

Forum Notes for the Theory & Research Context

Context Leads: Graham Bodie, Lynn Cooper, Margarete Imhof, and Debra Worthington

Writers: Sarah O'Colmain, Dr. Lisa Orick-Martinez

Participants: Andrew Wolvin, Dick Halley, Em Griffin, Jerry Catt-Oliason, Kelby Halone, Lisa Orick-Martinez, Mayra Bloom, Mike Purdy, Pete Bicak, Sarah O'Colmain, Susan Chrisman

Notes Consolidated by Margarete Imhof and Graham Bodie

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**Identified gaps of knowledge**

- Concepts

Explore, diagnose, and research where there are gaps in knowledge.

- Instruments

An instrument list would be helpful. One that identifies what groups to use it with, what the instrument measures and other information for researchers or practitioners may be useful.

We have these instruments, some need to be improved, some work in some areas, etc. Some instruments are overlapping, cognitively, behaviorally, etc.

- Definition of listening

A central issue we need to deal with is to come up with a definition of listening that's acceptable overall. We need to look at the function of listening. However, part of the problem is that we keep attaching a "to it" rather than just the "listening" part.

We've come this far in listening, but what can we say we know? This is in terms of legitimizing things. We need to establish the paradigm that is agreed upon so we can get grants for research.

Discussion focused around "function" and that it is what something does in and of itself.

Listening can be used for many different functions, as opposed to purpose. The reason to develop a scale or instrument is to measure the function of the phenomenon. The flip side is are we trying to find the construct of listening devoid of context? The question was raised: will coming up with a common definition be fruitful? Are we comfortable with a multitude of definitions?

The group agreed that we agree on more than we disagree on. One thing that we in the listening field agree on:

Individual culture influences our listening.

The individual skills, the context, culture, situation, plays on that.

There is a process that we can define, we know it's there, and we agree that there is something like this.

What we need to know about the person, context, culture.

What do we want to know of the process?

What do we know of the product, results, response?

Then we can locate where we look for all of this?

**Listening within the bigger picture**

The idea of testing the models that have been developed was brought up. One problem is that we get so focused on our area that we don't look at the bigger picture of listening. What does this tell us and what can we connect back to this larger idea of listening? When we are doing our research we need to keep in mind the bigger picture. It also will help us in terms of measures. Maybe we can better identify and fill in the gaps in listening research. Not all research and articles answer the "why" questions. We talk about individual differences in listening, but we don't take it back to the bigger picture. How does this help in cognitive processing? We never get back to the bigger picture.

The discussion turned to looking at the macro and micro issues of listening? We have this tension between what listening is doing and listening as being a certain way in the world. The conflict comes when the professional people come and say "tell us what you know" (to the researchers). We do need to have some way of connecting with other, definitions. We need to link everyone with the concept.

Another area discussed were lists of taxonomy, what are the verbal and nonverbal listening skills? Definitions? Do these skills actually increase listening skills; do they actually affect the relationship? Is there a broad construct of better listening? This is the groundwork of how do we teach our students to be better listeners? Or are there combinations of variables?

Some of the discussions focused on training, current articles, and teaching listening. Meta-analysis was suggested for these areas. Collapse these together? Skills in training, we teach our students and they appear to be better listeners, but are they better listeners?

A flow chart was suggested. We need a flow chart that shows what happens after we listen; an alignment between conception and operation. There is a gap in model building and testing. We don't have a lot of empirical studies that guide a model heuristically and empirical. There are various levels of theories of the phenomenon of listening.

Other Priorities / Aspects to consider as listening is conceptualized:

- Priority: We all have talked about, in some way, whether effective listening behavior equals some aspect of life success- a connection of listening to life success. Because the goal of effective listening is this form of life success, then that justifies training.
- Priority: Fear of personal revelation and disclosure and need for strong sense of self. Safe space and environment conducive to listening.
- Priority: need to be able to assess listening more effectively, because we need to assess the gap between the theory of what we want to accomplish and the application of what is being accomplished. *How do we know if we're being successful?*
- Researchers experience fear in producing a model that's out there in the public because of validity/reliability issues. *I don't want to put something out there if I can't really trust it...*

Suggestion of a heuristic model for listening research / of listening:

