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CAMBRIDGE UNIVERSITY PRESS

Cambridge, New York, Melbourne, Madrid, Cape Town, Singapore, São Paulo, Delhi

Cambridge University Press
The Edinburgh Building, Cambridge CB2 8RU, UK

www.cambridge.org

Information on this title: www.cambridge.org/9780521685702

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First published 2008

Printed in the United Kingdom at the University Press, Cambridge

A catalogue record for this publication is available from the British Library

Library of Congress Cataloguing in Publication data

Field, John, 1945–

Listening in the language classroom / John Field.

p. cm. – (Cambridge language teaching library.)

Includes bibliographical references and index.

ISBN 978-0-521-86678-1 hardback

ISBN 978-0-521-68570-2 paperback

1. Language and languages – Study and teaching. 2. Listening – Study and teaching.

3. Second language acquisition – Study and teaching. I. Title. II. Series.

P53.47.F54 2009

428'.0071 – dc22 2008045463

ISBN 978-0-521-68570-2 paperback

ISBN 978-0-521-86678-1 hardback

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*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

Acknowledgements

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 productively – 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 language 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 somewhere 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 copyright 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.

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Acknowledgements

Page 82: extracts from G. Brown and G. Yule, 'Investigating listening comprehension in context', *Applied Linguistics* 7/3 (1986): 284–302; page 282: extracts from M. Underwood, *Listen to This!* (1975), and page 306: extract from C. Goh and Y. Taib, 'Metacognitive instruction in listening for young learners', *ELT Journal* 60/3 (2006): 222–32. By permission of Oxford University Press.

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Page 147: Table 9.2 'Weak forms grouped by word class', adapted from A. C. Gimson, *Gimson's Pronunciation of English* 5th revised edition (1994), ed. Alan Cruttenden, Hodder and Arnold. Reproduced by permission of Edward Arnold; page 154: extract adapted from Richard Cauldwell, *Streaming Speech: Listening and Pronunciation for Advanced Learners of English* (Student Workbook), speechinaction 2003 © Richard Cauldwell.

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Page 242: extract from M. Geddes, 'A visit to Nepal', in *How to Listen*, BBC Publications.

Pages 300–1: Tables 15.3 'Avoidance and achievement strategies' and 15.4 'Repair strategies', adapted from Z. Dörnyei and M. L. Scott, 'Communication strategies in a second language: definitions and taxonomies', *Language Learning* 44/7/1 (1997): 173–210. By permission of Blackwell Publishing.