

Developing Our Listening Skill

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Abstract: *People usually think that to be a good communicator oratory or oral skills are the only required. However, they forget that human beings learn to 'listen' before he or she learns to 'speak'. If someone wants to achieve success in any field, he or she must develop the art of listening. To do this one must be aware about the difference between 'Hearing' and 'Listening'. At the same time one must be well versed with methods to improve the listening skill.*

Keywords: Listening, Barriers, Techniques, Styles

I. INTRODUCTION

The Importance of Listening Skills: Listening and speaking are intricately linked, as they are corresponding elements in the communication process. For all practical purposes, one cannot take place without the other: we speak only when there is someone to receive our message—and we cannot listen unless someone has said something or provided some aural stimulus. Listening has been defined in a rather light-hearted vein as —what you do while awaiting your time to talk

However, listening is far from being an inactive movement. It must be noted that there is a distinction between hearing and listening. Whereas —hearing is simply being aware of some sound imposing on our ears, —listening is a conscious attempt relating with psychological activity to make sense of, and understand the —message, often against a particular backdrop or within a certain point of view. As Nikki Giovanni, an American poet, has said, —I'm glad I understand that while language is a gift, listening is a responsibility. It is interesting to note that we use 40 to 50% of our total communication time, and one third of our working time, getting information rather than communicating it. But, despite the fact that listening is a basic and important human activity, most people are not very good at it. They seem to lack the required skills, perhaps because, intentionally or unintentionally, they have uncared for the nurturing and gaining of these skills. This is emerged by the following facts: our intake is at or below 25%, that is about half of what is said during a ten-minute conversation. We do not remember half of that within 48 hours. We mess the information, if called upon to replicate it. Living as we do in an era of communication, we are faced with additional challenges in the place of work where intercultural communication has become the custom. Improving and increasing our listening skills thus assumes greater significance. In this context, it is well to bear in mind Plutarch's advice: —Know how to listen and you will profit even from those who talk badly. Indeed, countless benefits can be achieved from listening efficiently. It may be recalled that listening is the first means of gaining information in the case of very small children. Also, Second Language Acquisition researchers recognize the implication of the silent period': the preliminary period in the process of language acquisition, when the learner limits himself/herself to listening in order to get and incorporate information about the language. It is only at a later stage that there is a burst in his language-producing activity. Listening also protects us against the tricks of an unprincipled speaker who presents matters of an unscrupulous nature

II. THE WAYS AND TECHNIQUES OF IMPROVING OUR LISTENING SKILL

- **Re-organize the substance in our mind:** The listener should be able to know patterns used by the speaker, and should be able to identify the main / central point, and sustaining points; s/he could rearrange the substance in his mind according to certain headings so as to facilitate recall.
- **Concentrating on the speaker's subject rather than manner:** The listener should not be biased by the individual or behavioural qualities of the speaker or his style, but should concentrate on the content, intent, and argument of the message.
- **Listening keenly:** Listening keenly also indicates being thoughtful to the speaker and empathizing with him. By assuming an attentive listening pose, the listener puts the speaker at his ease and places him in a better situation to invent and articulate his ideas. The listener should have a positive approach towards a talk,

thinking that in every talk there is always at least one point or idea that will be of worth and special importance to him.

- **Listen with absolute attention:** The listener should learn to distinguish between argument and evidence; idea and example; reality and view. He should attempt to pick out and paraphrase the important points while ignoring insignificant ones.
- **Interaction:** Interaction and partaking in a discussion, no doubt make the listening process more rewarding; but the following points must be followed:
- **Allow the speaker to complete what he is saying before you start to talk** Do not interrupt. Do not disturb the speaker by involving in some unwanted form of activity, like talking to the person next to you, looking at your watch, or walking out, or appearing indifferent or diverted.
- **Do not challenge the speaker:** Do not let your mind move on to predict what is going to be said next just listen cautiously to what the speaker is really saying. If you are busy planning your answers, you are likely to neglect significant points, and make immaterial or stupid statements. Avoid passing remarks or making comments while the speaker is speaking. Only one person should speak at a time. Be open to new ideas; ask questions, seeking explanation of meaning, ideas, and thoughts; or to collect supplementary information, or to direct the flow of the conversation.
- **Patience:** Do not get agitated or impatient. Be cautious not to lose your temper.
- **Motivation:** The experience of listening is more worthwhile if the listener is motivated and involved. Self-confidence and faith in the speaker are essential.
- **Introspection:** The listener must sincerely scrutinize his existing listening practice, and think whether he can improve upon them.
- **Provide positive feedback:** By maintaining eye contact, using appropriate facial expressions, nodding from time to time, leaning forward, and so on, you put the speaker at his ease, support him and thus facilitate him to provide his best.
- **Listen for vocal or non-verbal signs:** By observing the speaker's tone of voice or facial expressions, it is possible to get at his meaning more successfully. Pay attention to what the speaker says as much as to what he leaves unspoken.
- **Make good use of the time-gap between speaking and thinking:** Spend this extra-time thinking on what the speaker is saying. You could even note down points or make short notes on selected topics. Make a kind of mental summary, and appraise what is being said. You may predict what the speaker is going to say next, but it is necessary to listen cautiously to search out whether it is precisely what you anticipated or whether there is some difference. If there is a difference, it is important to consider what the difference is and the cause of it.
- **Practice your listening skills:** Train yourself to use your listening skills every time you have an opportunity to listen. Do not abandon the task of listening, particularly if you find it difficult. Listening is an act of the determination and will as much as a matter of practice. It depends on psychological conditioning. Willingness to make an attempt, therefore, matters.
- **Adjusting with different communication events:** Efficient listening includes the ability to adjust to several communication events, involving intercultural communication situations. The listener must be aware of factors like culture, gender, race, status, etc., and not allow them to negatively influence his listening. In this matter, tolerance, patience, and empathy are important.

III. STYLES OF LISTENING

The following are the different styles of listening available for the listener to choose from:

- **Empathic listening:** In this case we identify ourselves with the speaker, and comprehend things from her/his point of view, allowing her/him the liberty to express her/his emotions.
- **Informational listening:** Here, the objective is to obtain information. So the listener pays attention to the content, and makes decisions about the taking of notes; s/he also observes for related non-verbal signs, asks questions, and concentrates on the replies. All this helps her/ him to incorporate the information.

- **Evaluative listening:** We are exposed to a great deal of material proposed to influence us to agree to the speaker's point of view; we require to appraise what we hear, and note only certain points that are of interest or use to us.
- **Appreciative Listening:** We use this form of listening when we listen to our favorite music or watch pleasurable television programmes. In these examples, cautious listening greatly encourages pleasure and positive reception.
- **Critical listening:** This is when we listen critically and systematically, cautiously taking into consideration the topic of the argument, the purpose of the speaker, his omissions, his point of view; his reliability and so on.

IV. CONCLUSION

We may conclude by observing that effective listening is a positive, intellectual, psychological and active process, and to improve its effectiveness, it is essential to set one's mind to the task. Poor listening habits can be changed through conscious attempt, hard work, self-discipline, concentration, positive attitude, and willpower. So, there is no justification, really, for being a bad listener!

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