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Second Language Listening

Theory and Practice

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Series editor's preface

Acquiring good listening and speaking skills in English is the main concern of many second and foreign language learners, and today's English teacher needs to be well versed in current approaches to the teaching of the aural/oral skills. Second language listening, relatively ignored for many years within applied linguistics, has today come into its own. Although still somewhat neglected in second language acquisition research, listening now plays a more central role in language teaching. University entrance exams, school leaving tests, and other examinations have begun to include a listening component, an acknowledgment that listening ability is an important aspect of second language proficiency.

The nature of listening comprehension is also now better understood. Earlier views of listening saw it as the mastery of discrete skills or microskills, which formed the focus of teaching and testing. A skills approach focused on such things as discriminating sounds in words (especially phonemic contrasts), deducing the meaning of unfamiliar words, predicting content, differentiating between fact and opinion, and noting contradictions, inadequate information, and ambiguities.

The changed status of listening in recent years was partly prompted by Krashen's emphasis on the role of comprehension and comprehensible input in triggering language development. In the 1980s and 1990s, applied linguists also began to borrow new theoretical models of comprehension from the field of cognitive psychology. It was from this source that the distinction between bottom-up processing and top-down processing was derived – a distinction that led to an awareness of the importance of background knowledge and schema in comprehension. Listeners were viewed as actively involved in constructing meaning based on expectations, inferences, intentions, prior knowledge, and selective processing of the input. Listening came to be viewed as an interpretive process. At the same time, the fields of conversation analysis and discourse analysis were revealing a great deal about the organization of spoken discourse, leading to a realization that written texts read aloud could not provide a suitable basis for developing the abilities needed to process real-time authentic discourse. Authenticity in

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materials became a catchword and part of a pedagogy of teaching listening that is now well established.

Second Language Listening examines these issues and provides a valuable overview of recent and current approaches to the role of listening in language teaching. The authors present a highly readable account of the linguistic, psycholinguistic, cultural, interactional, and pragmatic factors involved in understanding spoken discourse. They also describe an original pedagogical model of second language listening that reflects the complexities of the listening process. They then show how the model can be used to evaluate published materials and to develop criteria for planning, evaluating, and creating listening materials and programs, including both conventional textbook materials and materials employing new technology. The authors include illuminating case studies from a range of contexts to show how listening can be taught and assessed at different levels.

Second Language Listening should therefore serve as a valuable resource for teachers, curriculum developers, and others concerned with the nature of second language listening processes.

Jack C. Richards

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Preface

For a long time, listening has been treated as the Cinderella of the four macro-skills: speaking, listening, reading, and writing. However, as an essential part of communicative competence, listening is a skill that deserves equal treatment with the others, both in the classroom and in the preparation of language teachers. With the unrelenting trend toward globalization, which manifests itself in greater international trade, travel, education, Internet use, cheap international telephone calls, and mass entertainment, English has become a world language. The need to be able to understand English is increasing by the day. There is a growing need, therefore, for international citizens to be able to understand not just standard British or American spoken English, but other varieties spoken around the world.

Second Language Listening: Theory and Practice combines up-to-date listening theory, a pedagogical model developed by the authors, and case studies of pedagogical practice. The volume draws on the authors' own research and experience, where appropriate, but is eclectic in encompassing a full range of current views on theory and practice. Each chapter contains tasks and discussion questions that contextualize the material and encourage readers to engage with the concepts presented.

Textbooks are normally viewed as presenting established bodies of knowledge to uninitiated students. In *Second Language Listening: Theory and Practice*, we have tried to go a little beyond this traditional approach by incorporating our own innovative pedagogical model of listening. This is introduced in Chapter 6 and applied in subsequent chapters, which deal with materials and methodology, primarily by means of a range of case studies.

The book is divided into three parts. Part I is entitled "Historical Background." In Chapter 1, we look at the main approaches that have been taken to language teaching over the years and the role of listening in these approaches. The approaches are grammar-translation, direct-method, grammar-based, audio-lingual, discrete-item, communicative, task-based, learner-strategy, and integrated. After introducing each approach, we identify the main learning goal for listening and, where appropriate, exemplify

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and critique each approach with a textbook task. Chapter 2 describes current models of the listening process. After brief descriptions of speech recognition, listening developments in the L1, and long- and short-term memory, we describe three models: the bottom-up, the top-down, and the interactive models. Chapter 3 describes what a spoken message consists of in terms of the different types of meaning it may convey: phonological, syntactic, semantic, pragmatic, and kinesic. All these elements of meaning play a role in comprehension, although deficiencies in one area can be made up for in others. Chapter 4 describes the features of spoken language that distinguish it from written text and the differences between monologue and dialogue. Considerable attention is given to the specific features of spoken interaction, such as turn-taking, topic shift, back-channeling, and repair. Chapter 5 discusses different learning styles and strategies for listening. We describe the extensive work on general learner strategies that has been conducted over the past 25 years and then focus in particular on learner strategies in L2 listening. The chapter concludes with an example of a strategies-based approach to teaching listening.

In Part II, "A Pedagogical Model and Its Application," we present and apply our own model of second language listening. In Chapter 6, we map out what we consider to be the essential features of such a model. In addition to the psycholinguistic theories presented in Chapter 2, our model incorporates a set of dimensions that we have derived from a range of theories relevant to listening. These dimensions are eclectic insofar as they draw on cognitive, social, linguistic, and pedagogic theory. Drawn together, they can enable us to develop a unified model of second language listening. These dimensions make the model individualized, cross-cultural, social, contextualized, affective, strategic, intertextual, and critical. It is stressed that not all of these dimensions will apply at any one time, but any of them may be drawn upon, where appropriate, in the design, adaptation, or evaluation of pedagogic materials. In Chapter 7, we examine listening materials from a variety of modern textbooks. Each activity, from beginner to advanced, is evaluated in light of the model presented in Chapter 6. Chapter 8 presents a series of case studies of a range of pedagogic listening situations – a primary school course, an academic listening course, a radio series, a self-access context for listening, and an intensive English language course. Each of the case studies is again evaluated in light of the pedagogic model presented in Chapter 6.

Part III, "Key Issues in Teaching and Testing," consists of three chapters. Chapter 9 deals with the role of technology. Radio, audio recordings, the language laboratory, video, and computer-assisted listening are all considered in relation to their ability to facilitate listening pedagogy. In Chapter 10, we

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focus on questioning techniques and analyze the different types of questioning formats: display versus referential, closed versus open, the use of the L1 versus the L2, focus on form versus focus on function, visually supported versus nonvisually supported, and individual versus group. Chapter 11 is devoted to testing. Three approaches to the testing of listening are introduced: the discrete-point approach, the integrative approach, and the communicative approach. It is suggested that the communicative approach is best suited to the pedagogical model of listening presented in Part II.

The book includes an appendix, "Concluding Questions for Reflection," which can be used by the reader to reflect on issues examined in the book and by tutors using the text as a course book.

Second Language Listening: Theory and Practice is designed to be used by both pre- and in-service teachers. It has been extensively piloted with both preservice BA-TESL students and MA part-time in-service teachers. Although the examples used in the book are from the perspective of English as a foreign or second language, the book may also be used by students and teachers of languages other than English.

Note: Transcriptions in the book reflect the contributor's original work and have not been altered to reflect American English.

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