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# Listening Education



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## The Influence of PowerPoint on Listening Activities on Beginning Spanish Students

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## The Influence of PowerPoint on Listening Activities on Beginning Spanish Students

### **Abstract**

This research aimed to compare the effect of visually enriched PowerPoint slides (VEPP) on students' listening outcomes and to determine whether gender affected listening outcomes with and without VEPP. A mixed ANOVA determined that students in the treatment group performed statistically significantly better on listening exercises. There was no main effect for gender, but an interaction revealed that females were at a disadvantage in the control condition (non-VEPP); VEPP appeared to help them to catch up with the males in listening comprehension. Finally, participant surveys revealed that students felt less anxious with the use of VEPP for pre-, during-, and postlistening activities.

*Keywords:* Listening, PowerPoint, Visual support, Technology, Teaching listening, Spanish

### **Introduction**

In real life a listener usually has the advantage of visual cues that establish both the context and the respective roles of the participants in a conversation. In a hotel check-in encounter, one would see a hotel foyer, a guest with a suitcase standing on one side of a desk, and a receptionist (possibly in uniform) standing on the other. According to Field (2008), our understanding of the conversation might be considerably assisted by facial expressions and visual cues. None of this is available when the learner is listening to an audio recording in an artificial environment such as the classroom. Recognizing the issue,

listening teachers increasingly make use of visual material on DVD or video to compensate the weaker listeners in the class and also to create a more realistic environment. That is why it seems reasonable to include some sort of visual stimulus to accompany listening activities, because, among other reasons, most real target-language-use situations include visual stimuli, and it seems unreasonable to have students stare at nothing (e.g., a piece of paper and the CD player) while they do their listening activities.

According to Wagner (2006), researchers are becoming more aware and interested in the role of nonverbal communication in listening comprehension (Baltova, 1994; Buck, 2001; Gruba, 1997). They have agreed that nonverbal components are an essential part of L2 listening ability, and that L2 listeners are able to more easily create meaning of a spoken text that includes nonverbal input than a spoken text that does not include nonverbal input. According to their research, the inclusion of nonverbal elements in listening could greatly assist the process of comprehending aural input in most listening situations. Therefore adding video and visuals to the teaching of listening comprehension reflects natural human behavior; in real-life conversation, people not only listen, but they also process the visual information accompanying the verbal message. However, there are some situations where there is no way to include this type of support, for example, telephone conversations, listening to the radio, and listening to loudspeakers. Another strong argument to support the inclusion of visual support to assist listening tasks is the addition of construct validity (the degree to which a test measures what it claims, or purports to be measuring; Brown, 1994) on the assessment of listening. According to Wagner (2006) the presence of visual support would allow L2 listeners to make more valid inferences, and this could lead to improved L2 listening performance. Additionally, visuals may help satisfy the diverse needs and styles of auditory, visual, and kinesthetic learners in any language setting.

Shin (1998) and Wagner (2006) agreed that if L2 listeners have the opportunity to anticipate and see the speakers of the conversation and their relationship before listening, this preview could allow listeners to make more accurate initial hypotheses about speakers' roles and the context of the speaking situation. Additionally, Ko (1998) also indicated that making use of visual support for listening activities can foster students' confidence in comprehending the main idea of the conversations so they can better focus on processing the language input.

Celce-Murcia and Hilles (1988) also pointed out that pictures are especially useful with beginning and low-intermediate learners, who have trouble understanding long or complicated verbal cues. They added that "interesting pictures or entertaining pictures motivate students to respond in ways that more routine teaching aids, such as textbook or a sentence on the board, cannot" (p. 73). Finally, they concluded that pictures are a very effective resource for getting students to match form with meaning at low intermediate levels.

