likely to employ implicit theories of listening or to view particular attributes as more evaluatively salient (and others as less salient) when making judgments of others as good listeners because they have

[6] All of these results are available upon request.

TABLE 9
Descriptive Statistics and Paired-Samples t-Tests Comparing Verbal and Nonverbal Behaviors Within Each Listening Attribute, Study 3

	M	*SD*	*r**	*t*	*p*	r^2
Understanding						
Nonverbal	3.50	1.10	.45	12.16	<.001	.12
Verbal	4.29	1.08				
Good Listening						
Nonverbal	3.77	.95	.39	10.92	<.001	.11
Verbal	4.45	1.01				
Conversational Flow						
Nonverbal	3.75	1.03	.39	9.65	<.001	.08
Verbal	4.40	1.13				
Responsiveness						
Nonverbal	3.93	1.06	.44	15.44	<.001	.18
Verbal	4.91	1.06				
Pays Attention						
Nonverbal	4.04	1.01	.50	11.12	<.001	.09
Verbal	4.67	.96				
Friendly						
Nonverbal	3.86	1.02	.66	.33	.74	—
Verbal	3.85	1.22				

Note. *r is the paired samples correlation used to compute the effect size, r^2.

different behaviorally-based expectations for initial interactions. Though such differences may span a range of individual differences, culturally prescribed rules may be a primary candidate for future research.

GENERAL DISCUSSION

The fact that thought influences action is axiomatic, which makes the following observation so perplexing: Although the study of listening "can benefit dramatically from the theoretical sophistication found in social cognition research" (King, 2008, p. 2720), there has been minimal attention afforded to the role of thought in processes related to listening. Indeed, defining the myriad cognitive processes associated with listening is still more like a dream than a reality (Fitch-Hauser & Hughes, 1988). The three studies reported above attempted to begin a process of remediation for this situation by investigating the structure of implicit theories of listening within the context of initial interactions. Like other implicit theories, implicit theories of listening are proposed as knowledge structures that specify sets of interconnected listening-related attributes and are used during interactions, especially first encounters, to infer an individual's competence in listening from observed behavior. Our investigation began by reviewing past research concerned with implicit theories of listening, and we found that none had afforded attention to initial interaction. Such a lacuna is surprising given the initial encounter is the context within which first impressions are formed. Moreover, the importance of good listening during initial interactions is lauded as self-evident in trade publications targeted to a range of professions. Indeed,

publications as notable as *Business Week* claim that by following a few "simple rules" positive first impressions are "guaranteed" (Gallo, 2007).[7] Even with all the attention afforded to the importance of "demonstrating good listening skills" in the popular literature, little empirical work has addressed the impressions formed by people interacting with individuals who display behaviors linked to competent listening; even less work has attempted to map a general framework for the associations among listening behaviors, listening attributes, and a general evaluative schema called listening competence. Thus, our studies offer both theoretical and practical guidance for a much maligned but important topic.

Theoretically, our studies offer a preliminary structural model of how an implicit theory of listening might be employed during an initial encounter. Specifically, we propose that the behaviors enacted by an individual elicit one or more attributes associated with competent listening.[8] The degree to which a given attribute is activated will, in turn, lead to an impression of the other as an effective (or ineffective) listener. This structure is displayed graphically in Figure 1. The five ovals displayed in the center of Figure 1 represent the five listening-related attributes generated from the open-ended coding of participant responses in Study 1 and cross-validated in Study 2. These attributes are arranged in a descending order from the good listener schema (represented by a larger oval at the top of the figure) in the order they were reported to be associated with listening competence (see Table 2). Specifically, participants in Study 2 reported *pays attention, friendly*, and *responsive* as most associated and *conversational flow* and *understanding* as least associated with impressions of good listening. In addition, *friendly* was statistically similar to both *pays attention* and *responsive*, thus those attributes overlap. In sum, the arrangement of attributes presented in Figure 1 suggests that when an individual is seen as attentive, responsive, and so forth, he or she will also be seen as a good listener; these attributes constitute the schema for listening competence.

The 19 behaviors generated from the open-ended coding of participant responses in Study 2 and cross-validated in Study 3 are represented by rectangles. The set of five verbal behaviors and the set of six nonverbal behaviors on the left and right side of the attributes, respectively, represent the two dimensions discovered through an exploratory factor analysis and confirmed for each attribute separately. The eight additional behaviors represent those that did not fit within that two-factor solution but may play a role in how people are judged as listeners.

