EDITION NO 02

LISTENING

PROCESSES, FUNCTIONS, AND COMPETENCY

DEBRA L. WORTHINGTON | MARGARET E. FITCH-HAUSER

Listening

Listening: Processes, Functions, and Competency explores the role of listening as an essential element in human communication. The book addresses listening as a cognitive process, as a social function, and as a critical professional competency. Blending theory with practical application, *Listening* builds knowledge, insight, and skill to help the reader achieve the desired outcome of effective listening. This second edition introduces listening as a goal-directed activity and has been expanded to include a new chapter addressing listening in mediated contexts. Theory and research throughout the text have been updated, and the final chapter covers new research methodologies and contexts, including functional magnetic resonance imaging, aural architecture, and music.

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Processes, Functions, and Competency

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Contents

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Preface

We went into the project of writing this book with the firm belief that listening is a critical life competency. Support for our belief can be found in the numerous business articles that are written about the importance of listening in various occupations. Even the American Medical Association has recognized the importance of listening by mandating listening training for future physicians. Unfortunately, however, listening is so embedded in our daily communication processes that few of us take the time to contemplate how it contributes (or detracts) from our ability to communicate effectively with others. Our primary motivation, as active researchers in listening processes, is to provide a vehicle to spur student awareness of and interest in listening as a critical communication competency and as a field of study.

As educators we know that today's college students are very pragmatic. Therefore, we address how listening can contribute to their future success in life as well as careers. Specifically, our text addresses the role and effect of listening in four selected academic and professional contexts. However, our text also has a significant theoretical focus. We provide a review of the progression of more than 70 years of listening research to provide an overview of theory and application. We believe it is important to understand what works but, more important, why it works. An understanding of theory will allow students to adapt their skills, not only in the areas covered in the text, but also in other situations, thus greatly extending their ability to apply skilled listening to a variety of personal and professional challenges.

As scholars, we have built upon the work of past researchers. We would like to dedicate this edition to one who influenced our work, Larry L. Barker: friend, mentor and scholar.

Organization of the Book

Our approach to this textbook provides a theory and research-based discussion of listening as a cognitive process, as a social function, and as a critical professional competency. To achieve the above goals, we have organized the text into three sections. The first section introduces foundational concepts, such as types of listening, as well as cognitive and individual-related factors that might affect listening processes. New to this section in our second edition is a dedicated chapter on mediated listening. The second section addresses social aspects of listening such as how it affects and is affected by the important relationships in our lives. The third section addresses listening in selected professional contexts, while the final chapter focuses on the future of listening: emerging contexts and research.

Pedagogical Features

Each chapter begins with a brief case study vignette based on a set of hypothetical students enrolled in a college listening course. Their interactions with each other and family members form the basis for examples and topic-specific discussions. Key concepts are identified in bold or italicized. At the end of each chapter is a list of key concepts, discussion questions, and additional readings and resources. Instructors can use the discussion questions as the basis for reading responses to assess comprehension and recall of material, to spark additional in-class discussion, or to assess students' ability to apply and critique concepts. *Think on it* boxes are located throughout the text, providing students with the opportunity to consider how a concept directly applies to them. Some boxes identify Internet sites where students can take self-tests associated with the personality or communication construct under discussion. Finally, each chapter is well supported by research as evidenced by extensive endnotes and bibliographies.

Part I

Listening as a Cognitive Process

1 Introduction and Overview

Walk into any Student Union on a college campus and you will find a group of students working on a project or discussing a class. Today, at a large table, we see a group involved in an intense discussion. They are all students in Professor Jackie Merritt's Listening class and just learned that they will be working together on a small group project writing and performing a skit about listening. Since this is the first week of school, they decided to meet so they could get to know each other better. Meet Ben Goleman, Tamarah Jackson, Nolvia Guetierez, Namii Kim, Carter Bishop, and Radley Monroe. Let's listen to part of their conversation.