Teng (1994) also mentioned the positive role of visually supported listening according to the results of an experimental study that she conducted in Taiwan with EFL students in high school. She said that “beginners are very likely to give up listening or to listen without understanding. Having well-developed cultural schemata and well-designed visuals cues, the EFL learners can get additional help for comprehension to compensate for their limited L2 linguistic knowledge” (pp. 546-547). Finally, Buck (2001) remarked that since technologies have become available, visual and audio are now being promoted together. He stated that visual information is an important variable in language comprehension because it serves as a supplement to the linguistic information, and it also serves to define the context in which the spoken message will be interpreted. However, he said that more research is clearly needed concerning “whether visual support makes a difference to comprehension, and whether any differences are construct-relevant” (pp. 253-254).

There are also two other factors that have been overlooked in previous research on visually supported listening. These factors are gender and anxiety. Gender is a factor that researchers believe affects listening comprehension (e.g., Bacon, 1992; Boyle, 1987; Clark & Trafford, 1995; Colnar, 1987; Farhady, 1982; Gardner, 1985; Worrall & Tsarna, 1987). However the findings are still controversial, speculative, and inconclusive. Li (2006) said that the relationship of gender to L2 listening comprehension is inconclusive, due to the small amount of research that has been conducted. According to MacIntyre, Baker, Clément, and Donovan (2002), “If the goal of L2 instruction is to increase the use of the L2, especially outside of the classroom, our understanding of age and sex variations becomes of paramount importance. L2 communication is a context-bound phenomenon, and that context is heavily determined by fundamental characteristics of the learner” (p. 560).

#### The use of PowerPoint in the language classroom

Modern language instruction relies more and more on the use of technology in order to convey ideas and messages with the help of images, symbols, and sounds. A convenient and practical medium of presenting these ideas is PowerPoint. This tool has become one of the most common tools used in different areas, and the foreign language field is not an exception. However, the use of PowerPoint in university classes is ubiquitous yet understudied in empirical pedagogical research (James, Burke, & Hutchins, 2006). Adams (2006) suggested that PowerPoint supports a cognitive and pedagogical style. Additionally, PowerPoint usage among educators seems to be relatively unreflective and taken for granted. Therefore, questions have been raised about the implications of the use of this medium for knowledge dissemination in different classroom settings.

Based on the literature review, the following hypotheses were formulated:

H1: Participants' scores from the treatment condition (VEPP) will be higher than those in the control condition (no VEPP, audio only).

H2: There will be gender differences on listening scores.

H3: Students will report listening anxiety to be lower when they have VEPP for their listening activities.

## Method

### *Participants*

The main study comprised two university classes of beginning level students of Spanish who had not previously taken Spanish or who had not taken Spanish in the 4 years prior to enrolling. Beginning level classes have a maximum of 25 students; there were a total of 45 students who participated in the pilot study, and 46 who participated in the main study. The majority of students were speakers of English studying Spanish as a foreign language at a Southern university. The participants in this study were classified as beginning-level learners based on the placement requirements form that students have to fill out in elementary levels of Spanish at the beginning of each semester.

This study was a quasi-experimental design. *Quasi* refers to the fact that the participants in the sample were not randomly assigned to groups, but it was a convenience sample of two Spanish classes. The pilot study took place Spring 2008, and the main study took place Fall 2008. First, a pretest was administered to both classes and scored at the beginning of this study. The pretest consisted of a listening test designed by the researcher, with grammar and vocabulary from chapters 1 through 6 of the textbook, the chapters that Spanish 101 covers during a whole semester. The listening pretest determined whether there were any significant differences in the listening proficiency levels of the students in the two classes.

For the experimental condition, the treatment consisted of using VEPP prepared by the researcher according to the content and context of the conversations in the listening activities. For the control condition, the exercises consisted of using the textbook *¡Tú dirás!*, which generally presents photos of the speakers in the conversation as the only visual support for listening activities. These photos are located at the beginning of the listening activities with the introduction to each conversation. Paper worksheets were prepared to accompany each one of these activities for the duration of the research for both treatment and control.

Each treatment (VEPP) and control (non-VEPP) activity was presented as another routine listening comprehension exercise in the normal curriculum. Students had no

knowledge of the details or purpose of this research. Participants were told about this research and its purpose the last day of class.