The arrows leading from individual behaviors to attributes represent the information contained in Table 8 where participants in Study 3 rated each behavior within each listening-related

[7]The sheer number of similar articles precludes a comprehensive list of sources to be cited here. More generally (and alarmingly) claims about the importance of good listening are not localized to the popular literature. For example, undergraduate textbooks in interpersonal communication stress that "good listening" behaviors make people more attractive (e.g., McCornack, 2010; Orbe & Bruess, 2005), whereas texts focused on business communication stress the importance of listening to first impressions within the job interview setting (Stewart & Cash, 2002). These claims are rarely followed by citations, and when they are the sources are often not empirical research. This general trend seems to warrant an extended discussion and investigation by listening scholars and practitioners alike (Bodie, Janusik, & Valikoski, 2008).

[8]This causal structure seems more plausible than the reverse (attributes → behaviors) based on principles of parsimony (i.e., storing five attributes is much simpler than storing 19 behaviors) and on past research on implicit theories of personality (Wyer & Gruenfeld, 1995; Wyer & Srull, 1989). In addition, research has demonstrated that people lose behavioral information that leads to trait descriptions while attribute-level data remains in memory suggesting that the latter but not the former is stored for later retrieval and used when forming impressions of others (Allen & Ebbesen, 1981). Of course, the temporal ordering of the impression formation process as it plays out in initial interactions and with specific relation to listening should be empirically demonstrated.

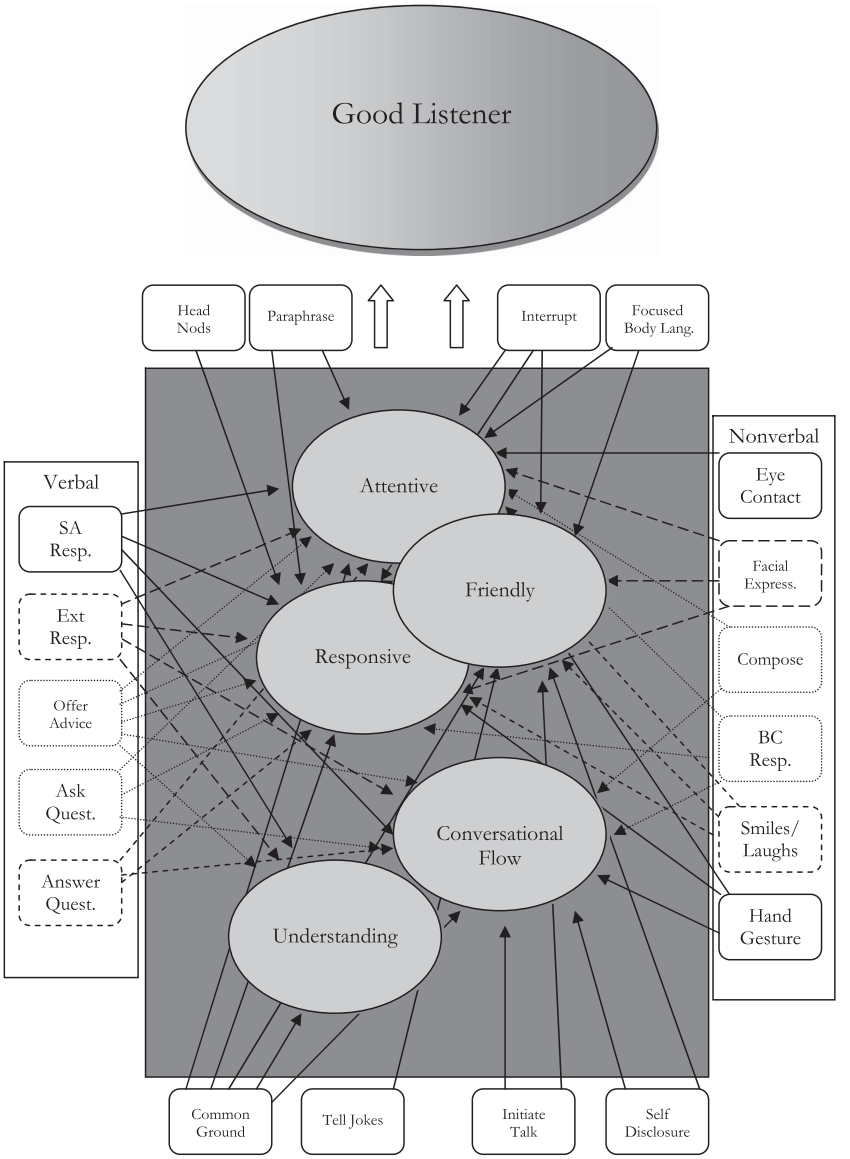

FIGURE 1 Graphical depiction of an implicit theory of listening. This figure should be considered a preliminary framework and used to guide future theory building and research and not a final model.

