**Chapter Three**

**THE RUDIMENTS OF LISTENING SKILLS**

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**Introduction**

Listening is usually misconceived to mean the same thing as hearing, but there is a real distinction between merely ***hearing the words*** and really ***listening for valuable words****.* Hearing is a biological process by which sound waves are received, modified and relayed along the nervous system of the ear. It can be said to be passive because it is done effortlessly. In as much as the auditory organs (i.e. the ears) are effective, you can easily perceive sounds such as lectures going on, students shouting, cars hooting, children playing, birds chirping, and so on. The ears can pick up all manners of sound either useful language sounds or irrelevant non-linguistic sounds. Listening on the other hand, is a psychological and conscious process of directing attention to the sound contrasts and their sequence, selecting sounds and getting desired information from sound frequencies. It is active, concentrated hearing. It involves close attention to, and making sense of what you hear, absorbing vital and important information from what is said, and doing so quickly and accurately.

**Meaning and Nature of Listening**

*“We were given two ears but only one mouth, because listening is twice as hard as talking."* Larry Alan Nadig.

Of the four communicative skills of language, listening is the first and the most basic. The others are the skills of speaking, reading and writing. Listening and reading are referred to as receptive skills as a result of the fact that the listener and reader are at the receiving end. The other two skills i.e. writing and speaking are however referred to as expressive or productive skills. Another fact that makes listening the most basic of these skills is that it can affect the other skills if not effectively done. To listen effectively, you must be actively involved in the communication process, and not just listening passively. For example, being a bad speaker or writer could be as a result of being a bad listener. According to Ibrahim (2005:84), “Poor listening skills will affect efficient speaking, reading and writing. This is because we often speak, read and write in response to either a speech, instruction given by another person or required by a situation all of which we must have understood through listening.’’

**Types of listening**

According to most communication experts such as; Adetugbo (1997), Adegbija (2004), Ogbulogo (2004), Nadig (2010), there are different types of listening and the types of information being anticipated and context, determine the appropriate listening type. They include the following functional types:

***Attentive Listening***

This type of listening is basic to all types of contexts. It requires full concentration and attention. **Attentive listening** means thinking and acting in ways that connect you with the speaker. You may choose to listen attentively. Of course, sometimes you may choose **not** to listen attentively. Listening is a process of patience and to listen effectively requires a considerable self-control. This listening method is essential in teaching and learning contexts.

***Appreciative listening***

This is a type of listening behaviour where you as a listener seek certain information which you will appreciate; for example that, which helps to meet your needs and goals. You use appreciative listening when listening to good music, poetry or maybe even the stirring words of a great leader. Appreciative listening does not rely on the message from the speaker; rather it is how you respond as a listener. Our appreciation of what we hear will vary depending on our individual interests.

***Critical listening***

This is a kind of listening where the message has to be evaluated. Listeners have to critically and objectively listen to the message, questioning points in the light of existing information before giving their opinion. This type of listening requires you to consider what you hear and arrive at decisions based on critical judgment. The aim here is entirely to criticize. For instance, a cigarette advertisement that cautions that “smokers are liable to die young” can be criticized thus: Will anybody be interested in buying the cigarette having been forewarned? Will the cigarette company enjoy any patronage? Does it mean only smokers die young? Does it mean that anybody that smokes do not mind to die young? etc. An attempt to answer all these questions invariably to makes listening critical.

***Reflective/Active listening***

This is a communication technique used in counselling, training and conflict resolution, which requires the listener to feed back what they hear to the speaker, by way of re-stating or paraphrasing what they have heard in their own words, to confirm what they have heard and moreover, to confirm the understanding of both parties. When interacting, people often "wait to speak" rather than listening attentively. They might also be distracted. Active listening is a structured way of listening and responding to others, focusing attention on the "function" of communicating objectively as opposed to focusing on "forms", passive expression or subjectivity. Active listening usually happen naturally when you are very interested in what someone is saying. You can also choose to listen actively whenever you want to maximize the quality of your listening, both in terms of the effect it has on you and the effect it has on those you are relating what you have heard to. This type of listening can be adapted to a preacher’s sermon.

***Empathic Listening***

This is paying attention to another person with empathy (emotional identification, compassion, feeling, insight). One basic principle is to “seek to understand, before being understood.” Empathy is the ability to project yourself into the personality of another person in order to understand better that person's emotions or feelings. Through empathic listening, you as a listener let the speaker know, “I understand your problem and how you feel about it, I am interested in what you are saying and I am not judging you.” You unmistakably convey this message through words and non-verbal behaviours, including body language. In so doing, you encourage the speaker to fully express him/herself free of interruption, criticism or being told what to do. For example, your friend might tell you, “My wallet was stolen this morning.” An Empathic listening response might be, “Your wallet was stolen?” or “What items did it contain?” Another response might be, “I can see this has upset you. Do you want to talk about it?” Whatever the response, it is intended to clarify the facts or information being presented (obtain understanding) and to identify and respond to the emotions or feelings of your friend.

