

Listening to Understand the Connections between Ideas, Opinions, Feelings, Attitudes and Implied Information in Spoken Contexts

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The listening habit is as old as man on earth. If you do not listen, you will neither hear nor understand (Otagburuagu, E.T.; Obah, T.Y.; Onuigbo, S.M.; Okorji, R.I, 2007). Thus, this shows that listening is not “a passive and mere receptive skill, (Anderson and Lynch 1984) but is an active communication skill.” Listening is necessary and important because a good listener can understand the connections between ideas, opinions, feelings, attitudes and implied information in spoken contexts. Effective listening involves being attuned to all these elements. This means paying attention to the speaker's tone of voice, body language, and the context in which the conversation occurs. For instance, a speaker might use a calm and measured tone to imply seriousness or employ sarcasm to convey a different meaning than their words suggest. Understanding the connections between ideas, opinions, feelings, attitudes, and implied information while listening in spoken contexts is essential for grasping the full depth of communication. When we listen, we engage in a dynamic process that involves decoding not just the explicit content but also the subtler layers of meaning conveyed through various elements of speech.

Listening to Identify a Speaker’s Ideas, Opinions, Feelings, or Attitudes

Identifying a speaker’s ideas, opinions, feelings, or attitudes involves listening attentively to the content and context of their speech. According to Brownell (2012), effective listening requires not just hearing the words, but also understanding the underlying emotions and intentions.

Listening to ideas involves understanding the main points or messages that the speaker is trying to convey. This requires cognitive engagement and the ability to process and organize information. Ideas also refer to the conceptual content or messages conveyed by the speaker. They form the foundational content of what is being communicated. They are the primary concepts or thoughts that the speaker wishes to convey. Recognizing the speaker's core message or main idea often involves paying attention to keywords and phrases that summarize the central point. For instance, a speaker discussing climate change might frequently mention terms like “global warming,” “carbon emissions,” and “sustainability.” Effective listening involves understanding and processing these ideas accurately. Example:

1. During a team meeting, John proposed an idea to streamline the project management process by using a new software tool.

Active listening enabled his colleagues to understand and build upon his suggestions. Identifying the speaker's ideas is foundational for effective listening. It allows the listener to grasp the core content of the communication, facilitating a deeper understanding and better response.

2. During a lecture, a student must listen attentively to grasp the lecturer’s key ideas, which form the basis for further discussion and analysis.

Opinions are the personal beliefs or judgments expressed by the speaker. These reflect the speaker's perspective and can provide insight into their stance on the topic. Listening to opinions involves recognizing and evaluating the speaker's personal views or judgments. This requires the listener to distinguish between objective information and subjective expressions. To understand the speaker's opinions listeners should note the tone, pitch, and pace of the speech. A speaker might express frustration or enthusiasm through changes in vocal inflexion or speed. Understanding opinions helps listeners appreciate diverse perspectives and engage in meaningful dialogue. Recognizing opinions also aids in identifying the speaker's stance on various issues. Example: In a meeting, understanding a colleague's opinion on a proposed policy helps in evaluating the policy's potential impact and fosters collaborative decision-making. When listening, recognizing opinions involves identifying the speaker's personal views or judgments about a topic. This requires distinguishing between factual information and subjective statements. Example:

1. In a debate, Jane expressed her opinion that remote work is more effective than traditional office work. Effective listeners acknowledged her viewpoint while considering other perspectives.

Feelings are the emotional undertones that accompany the spoken words. They add a layer of emotional context that can significantly influence how the message is perceived. Listening to feelings involves being attuned to the emotional states expressed by the speaker. This can include verbal cues and non-verbal signals such as tone of voice and body language. It also entails being sensitive to the speaker's emotional expressions, both verbal and non-verbal. This aspect of listening involves empathy and emotional intelligence. Recognizing feelings is crucial for building rapport and trust. It allows the listener to respond with appropriate empathy and support, enhancing interpersonal relationships. Examples:

1. When a friend expresses frustration about a personal issue, listening to their feelings helps in providing empathetic and supportive feedback.
2. When Tom talked about his frustration with the recent project setbacks, effective listeners picked up on his feelings of stress and disappointment, showing empathy and support.