To summarize, the two experimental conditions in this study were as follows:

1. VEPP accompanying pre-, during-, and postlistening activities: Participants in this condition saw and interacted with the PowerPoint during the three listening stages using the activities and instructions from the Spanish textbook. Then they listened to the conversation in Spanish from the textbook and they looked at the VEPP slides to contextualize what they were hearing. Finally, they recalled the conversation's content by answering listening comprehension questions from the Spanish textbook.

2. Non-VEPP pre-, during-, and postlistening activities: Respondents in this condition did not see the PowerPoint during the three listening stages. They just saw and read the activities from the Spanish textbook. Then they followed the Spanish textbook instructions, they listened to the conversation in Spanish without VEPP slides, and they recalled the conversation's content by answering the listening comprehension questions from the Spanish textbook. The students' listening comprehension activities were then scored on the basis of the correct answers to the questions.

Based on the literature review and previous studies on visually supported listening, the focus of this study is whether visual support such as VEPP will affect beginning level students' listening outcomes. To reach this goal, a mixed ANOVA was conducted to examine the effects of the within-subjects manipulations of six unit listening exercises in two Spanish 101 classes. The dependent variable was the mean of six listening scores, and the independent variables were treatment and class. It was a 2 (treatment)  $\times$  2 (class) design. Each class alternately received the VEPP treatment during each listening activity, while the other class functioned as the control group. Each student was given six listening activities, received the treatment of VEPP slides for three of the activities, and was part of the control group for three activities, in an alternating pattern. Class 1 received the treatment (visual aids) for activities 1, 3, and 5, and Class 2 received the visual aids for activities 2, 4, and 6. Participants' scores in the VEPP condition were averaged to get one measure as well as participants' scores in the non-VEPP to get the second measure. The listening scores were kept in an Excel spreadsheet and exported to SPSS for windows (version 15.0) to analyze how students did in the VEPP and non-VEPP condition. A *t* test was conducted to see if there were any significant differences between the two conditions.

Each participant had three treatment condition scores and three control condition scores, which were averaged to provide one treatment condition measure and one control condition measure. In this way it was possible to compare each participant's control and treatment scores for a within-subjects comparison. Participants' scores in one Spanish class

could also be compared to those of the other Spanish class, for a between-subjects comparison to determine whether being in one class over the other affected the results of the treatment. Students alternated being in the treatment condition to control for class and the cumulative effect of one group receiving the treatment every time. With this design, both classes could benefit from the experimental materials.

With the previous design description one tried to determine if using visually assisted support at the pre-, during-, and postlistening stages in the form of VEPP would impact students' outcomes in listening activities.

The listening activities used for this study were taken directly from the textbook that participants utilized for Spanish 101, *¡Tú dirás!* 4th edition. The textbook is divided into 14 chapters. Each chapter consists of three *etapas* (stages) that present new material and review the content of previous *etapas*. Each *etapa* begins with *Para empezar* to give a contextualized overview of new vocabulary. There is only one listening activity per chapter, called *Vamos a escuchar*, which is located at the end of the first *etapa*. All listening sections are accompanied by pre- (*Antes de escuchar*) and postlistening (*Después de escuchar*) exercises. In general the pre-exercises are written "prediction" exercises. They are used to activate students' prior knowledge of the topic before they listen to the conversation and answer the postlistening exercises (*Después de escuchar*). In general, the postlistening exercises consist of multiple-choice listening comprehension questions, completion of charts, completion of ideas, and checking boxes according to what students hear. It is important to say that listening comprehension activities from chapters 1 and 2 give the instructions for the activities in English. However, chapters 3 through 6 give instructions in Spanish because it is assumed that at that point students are able to read and follow instructions in Spanish.

During Spring 2008 and Fall 2008 a participant demographic survey, a listening pretest, and six listening activities were conducted in the two classes.

