# Priorities of Listening Research:
# Four Interrelated Initiatives
A White Paper Sponsored by the Research Committee of
the International Listening Association

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# Priorities of Listening Research

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**EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

Listening is a multidimensional construct, and its processes and effects have been studied by various disciplines. One challenge to studying listening is that the processes involved in listening are primarily cognitive, yet listening is perceived behaviorally (L. Janusik, 2007; Witkin, 1990). This fact has caused many to study cognition and behavior associated with listening as separate phenomena. Indeed, integrative research in listening is rare (see Bodie, Worthington, Imhof, & Cooper, in press). Another challenge facing future theorizing about listening is that work relevant to building general models of listening is spread out among several discipline-specific literatures. Although reviews of this literature exist (Bodie et al., in press; Wolvin, in press; Wolvin, Halone, & Coakley, 1999), the assumptions underlying different theoretical perspectives are often obfuscated or ignored. In order to advance (and possibly unify) our field we need to develop and integrate perspectives that allow for a fuller investigation of listening and its importance to everyday human interaction.

This white paper outlines four initiatives and their underlying research questions that serve to advance the study and theorizing of listening. We hope the contents of this document will strike a chord in others so that collective work toward advancing our knowledge of listening can be accomplished. In service of this goal, the document begins by providing a background of two meetings, both of which focused on honing what needs to be known about listening to develop solid listening theory. After this background is provided, the following initiatives and research questions are explored:

*Initiative One: Is What we Know about Listening Folklore or Fact?*
- RQ1: What is the evidence for claims made about listening behavior, listening processed, and listening barriers in the popular, technical, and academic literature?

*Initiative Two: What is Listening?*
- RQ2: What should theories of listening look like, what sort of terms ought they contain, and what are the specific components of good listening theory?

- RQ3: What theories exist to explain listening, broadly speaking, and how well do they stand to empirical scrutiny?

*Initiative Three:  Investigating Listening in Context*
- RQ4: What is listening in the context of "X" (e.g., informal social support)?

- RQ5: What do we need to know about listening in this context?

*Initiative Four: Measuring Listening*
- RQ6: What are the psychometric properties of the available tests of listening (broadly defined)?

- RQ7: Are there new tests of listening that need to be developed to answer your specific research questions?

# Priorities of Listening Research

## INTRODUCTION

Within the communication discipline, many trace the origin of listening research to the work of Ralph G. Nichols (Nichols, 1948). Although Nichols was not the earliest to theorize about (James, 1890/1981) or conduct empirical research on (Rankin, 1926) listening, his dissertation was the catalyst for considering listening as a fundamental communicative competency. Over the decades since Nichols' dissertation and subsequent publications, several thousand studies have been conducted on the subject within Psychology (e.g., Cherry, 1953; Treisman, 1960), Second Language Learning (for reviews see Buck, 2001; Flowerdew, 1994), Linguistics (e.g., van Dijk & Kintsch, 1983), and Education (e.g., DeWitt-Brinks & Rhodes, 1992; Janusik, 2002, in press), as well as the Communication discipline.

Taking a broad perspective on what constitutes listening research, it becomes clear that several disciplines are concerned about the process and outcomes of listening. Although much listening research still takes place in Communication, there are other perspectives that are equally important. Listening is a multidimensional construct, so it must be studied from various perspectives. The perspectives currently found in the extant literature have been reviewed elsewhere (Bodie et al., in press), and comprehensive reviews of listening theory and research also are available (Bodie & Fitch-Hauser, in press; Rhodes, Watson, & Barker, 1990; Witkin, 1990; Wolvin, in press; Wolvin et al., 1999). The purpose of this white paper is to serve as a catalyst for future listening theory and research efforts.

Our main focus is to present four areas of primary importance for moving the field of listening forward. The ideas for these areas were generated through a series of conferences and discussions; thus, we provide the reader with a background to help contextualize our discussion. The subsequent four sections introduce the four primary initiatives and potential projects that will aid in moving our field forward. A concluding section summarizes this discussion and introduces a new program to help fund projects related to our primary initiatives.