Attitudes indicate the speaker's disposition or stance toward the subject or the audience. They can reveal underlying biases, enthusiasm, scepticism, or other subjective views that shape communication. Listening to attitudes therefore involves perceiving the speaker's predispositions or tendencies towards certain ideas, objects, or situations. This can affect how the listener interprets the message. It requires attention to the speaker's tone and choice of words. Understanding attitudes can influence how a listener interprets and responds to the speaker's message. It provides a perception of the speaker's biases and predispositions. Examples:

In a discussion about environmental policies, noticing a speaker's positive attitude towards sustainability can shape the conversation constructively.

During a discussion on environmental policies, Jane's positive attitude towards sustainable practices was evident. Attentive listeners noted this and engaged in a constructive conversation about green initiatives.

The speaker's attitude can often be inferred from their choice of words and the context in which they are used. For example, a speaker might show a positive attitude towards renewable energy by using terms like "innovative" and "promising."

Understanding the connections between ideas, opinions, feelings, and attitudes in both spoken and written contexts is crucial for effective communication. It involves recognizing linguistic markers, listening attentively, and interpreting the speaker's intent. These skills can be developed through practice and awareness, leading to better comprehension and more meaningful interactions.

Understanding Implied/Inferred Information in Spoken Contexts

Implied information refers to the underlying messages or intentions that are not explicitly or directly stated but are inferred from the context, tone, and non-verbal cues. It requires listeners to interpret subtleties and read between the lines to fully understand the speaker's intent. Listening for implied information therefore means being able to infer meanings that are not explicitly stated but suggested through context or manner of speech. This requires critical thinking and attention to detail. Detecting implied information enriches the listener's understanding of the full message, including subtleties and suggestions that are not explicitly communicated. This skill enhances critical thinking and interpretation. Example:

1. When a manager says, "We could improve our efficiency," the implied information might suggest current inefficiencies without directly stating it. Effective listeners will pick up on this and look for ways to address the issue.
2. When the manager mentioned, "We could improve our efficiency," it implied that there were current inefficiencies without directly criticizing anyone. Attentive listeners understood the underlying message and sought ways to enhance productivity.

Students must develop the skill to comprehend what is implied but not directly stated in spoken language. This involves understanding inferred information, recognizing the speaker's attitude or feelings, and deducing the meaning of unfamiliar words or phrases. These abilities are essential for effective communication and critical thinking. This analysis provides a detailed examination of these skills, supported by examples and exercises designed for assessment.

Understanding Implied/Inferred Information

Example 1: Information that is inferred but not explicitly stated often relates to the gist or purpose of a text or the speaker's overall intention. Goh (2008) projected that listening comprehension involves not only understanding the literal meaning of words but also grasping the underlying message. This means listening to not only what the person is expressing directly, but also the feelings, ideas or thoughts that underlie what is being said.

Gist or Purpose: The gist of a conversation or text refers to its main point or purpose. For example, in a news report about environmental policies, the gist might be the government's efforts to reduce carbon emissions.

Speaker's Intention: The speaker's overall intention can be inferred from the context and content of the speech. For instance, in a motivational speech, the speaker's intentions might be to inspire and encourage the audience.

Recognizing Speaker's Attitude or Feelings

Example 2

Words and phrases can suggest a speaker's attitude or feelings even when not explicitly stated. As stated by Vandergrift and Goh (2008), intonation, stress, and context play significant roles in conveying emotions and attitudes.

Attitude and Feelings: The speaker's choices of words, tone, and context can indicate their feelings. For example, the phrase "I'm so thrilled about this project" conveys excitement, while "I'm not sure this will work" suggests doubt or hesitation.