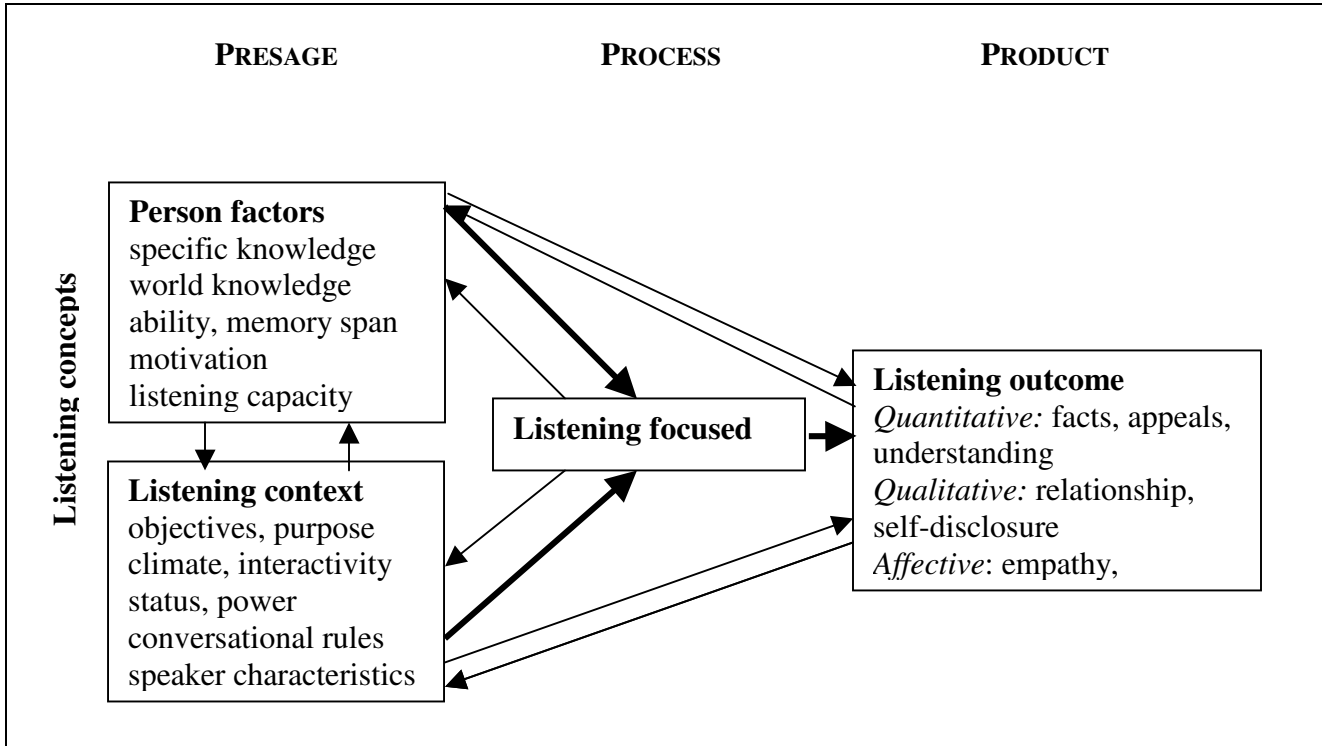


Figure 1: Systems model of the listening process (Imhof & Janusik, 2006).

(Imhof, M. & Janusik, L.A. (2006). Development and validation of the Imhof-Janusik Listening Concepts Inventory to Measure Listening Conceptualization Differences between Cultures. *Journal of Intercultural Communication Research*, 35, 79-98.)

**PRESAGE** of Listening: Anything that has an (empirically testable) impact on listening

**Person factors:** trait and state variables pertaining to the person who is processing the information, e.g., objectives, gender, knowledge, memory span, personality, goals, confidence in skills level, relationship, status, emotional states, self-regulation, hierarchy, type of bonding and obligation, communicative skills (adaptiveness) ....

**Context factors:** trait or relatively stable factors of the distal and peripheral environment, both in terms of physical variables and in terms of psychological and social variables, e.g., culture, degree of formality of the communication (number of conversational rules which are in effect), intersubjectivity and shared knowledge, speaker characteristics,

**PROCESS:** Processes on various levels which are applied to the message and which contribute to the listening product

Neuropsychological processes, brain activity,  
Cognitive processes, understanding, integrating information  
Social and communicative behavior, e.g., nonverbal feedback during listening

**PRODUCT:** Any concept that results from the process of listening

Quantitative: Facts, knowledge, individual pieces of information, understanding, instructions, conceptual change, behavior...  
Qualitative: empathy, motivation, co-construction of a view of the subject, emotion, judgment, social feeling, establishing common ground.....