# Priorities of Listening Research

## BACKGROUND

In her capacity as Chairperson of the International Listening Association (ILA) Research Committee and using the National Cancer Institute's Progress Review Groups model, Laura Janusik began organizing an international forum in 2004 with the mission of developing a five-year listening research agenda. Sponsored by Rockhurst University and the ILA, the Kansas City Forum (KCF) was held in 2006 and consisted of five context areas: Business, Education, Healthcare, Religion/Spirituality, and Theory and Research. Each of these areas produced a "state of listening" paper; each of these manuscripts serves as a partial backdrop for the current essay.

Conversations from the KCF were revisited at the 2007 ILA convention in Frankfurt, Germany where a series of panels developed actionable research questions that stemmed from a combination of areas of inquiry highlighted by the KCF documents and individual interests represented at the convention. Participants of the Frankfurt panels indicated the need for a comprehensive document that summarized areas of primary importance and highlighted an actionable list of research questions that could be answered in a timely manner. This white paper provides that comprehensive review.

Certainly the current document is limited in scope. Given the majority of ILA members claim Communication as their home discipline, the areas of inquiry and research questions are admittedly biased toward a paradigm whereby listening is seen in the broader context of interaction or dialogue. We welcome others to add to our list of initiatives as well as our list of research questions.

> "…this white paper represents s a work-in-progress due to the oversight we admit at the forefront. Moreover, this is a work-in-progress due also to the fact that the document should change as questions are answered and as these answers spawn future areas of inquiry and questions. …"

In other words, this white paper represents s a work-in-progress due to the oversight we admit at the forefront. Moreover, this is a work-in-progress due also to the fact that the document should change as questions are answered and as these answers spawn future areas of inquiry and questions. We hope to revisit this document regularly to update progress.

Limitations notwithstanding, the following sections introduce four areas of central import that stem from the Kansas City and Frankfurt meetings. Each section ends with actionable research questions that serve as priorities for the newly established ILA Synergist Award sponsored by the Research Committee of the ILA. The details of this prize are presented in the concluding section.

## INITIATIVE ONE: FOLKLORE OR FACT?

Assertions about listening behavior, listening processes, and listening barriers are found in corporate (e.g., Steil, Barker, & Watson, 1983), academic (e.g., Wolvin & Coakley, 1996), and popular press (e.g., Pease & Pease, 2001) texts. Similarly, listening "truths" are espoused across a range of disciplines including counseling, sales, human resource

management, and general business communication, just to name a few. These assertions often are backed with empirical evidence; however, folklore also is perpetrated alongside fact. Fortunately, separating folklore from fact is as easy as asking, "What is the evidence?" The first initiative in moving the field of listening forward is to *seek out the evidence for claims made in the extant literature and test those claims not yet empirically verified.*

For example, texts claim the existence of several types of listening (e.g., discriminative, empathic) with particular skills necessary to be proficient within each listening subgenre (Wolvin & Coakley, 1993). Although useful, follow-up research on these taxonomies is rare (Ford, Wolvin, & Chung, 2000). In fact, we are currently unable to definitely report whether (a) each listening type has a unique set of skills, (b) particular skills are necessary for effective listening of particular types, or (c) engaging in different types of listening in different situations leads to different outcomes. Very rare, indeed, is the study that systematically manipulates listening skills and tests their impact on relevant outcomes (c.f. Hutchby, 2005; Libow & Doty, 1976).

Similarly, barriers to listening are identified in all major listening texts. Unfortunately, only a handful of studies have systematically tested these barriers. Moreover, many of these studies use preformulated lists derived from textbooks (e.g., Golen, 1990) and, thus, may be perpetuating the status-quo more than developing new knowledge. It is highly important to demonstrate the impact of particular listening barriers with particular people and within particular contexts if we are to teach people strategies of overcoming these barriers (Imhof, 2001).