As previously described, the researcher prepared and adapted VEPP slides for each listening activity that was part of this study. The PowerPoint slides were enriched with different types of visuals according to the content of each listening activity. The pictures and images in the PowerPoint slides were taken from Google Image Search and from the Spanish textbook. Speakers' photos from the conversations were scanned and then added to the VEPP slides.

## Results

The quantitative data came from the outcome measures (six unit listening exercises). Analysis for the *t* test and mixed ANOVA design was performed using the statistical program SPSS for windows (Version 15.0). Participant performance was measured in terms of percentage of correct responses from the multiple-choice comprehension and completion

activities in the listening exercises. The exercises were scored by an impartial graduate student and then reviewed by an independent rater (another graduate student) to ensure inter-rater reliability. Any discrepancies were discussed by the two raters. The results obtained from the unit activities for the control and experimental conditions were compared and analyzed statistically to determine if there were significant differences. The highest level of confidentiality was maintained in the collection of the data for this research, as the researcher was the only person to have access to the students' grades. The data were kept safely in the researcher's personal library in her home, where she was the only one who had access. Participants were given an ID number after the data were collected, so the data were anonymous and confidential at that point.

Hypothesis 1 predicted that VEPP would facilitate student listening comprehension and result in higher listening comprehension. A paired-samples *t* test was used to compare the means of the treatment and control scores to determine if the VEPP treatment made a difference in the students' listening outcomes. The test results revealed a significant difference between conditions,  $t(45) = 2.768, p < .05$  (two-tailed). On average, participants ( $n = 46$ ) produced higher listening scores in the VEPP condition than in the non-VEPP condition,  $M = 60.16, SD = 17.06; M = 54.51, SD = 14.59$ , respectively. This study showed that using VEPP before, during, and after listening activities in a beginning Spanish class enhanced students' listening comprehension of Spanish conversations. These findings provide support for Hypothesis 1.

Given the fact that previous research mentions differential cognitive effects of visuals support on males versus females in listening, the analysis was refined by introducing gender as a possible moderating factor. Hypothesis 2 predicted that the use of VEPP in listening activities would impact male and female listening scores differently. In our convenience sample, there were 16 males and 30 females. An ANOVA was run with treatment/VEPP and gender as independent variables (a 2 x 2 design) and the participants' mean listening scores as the dependent variable. The analysis revealed no main effect for gender,  $F(1, 44) = .520, p > .05$ . However, an interesting interaction emerged between treatment and gender,  $F(1, 44) = 4.869, p < .05$ . Although the means of the listening scores for males and females were not statistically different in the treatment condition (males:  $M = 59.30$ ; females:  $M = 60.62$ ), they were statistically different in the control condition (males:  $M = 59.56$ ; females:  $M = 51.82$ ). This finding suggests that the VEPP treatment enabled the female participants to recoup a preexisting disadvantage relative to the males in terms of listening comprehension, possibly due to females' stronger reliance on visuals for message comprehension. These results corroborate previous research findings regarding gender-related differences in comprehension of audio and/or visual messages (Bacon, 1992; Colnar, 1987; Farhardy, 1982; Hwang, 1997; Li, 2006; Markham, 1988) and provide support for Hypothesis 2. More

research is needed to clarify the relationship between gender and visually assisted listening.

Finally, a participant survey was utilized to determine students' views and opinions about the use of VEPP during the pre-, during-, and postlistening stages. Forty-six students responded to the survey. Participants were asked to respond with *Yes* or *No* as to whether or not the use of VEPP was useful in helping them feel less anxious before listening to a conversation in Spanish. Participants were also asked to provide additional comments. The survey participants offered overwhelmingly positive responses, with 91.1% of the total student sample reporting that VEPP helped them feel less anxious before listening to a conversation in Spanish.