Case Study 1.1 Introductions

Well, since I appear to be the oldest in this group, why don't I get things started. As you know, I'm ***Tamarah Jackson*** *and I really appreciate you agreeing to meet at this time. Since I work full time in the city's public safety department, I can only meet after five. I'm an only child and grew up surrounded by members of the Choctaw Nation since my dad is a tribal elder. My mom is a social worker and my dad is a plumber.*

Hi Tamarah, I bet your background will add a lot to our class discussions about listening. I'm ***Ben Goleman*** *and like Tamarah, I have some time constraints. I can't meet between sundown on Friday and sundown on Saturday. Friday evening my family observes Shabbat and then attends synagogue on Saturday. I'm a middle child, and my mother is a physician and dad is the VP of Human Resources at the auto plant here in town. He thought I picked a good class when I told him I was taking a listening class. He thinks it's a skill that can really help me in all aspects of life. I sure hope he's right – I hate the idea of just taking a class to get a grade.*

I know what you mean. Some classes can be a real waste of time. But I think this one will be different. My name is ***Carter Bishop,*** *and I'm a "second batch" kid. My parents had three girls and then fifteen years later I came along. They split up when I was four. My mom, sisters and I stayed here. Dad moved to Chicago and works for a PR firm there. Mom's an administrator in the Dean's office. I know both of my parents think listening is important. Just last week, when I visited my Dad, he talked about how important listening to his clients is to his success.*

You're the youngest kid? I'm the oldest of four and my folks really seem to be zeroed in on me setting the bar for my sisters and little brother. I'm ***Radley Monroe****. If you're from around here, you may have heard of my folks. Dad's the football coach at Mockingbird High. He was the first African American to get a graduate degree from State U. He also teaches math, so he's pretty smart. Mom's Scout Monroe, one of the anchors of the 6:00 o'clock news on Channel 10.*

Wow, my parents never miss your mom's newscast. They will be so excited when I tell them that we are working on a project together. My name is ***NaMii Kim*** *and as you have probably figured out, I'm Korean. My grandparents immigrated here in the 50s. My dad is the eldest of their children and the only boy. My grandparents love to talk about Korean traditions. It's pretty interesting most of the time. But sometimes they don't exactly approve of the "modern" ideas my brothers and I have, and since they live with us, we get an earful. My dad works at the auto plant as an accountant and business manager. And Ben, I think my dad knows your dad. My mother works at Merc's Department store. Let me know if you need anything, I can get a discount.*

Well it looks like I'm last. I'm ***Nolvia Guetierez****. I know what you mean, NaMii, about grandparents and their old-fashioned ideas. Mine came from Honduras and live next door to my family. But it actually has been a good thing. My dad had an accident a few years ago and now he's a paraplegic. Thank goodness my grandparents were there. They really helped while dad went through operations, therapy and all that stuff. My mom works as a pharmacist with Rex Drugs, and she really relied on them a lot to help my dad and to look after my brother and me.*

Introduction

As children, we are often praised and reinforced for speaking well. But how many of you were praised for "listening well?" For not interrupting? For being attentive? In school, you are assigned speeches to give, and you can even take speaking classes. However, it is unlikely that you have received formal listening training before now. At best, you were exposed to a unit of listening as part of another class you have taken – public speaking, interpersonal communication, music education, or perhaps a second language class.

Classes aren't the only way you've learned about communication. You've spent your life studying the communication behaviors of those around you, particularly the communication habits and behaviors of significant people, like your parents and friends. We tend to model our communication behaviors after those whom we observe. This holds true for listening as well. But just because you model your communication and listening on others in your lives, doesn't mean you can't learn a great deal more about useful and effective listening behaviors.

As scholars and consultants in the field of communication and listening, we feel that listening is not just a critical communication competency; it is an important life competency. As a listener, you receive information that helps you to reach personal goals and develop and support relationships. Business owners often report that one of the skills they value most is listening.[1] As consultants, we often hear them complain that they have a hard time finding employees who listen effectively.

Listening is Fundamental

The Importance of Listening Competency

One reason we believe listening is a critical life competency is because it is fundamental to all other communication competencies – speaking, writing, and reading. Of these competencies, listening is the first communication skill we acquire and use. In fact, you began to listen before

you were born. Researchers have found that during the last trimester of a pregnancy, the fetus actively processes incoming auditory input, and can clearly distinguish between music, language, and other sounds.[2] Thus, at the very beginnings of human consciousness listening plays an important role.