An important question to ask across the landscape of listening assertions is, "Where is the evidence?" Overall, the first area of inquiry addresses the need to systematically investigate claims made in the extant listening literature. As Imhof (2001) claims, "we would not use or teach certain strategies unless we had sound reasons to believe that they are worth the effort"(p. 3). These sound reasons, however, are sometimes based on little empirical evidence.

Specifically, research question one asks:

*RQ1: What is the evidence for claims made about listening behavior, listening processes, and listening barriers in the popular, technical, and academic literatures?*

This question can be answered using diverse methodologies and approaches. For example, this question is broad enough to support several narrative reviews that trace the origins of specific claims (e.g., verbally acknowledging a speaker's message increases feelings of self-worth, relationship satisfaction, etc.) or groups of claims (e.g., claims about active or empathic listening in general). Questions such as the following might direct such a project:

- Where was this claim first made?
- Are the studies that serve as the base for a claim methodologically sound?

&ndash; Is behavioral change being recommended based on folklore or fact?

A more comprehensive project might explore the treatment of listening in popular culture texts or popular press books. Important questions in need of answers include:

&ndash; What is the general public reading that relates to listening?
&ndash; What is the foundation of popular press treatments of listening?
&ndash; Should popular press treatments of listening be criticized or lauded?
&ndash; Are popular press books misrepresenting listening or are they true to the available evidence?

Finally, projects that seek to fill in our knowledge gaps using correlational or experimental designs are a needed component of this first research question. Identifying knowledge gaps and proposing studies to fill these gaps represents a third option to answer the first research question.

## INITIATIVE TWO: WHAT IS LISTENING?

Typically, listening scholars have answered this question by attempting to define listening in one way – "in order to understand listening, we must come to agreement on its definition" has been a prevalent motto in the ILA since the mid-1990s. Thus, we have a plethora of spins on the ILA definition of listening: "listening is the attending, receiving, interpreting, and responding to messages presented aurally" The Frankfurt panel discussions were based on the assumption that *it is more important to develop listening theory than to agree upon a single definition of listening*. Theory necessarily comes from a perspective – an overarching meta-theoretical framework paired with typical methodological paradigms and enlivened by debate among those who disagree. Thus, a first step to developing listening theory is to develop listening perspectives.

All perspectives assume some aspects of listening and problematize others. They adhere to particular methodologies and tend to underutilize others. Most importantly, different perspectives will have different definitions of listening. For instance, while viewing listening as social information processing might result in a definition of listening as a series of stages through which one goes in order to process information in a social environment, viewing listening as an ethical endeavor might result in a definition of listening as a way of knowing and valuing the other. Of course, the reader can imagine a perspective that combines these two definitions as well. Thus, to say that we need to agree on a single definition of listening is problematic. Instead, we should be developing multiple definitions that are useful for particular purposes of advancing theory. If listening is multi-faceted, as we claim, then it is more desirable to have multiple definitions as a reflection of this assumption.

So what is listening theory? Overall, a theory is a systematic accounting of interrelated phenomena and why their relationships exist. Listening theories are useful to the extent that they aid in understanding the social world (how and why people listen in particular ways and on particular occasions). A primary function of theory, then, is to guide discovery and interpretation of a set of phenomena (Berger & Chaffee, 1987). The more precise and particular a theory, the more precise are the recommendations that the theory advocates (Schutz, 1967).

> "… better theory should lead to better practice primarily because theory enables comprehensive understanding…"

Why do we need listening theory? The purpose of theory is to aid in understanding the social world by providing an organizing framework (among other functions); good theory helps us to answer questions in a more systematic and organized fashion. Thus, better theory should lead to better practice primarily because theory enables comprehensive understanding as opposed to the variable-analytic approach (i.e., generating lists of skills that seem disconnected) that describes much of the listening research to date.