attribute. When deciding on how many associations between behaviors and individual attributes to represent we considered the mean behavior rating for each attribute compared to the rating for that behavior for the *good listening* category. In other words, the mean for a specific behavior within the *good listening* category was used as the baseline; means for that behavior on each

of the other attributes were compared to the *good listening* mean. Mean behavior ratings that were statistically equivalent or higher than the rating for good listening were depicted with an arrow, whereas those that were statistically different and lower than the rating for good listening were not.

Using the behavior-attribute pattern as a criterion seems to indicate that the relationship between a behavior and listening competence is a function of two interrelated aspects, namely (a) the number of attributes to which the behavior is related and (b) the relative importance of those attributes to impressions of others as a good listener. In other words, the reason some behaviors were rated as more indicative of listening competence (see Table 6) is because they are related to more listening-related attributes and/or more central attributes. Indeed, this theoretical speculation is supported by the relative strength of the relationships among the verbal responding behaviors (e.g., *subject appropriate responding, answers questions*) and the listening-related attributes and the relationships among the nonverbal behaviors (e.g., *eye contact, hand gestures*) and those attributes. Specifically, each verbal behavior was related to at least three of the attributes, whereas each nonverbal behavior was typically only related to one or two of the attributes. Of course, this model was inductively derived and, thus, should be tested in future work. Indeed, the primary contribution of this investigation is to serve as an empirical base for a host of specific research programs aimed at discovering how implicit theories of listening impact impression formation and other outcomes (see Spitzberg & Cupach, 2002 for a similar model for interpersonal skills).

INVESTIGATING THE STRUCTURE AND FUNCTION OF IMPLICIT THEORIES OF LISTENING

The model depicted in Figure 1 should be considered preliminary with future research helping to modify and restructure it. Although various aspects of the model can be investigated there are two general classes of concerns, the nature of attributes and the nature of behaviors.

Structure of Listening Attributes

With regard to listening attributes (what listening is), the model assumes that there are five traits central to implicit theories of listening; however, the structure of the relations among various traits and whether trait centrality varies as a predicable function of individual and situational differences are both open questions. According to lay epistemic theory (LET), trait relations are either symmetrical or asymmetrical and are stored in an "if . . . then" fashion (see Orehek, Dechesne, Fishbach, Kruglanski, & Chun, in press). For instance, the association between *attentive* and *friendly* might be such that "if someone is attentive, then s/he is friendly"; knowing a person is friendly may (symmetrical) or may not (asymmetrical) imply that he or she is also attentive. The centrality of a particular attribute is a function of the degree to which it implies other attributes and has mostly asymmetrical relationships with those attributes. Thus, the degree to which "good listening" implies *attentiveness*, *friendliness*, and so forth but not vice versa, it (good listening) can be considered more central than the other attributes found in our studies. Likewise, the model depicted in Figure 1 suggests that the five listening attributes are stored in memory in a symmetrical manner. To the extent that future research provides support for good

listening as a central attribute implied by the five subordinate attributes, it is more likely that good listening is, in fact, a superordinate evaluative category.

Of course, good listening may be merely one among many more subordinate (peripheral) attributes subsumed under something akin to social skill, communicative competence, or sociability. Indeed, the methodological decision made with respect to Study 1 to ask individuals to describe a communicatively competent individual assumes (perhaps correctly, perhaps not) that listening is a subset of communicative competence. Specifically, we asked people to list characteristics that would lead them to form an impression of "Alex" as a competent communicator then subsequently asked them to rate these characteristics as more or less indicative of listening competence. Both methodologically and theoretically, this begs the question whether our results would have been the same if we had initially asked about listening competence then subsequently requested ratings of communicative competence.