Listening is also key to learning language.[3] In fact, "learning to speak a language is very largely a task of learning to hear it."[4] Infants are born with the ability to distinguish between every sound – consonants and vowels – necessary to produce any human language.[5] However, if infants do not hear certain sounds, they eventually lose the ability to easily reproduce it. By 12 months, children have learned the sounds and rules of their native language. So, an English speaking child distinguishes between and can articulate both "R" and "L," while a Japanese child does not. It is by listening that infants fine tune their brain to Swahili instead of Spanish, or to English instead of Egyptian. Infants, then, learn to understand and master language by simply listening to us talk. You'll notice that we said "listening to us talk." Emerging research in language development suggests that social interaction is a key component of language development. This emphasis on interaction may help explain why children with autism sometimes have difficulty with language; they prefer non-speech sounds over their mother's speaking.[6]

Learn more: Dr. Patricia Kuhl, a leading researcher in early language and bilingual development, provides a short TED talk on research in infant language development: www.ted.com/speakers/patricia_kuhl.

The understanding of oral language becomes the basis for learning how we comprehend and accurately read and write. In fact, reading comprehension is highly correlated with listening comprehension.[7] This finding is illustrated by how children learn to read by first listening to others read aloud (parents, teachers, babysitters), and then listening to the words as they themselves read aloud. By reading aloud, children can recognize (by listening to their own voice) and self-correct their pronunciation.[8]

Ultimately, your ability to "speak, read, write, and reason" are influenced by your listening ability.[9] As students, listening is fundamental to your personal and academic success.[10] Educator Joseph Beatty goes even further arguing that good listening is both an intellectual as well as a moral virtue because it is fundamental to understanding both yourself as well as others. It is only through good listening that you have the ability to "transform" yourself (and others). In other words, through listening you have the opportunity to "be all that you can be" and can help others do the same.

Think on it: Can you think of a time when listening led you to discover something new about yourself? How did you react? Do you think you would have learned this about yourself if you hadn't learned it by listening to others?

Listening Takes Time (Literally)

As the discussion and proposed skit at the beginning of this chapter suggests, listening is an important communication competency. But just how important is it? Of the many forms of communication – reading, writing, speaking, and listening – which is used the most?

Researcher Paul Rankin was the first to ask this question – in 1926. Results of Rankin's communication time study suggested that people in the early 20th century engaged in listening approximately 42% of their waking hours. Studies conducted since then have consistently supported Rankin's findings across a variety of populations and contexts. For example, research in the early 1970s showed that homemakers spent about 48% of their time listening, while business people spent 33% of their time listening.[11] Another study assessing how students, employees, and homemakers spent their communication time, found that 55% of that time was spent listening.[12] For business people, this percentage increases as they advance into management positions. Managers and executives report spending 60% and 75%, respectively, of their time listening.[13] Table 1.1 summarizes much of the time research that has been conducted over the past 70 years.

Table 1.1 Time Studies Showing the Percentage of Time in Various Communication Activities[a]

Year	Study	Population	Time listening	Time speaking	Time reading	Time writing	Time with media
1926	Rankin	Varied	0.42	0.32	0.15	0.11	
1971	Breiter	Homemakers	0.48	0.35	0.10	0.07	
1975	Weinrauch & Swanda	College students	0.33	0.26	0.19	0.23	
1975	Werner	Varied	0.55	0.23	0.13	0.08	
1980	Barker et al.	College students	0.53*	0.16	0.17	0.14	0.20*
1990	Vickers	College students	0.64*	0.22	0.08	0.07	0.31*
1999	Bohlken	College students	0.53	0.22	0.13	0.12	
2001	Davis	College students	0.34	0.31	0.12	0.10	
2006	Janusik & Wolvin	College students	0.24**	0.20	0.08	0.09	0.39
2008	Emanuel, et al.	College Students	0.55*	0.17	0.16	0.11	0.28*

[a] Adapted from Janusik & Wolvin (2009).
* Time spent listening to media is also included in total time spent listening.
** Time spent listening does not include time spent listening to or using the media.