In sum, the first actionable research question within this initiative can be stated as:

*RQ2: What should theories of listening look like, what sort of terms ought they contain, and what are the specific components of good listening theory?*

In 1994, John Greene published *What sort of terms ought theories of human action incorporate?* in which he advanced a "perspective on the kinds of terms that theories of human action, and particularly theories of message production, ought to incorporate" (Greene, 1994). A similar article could outline what listening theories should do. Of course, a number of competing perspectives could be elucidated, thus providing for future research to test competing (or suggest complementary) claims. Other articles could expand upon different perspectives one could take to study listening. Essays by Purdy (2000) and Imhof (in press) provide two examples of such an approach.

Several perspectives on listening exist, the most prevalent of which are identified in Bodie et al. (in press). Similarly, our discussions in Frankfurt surfaced the following perspectives: (a) listening as social information processing, (b) language learning, (c) listening as an ethical endeavor, (d) listening as social interaction, and (e) listening as experiential. The subsections below summarize these new perspectives as they were discussed at the Frankfurt convention. They are not representative of all available perspectives on listening and all are drastically underdeveloped. They are presented here to spark future theoretical work.

# Priorities of Listening Research

### *Listening as Social Information Processing*

Drawing heavily from cognitive and social psychological perspectives on listening as information processing, listening is defined as an information processing task carried out in a social, interactive, or communicative environment. Several interrelated areas include, but are not limited to, listening as co-narration, listening as iInteraction, a communication perspective on listening, social cognition, human information processing, discourse analysis, linguistics research, and listening for meaning.

From this perspective, scholars should focus on how individuals process information in their social environment and how this might be similar to and/or different from information processing in non-social environments. Borrowing from theories in cognitive and social psychology we should be able to identify the stages of information processing most important for a model of listening (see Bodie et al., in press; Imhof, in press) as well as the variables that might influence listening in a social context (e.g., profiles, preferences, fidelity).

### *Listening as Language Learning*

From this perspective, listening is a critical language skill, necessary for competent communication in its many manifestations (e.g., reading, speaking). Related areas include, but are not limited to, learning to read, foreign language learning, and language usage. From this perspective, scholars should focus on acquisition (first versus second language), therapeutic elements involved in teaching, cultural specific versus universal knowledge claims, differences and similarities between hearing and producing language, and the role of listening in acquiring print competencies.

### *Listening as an Ethical Endeavor*

Listening as an ethical endeavor involves studying listening as the ability of listening to aid in acquiring the perspective of the other person. From this perspective, listening, in its purest and most non-egocentric from, is a way of knowing and valuing the other person. Thus, from this perspective, listening can be conceptualized as exdoctrination and its study is necessarily ethnographic or narrative.

*Listening as Social Interaction*

Although sharing some in common with listening as social information processing, listening is defined from the social interaction perspective as a communal activity, simultaneously created by and helping to create social interaction. This perspective incorporates theories and principles from story telling, narrative theory, therapeutic listening, experience, and phenomenology. Especially divergent from the information processing approach is the focus of listening as social interaction on effectiveness.

*Listening as Experiential*

From this perspective, listening is a natural and creative process, as opposed to forced or contrived. Specifically, listening is a non-linear, non-systems, dynamic and creative endeavor, unique to the individual experiencing the listening situation and analogous to the artist's experience.

While developing useful perspectives and generating theories from these perspectives is a first step toward advancing our field, doing so without regard to testing theory only leads us back to our current state – lists of behaviors and recommendations that only are valid within a particular perspective but advocated as general truths. To continue our quest for understanding listening, we must test theory. Testing theory involves developing valid and reliable instruments. Strong tests of theory (Popper, 1965) enable us to pit competing claims against one another and enjoy as the winner slowly emerges. Theories will be more or less supported; such is the nature of scientific discovery. Ideally, theories will be discarded, revived, and combined after tests have been made to their underlying structure.

