

**PERCEPTIONS OF LISTENING RESEARCH**

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## PERCEPTIONS OF LISTENING RESEARCH

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Questions regarding listening research are nothing new. We have been asking them for a long period of time. Unfortunately, we have fewer answers than questions.

At the Denver International Listening Association conference this past year, the Research Committee met for the first time and discussed potential research questions. The committee also decided that it would be beneficial to host a pre-conference seminar specifically devoted to listening research. It was recognized that previous conference panels have focused on research issues, however, it was thought that focusing upon one or several research questions would not only help focus our concern in a needed area, it would also generate needed interaction.

Washington, D.C. was targeted for the first pre-conference seminar on listening research. "What issues should be our first topic areas?" This was an immediate concern. In order to utilize the expertise of our International Listening Association members, I developed a questionnaire which attempted to obtain an answer to this question.

At the 1981 ILA conference I presented a paper prepared by William E. Arnold and myself titled, "Directions for Research in Listening." This paper served as a basis of the questions developed in the questionnaire mailed to all 1981 ILA members.

The questionnaire was mailed in October, 1981 and most of the returns arrived in early November. It was limited to one page in hopes of encouraging an early and complete return. In total, 94 members of the ILA responded. This represented a 47.7% return.

The first question was an open ended question asking "What do you think is the best research topic that needs to be explored on the subject of listening at an 'all-day' conference?" This encouraged the respondents to develop their own topics for exploration. Two-thirds of all respondents indicated their unrestricted choice. Table 1 summarizes these findings.

TABLE 1

Open Ended Response to Best Listening  
Research Topic to be Explored

<u>Subject</u>	<u>Percent Citing</u>
Teaching Effective Listening	33.9%
Measuring Listening	25.8
Listening as a Process	9.7
Teaching & Measuring Listening	8.1
Defining Listening	6.5
Others	16.0

The above table notes that 67.8% of those responding to the open ended question, with respect to the best research topic, thought that teaching effective listening and measuring listening were the best topics. Sixteen percent of the respondents selected other topics which included those additional ones listed in question # 2 of the questionnaire plus studying attitudes towards listening, the thought process as it relates to listening, and an examination of potential grant sources for the funding of listening research.

The second question in the questionnaire sought specific information. It provided five choices (ranging from very important to very unimportant) when asking the respondents, "How important do you think the following topics are for possible exploration?" There were ten options and spaces for additional topics to be supplied. Table 2, found at the end of this paper, summarizes these findings.

The data clearly indicated that the members of the ILA thought that teaching effective listening (94.4%) and measuring listening (93.1%) were the two most important topics to be explored. There were no topics provided in the ten options, however, that the members thought should not be studied.

I was somewhat concerned about helping coordinate a pre-conference seminar devoted to listening research and not having any people attend. Not only are the costs of travel and lodging rising and university travel budgets declining, the length of the ILA conferences appear to be expanding. All these lead to increased individual costs. The questionnaire addressed itself to this concern when it asked, "How likely do you think it is that you would attend a pre-conference session(s) on a single or several topics relating to research in listening? The respondents were able to indicate one of five choices. Table 3 summarizes these findings.

TABLE 3

Likelihood of Attending a Pre-Conference  
Devoted to Listening Research

<u>Option</u>	<u>Percentage</u>
Very Likely	20.2%
Likely	34.0
Unlikely	10.6
Very Unlikely	12.8
Don't Know	16.0
Not Responding to Question	6.4

While the results would not guarantee an audience, they revealed that 54.2% of the ILA members responding to the questionnaire thought back in November that they would either very likely or likely attend a pre-conference devoted to listening research. Several people did write directly on the questionnaire noting that they would prefer a half-day pre-conference, rather than a full day to reduce their costs.

In summary, the questionnaire discovered from the ILA members that many would like to attend a pre-conference focusing upon listening research. The topics of most concern were teaching effective listening and measuring listening. These two topics were thus target for the first pre-conference on listening research.

TABLE 2

## Perceived Importance of Listening Research Topics

Topic	Avg Rating*	Very Unimportant	Unimportant	Don't Know	Important	Very Important
Listening as a process	4.0	8.0%	10.3%	1.1%	33.3%	47.1%
Time spent listening	3.2	6.0	34.5	2.4	47.6	9.5
Definition of listening	3.8	5.8	24.4	1.2	44.2	24.4
Facilitating listening	4.4	2.3	3.4	2.3	33.3	58.6
Reading vs. listening	3.4	7.4	25.9	2.5	51.9	12.3
Media effect on listening	4.1	1.2	9.3	3.5	47.7	38.4
Developing memory	4.1	-	16.3	2.3	39.5	41.9
Theory development	3.8	3.5	17.4	11.6	29.1	38.4
Teaching effective listening	4.7	2.2	3.4	-	9.0	85.4
Measuring listening	4.6	1.1	1.1	4.6	24.1	69.0

\*The rating ranged from 1 to 5; 1= very unimportant, 2= unimportant, 3= don't know, 4= important, and 5= very important.