Empathy is not sympathy. Whereas sympathy is “feeling for someone,” empathy is “feeling as someone.” It is a situation where the listener tends to listen rather than talk. The non-verbal behaviour indicates that the listener is attending to what is being said. The emphasis is on understanding and identifying with the speaker’s feelings and being supportive and patient.

**Causes of poor listening**

It is common to find some students nodding off in class, while some are tempted to skip class because they probably think that they get so little from it anyway or maybe, too, they find at test-taking time that the lecturer asks about information that seems they have never heard of. It is very likely that the material was presented during those days when such students simply tuned off on the lecture. Poor listening could be attributed to either the speaker and/or the listener based on the following:

***Speaker’s Causes of Poor Listening***

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
|  | 1. His voice volume may be too low to be heard by the students. |
|  | 1. Making the lecture/message too complex, either by including too many unnecessary details or too many issues. |
|  | 1. Getting lost, forgetting his point or the purpose of the lecture. |
|  | 1. Body language or non-verbal elements contradicting or interfering with the verbal message, such as smiling when anger or hurt is being expressed. |
|  | 1. Paying too much attention to how the listeners are taking the lecture/message, or how they might react. |
|  | 1. Using a very unique code or unconventional method for delivering the lecture/message. 2. Inability to use stress and intonation properly to effect the differences in the meaning of certain words. |

***Listener’s Causes of Poor Listening***

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
|  | a. Being preoccupied and not listening. |
|  | b. Being so interested in what you have to say that you listen mainly to find an opening to get the floor. |
|  | c. Listening too hard by concentrating on irrelevant details thereby missing out on important ones. |
|  | d. Listening to your own personal beliefs about what is being said. |
|  | e. Evaluating and making judgments about the speaker or the message.   1. Focusing on delivery and personal appearance of the speaker instead of his message. |
|  | g. Not asking for clarification when you know that you do not understand. |

**Characteristics of poor listening**

There are certain characteristics that indicate poor listening and these can be easily detected by close observation of the student listener. They include:

a. Intermittent dozing

b. Mind wandering or day dreaming

c. Distractions such as talking, eating, playing games or doing something else during lectures

d. Feedback responses that communicate tiredness or resentment

e. Actions such as intermittent gazing at the wristwatch, tapping the foot on the floor or

hissing which imply that the speaker is not wanted

f. A negative opinion of the speaker and his or her message thereby giving a negative response

**Conditions for effective listening**

Listening and hearing cannot be said to be unconnected at all, after all, the same organ which is the ear is used for both actions. For you to listen to a speaker, you must have first heard what the speaker is saying. This implies that for effective listening to take place, both the speaker and listener must understand each other. It must not be a one-sided thing, otherwise the purpose, which is mainly effective communication will be defeated. Effective communication exists between two people when the listener interprets and understands the speaker’s message in the same way the speaker intended it. To listen effectively requires considerable self-control. A deliberate paying of attention to the immediate sounds of teaching going on in class, absorbing vital information quickly and accurately must be made by students in order to make communicative meaning out of what is being taught.

As students, a great percentage of your time is spent listening to lectures and taking down notes, therefore you need to cultivate and imbibe excellent listening strategies if you must take down meaningful and useful notes.

A student can use the following techniques for developing and maintaining the self-discipline needed for attentive listening.

1. ***Take a Proper Sitting Position***

The way you sit down in class can affect your listening positively or negatively. Sitting posture like slouching or bending forward suggests tiredness or poor concentration. Good listening can be enhanced by sitting upright with the lower back (not the whole back) resting on the back of the chair.

1. ***Take Listening Seriously***

This can be achieved by considering listening as an active process that requires consciousness and concentration. Listening in class is not the same as the more common process of listening to music or to the radio while doing something else. To become an active listener, you need to put in a lot of effort, determination and commitment.

1. ***Concentrate***

Even though we cannot eliminate all physical and environmental distractions such as hot classroom, movement and sounds of people and/or objects outside the classroom, therefore you must develop a disciplined mind to resist all forms of distractions. You must make a conscious effort to pull back your mind to focus on what the lecturer is saying then force your mind to stay there. You must also avoid mind wandering or day dreaming while receiving lecture.