These were some of the commentaries collected from students' surveys: "Yes, pictures help me to associate the words to the actual thing it was," "Yes the visual PowerPoints were helpful to put a name with a picture," "Yes help reinforce," "Yes because I tend to remember things better after seeing a visual presentation," "Yes because it helped put words to pictures and that is how people naturally learn," "Audio with images—it helps to learn conversation," "No, I still couldn't understand what they were saying. The people spoke too fast in the listening activities," "Yes, the visual support was an interactive learning tool making it easier to learn," "Yes I am a visual learner so when I see something it helps me remember," "Yes they provide an alternative learning style, which was good for me," "Yes visual support breaks the normal routine and made it more interesting," "No," "Yes it helped me remember vocabulary," and so on.

### **Interpretation and Discussion**

The present study reveals that Spanish foreign language learners at beginning levels seem to perform better in listening comprehension when they are provided visual cues via PowerPoint during the pre-, during-, and postlistening stages. The results of the current study suggest that the students' comprehension of a foreign language conversation can be effectively enhanced by providing VEPP as an advance organizer prior to listening to conversations in Spanish. The results also suggest that visual information might complement the aural information processed by the listener, or it might provide redundant information that can be useful for the listeners in confirming their processing and comprehension of the aural text. The results are also consistent with previous findings (Bright, 1986; Kim, 2003; Li 2006; Mueller, 1979; Rubin, 1990) and provide further proof that visual support may facilitate and enhance listening comprehension. This study also confirms how visual cues aid listening comprehension of new material by activating background knowledge and providing contextual cues to upcoming information. As to the use of PowerPoint versus other visuals (e.g., Aleman-Centeno, 1982; Chung, 1994; Gruba, 1993; Mueller, 1979; Rubin, 1990), the current study shows that PowerPoint is an appropriate multimedia tool that allows teachers to

create interactive listening lessons. Teachers can use different colors, sounds, and pictures to make the listening lesson more appealing to students. Additionally, PowerPoint is easy to use and accessible to all, and teachers do not have to spend much time preparing a short PowerPoint for their listening lesson. Finally, PowerPoint allows teachers to be better prepared and present more material to help their students.

Most literature regarding the effect of gender differences in listening comprehension with and without visual support is inconclusive (Li, 2006). Some studies indicate that females do better in language ability in general (Gardner, 1985), whereas other studies indicate that females are better at listening tasks and are better decoders of nonverbal information (Hall, 1978; Rosenthal & DePaulo, 1979). Boyle's (1987) study found that men had superior listening abilities. Meanwhile other studies reported no significant differences in females' and males' overall performance in listening (Bacon, 1992; Colnar, 1987; Farhardy, 1982; Hwang, 1997; Markham, 1988). Only further investigation will help clarify the ambiguous/inconclusive findings with respect to visually and non-visually assisted listening and the impact on gender. Meanwhile the current study revealed that men did not benefit from visual support for listening, suggesting that men did not need it under the conditions of this study. However, women took more advantage of visual support for listening, suggesting that there was more impact on them, and suggesting that they performed worse in the absence of visual support. In conclusion, in the present study, visual support seemed to assist women more than men in listening tasks.

In general participants in this study expressed positive opinions about the impact of using VEPP in listening activities and how it helped them to feel less anxious. Thus the primacy of visual information in a listening activity cannot be overlooked in the second and foreign language curricula. Participants' opinions also add to the research and confirm some previous and scarce research on how visual cues help reduce anxiety in the classroom (Arnold, 2000; Damasio, 1994). Participants' remarks reflect the educational implication of this study that instructors at lower levels should provide students the option to select from and process visual and verbal stimuli that accompany an aural passage. By doing this, instructors are considering students' learning preferences and at the same time addressing their needs. Participants' commentaries are also consistent with previous research on the benefits and usefulness of verbal and nonverbal information in human learning and how linguistic input is enhanced when information is concurrently presented in auditory and visual modes (The Dual Coding Theory, Paivio, 1971; Mayer's Generative Theory of Multimedia Learning, 1997, 2001). Finally, the findings are fairly indicative of how students liked it and felt less anxious when the instructor used VEPP for the listening activities in class and the reasons why VEPP was a useful and interesting.

