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"What Is Listening Competence?"

Listening is a behavior developed before the birth of the infant. By the time the child comes to school, the style of processing oral messages has become automatic. Although apparently easier than the act of speaking, listening may be more complex in that a message must be processed for which there is no experiential base. As compared with reading, listening requires processing of both visual and aural signals within a given time frame under the pressure of competing signals.

Many scholars have analyzed the components of listening behavior. The factorial studies of Nichols and Spearritt offered the first evidence that listening involved a distinct mode of processing. Theorists have offered a variety of models: Taylor, STEP, Weaver, Friedman, Goss Barker, Lundsteen, Wolvin-Coakley, and Ridge. The early models suggest a sequence from the sensory stimulation of hearing to the final product of understanding. Recent models parallel the trend in reading research to view the act of listening as a simultaneous top-down and bottom-up processing activity.

While we do not have agreement on a model of listening behavior, there is research to support the following:

1. Listening skill develops with age.
2. Listening skill can be taught.
3. Listening is the primary communication skill for the classroom and life.
4. Listening skill is correlated with thinking and language skills; in this sense, it is also related to reading ability.

If our primary purpose in testing listening skill is to examine thinking ability or language proficiency, we have limited justification for a test separate from the reading battery (except for the dyslexic child). The primary justification for testing listening competency is to examine the ability to:

1. Maintain attention to oral messages
2. Select significant messages while exposed to competing stimuli
3. Process oral language style as compared to written style
4. Process a variety of oral presentation modes
5. Use non-verbal context in processing messages.
6. Self-monitoring the accuracy of comprehension. These behaviors cannot be separated from thinking or language skills but can be the focus of the listening test.

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FACTORS INFLUENCING LISTENING COMPREHENSION

Intelligence
Recognition of correct English usage
Size of the listener's vocabulary
Ability to make inferences
Ability to structuralize a speech
Reading comprehension
Listening for main ideas as opposed to specific facts
Use of special techniques while listening to improve concentration
Real interest in the subject discussed
Emotional adjustment to the speaker's thesis
Ability to see significance in the subject discussed
Curiosity about the subject discussed
Physical fatigue of the listener
Audibility of the speaker