1. ***Avoid Diversion by Appearances and/or Delivery***

You must not allow a lecturer’s appearance or delivery to hinder your active listening. Irrespective of whether the lecturer is looking good, elegant, awkward or shabby, attention and appreciation must be paid to his/her verbal performance, use of language, voice modulations and the message and ideas in his/her lecture. There should be alertness to the speaker’s pauses or falls of speech rhythm, interposing, or follow-up questions. Attention should also be paid to the speaker’s face, posture and gesture. The student ought to be able to interpret non-verbal communication (NVC) correctly.

1. ***Avoid Being Judgmental***

It is improper to blot out what the lecturer is saying even if the student does not share his or her view. The proper thing to do is to listen attentively, try to understand the lecturer’s point of view, examine his or her ideas, consider the evidences and assess the reasoning. Hear out the lecture before reaching a final judgment. While the lecture is going on, you can put down relevant questions and be ready to ask them when the opportunity presents itself. You can also make positive remarks that will propel the lecturer to provide further explanation on any topic of contention. This enhances better understanding for you.

1. ***Focus and Retain Main Points***

It is impossible to retain everything the lecturer says, what is important is to focus on specific things in the lecture. The first way this can be achieved is by listening to identify the main points. These should not be difficult to get if the lecture is well planned and developed. The lecturer is likely to introduce his or her main points by using a combination of thesis statement, topic sentences and transitional signals such as; first, second, next, later, in addition, furthermore, finally, in conclusion and so on. You should take note of these and be prepared to identify the main points. Another thing you can also do is to repeat key words or phrases in your mind in order to retain them, especially names, items, dates, formulasand so on.

1. ***Provide Regular Feedback Responses***

As a student, you are expected to give appropriate non-verbal communication (NVC) feedbacks in order to reinforce the speaker’s confidence, establish easy rapport and strengthen the speaker’s confidence. Such feedbacks could be smiles, nod or shaking of the head, clapping ovation and other actions that could reduce breakdown, tension, indifferences or tiredness and feeling of being unwanted.

**Exercise 1**

Answer true or false to questions 1-3

1. The first and most basic of the four communicative skills of language is listening.
2. Listening and hearing mean the same thing.
3. Listening type is not necessarily determined by the context and the type of information being anticipated.

Provide the correct answers to questions 4-6

1. What type of listening is best used when listening to the inspiring words of a great leader?
2. Reflective listening can also be referred to as what?
3. Intermittent dozing, gazing at the wristwatch or tapping the foot on the floor by the students in class is an indication of what?

**Exercise 2**

*Listen to the following passage as read to you by your classmate or lecturer and answer the questions that follow it.*

Matthew Henry describes grace as ‘salt that seasons our words and keeps them from corrupting.’ Salt has two primary purposes: it preserves and it adds flavour. So when the Bible says your words should be ‘seasoned with salt’ (Colossians 4:6), it means they should preserve and not corrupt, always be in good taste, and promote wellbeing. James the apostle says, ‘You can’t draw water from a salty spring’ (James 3:12 NLT), in other words you can’t fake what’s in your heart. It’s not just a question of learning to say the right things; it’s about having a right attitude, because what you say reflects ‘the things that are in your heart’ (Matthew 12:34 NCV). Solomon says, ‘There is one who speaks like the piercings of a sword, but the tongue of the wise promotes health.’(Proverbs12:18 NKJV). Unless you are careful, you can end up talking yourself and the people around you into all kinds of problems. One Bible teacher says: ‘We have the ability to speak words of faith, which cause miracles to manifest…Faith is a law and we operate in it with our words, either to our benefit or our destruction…’The tongue of the wise promotes health. ‘We could turn that around and say, ‘The tongue of the unwise promotes sickness.’ It’s your choice. You can line up your mouth and heart with what the devil tells you, or you can operate in faith by lining your mouth and heart up with God’s word, pointing towards His blessings. Faith works by believing and saying what God says. So begin to speak God’s words of healing.

Culled from *The Word for Today* ( June 1st, 2013)

1. Write the most appropriate title for the passage.
2. What type of l\*\*istening is best used for the passage?
3. Write the main lessons of the passage.
4. What does the expression ‘You can’t draw water from a salty spring’ mean?

***Conclusion***

It is not enough to just listen to a lecture, what is most important is for effective learning to be achieved through effective teaching and effective listening. Students must have the ability to develop good and positive attitudes towards listening in order to obtain information, criticize and effectively appreciate a lecture.