This study generally supports previous research and findings on the positive impact of visually supported listening. However, there are a number of limitations in this study that should be considered.

The relative effectiveness of VEPP used in this study may vary as a result of learners' listening proficiency and the format of the listening comprehension test. In this experimental study all the participants were rated beginning proficiency college learners. The use of this sample limits the generalizability of findings to other language learners of various ages and proficiency levels. It is possible that some participants were able to answer the listening comprehension questions based solely on the pictures that the VEPP contained. Thus, when evaluating or reporting the findings and results from this study these limitations should be taken into account.

### **Implications for Teaching**

Studies on visually supported listening in foreign and first languages have pointed to the effectiveness of visual and verbal modes for comprehending aural passages (Baltova, 1994; Burger, 2001; Ginther, 2001; Jones, 2001; Kim, 2003; Mueller, 1980; Omaggio, 1979; Rubin, 1990; Wagner, 2006). However, to this author's knowledge, researchers have never examined the effects of VEPP on students' comprehension of an aural passage. Now we have support for a positive VEPP effect on listening comprehension processes and student outcomes.

In summary, the purpose of this study was to examine the impact of VEPP and to provide additional research about the positive effect of visual support using technology such as PowerPoint during listening comprehension activities in class. Results indicate that providing visually supported listening in the form of VEPP makes the aural material more comprehensible to the listeners at beginning levels because it activates their prior knowledge and schemata. Additionally, by using VEPP, listening activities are more contextualized. That is, this study shows that appropriate contextual visuals can improve listening comprehension recall for beginning students of Spanish. This result is not surprising and supports prior theoretical and empirical findings. In previous research Mueller (1980), Omaggio (1979), Bransford and Johnson (1972), Teng (1997), Li (2003), Kim (2003), Wagner (2006), Burger (2001), Ginther (2001), and others have demonstrated the beneficial effects of visual support on listening comprehension. Finally, it is important to keep in mind that it would not be reasonable to infer that audio-only recordings should be avoided for listening activities in our classes. It is understandable that students should be prepared for real-life situations where visual stimuli are not available to assist them in decoding messages, such as talking over the phone or listening to the radio.

Participants' listening comprehension with visual assistance in this study was relevant to gender. It seems that VEPP treatment enabled the female participants to recoup a preexisting disadvantage relative to the males in terms of listening comprehension, possibly due to their stronger reliance on visuals for message comprehension.

Participant surveys indicated that students prefer and like the use of technology in the form of VEPP with colors, pictures, and sound for the listening activities in class because they felt less tense and nervous.

The implications of this study provide an empirical base to indicate that visuals are useful for listening instruction in class. The study shows that given the foreign language context of this study, prelistening instruction that provides necessary background knowledge prior to comprehension tasks is an effective way to increase students' Spanish comprehension. In conclusion, students benefited from the content- and context-related VEPP in understanding Spanish conversations. Given the importance of listening in second- and foreign-language acquisition, any assistance from instructors to help L2 listeners deserves consideration. These findings seem to be useful for developing instruction on effective use of VEPP in order to decode and comprehend spoken conversations better before, during, and after listening. It is not only the visuals themselves that have helped students perform better but also the care shown by teachers who prepare their classes better and include more materials to help students to success.

It is hoped then that the implications of this research may be considered when teaching listening using VEPP. By framing listening activities with VEPP, the language learning listening process may become a more pleasant and successful experience for the learners at beginning levels, where students tend to get frustrated and give up very easily when they do not understand what is being said in class.

Finally, this study is also useful for universities and educators who are currently using and integrating multimedia in their teaching, specifically, in listening. The study suggests that presentation of aural passages in more technological ways (using PowerPoint for example) has a positive impact on beginning students of Spanish.