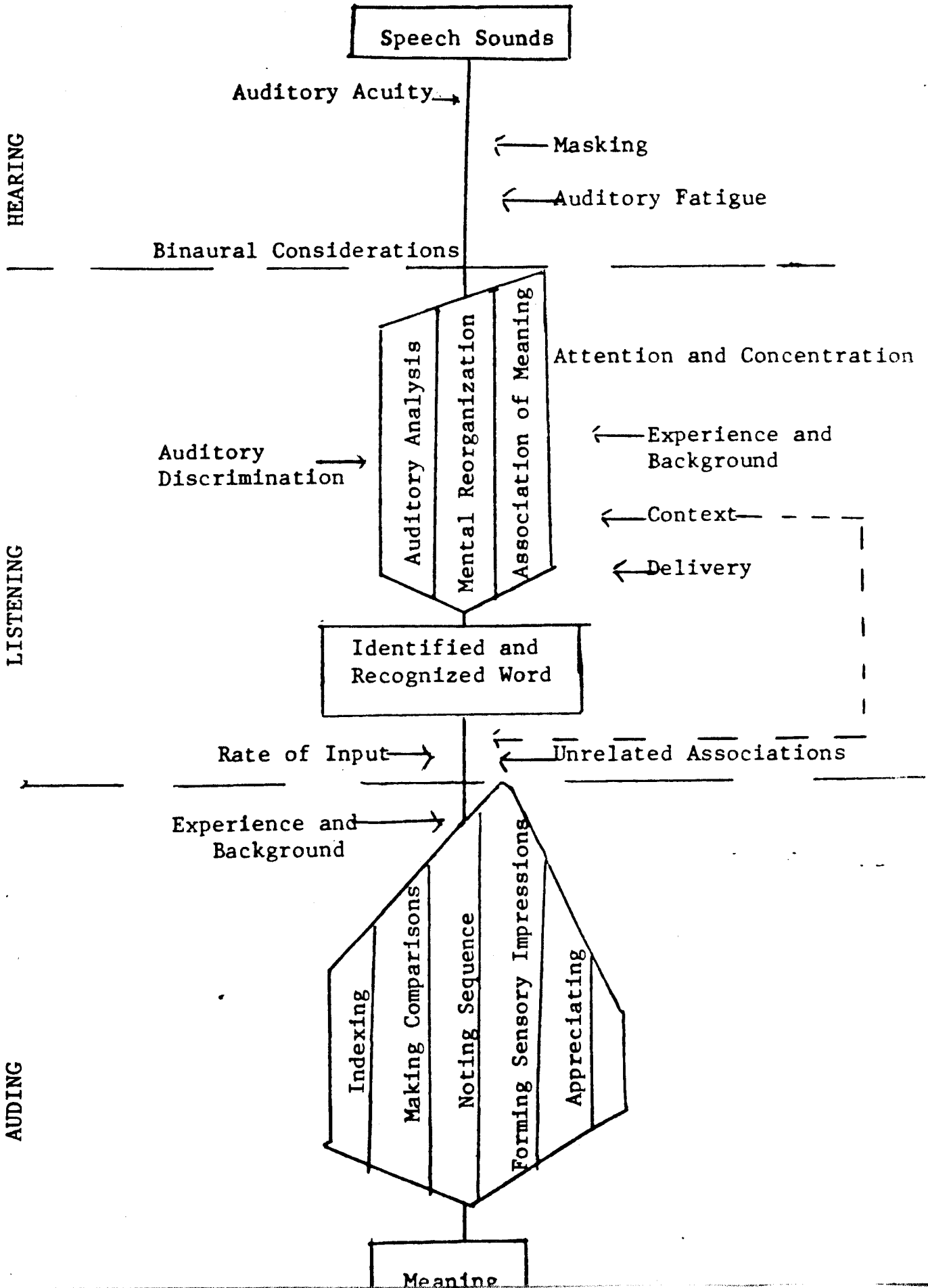
FACTORS INFLUENCING LISTENING COMPREHENSION (less evidence)

Speaker effectiveness
Admiration for the speaker
Respect for listening as a method of learning
Susceptibility to distraction
Parental occupation
Sex of the listener
Room ventilation and temperature
Use of only the English language at home
Rearing in an only-child home environment
High school scholastic achievement
High school speech training
Experience in listening to difficult expository material

FACTORS NOT INFLUENCING LISTENING COMPREHENSION

Listener buoyancy and optimism
Social ease of the listener
Family relationships of the listener
Self-satisfaction of the listener
Economic attitudes of the listener
Hearing acuity of the listener
General state of the listener's health
Distance of the listener from the speaker
Worries of the listener about personal problems
Note-taking ability or methods of the listener
Previous training of the listener in the subject discussed
Size of the listener's family beyond the minimum of two children

Stanford E. Taylor, Listening, Washington, D.C.,
National Education Association, April 1964