**The lecture**

A lecture is a body of information, which may consist of instructions, procedures, processes or practice on any aspect of human knowledge (Northshore Community College 2013). It is a teaching method where the lecturer is the central focus of information transfer. Typically, the lecturer will stand before a class and present information for the students to learn. Sometimes, he/she will write on a board or use an overhead projector to provide visuals for students. Students are expected to take notes while listening to the lecture. Lectures are also interactive in a learner-centered situation.

***Nature of a Lecture***

Most academic lectures are instructional and some are interactive, generally aimed at equipping the learners with skills and requisite knowledge. Some train the learners to be able to perform certain assignment or jobs in order to practice certain professions.

Lectures are a straightforward way to impart knowledge to students quickly. It is therefore important to note that a lecture is not just about passing academic examinations; rather it is for imparting knowledge, skills and values for a successful living.

It is expected that a knowledgeable and experienced lecturer ought to identify important information in related field(s) for the students and transmit this knowledge in the lecture.

***What to Expect from a Lecture***

1. Life-applicable knowledge or information such that can aid day–to day living of individual student
2. Procedures for performing certain knowledge-based activities
3. Results of proven processes and procedures
4. Precaution against possible failures (i.e. how not to perform/approach certain activities)

However, in order to obtain the desired results and for your expectations as a learner to be met, it is important for you to adopt the right attitude towards a lecture. Such right attitudes include:

1. Having an inquisitive mind which can be developed by taking listening seriously
2. An attentive heart and ears; resist distractions
3. Paying enough attention that results in having questions to be answered in the lecture
4. Having a positive attitude towards the lecture and the lecturer
5. Active participation in class; be an active listener and participant
6. Having a sense of alertness and vigilance
7. Having a strong determination to leave the lecture with a new knowledge

***Structure of a Lecture***

Lectures are usually organized sequentially and logically. Ideas are sometimes presented in a chronological order, transiting from one level to another. They usually consist of three segments namely: the introduction, the body and the conclusion. The *introduction* comprises a summary of what the entire lecture is about. It is usually done during the first three to five minutes of the lecture. This time is crucial in determining how well students learn and retain the information to be presented. Here, the lecture topic is usually given as a title and some introductions define key concepts and purpose of the lecture. The ***body*** of the lecture covers the content in an organized way. Since this component is allotted the greatest amount of class time, it includes many more teaching procedures than the introduction and conclusion. Here, main ideas and key points are explored, illustrated and exemplified. Subordinate ideas are also explored. The c*onclusion* comprises a summary of the lecture. Here the student’s learning is reinforced and misconceptions regarding the understanding of the lecture are clarified. Students are reminded of the key points of the lecture and sometimes practical demonstrations of certain main points are carried out here.

***Identifying Key Points in a Lecture***

A student must be sensitive and watch out for guides to new points at the point of transition (Longe & Ofuani 2008:45). Words such as *firstly, secondly* or *thirdly, next*, *moreover*, *furthermore*, etc. are good guides or indicators to new ideas. Words that indicate cause and effect relationship (e.g. *therefore, consequently, because, since, as a result*) and contrast (e.g. *on the contrary, however, nevertheless, on the other hand, even if*) are also very helpful. Also as good guides to key points in a lecture are lecture paragraphs that are usually tied together coherently by certain discourse markers or cohesive devices such as *although*, *similarly*, *in addition* etc.

***Identifying Patterns of Lecture Organization***

There are certain questions you can ask yourself as a student about the lecture and the lecturer in order to recognize the organization of a lecture. Such questions also aid the understanding of the lecture and enhances note-taking. The questions include:

* Is the lecture topic well defined?
* Does the lecturer order, list or itemize facts?
* Does he/she narrate events sequentially?
* Does he/she relate cause to effect?
* Does he/she make a general statement followed by examples?

**Exercise 1**

1. The aim of a lecture is just for passing academic examinations. True/False
2. Capturing everything the lecturer said in class implies the same thing as writing down everything. True/False
3. Coming late to class has no implication on being in tune with both the lecturer and lecture. True/False
4. In what manner are ideas most presented in a good lecture?
5. What does a word such as ‘therefore’ indicate in a lecture?

**Exercise 2**

Listen to any recorded speech or a 30-minute news on any electronic media and take important notes as the speech or news is presented. This is to be submitted the next class.

**Conclusion**

Lectures should not leave a learner the way they were. They should add more value for there ought to be something new to learn per lecture. However, there should be pre-lecture preparation too on the part of the student such as:

1. Providing study materials such as relevant texts and writing materials
2. Reading ahead with the aid of the course outline of the lecture
3. Arming yourself with relevant question(s)
4. Approaching a lecture with a ready mind in order to have your question(s) answered

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