Problems discussed with this model:

What constitutes the concept?

What exactly do we mean by information processing and Comprehension?

If we can see a bigger picture, we can tell each other what we are looking at.

Hesitant to look for a single definition. It's a concept, you can have different definitions, and we are coming from the same theoretical framework.

This model is still applicable to the communication process if you take out "listening" and therefore it would not constitute a specific theory of listening. – Comment: This observation is correct, but the intention of the model is rather of a heuristic nature to motivate empirical research which might later be used as the basis / evidence for specific theory building.

One way of conceptualizing is to start with this chart. Think in terms of processing and the outcome. Careful, our biology comes first, then we try to predict on the outcome, not the internal stimuli. This is a recursive, non-linear model. Everything is influencing everything else. Arrows go in all directions. Information processing, may have an impact on you attitude as a person, this may have an impact on your behavior as a person, etc. It's recursive.

### **SUMMARY:**

The issue of definition establishes the paradigm that it's there.

1. To identify the contextual and situational variables that give rise to the contextual process.
2. There is a continuum of social science to humanistic in studying listening. We have to make sure that the paradigm is distinct.
3. Macro and micro issues of listening.

Look at contextual and situational variables that arise when looking at and studying listening in the humanistic and socialistic arena?

All points of knowledge would be good to have in a paper.

There is a metaphoric gap.

Diagnostic, heuristic and research all ways are important.

We have a lot of instruments, reliability and validity is not well established. Going back to the initial conversation we had, this is something we can start working on now. It's important for the type of work that we do.

These are some of the domains, we have the topic, but we are going to frame this from a variety of perspectives. If we don't know where they are coming from conceptually, then we don't know what it means.

Listening tests driven. All tests are looking at understanding what listening is, but not what the differences are and to meld them together. It's a multi-dimensional concept.

Qualitative and quantitative are both needed in listening.

We need to link the perspectives together and we aren't there yet. In Kuhn's terms of a state of the science, we could say that the research of listening is still in the pre-paradigmatic state.

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**The top priorities and concerns were identified as**

1. What is listening? Does this differ across situational, individual, cultural, and other variables?
2. How do we develop effective listeners across the lifespan in various contexts? What is good/bad listening and how does this differ based on certain variables?
3. How do we measure, assess, and account for competent listening in particular contexts and within particular cultures? (what are the similarities and differences of which we need to be aware in order to measure listening appropriately)?

**Other observations:**

Need to be careful on development of models because it has an impact on the field.  
Validating not just listening, but the outcomes, being able to tie good listening to outcomes.

Conversational Memory legitimacy in the 1970's popular because they could produce the outcomes. (Information processing)

- The way we typically look at *competent* is that it incorporates "effective" and "appropriate". Maybe should use effective because using competent implies knowledge of what competent in this context means.
- Griffin: Very heavy on practitioners. First one was about cross-culture, could be an assessment issues, how are techniques effective in different cultures, how do people from different cultures understand teach others- great interest in cross culture. Second unique and powerful: how to train people to listen to the un-listenable. A little context: Came from a man who works in hospice training- how do you tell people they're going to die? Religious groups: how do you get members of different religions to listen to each other. Third, the important of needing to validate and disseminate our legitimacy as a science. In other words, we need to come up with good research based on sound concepts and definitions and driven

by theory. Real desire for theory that would be useful and disseminated, both in public domain and scholastically.

- Dick Halley: Need for instruments in all areas. Big concern about listening not being valued, and so need to look at valued outcomes to be researched to see if they happen when listening is involved. Need to be able to map skills to the outcome.
- Everything boiled down to two things: 1) lack of model or theory of listening. And 2) need to do more work on measurement, esp. validating them, and take cross-cultural issues into account. The importance of training was thrown in with measurements, because training people wanted to be able to prove it worked (part of legitimacy and validation). Context needs to be taken into account with models. We need to be able to code-switch.
- Good visual from our group was replay in collegiate sports. Each camera gives different view and angle, but same thing happening regardless of who's looking at it.
- Worthington: If we're going to validate and legitimize ourselves, first need to do this with our instruments.
- Graham: Think that's why listening not seen as a legitimate field sometimes. Because some of the stuff that's created is not good. Instruments are used in their original form even when they've been shown to not measure what they're supposed to.
- Relating back to the bigger picture gives legitimacy. If field gained greater legitimacy, would work on priorities we've already set.
- Halley: If we're thinking in terms of our workload as researchers implementing this eventually, need to make clear distinction between outcome-assessing and assessing that says "Did listening take place", those are two big chunks of things that have to be done, they should not get meshed together.