When looking at the results presented in this table, notice the impact of media usage on the time spent listening. As indicated in Table 1.1, some studies included time spent listening to media in their calculation of the total percentage of time we spend listening. These studies were conducted before the advent of many of the computer and related communication technology commonly used today. To get an accurate picture of how much time you and your colleagues actually spend listening, we must look at the impact of your use of the Internet, e-mail, Snapchat, Facebook, Instagram, mobile phones and so forth. One time study reported in 2006 by listening scholars Laura Janusik and Andy Wolvin, measured media usage (including internet and e-mail) and looked at communication in specific settings such as work and family/friend time.[14] They concluded that, on average, we spend at least 50% of our day listening to either another person or to media. However, given the ubiquitous nature of media technology, they speculate that the figure may actually be higher. Another interesting finding emerging from the Janusik and Wolvin study is that use of technology has impacted how much time we interact face to face. Their research suggests that while overall communication time has increased, it appears that for the first time we spend less than 50% of our communication time speaking (20%) and listening (24%) to others. Listening associated with new media has apparently taken time from previous listening and speaking interactions. Importantly, Janusik and Wolvin's study indicates that we still spend more time listening in a face-to-face context than we do in any other communication activity.

A study done a couple of years after Janusik's and Wolvin's, found college students engaged in communication activities over 13 hours a day. As indicated in Table 1.1, of that 13+ hours, over 55% of the time was spent listening. The time spent listening interpersonally included listening to lectures, in face-to-face encounters, on the phone, and instant messages. Interpersonal listening accounted for just under 50% of total listening time. The remainder of listening time was spent listening to media, primarily television and music.

Taken as a whole, these studies indicate that you spend approximately half of your time communicating with others. And, you spend at least half of your communication time listening.

Think on it: Time studies, such as those presented in Table 1.1, typically rely on self-report data. That is, they ask people to make estimates of how much time they engaged in specific communication activities (e.g., in the past hour, day, or week). What type of problems might arise when conducting such a study? How might these problems affect study results and our interpretation of them?

Clearly, listening plays a significant role in our intellectual and social development as well as being critical to effective communication. To get us started in our exploration of this critical competency, we first discuss definitions of listening and review models of listening. We, then, introduce a new model of listening that we use throughout this book, and finally we provide an overview of the topics covered in this text.

Defining Listening

Even though listening is one of the most important skills you can develop, scholars haven't always agreed upon just what constitutes listening competency. One early overview of definitions of listening was written by Ethel Glenn in 1989. In that article, she analyzed the content of 50 definitions of listening.[15] A more recent review was written by Professors Debra Worthington and Graham Bodie. In their *Sourcebook of Listening Research*, they present an historical overview as well as an analysis of multiple definitions of listening. Table 1.2 provides a sampling of listening definitions.

Glenn concluded her 1989 article by stating "[a] universal definition of listening from which operational guidelines may be established will not be easy to formulate."[16] Her observations presented a challenge to scholars around the world involved in listening research. After much discussion and debate, the members of the International Listening Association (ILA) adopted the following definition: Listening is ***"the process of receiving, constructing meaning from, and responding to spoken andlor nonverbal messages."***[17]

Think on it: Looking at the definitions presented in Table 1.2, what do they have in common? How do they differ? How do they compare to the definition adopted by the members of the ILA? Do you think the ILA definition should incorporate any other elements? Given recent advances in technology would you suggest any changes to the ILA's definition?

Today, it is one of the most utilized definitions in both professional and academic listening publications. However, Worthington and Bodie, focusing on the role of defining listening in research studies, wrote, "We are not convinced that a single definition of listening is practical or even

Table 1.2 Definitions of Listening*

Author(s)	Date	Definition
Rankin	1926	…the ability to understand spoken language.
Barbe & Meyers	1954	…the process of reacting to, interpreting, and relating the spoken language in terms of past experiences and further course of action.
Brown & Carlson	1955	…the aural assimilation of spoken symbols in a face-to-face speaker audience situation, with both oral and visual cues present.
Barker	1971	…the selective process of attending to, hearing, understanding, and remembering aural symbols.
Lundsteen	1971	…the process by which spoken language is converted to meaning in the mind.
Kelly	1975	…a rather definite and deliberative ability to hear information, to analyze it, to recall it at a later time, and to draw conclusions from it.
Millar & Millar	1976	…three interwoven processes: (1) the physical reception of auditory stimuli, (2) the perception (symbolic classification) of the stimuli, and (3) the interpretation of the stimuli.
Wolff et al.	1983	…a unitary-receptive communication process of hearing and selecting, assimilating and organizing, and retaining and covertly responding to aural and nonverbal stimuli.
Wovin & Coakley	1988	…the process of receiving, attending to, and assigning meaning to aural stimuli.
Vasile & Mintz	1986	… an intellectual or active function that involves the mind, eyes, ears, and memory.
International Listening Association	1996	…the process of receiving, constructing meaning from and responding to spoken and/or nonverbal messages.
Bostrom	2011	…the acquisition, processing, and retention of information in the interpersonal context.

