Listening in the Language Classroom
Listening in the Language Classroom

John Field
## Contents

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Acknowledgements</th>
<th>page viii</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Introduction</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Part I  Background</strong></td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 Listening then and now</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 The comprehension approach: pluses and minuses</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Part II  Rethinking the comprehension approach</strong></td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 Listening and the learner</td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 Types of listening</td>
<td>58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Part III  Process, not product</strong></td>
<td>77</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 A diagnostic approach to L2 listening</td>
<td>79</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6 Dividing listening into its components</td>
<td>96</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7 A process approach</td>
<td>110</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Part IV  A process view of listening</strong></td>
<td>123</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8 Input and context</td>
<td>125</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9 Decoding and the inconsistent signal</td>
<td>140</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10 Decoding: sounds, syllables and words</td>
<td>163</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11 Using grammar and intonation</td>
<td>185</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12 Amplifying what the speaker says</td>
<td>209</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13 Handling information</td>
<td>241</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Contents

Part V  The challenge of the real world 267
14  Real speech 269
15  Listening strategies 286
16  Strategy instruction in second language listening 304

Part VI  Conclusion 325
17  Fitting it together 327

Appendices 336
Glossary of listening-related terms 345
References 353
Index 360
In recognition of all I owe to my mother
Maud Henrietta Field (1910–1983),
the best of listeners
Acknowledgements

This book has a long history. It grew from an interest in second language listening that goes back over 25 years, and from an idea that was first mooted ten years ago. I had expected the writing to take eight months but it finally lasted three years. Unsurprisingly, I have built up more than a few debts of gratitude along the way.

As often happens, putting words on the page had the chastening effect of showing the author how little he knows. I rethought ideas that had seemed set in stone and questioned lines of argument that had once been utterly convincing. I also had to find ways of making information relevant to teachers in the field. In circumstances such as these, one badly needs to put one’s ideas past an informed listener who has a complete grasp of the issues. I cannot think of anybody more competent to fulfil that role for L2 listening than Gillian Brown, who commands enormous respect among all who work in the area. Gill was enormously generous with her time; and it was a great pleasure and privilege to work with her on the final draft of the book. I cannot stress enough how much poorer the book would have been without the benefit of her experience and without her insights, always perceptive, invariably frank (‘Omit’ featured quite often, and she was always right), and punctuated at well-timed intervals by coffee and walks round the garden.

I also owe a considerable debt to Alison Sharpe of Cambridge University Press for her continuing faith in me and in the book, ever since the time we first discussed it on a train all those years ago. During the writing, I greatly appreciated the sound advice – not to mention the understanding and patience – of Jane Walsh, my editor. The presentation of the material has benefited considerably from the expertise of Jacqueline French, the copy editor, who showed great sensitivity towards both text and author.

Many of the ideas in the book were first developed during a three-week summer school on second language skills that the British Council ran at Oxley Hall in the University of Leeds. (Sadly, like much of the enlightened work that the Council once did, it has now been axed.) I taught there for ten years and remain grateful to the Director, Niall Henderson, for employing me on what was undoubtedly the most rewarding teacher-development experience of my career. Oxley Hall gave me the
opportunity of exchanging views on listening with teachers from all over
the world. Many of those attending taught in difficult conditions. Some
(from Tanzania, Vietnam, Cambodia, the poorer parts of South America)
had to make do with the most limited of resources. Others (from eastern
Europe, from Palestine, from South Africa, from the Sudan) had been
the victims of occupation or intimidation. I developed a huge respect
for their commitment and for the enthusiasm with which they embraced
the idea that second language listening might be handled more produc-
tively – even where they had no reliable power supply or their books and
equipment had been destroyed. I hope that former Oxley Hall students
will come across this book and remember some happy and stimulating
times.

Another much-valued source of ideas has been the relatively small
group of teachers, writers and researchers who specialise in second lan-
guage listening. Over the years, I have been fortunate to work with some
and to engage in fruitful discussions with others at conferences or via
email. I imagine that traces of all these exchanges can be found some-
where in the pages that follow. I add the usual rider that any errors of
interpretation are entirely my own – but (given the topic of the book) I
can always fall back on the defence that listeners and readers have no
choice but to remake the message.

Finally, it is not surprising that a project that took up so much time
and was so important to me put a severe strain upon my personal life.
I am lucky indeed to have a group of loyal friends who have kept faith
with me over many years; and I cannot thank them enough for their
concerned enquiries and their tolerance of my prolonged absence from
the scene. Above all, I would like to thank Paul Siedlecki for the support
and understanding that has helped me to get through what has been a
very long haul.

Publisher’s acknowledgements

The authors and publishers acknowledge the following sources of copy-
right material and are grateful for the permissions granted. While every
effort has been made, it has not always been possible to identify the
sources of all the material used, or to trace all copyright holders. If any
omissions are brought to our notice, we will be happy to include the
appropriate acknowledgements on reprinting.

Page 20: text ‘Contextual ambiguity’ and page 233: Table 12.9 ‘Sam-
ple exercise: text-level reference’, from A. Maley and A. Duff, Variations
on a Theme (1978). By permission of Alan Maley.
Acknowledgements