Thus a second, but connected, question can be asked within this initiative:

### RQ3: What theories exist to explain listening, broadly speaking, and how well do they stand to empirical scrutiny?

Perhaps the theories we have are not well tested and thus this question becomes moot. In this case, proposing rigorous tests of existing theories also fits within this question and projects doing so are especially welcomed.

### INITIATIVE THREE: INVESTIGATING LISTENING IN CONTEXT

"…practical recommendations are more useful and focused when stemming from contextually-based research …"

As evidenced by the division of the KCF into five context areas, the importance and necessity of studying listening within multiple contexts is recognized. Contextually-based theories that explore the basic structures and functions of listening show a concerted effort of "taking communication seriously" (Burleson, 1992), and practical recommendations are more useful and focused when

stemming from contextually-based research. Thus, it is not enough to focus on developing grand theories of listening; listening must be contextualized.

The five areas represented at the KC Forum (Business, Healthcare, Education, and Religion/Spirituality) are not the only contexts within which listening can be studied. For instance, there is more than six decades of work on the concept of client-centered psychotherapy (Rogers, 1942). Theorizing about listening in this context is flourishing and is just one example of how listening should be contextualized. Questions such as, "Can research on empathic listening in the psychiatrist-patient relationship be extrapolated to informal support situations?" deserve to be answered, too. Moreover, an area like Business should be segmented into its constituent parts. Another sub-area of interest might be the concept of institutional listening (cf. Välikoski 2004, 108), where the listener is the state or the organization via its civil servants, judges, officers, and consultants. The state or the organization is obliged to listen based on legislation and a citizen must be listened to before final decision-making in her/his case. Questions such as "How is the feeling of being listened to conceptualized in the institutional listening process between expert and layman?" might be interesting to answer (Brockner 2006, Messmer 1997, Välikoski 2000). Another sub-area in Business might be the relationship between effective listening and salesperson performance; he or she would be comforted to know that although several lines of research speak to this context (e.g., Castleberry & Shepherd, 1993; Drollinger, Comer, & Warrington, 2006) there is need for future endeavors as well.

Two interrelated research questions stemming from this initiative are:

## RQ4: What is listening in the context of "X" (e.g., informal social support)?

## RQ5: What do we need to know about listening in this context?

Importantly, research question four is intimately tied to the second initiative of building listening theory. As noted previously, the definition of listening is tied to the theoretical perspective from which it is derived. Thus, contextually based research should differ substantially from the atheoretical nature of past efforts focused mainly on training and development. Instead, efforts to move our field forward should be theoretically rich and pragmatically useful in the same breath.

## INITIATIVE FOUR: MEASURING LISTENING

To this point, this paper has addressed theory building and contextualizing listening but nothing about how we operationalize this construct. A necessary step in valid operationalization is establishing the psychometric properties of measurement instruments. Unfortunately, a preliminary analysis of available listening measures is not positive (available at www.listen.org). Unfortunately, some (if not most) of the literature fails to report evidence of the psychometric properties of current scales (e.g., reliability, validity, factor structure, factor invariance). Thus, the first research question within this initiative is phrased as:

## RQ6: What are the psychometric properties of the available tests of listening (broadly defined)?

Work is underway investigating the reliability and validity of the Listening Styles Profile (LSP-16) (Bodie & Worthington, 2007; Worthington & Bodie, 2007), the Imhof-Janusik (2006) Listening Concepts Inventory (LCI) (Bodie, Valikoski, & Worthington, 2008; Imhof & Janusik, 2006), a newly developed measure of listening fidelity (Fitch-Hauser, Powers, O'Brien, & Hanson, 2007), and a measure of conversational listening span (CLS) (Janusik, 2004, 2005, 2007; Välikoski, Ilomäki, Mäki, & Janusik, 2005). Numerous scales have yet to achieve validity.