## **Discussion and projection of future research projects:**

### **Priorities**

- Priority # 1: What is a definition of listening which would be acceptable for the different context areas and which would be conducive for a listening model / or at least a working theory of listening?
- Priority #2: cross-context group thought that “assessment tools” needed to be expanded to just be “research”; and that it needed to be translated so could be understood by practitioners and lay people. Theory building and research are important, but after research, there’s got to be a way to translate it so can be understood by non-researchers. We need to focus on areas where we need additional research and then focus on filling those gaps; the instrument issue is only part of this.
- Group decided that Priority #3, then, should focus on need to translate research into practical areas of application. Rationale is that, as researchers, we often fall short of telling people why our research is important and how to use it, which creates and exacerbates the divide between researchers and non-researchers. It’s an issue of disseminating the research and providing training on how to use instruments. We need to be able to bridge/close the gap between research and practice.

### **Potential Partners for research**

- Potential partners: Departments of Communication, Departments of Marketing, Business Management Schools, Schools of Public Health, Seminary Schools, Psychology departments, Sociology departments, Education departments, etc.
- Think also of divisions of student affairs, like career training, diversity training, leadership training that transcend traditional academic divisions, and other student organizations

### **Funding ideas**

- Funding ideas: PEW Foundation, LILY Foundation, CCC (Council for Christian Colleges)
- Still need to identify new funding sources
- More ideas: grants.gov, NSF, Carnegie Foundation, McArthur Foundation, Spencer Foundation,
- S.C. Johnson Foundation (does series of listening ads on TV, got ILA award for that before, we need to go back to them), Philip Morris, same reason
- We need to stake a Center for Listening Research, we need to have one in tandem with Reading Research Center, we need to have an archive; we need someone to write us a check to build a building, hire staff, etc. Maria Roca would like to establish this at Florida Gulf Coast Univ.

## Generating ideas for resources and the next steps for research

- Assessments include standardized instruments that already exist and new ones to be developed to test peoples' listening abilities before going through it and afterwards, including longitudinal assessments
- Software with sound media, where you select sound files and can change whether filters are used, steepening of tones, etc. 30 hours of sound stimulation gets them connected with body and language. \$2500 for software for first year, website is: [www.soundlistening.com](http://www.soundlistening.com).
- Just finished study that needs a place to be published about children who are behaviorally and cognitively challenged- listening tests show amazing improvement in these kids. One of the 10 kids at one school that they worked with was selected as the most improved student of the year.
- Em Griffin passed out two-page handout of Value Questions for Theory Selection in his *First Look at Communication Theory* textbook
- Key idea behind first priority is to have some individuals critique our current models and theories of listening, do compare/contrast. There are some people who are very theory-oriented that would have an interest in it and be very good at it. This would be an incredibly important article to be in the Journal.
- Second priority deals with research- we need to start choosing some of the instruments to take a hard look at and set up a program to establish their reliability and validity.
- Dissemination of knowledge priority might just be people volunteering to look at what comes out in the Journal and create bullet points of what to take away as practitioners. In articles when there should be a practical implications section (in Discussion section), people often don't put enough in; we need to put more effort into talking about the practical significance of findings. Or post this stuff on the listserv or on the website.
- Project would be to go through Journal and find most important articles and pull bullet points from it: for example, say: "Here's the theory, here are the implications, here's what to keep in mind in terms of comprehension, etc." So, could be contextual (health, education, etc.) like for people developing a class in listening.
- *Listening, the Big Picture* should be an NCA project, focused to people who want to teach basic communication/listening courses.
- Rubric for writing articles should require section for detailing how research can be applied practically.
- Group agrees that this is good point and something we can start working on now. Will take care of the "So what?" question people have when can't make that critical connection.
- Suggestion of a forum that facilitates what the criteria are for how we would develop theoretical argument, methodological argument, and then research testing it. It would be beneficial to have people outside of listening, like Berger, Spitzberg, etc., to contribute that "instant replay" view (different perspectives about the same issue). For example, Kory Floyd studies the physiological effects of affection- it would be interesting to look at this in terms of listening.
- It would be useful to have a funded conference to bring all kinds of scholars in where we write papers from a listening perspective and have them contribute their responses. They could participate "within their world".

