

(Re)discovering Listening in Communication and Language Education Interdisciplinary Approaches. Foreword

Abstract:

The teaching and learning of languages is an increasingly relevant global prerequisite, which translates into consistent efforts in educational quarters to increase intercultural understanding. An emerging trend in academic research notably promotes interdisciplinary perspectives, leading to a more coherent understanding of current issues connected to interpersonal and intercultural communication. This collection of papers is a common effort of researchers in the area of communication and language learning, from various perspectives – linguistic, psychological, cultural, and pedagogical – brought together by an awareness of the relevance of a fundamental aspect in any functional society: oral exchange and the genuine interchange of meaning.

In a world where constant technological advances dictate larger and more salient divides in modes and methods of communication, it might be contended that the inability to critically transfer and (re)adapt communicational patterns serves only to undermine healthy and constructive interactions, prompting interlocutors to engage in miscommunication or to be manipulated by others' argumentative and persuasive strategies, whether intentionally or by accident. Attending to the different cognitive faculties (e.g. theory of mind and comprehension monitoring) which impact on communication practices, one might arrive at the conclusion that some dimensions are benefitted in detriment of others concerning specific communicative acts, including discriminative comprehension, emphatic and interactive/dialogic listening.

When applied to classroom practice, this would lead, as it so often does, to students and educators alike perceiving listening in terms of the ability to identify word and sentence boundaries, different pronunciations and accents, and so forth; listening thus amounting quite often to little more than actual hearing from a reductionist perspective. This, however, would represent a partial utilisation of Jakobson's theoretical framework (1960: 350-377) and an incomplete understanding of the complex role played by listening. The problem here has to do with the insufficient level of specification of what it means to decode a message, as some scholars might be prone to understand this as the attainment, on the part of the addressee, of the propositional content of the addresser's utterances, i.e. the pure acquisition of information.

For this reason, listening is an essential part of the communicative process which has remained somewhat misinterpreted in foreign language research, as much as in the English learning classroom. It is this pivotal aspect of communication that our volume aims to scrutinize in greater depth, while focusing on listening in a profoundly inclusive and effective manner, as opposed to limiting the listener's/learner's experience to passive exposure to the target language. This "genuine listener" competence can be viewed as an essential aspect of human communication, which remains a valuable asset across discourse communities. With this aim in mind, our volume proposes the development of a genuinely cooperative outlook, which seems to have become the new conceptual framework for language learning, as acquisition metaphors have gradually been replaced by a conceptual grounding which emphasizes collaborative teaching/learning practices also drawing on action research.

Guided by the relevance of these aspects and by the authors' intention of making communication more efficient, the papers assess the current situation of listening in second /additional language education, with a focus on English teaching and learning, while drawing on contemporary advances in research in the field, specifically linguistic and intercultural education (e.g. intercultural pragmatics). The authors share renewed insights and propose aspects related to listening likely to be used by educators in general and language

teachers in particular, by asking three interrelated questions: how listening is/should be under focus among contemporary readers/speakers/internet users; what the current situation in language education is; and what can be done to enhance it. This undertaking borrows extensively from a pedagogically task-oriented approach within a pragma-linguistic perspective on listening and communication.

Marta Boguśławska-Tafelska (Poland) employs the educational and ecolinguistic paradigm to uphold a novel holistic framework that can be used both in scientific research and in the teaching-learning context likely to address learners irrespective of their level of language acquisition. Her paper discusses some alternative conceptual-terminological fields which educators can resort to for this purpose. The author analyses in great depth the progressive methodological and philosophical transition from materialistic cognicentrism towards cross disciplinary holism, which she views as a unifying paradigm in Western sciences.

The volume also includes a paper by Diana Cojocnean (Romania), *A Textual Analysis of Students' Business Writing Tasks in a Romanian University Setting*, in which the author brings to the fore specific language traits identified in Romanian students' writing tasks, as well as the extent to which their writing is influenced by inter-lingual transfer. Pedagogical implications for teaching business writing skill are likewise taken into consideration.