One side effect of producing new listening theory is the need for additional measures of listening in its nuanced forms. Particularly valuable is the development of valid and reliable scales with a rigorous plan of how to do so. Thus,

## RQ7: Are there new tests of listening that need to be developed to answer your specific research questions?

Janusik reports the development of the Conversational Listening Span (CLS) instrument (Janusik, 2005). The CLS measures one's conversational listening capacity, or the number of items that one can hold active and respond to in a conversation. The CLS was shown to have content, criterion, and construct validity (Janusik, 2007). In addition, those with greater CLS capacities were perceived to be more communicatively competent than those with lower capacities (Janusik, 2004). The variable was shown to be normally distributed in both US American (Janusik, 2004) and Finnish populations (Välikoski, Ilomäki, Mäki, & Janusik, 2005).

The impetus behind this new instrument was to introduce the concept of Working Memory (WM) Theory (Baddeley, 1986, 2003; Baddeley & Hitch, 1974) into listening research, because Janusik (2005, 2007) argues that WM is a better indicator of listening competence than long-term memory. Additionally, most listening tests have been criticized for measuring only long-term memory and showing little more than face validity. The development and subsequent validation of the CLS established it as a listening instrument that counters these criticisms.

### CONCLUSION

As Nichols served as a catalyst for the systematic study of listening as a core communicative competency, the ideas generated by the KCF and the Frankfurt convention have the potential to maintain this fervency. In the past decade, listening research has waned from its prominence during the 1970s and 1980s. The future of listening research and theory building is bright, and their advancement begins with a sincere desire to question what we know and how we know it. Table 1 provides a summary of general questions stemming from the above initiatives.

So what *should* we do to advance listening research? What are the practical barriers to this advancement? And how do we overcome them?

**First, listening should be defined and theorized from multiple perspectives**. As evidenced above, listening theory and research is scattered throughout several literatures from psychology to communication to linguistics and so forth. Questions that need to be answered include:

- What are the many perspectives one could take when studying listening and what would the study of listening look like from those perspectives?
- What are the variables of central importance within each perspective?
- What does this perspective bring to the table that is ignored or assumed in other perspectives?

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**TABLE 1**

**SEVEN RESEARCH QUESTIONS**

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| Initiative | Question |
| --- | --- |
| Initiative One: Folklore or Fact? What is the Evidence? | What is the evidence for claims made about listening behavior, listening processes, and listening barriers in the popular, technical, and academic literatures? |
| Initiative Two: Building and Testing Listening Theory | What should theories of listening look like, what sort of terms ought they contain, and what are the specific components of good listening theory?<br><br>What theories exist to explain listening, broadly speaking, and how well do they stand to empirical scrutiny? |
| Initiative Three: Investigating Listening in Context | What is listening in the context of "X" (e.g., informal social support)?<br><br>What do we need to know about listening in this context? |
| Initiative Four: Measuring Listening | What are the psychometric properties of the available tests of listening (broadly defined)?<br><br>Are there new tests of listening that need to be developed to answer your specific research questions? |

**Second, we should learn from our past and scrutinize presently uninvestigated claims about listening**. For instance, our textbooks treat listening as an information processing task and propose that listening consists of at least four stages: attention, interpretation, evaluation, and response. We see evidence for this in our past; however, these models have yet to be sufficiently supported empirically.

This sort of theorizing will necessarily spark the need for developing new measurement instruments capable of answering perspective-specific questions. This work is already underway; however, learning from our past here is vital. Published listening research often uses incorrect statistical techniques to investigate validity, reliability, differences in means, etc. The need for statistical sophistication in our field is evidenced by a quick perusal through the past few issues of the *IJL*. Many of the studies that report results from quantitative analyses violate one or more assumptions of their statistical tests warranting the use of techniques such as multi-level modeling, tobit regression, and confirmatory factor analysis. Thus, perhaps a needed addition to our scholarship in the *IJL* is a "statistical tutorial" to ensure mistakes are avoided in the future.