### Further projects suggested by members of the group

- Theory group needs to assess where are we right now, that article that will be informative for all context areas in terms of being able to provide directions or pointing out areas that need further theoretical development. A starting point will be to compare and contrast current models. We can start with Dr. Wolvin's Listening: Theoretical Intersections paper that was presented at the 2003 National Communication Association conference, and some other papers he's written.
- English as a Second Language (ESL): great research being done that addresses the importance of listening when it comes into the English classroom, have whole typology in the way to break down how problems occur when listening. Problems for ESL students include differences in metaphor use, (causes problems because they can't process metaphors,) and the role of Power Point (it can get in the way because it adds to the cognitive load of trying to process language).
- Lynne: if you're an educator, listening as information-processing becomes a fascinating thing. If you're a healthcare practitioner, listening as behavior might be more useful because they have little time with patients, need outcome-orientation. By context, may by default be zeroing in on certain context groups. So, it is task-oriented model we need.
- Mike Purdy is working on writing a phenomenology of listening (what is listening?); he needs collaborators.
- Mayra would create questionnaire to give to her listening students to assess whether listening course affected their behavior and choices they make before and after the listening course. Also, curious to see would teachers (in narrative evaluations) notice anything about their attentiveness or participation in group discussions compared to students who didn't take the listening class. Also, establish a listening center at the CEC (Continuing Education Center).
- Susan: immediate problem is that she has group of students (nursing, college juniors) who are failing. Would like a tool to assess their listening and then devise course to improve listening to see if this improves test scores.
- Graham: paper with 2 main parts: first, review of listening assessment instruments with any available norm data, reliability and validity estimates. Also, adding a table that had instruments in the column section and across rows style column with dots to show which kind (like information-processing, behavioral, etc). Then, fill in gaps of missing data, once we have all these tables and norm data.
- Dick: sex differences study on people evaluating readers, any difference in how well they score on the test. Right now, have indication that they only get 40% of the message the first time around.
- Wolvin: (already working on these): edited book on dimensions of listening. Proposal for patient-as-listener. We need some neck-snapping initiatives that'll draw international attention. He feels we need to make places of worship a listening space, as people more and more want spiritual and social connections at Church.
- Wolvin: interesting model for us to remember is John Power's piece about intellectual structure of the discipline, nice way to start thinking about this.
- Mike: A piece on *what is listening?* There are few books on phenomenology of listening. Will bring together work done in the past and from the literature.
- Lynne: work with Organizational Listening Survey (OLS) instrument to measure listening in organizations. Compare with Brian Spitzberg's Conversational Skills rating scale. Using in

different contexts (mentoring, international volunteers, etc.) Also use OLS to assess listening at the college level.

- Jerry: hermeneutic theory and how relates to listening theory, practical ways to interpret. How metaphorical processes contribute to the creativity of language; project underway to explore how metaphor creates meaning in different organizational contexts, listening in relation to power and imagination.
- Debra: Look at one or two instruments that need some attention, for example, the LSP-16, which had really low reliability on one of the subscales in the last study she used (either Time or Content). Begs question of validity. Are we tapping what we need to be tapping. Thinks we need to divide up some of the scales to evaluate. Big goal is to finish book.
- Is LSP-16 one of our main instruments? Debra thinks yes. There is a lot of training that is used for it. Purdy thinks it sounds like it fits well with what business contexts are interested in. Would like to do in different contexts and with different samples (other than white Southern college students). Would like to do in Healthcare.
- After work on reliability and validity of scale is to do second-step above self-report scale. Want to do study to find out if parents and kids can estimate each other's listening style. What are implications if do not have same listening style for the family? Is this state or trait issue?
- Margarete: Need to validate some of the instruments. Want to look at how approaches to listening are related to approaches to learning and achievement. Main concern is that we don't have instruments that measure listening approaches. We need one that is more fine-tuned than the LSP. We should consider, as a group, trying to validate instruments that we have.
- Kelby: Wants to study difference between listener as role and listener as process. Context will be trying to legitimize the role of the concept of listening in and among different communication concepts. Second, grounded study looking at gendered listeners.
- Debra wants people to contribute ideas about the items on the LSP. There are issues that can be readily addressed. Call for student populations, including adult learners, nursing students, etc.
- See if there are commonalities in different measures of listening style. (LSI very different than LSP). Is there a way for us to look at these different listening styles, figure out which of these will be best in association with learning style?
- To address third priority (translate research into practical suggestions for business and health and education), send out listserv. We want to do this- ask them what they want to know that we can provide them with, what gaps do they want filled, what can we translate- Graham will use his space on the Listening Post to address these issues.