Laura Ioana Coroamă-Dorneanu has conducted research with a group of students from the Food Engineering Faculty within the BUASVM "King Michael I of Romania" in Timisoara (Romania), focusing on listening practices in the English class. The main discussion points target the challenges students encounter in foreign language classes while practicing listening in various environments related to their area of study. Her research is broader in scope, as it considers not only strictly professional aspects, but also personal insights, difficulties, and aspirations. The researcher herself specializes in multicultural communication and mediation in foreign languages, which she addresses together with and for the benefit of students in an integrative approach to learning.

Alina Andreea Dragoescu Urlica (Romania) puts forward a discussion of resources and insights for promoting English learning based on collaborative communication and emotional intelligence, which are to be enhanced in language learning across all levels of academic training. While discussing language proficiency, she highlights an underdeveloped area – the listening competence – which is arguably the essential aspect of achieving empathic awareness and prompting genuine communication across all types of learning. The author also suggests that social and affective learning strategies – which are arguably underdeveloped in academic education – can be viewed as outstanding learning facilitators, in agreement with the ecolinguistic paradigm which is suitably applicable to foreign language learning.

Anamaria Hopartean's paper, titled *Self Evaluation: How to Ease Speaking Anxiety in Exams and Improve Performance* focuses on the role played by self-evaluation as a metacognitive strategy in lowering students' anxiety in English language speaking examinations, with a focus on Romanian business students.

Lulzime Kamberi (Republic of Macedonia) puts forth a diachronic perspective on language learning and makes a critical appraisal to listening as a construct: from reception to production skills in an integrated way. She reports initial results from a study she conducted at the Faculty of Philology of the University of Tetovo, regarding the application of listening to foreign language instruction in the academic English courses she holds. The study investigates students' perceptions of the importance of listening skills in English language learning and teaching, which are contrasted to teachers' perceptions.

Sylke Meyerhuber (Germany) introduces cornerstones of the Rogerian 'Active Listening' theory as a conceptual framework that she proposes for the academic environment, while elucidating how this communication model can be applied in university seminars. The paper puts forward a proposal to position this approach in the discourse of intercultural communication education, modelled along the lines of Adrian Holliday's applied linguistics. From the point of view of humanistic psychology, the paper highlights competences related to active listening and communication training as a valuable working tool in professional and intercultural communication.

Vladimir Žegarac, an Invited Professor of Linguistics at the University of Madeira (Portugal), considers

how communicative silence can be explained using the pragmatic framework of relevance theory in a way which makes it possible to provide an analysis which relates explicitly the motivations and the effects of communicative silences. The analysis is supported by evidence from real-life situations and shows that communicative silences can be relevant by conveying implicatures, by guiding context selection through inviting active listening or by providing evidence of the speakers' attitudes towards what they have said or contextually implied.

Issues in education and interculturality are further discussed in the concluding paper, co-authored by Alcina Sousa (Portugal) and Svetlana Kurteš (UK). More to the point, the authors revisit the importance of well-developed active listening skills in the context of postmodern pedagogical requirements, more specifically in linguistic and intercultural education. They plead for a more integrative approach in teaching active listening, suggesting a comprehensive cross-curricular educational effort that profoundly understands the essence of human interaction in inter- and cross-cultural contexts.

*Encarnación Almazán Ruiz (University of Jaén, Spain) proposes a review of a recent volume published in 2017 by editors M. Boguslaswska-Tafelska and M. Haladewicz-Grzelak entitled *Communication as a Life Process: Beyond Human Cognition* (Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2017). The reviewer remains neutral in tone, but concludes in an appreciative tone, although she does not fail to suggest some valuable additions the volume may have included. The collection of papers considers various perspectives relating to the process of communication which makes it worthy of attention and a significant accomplishment of recent research in the area of language studies. It is highly recommended for readers interested in Ecolinguistics and the workings of culture upon language, which is, in its turn, influenced by culture at the same time.*

To conclude, any act of communication, any utterance made by a specific person to a specific addressee in a specific context, will always and to varying degrees comprise several dimensions besides informational value (logos), to appropriate Aristotelian terminology, namely, emotional engagement (pathos), as well as the trust in and (perceived) personality of the speaker. All these subtle dimensions are expressed in and through language and, thus, the array of elements which need be attended to when listening widens from accurate pronunciation and shared lexicons so as to include awareness of wider societal contexts, meaning-making and decoding strategies, and patterns of communication across cultures.

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