Of course, these ideas do not represent the totality of important questions that can be asked about listening. We welcome others as well and hope the readers will advance our cause to further the future of listening research. In service of this goal, we are encouraging proposals for the ILA Synergist Award sponsored by the Research Committee of the International Listening Association. The specifics of this prize are included in the Appendix material. We welcome your submissions and look forward to rewarding you soon!

> "…these ideas do not represent the totality of important questions that can be asked about listening. We welcome others as well and hope the readers will advance our cause to further the future of listening research…"

# APPENDIX MATERIAL

## ILA SYNERGIST AWARD

The ILA Synergist Award promotes the advancement of listening knowledge and research through a targeted focus. Using a deductive process, listening scholars and educators have developed a set of priorities for listening research. The priorities include four initiatives and seven research questions, as well as contextualized questions in the areas of Business, Education, Healthcare, Religion/Spirituality, and Theory/Research. Achieving these priorities will assist researchers in providing a solid foundation for future listening research in terms of future theory development. A Synergist is one who cooperates with another. Thus, the researchers granted the ILA Synergist Award will be those cooperating with international listening scholars to build listening theory. We encourage multi-author proposals as well as cross-cultural research but will accept single authored work assuming it meets relevant objectives.

The ILA Synergist Award was developed to encourage researchers to address one or more of the stated priorities. The researcher(s) awarded the cash prize (up to $500) will be expected to present the findings at the next ILA conference as well as permit the *International Journal of Listening* the first right of publication for the first manuscript stemming from this work.

To be considered for this award, the following application, available on the website or from cdbond@ualr.edu, must be completed and submitted as indicated.

# Priorities of Listening Research

**ILA SYNERGIST AWARD APPLICATION**

*Directions*: Briefly answer the first five questions. Then attach the required documents, as indicated below, and compile into one Word or Adobe pdf document, if possible. Send the document to cdbond@ualr.edu.  Ask for a return receipt. If you'd like to mail the application, you may mail it to:

> Christopher Bond
> ILA Research Chair
> University of AR-Little Rock
> Speech Communication Dept.
> 2801 S. University Ave.
> Little Rock, AR  72205

The application must be received at least 60 days prior to the first day of the general convention of that year.  **The application receipt deadline is end of day, Jan. 18, 2009.**

**Title of the Project**:

**Name, Address, Telephone Number, and e-mail Address of all Primary Investigators**:

**Abstract of the Project (Limited to 300 words):**

**Identify which Imitative, Research Question, or Contextualized Question is under Study**:

**Explain how the proposed research addresses the targeted priority, and why the research is worthy of funding**:

Also include, in this order,
o   A description of the project not to exceed three pages that the rationale, methods, and objectives of the research project(s);
o   A one- page proposed timetable;
o   A one-page budget that includes the amount of money requested and how it will be spent (note: budget shall only be used for research materials and participant compensation; travel cannot be included unless it directly relates to data collection; salary cannot be included);
o   A brief (i.e., two-page) curriculum vita of each applicant; and
o   Names and contact information of three references familiar with the applicant's work.

**Top Priorities Eligible for the ILA Synergist Award**                    **3/09/2008**

In addition to the four initiatives and seven research questions outlined in *Priorities of Listening Research: Four Interrelated Initiatives*, below are the contextualized questions for development.

# Priorities of Listening Research

**BUSINESS**
- What are the tangible benefits of effective listening and the liabilities of ineffective listening?
- How do we educate and train individuals to be lifelong effective listeners?
- Create a pool of effective listening definitions and assessment tools appropriate to various contexts.
- Investigate the qualities that constitutes a listening organization.
- Identify the relationship between listening and ROI (return on investment).
- Measure the impact of listening on Productivity, Turnover, Sales, Recruiting, Total Bottom Line, Job Satisfaction, Growth of Company, Longevity, Relationships, or any other important variable.
- Develop and test measurable objectives for employee evaluations
- To what extent does listening impact organizational success?
- What are the best practices in training listening?
- Would listening be more effective if meetings/lectures with shorter times?
- Listening as part of the leader competency model used by businesses
- What are the features which conceptualize the institutional listening? How can the listening between an expert and a layman be improved?
- What is the relationship between one's listening conceptualizations and her/his perceived behavior?