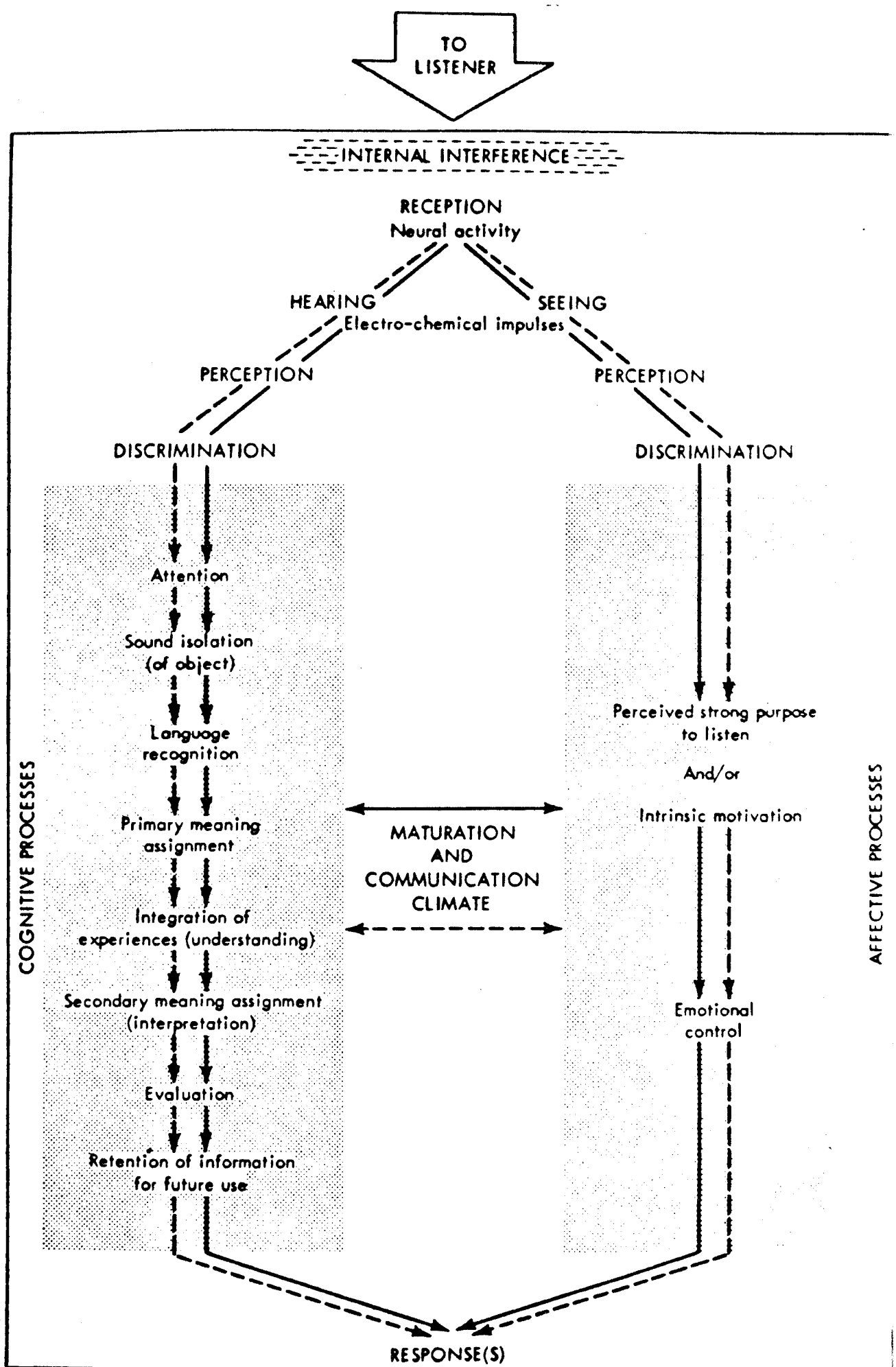


Figure 3. A "Closeup" View of the Listener

AN OUTLINE FOR A DEFINITION OF LISTENING

PARTS

↓
1. Previous knowledge

↓
2. Material to be listened to

MAJOR DIVISIONS OF LISTENING ACTIVITY

1. Responding and Organizing

↓
3. Physiological activity of the listener

STEPS FOR A PROFICIENT LISTENER

↓
(1) Hear

↓
(2) Hold in memory

↓
4. Attention or concentration

↓
(3) Attend

↓
(4) Form images

↓
(5) Search past store of ideas

↓
(6) Compare

↓
(7) Test

↓
(8) Recode

↓
5. Highly conscious intellectual activity

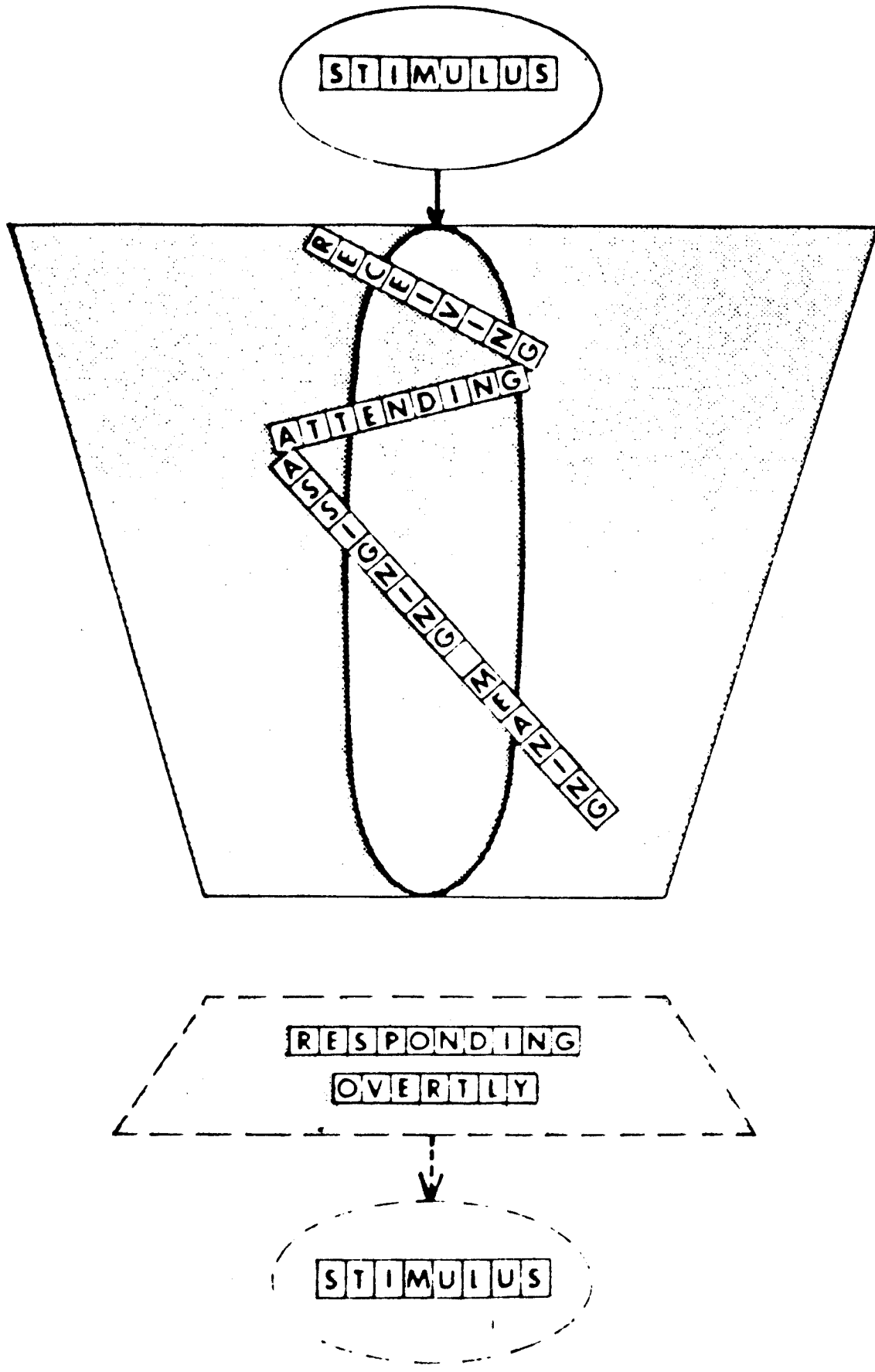
↓
11. Getting Meaning

↓
(9) Get meaning (literal comprehension)

↓
111. Thinking beyond Listening

↓
(10) Intellectualize

Figure 8.3.
Wolvin-Coakley Model of the Listening
Process.
Drawing by Ted Metzger, Visual Technics



Unique Aspects of Listening -

Characteristics of Spoken Language
Loose seq.

Redundancy
Reciprocity - imitation or feedback
Grammar + idiom

Characteristics of spoken versus written messages

Time elements - rate, pause, etc.
(intonation, stress)

Intonation + stress
Loudness
Nonverbal elements (proximity + kinesics)

Lehola 1948 Speech Monographs - Factors

influencing listening comprehension

STEP test 1957 -

3 skills - plain-sense comp.
not exp.
eval, application

Wpover -
Aspects -
Capacity
~~stability~~ will, habits

Aspects of listening

Freedman - attend, understand, evaluate - process

Lundsteen - process (in 2nd edition)

Hoss -

Redei's
competence
fluency
strategy