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**Teaching Listening in the Classroom:** Using lyrics to demonstrate the role of message creation and interpretation in the listening process

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**Courses:** Communication theory or any other classes that deal with critical listening skills

**Grade Level:** Undergraduate

**Aspects of Listening:** Message creation and interpretation, critical listening

**Goal:** Students will understand the role of listening in relational, cognitive, behavioral and emotional contexts.

**Description:** Given that communication is a relational process of creating and interpreting messages that elicit *cognitive, behavioral* or *emotional responses*, music and song lyrics are utilized in a two-step process to display the role of listening. Music was chosen to demonstrate that although hearing is a necessary condition for listening, the two are different processes in a multitude of ways. Although there are many definitions and descriptions of listening, most describe an aural *process* where individuals select information affected by schemata and attention regulation, organize and interpret the resulting information in regards to stored knowledge, then integrate and respond (see van Dijk & Kintsch, 1983). In other words, there are a multitude of variables contributing to the listening process, “including attention/perception, decoding/interpretation, working memory, long-term/schematic memory, and response preparation” (see, Bodie, Worthington, Imhof, & Cooper, 2008, pg.106). Music provides the perfect medium from which to demonstrate the complicated process of listening.  
*Keywords:* lyrics, message creation, interpretation, listening, cognitive, behavioral

**Preparation and Procedures:** The activity was designed to take approximately 20 minutes, but it is easily adaptable to either longer or shorter durations.

Steps in the Activity:

1. Without describing or prepping the students about the particular medium chosen, instruct them to write down their responses to the songs, including what types of

responses they may have (cognitive, emotional and/or relational), what they construe the message of the lyrics to be and what is involved in interpreting the message. We found it helpful to choose songs containing politically charged lyrics to elicit more easily observable responses.

2. Have the students separate into manageable groups to discuss their interpretations of the lyrics' message(s) and outline the process they went through during their initial reactions.
3. Introduce a definition of communication that contains process, interpretation and response. We recommend, "Communication is a relational process of creating and interpreting messages that elicit cognitive, behavioral or emotional responses."
4. Play the songs again, revealing the author of the music. In our case, the author was also the instructor of the activity, which was meant to demonstrate the relational aspect of communication, and how it affects the listening process. The lyrics were posted so they could more easily focus on the content and process information.
5. Ask the students to consider how knowing the author affects the relational process. Proceed in a similar manner considering cognitive, behavioral and emotional processes. What changed? What remained unchanged? Did the students *listen* differently? How?
6. Discuss how listening involves hearing but much more; the process involves understanding, interpretation and evaluation. Relational, cognitive, behavioral and emotional aspects of communication affect individuals' interpretation and evaluation of information.
7. Guided questions should include:
  - a. "Did you understand the song differently?"
  - b. "Did you interpret the song differently?"
  - c. "Did you evaluate the song differently?"
  - d. "Why?"

**Tips and Debriefing:** In some ways, this may become a challenging activity. It is more effective if the author is also the instructor; therefore, the instructor is encouraged to create an artistic and/or rhetorical piece that affects the students' relational, cognitive, behavioral or emotional responses. Because it is understood that *this activity was not designed to advance a political or otherwise inappropriately controversial agenda*, the subject matter should be considered with care. If the instructor feels uncomfortable in that role, it is advised to recruit the assistance of a volunteer presenter from outside the class that is willing to advance mildly to moderately controversial values for the sake of scholarship and instruction.

**Assessment:** The students were assessed on their written responses for a quiz grade. However, it was also possible to informally gauge their nonverbal responses between presentations of the material. In this manner, the extent of the relational, cognitive, behavioral and emotional responses can be noted by the instructor and used for revision of the exercise for future use.

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## **Review of teaching material**

**Title reviewed:** Linda Eve Diamond (2007). Rule #1: Stop Talking – A Guide to Listening. Silicon Valley: Listeners Press.

**Author of the review:** Margarete Imhof

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**Grade level:** Undergraduate; Adult Education; General

**Type of material:** Book

**Keywords:** Listening, Interpersonal Communication, Self-Reflection, Building Listening Skills

### **1. Description of the material**

Linda Eve Diamond's book presents the challenges involved in listening in a world which is full of noise. The book has two basic messages: One is that good listening skills help to improve everybody's life in many areas, family, relationships, business; the other is that listening is a learnable skill. And the book shows how: Essentially, the title says it all – or almost: Stop talking to start with. Give yourself a chance to take in what the other(s) have to say and want to tell you.