**EDUCATION**
- Identify listening construct's effects on the classroom learning experience. (i.e. cultural, diversity, lifespan, etc.)
- Assess the teaching of listening
- Create and assess safe learning environments
- Develop Standards of Practice for teaching listening at various levels.
- Outcomes assessment – how does improved listening affect grades, retention, etc.?
- How does one integrate listening training into the educational curriculum; teachers, caregivers, administrators.
- In terms of the Watson Barker listening test, what are the scores of online classes versus face to face classes? Determining the reliability/validity of these tests.
- Meta analysis needed for existing data (pretest/post-test)
- How are teachers being taught to teach listening? Multi-state studies preferred.
- How do we best address how people make sense of what they listen to?
- Does listening training actually increase listening skills? If so, how? What is the best model for listening training?
- Focus on developing more concept/context specific listening instruments.
- How can we teach educators to integrate listening into daily curriculum?
- Do we have material to test and address listening at a pre-k level?
- Physically document the activity that is association with different types of listening.
- How does the teaching of reading affect students' listening?

**HEALTHCARE**

- o Continue to examine and measure the various models and instruments of listening across all contexts
- o Assess the tangible benefits of listening through measurable outcomes
- o Develop continuous listening education across the lifespan
- o Inquiry of cost effectiveness of listening or the cost of not listening effectively
- o Proposal "patient as listener" and funding
- o Integrate "listenability" into health literacy

## RELIGION/SPIRITUALITY
- o To recognize and neutralize our own emotionally - charged words / phrases in intrapersonal, interpersonal and interfaith dialogue
- o Educate people to identify, understand and embrace their personal vulnerability & fear in conversations about religion and spirituality
- o To create an interfaith listening study

## THEORY/RESEARCH
- o Develop a formal critique of the existing models and theories of listening
- o Perform a meta-analysis to determine what we know about listening.
- o Develop reliable and valid assessment tools to measure listening and/or find ways further to enhance the reliability and validity of current assessment instruments.
- o Demonstrate a value to establish the legitimacy of listening as a field.
- o Validate listening instruments
- o Create and validate a model that is grounded in current empirical research that is not perceptual.
- o What is the evidence that active listening is more effective than listening?
- o Are there any listening behaviors that are tied to listening cognitions that cannot be faked?
- o How does multi-tasking affect listening?
- o In conjunction with neurological instruments, begin to identify how information is processed and stored.
- o What are the claims made in the extant literature (popular, technical, academic, etc.) about listening? What is the evidence for the claims?
- o What should theories of listening look like, what sort of terms ought they contain, and what are the specific components of good listening theory?
- o What theories exist to explain listening, broadly speaking, and how well do they stand to empirical scrutiny?
- o To what extent do behaviors affect comprehension/processing? To what extent does comprehension/processing affect behaviors?
- o Are there really stages of the listening process or is it a dynamic process?
- o Are there process differences in listening to one's first language versus listening to a second language? At one point, if any, do those differences decrease significantly?
- o How many options does one consider before co-narration can take place? Why THAT many?
- o What is the impact of the valence of language on listening perceptions and on listening outcomes? Why?

- o How does the frame shift during various types of interactions? Why?
- o What are the processing stages most important to listening as a communication phenomenon?       What do these stages look like? Are they sequential or parallel? Do they require a central processor or are they distributed?
- o How do listening behaviors impact processing? How does processing affect behaviors?
- o Does one's choice of language affect the listening process? How? Why? To what extent?

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