* See Glenn, 1989; Wolvin & Coakley (1996) and Worthington & Bodie (2017) for full citations.

desirable."[18] One reason they make this argument is that listening researchers still do not fully understand many of the underlying processes of listening (e.g., memory, comprehension, recall, etc.). They assert that trying to develop a single definition of listening may essentially be "putting the proverbial cart before the horse."

As you examine the definitions provided in Table 1.2, you'll notice that many suggest that listening is a multidimensional construct. Most typically, elements of these (and many other) definitions fall into three broad, yet complex categories: a) affective processes, which include aspects related to motivation and appreciation; b) behavioral processes, which generally focus on responding, including verbal and nonverbal feedback; and c) cognitive processes, which address attention, understanding, reception, and interpretation.[19] These elements are featured prominently in many listening models, including several outlined below.

Models of Listening

Most of you are probably familiar with basic communication models that address the sender, receiver, message, feedback, and noise. These elements are combined with various other

characteristics in a multitude of models. Based upon these communication models, we have learned a great deal about constructing and sending messages. However, while you have spent much of your lives learning how to put together a message, this time is wasted if you don't also think about what happens when the other party receives it. Just as you are mindful about what goes into a message that you send, you need to be mindful of how incoming information is received and processed. To help us start down that road, we will first introduce the purpose behind model building, then look at several models of listening. The primary purpose of a **model** is to illustrate complex, abstract processes in such a way that you have a clear understanding of how the process works.

While many types of models exist, listening is most often portrayed using *process models*, which attempt to illustrate what happens in our minds as we listen. Process models serve a number of purposes for researchers.[20] They are *organizational*, illustrating the connections and rules between elements. Ideally, models also serve *heuristic, predictive,* and *measurement* functions. Put more plainly, they should give us ideas of what to research, make predictions of how components (or other concepts and elements) work together, and give us an idea of how best to measure listening processes. The primary purpose of models in most textbooks is organizational, and our model of listening (the WFH model) is no different.

However, before introducing our own model of listening, we need to look briefly at existing models. Following the work of early listening scholar, Belle Ruth Witkin, we divide these models into three broad areas: speech communication models, cognitive models, and speech science models.[21]

Speech Communication Models

Speech communication models look at listening within the context of a communication setting or as a communication specific skill. Essentially, these models go beyond traditional communication models to emphasize the skills and processes used to listen.[22] For example, models by Larry Barker, and Andy Wolvin and Carolyn Coakley highlight the role and importance of receiving information and assigning meaning to messages. Most general communication models at the time tended to ignore these aspects of communication.

Speech communication models are rooted in the early work of Ralph Nichols. Known as the "Father of Listening," Nichols' early research had a profound impact on how scholars viewed listening. Nichols' research motivated scholars to think of listening as a separate and identifiable aspect of communication. During this period, Nichols was mostly interested in listening as it related to the comprehension of lecture information. He constructed a test designed to tap listening comprehension of a lecture and compared the results with several standardized tests covering intelligence, social ease, and other mental and social variables. His results suggested that there are a number of elements impacting **listening comprehension,** including *cognitive factors* (e.g., intelligence, curiosity, inference-making ability, and ability to concentrate), *language-related factors* (e.g., reading comprehension, recognition of correct English usage, size of the listener's vocabulary, ability to identify main ideas), *speaker-related factors* (e.g., speaker effectiveness, audibility of the speaker, admiration for the speaker), *contextual factors* (e.g., interest in the subject, importance of the subject, room ventilation and temperature, listener's physical fatigue), and *demographic factors* (e.g., listener sex, parental occupation, high school academic achievement).

Looking at Nichols' research, you can see that he focused on the overall communication process. Importantly, while he began to isolate or separate listening from other communication elements,