The structure of the book reflects a suggestion for a course on listening. The point of departure is a self-assessment of individual listening skills and listening challenges. The author then explains the benefits of good listening to the listener and proposes a process model of listening. The promise of good listening implies that the listener may be invited into someone else's world, that listening increases self-confidence as well as mutual understanding, and, as a consequence, fewer misunderstandings, closer relationships, and a better use of human resources.

The second chapter provides more detail on the intricacies of listening behavior and attitudes. The author makes it a strong point to illustrate that good listening does not automatically come with the proper attitude, but that good listening is active, e.g., managing the thought process to open your mind, withholding judgments, monitoring nonverbal behavior, in particular eye contact. In the same line, the importance of basic psychological processes, such as memory and critical thinking (as in question asking) is discussed. Special attention is given to pitfalls and common causes for communication breakdowns. Being distracted, making assumptions, drawing premature inferences, making associations, adding your own story are patterns of behavior which are more than likely to lead to miscommunication and misconceptions about what the other person wanted to say. The author calls these situations "circuits" and she extends this idea to those areas where

communicators come from different angles and enter a conversation with disparate expectations. According to the author, this may be the case in all conversations where stereotypes and prejudice play a role. The author shows how this applies to communication between male and female, to inter-generational communication, to communication with people of different personality or physical appearance. In addition, it is important to understand how cultural, racial, and religious background is intertwined with listening skills and communication challenges.

In the next chapter, the author proposes reasons for the talkative culture in modern societies. Speaking is often assumed to be identical with leading. However, the author discloses conversational powerplay and script talking (using over-simplified, nonflexible, preconceived language) as unproductive and unsuccessful specimen of ineffective communication strategies. However, good listening needs good speaking. The course includes rules for a clear and straight speech to ensure listenability and to secure understanding.

In a separate chapter the author looks at the challenge of listening to resolve conflict. The emotional involvement makes both listening and speaking more difficult. The communicators need to control their feelings and their language in order to avoid all those elements which cause hostility and which finally make the problem larger than life, e.g., sarcasm, insincerity, blame, which finally leads to estrangement of the respective parties, and impede constructive problem solving.

The final chapters are dedicated to the presentation of listening behavior. The author presents ideas which the learner may consider to experiment with in order to improve personal listening skills. These activities include both monitoring the listening environment and using self-regulating skills to prepare for listening. The author shows how listening to oneself, opening the inner ear in order to understand fine nuances in the messages of the others, using silence, walling out distractions, are helpful ways to overcome ineffective listening behavior and to experience fresh and deeper exchange of ideas with others.

## **2. Evaluation and recommendation**

The book is strong on encouraging the learners to reflect upon their own experience and to work from there. The book has a clear structure which uses a self-assessment as a point of departure. The rationale presented in the book is consistent and convincing: The author invites the learners to think about the benefits of good listening, to relate the content of the book to their own lives and to their own experience. The analysis and the options for

exploring listening behavior are based on findings of listening research (although sources are not referenced throughout the book) and consistent with current listening models.

The author has a strong background in interpersonal and business communication. The examples she uses are relevant and authentic, and the suggestions she proposes are practical and purposeful. She has a wonderful sense for the doable and, yet, she also challenges the learner. This keeps up the attention and the interest of the reader.

The tone of the book is both informative and entertaining and provides a lot of material for discussion. The individual reader will certainly benefit from the ideas presented here, but the book would also be a great means to start discussions in a classroom. It proposes interesting ideas which might help learners to discuss communication issues and to take an interest in communication theory. The way the book is written could elicit further research and help develop declarative and procedural knowledge about communication. I can see the book as a great tool in an undergraduate classroom as well as in a general education classroom and in training settings.