In general, then, our assumption about the association between listening and communicative competence should be empirically tested against other possible associative frameworks. In addition, research should explore the (a) shared attributes between communicative and listening competence, (b) attributes that can help distinguish between communicative and listening competence, and (c) degree to which listening and communicative competence can and should be subsumed under a more general taxonomic framework of, for instance, interpersonal or social skills. In fact, listening is most often represented in the scholarly literature as a non-central skill. Reviews of interpersonal skills rarely list listening among competencies such as altercentrism, composure, coordination, and expressiveness (Spitzberg & Cupach, 2002), and reviews of social skills exclude listening in favor of "decoding" abilities (Gearhart & Bodie, 2011; Riggio, 1986). Fortunately, the interpersonal and social skills literatures provide a corpus of theory to help guide research efforts aimed at understanding the structure of implicit theories of listening and how they are related to other knowledge structures.

The structure of listening attributes is further complicated by research finding individual and situational differences in the structure of implicit theories and how people employ these theories when evaluating others (e.g., Lewicki, 1984; Orehek et al., in press). Indeed, the strength of the stored rule linking various listening attributes to each other should influence the extent to which any single attribute will influence the impression formation process. That is, some individuals will see certain traits to "constitute compelling evidence for given impressions" (Orehek et al., in press, p. 8), whereas others will hold less steadfast to the link between an attribute and an impression. For instance, assume Person A has a very strong and Person B a very weak inference rule concerning the relationship between *attentiveness* and *good listening* (i.e., "if someone is attentive, s/he is a good listener"). When engaged in a conversation with an attentive individual, Person A will come away with a greater impression of him/her as a good listener than will Person B. Of course this example also highlights the need to research the possible links among behaviors and attributes.

Role of Listening Behaviors

There is little doubt that behaviors serve many functions in conversation. Research shows that eye contact, proximity (and other features of body movement), and touch, just to name a few, carry consistent and recognizable meanings within particular social communities (Burgoon, Buller,

Hale, & deTurck, 1984; Burgoon & Newton, 1991). In a similar manner, it is likely that both verbal and nonverbal behaviors signal a range of attributes, some of which are associated with and others of which are unassociated with listening. Although Figure 1 represents the complexity of the relationships among behaviors and attributes, we do not claim this model is final or comprehensive. Instead, it should be used as a framework through which a solid theory of the structure and function of implicit theories of listening can be built.

As an initial model, Figure 1 suggests that some behaviors are linked to a variety of attributes while others are linked to only one or two. This pattern provides an explanation as to why some behaviors are more (and others less) related to listening competence; that is, those behaviors that are more associated to listening competence are so because they are related to more listening attributes or they are related to attributes more central to the trait of good listening. Of course, this particular causal structure should be investigated in future research and tested against alternative structures.

Perhaps the primary limitation associated with the behavior list and our conclusions regarding the association of behaviors to attributes is the underlying assumption that people consciously attend to all behaviors when forming impressions of others. We acknowledge this limitation and forward that it was a necessary part of our methodological choice to generate implicit theories of listening from the ground up. Nevertheless, behaviors (some listed and others not) may influence impressions of others as (in)competent listeners without anyone explicitly recognizing their influence. Indeed, research suggests that unless a behavior goes against our pre-interaction expectations we may not notice it at all (see Spitzberg & Cupach, 2002). Of course, some people may be more apt at attending to and making sense of nonverbal behavior (Nowicki, 1994), so the influence of these behaviors may be moderated by individual differences. Likewise, different people may hold different expectations about listening and, thus, respond to behaviors in diverse ways. Indeed, the low degree of concordance ($W = .17$) found when participants ranked the importance of listening behaviors in Study 3 provides at least partial support for this contention. Whether a behavior makes salient one or more listening-related attributes is potentially dependent on a host of individual differences and various nuances of the interaction setting.

As a consequence, future research should explore not only the behaviors listed but also the myriad behaviors touted as necessary to be seen as a good listener and not mentioned by our participants. Also, research should investigate how these various behaviors elicit inference rules and judgments of others as capable listeners. In addition, since behaviors occur in clusters research should attend to the ways in which verbal and nonverbal behaviors (both as general classes and specific combinations of particular behaviors in these classes) act and interact (Burgoon, 1985). Finally, future research should explore the degree to which listening behaviors constitute expectations of interlocutors and how these pre-interaction expectancies drive the use of implicit theories of listening (see Honeycutt, 1990) by various individuals under various types of initial encounters.

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