Deducing Meaning of Unfamiliar Words/Phrases

Example 3

Students should be able to deduce the meaning of unfamiliar words or phrases by listening to the information around them and making inferences. Thornbury (2002) emphasizes the importance of contextual clues in understanding new vocabulary.

Contextual Inferences: By paying attention to surrounding words and the context, students can infer the meaning of unfamiliar terms. For example, in the sentence "The arid landscape was devoid of vegetation," the word "arid" can be inferred to mean dry or barren from the context of the landscape being devoid of vegetation.

Understanding connections between ideas, opinions, feelings, attitudes and Implied Information in spoken contexts is a critical component of effective communication. These elements are interwoven in the fabric of effective listening. Recognizing ideas provides a framework for understanding opinions, while sensitivity to feelings and attitudes deepens interpersonal connections. Detecting implied information ensures a comprehensive grasp of the speaker's message. Together, these skills enhance overall communication, fostering understanding, empathy, and collaboration. This comprehension is essential in various settings, including education, professional environments, and interpersonal interactions. This analysis aims to elucidate how individuals can identify and interpret these connections, supported by examples and relevant literature.

By recognizing the cohesion of ideas, opinions, feelings, attitudes, and implied information, listeners can achieve a more subtle understanding of the speaker's message. This holistic approach to listening enhances our ability to respond appropriately, fosters deeper connections, and facilitates more meaningful and effective communication. Recognizing these connections allows us to appreciate the complexity of spoken interactions and improves our overall communication skills. Understanding implied information, recognizing attitudes, and deducing meanings from context are essential skills for effective communication. These skills can be developed through targeted exercises that encourage active listening and critical thinking.

Assessment Exercises

Task 1: Understanding Information or Ideas

Students should listen to eight short extracts on familiar and accessible topics. For each extract, there is one multiple-choice question with four visual options. Students select the correct option (A, B, C, or D). The questions test understanding of information or ideas expressed by the speaker(s).

Text Types: A range of text types, including monologues and dialogues, such as conversations, recorded messages, announcements, news items, and extracts from a radio program

Transcript - Extract 1: A recorded message about a new library service.

Our local library has recently introduced a range of new services aimed at enhancing user experience. Among these are digital book loans, an online catalogue system, and extended weekend hours. The digital book loans allow members to borrow e-books and audiobooks directly to their devices. The online catalogue system enables users to search for books and reserve them from the comfort of their homes. Extended weekend hours mean the library is now open until 8 PM on Saturdays and Sundays, providing more flexibility for those with busy schedules.

Question:

Which of the following services allows users to borrow books without visiting the library physically?

- a) Extended weekend hours
- b) Online catalog system
- c) Digital book loans
- d) New reading rooms

Extract 2: Community Garden Initiative

The community garden initiative has taken off with great enthusiasm. Residents of all ages participate in planting, maintaining, and harvesting produce. The garden serves as both a food source and a social hub, where people can meet and bond over their shared interest in gardening. The project has also fostered a greater sense of community and environmental awareness among participants.

Question:

What is one of the primary benefits of the community garden initiative?

- a) It reduces water usage.
- b) It provides a food source and social hub.
- c) It increases property values.
- d) It offers free gardening classes.

Extract 3: Healthy Eating Workshop

Last weekend, the town hall hosted a healthy eating workshop, which was well attended by community members. The workshop covered various topics, including meal planning, reading nutrition labels, and cooking nutritious meals on a budget. Participants were given handouts and recipes to try at home, and there was a cooking demonstration featuring healthy, easy-to-make dishes.

Question:

What was one of the main topics covered in the healthy eating workshop?

- a) Organic farming
- b) Meal planning
- c) Outdoor exercise routines
- d) Stress management

Extract 4: Local Art Exhibit

The local art gallery is hosting an exhibit showcasing works by emerging artists from the region. The exhibit features a variety of media, including paintings, sculptures, and digital art. Visitors have the opportunity to meet the artists and attend workshops on different art techniques. The exhibit aims to highlight local talent and provide a platform for new artists to gain exposure.

Question:

What is one of the features of the local art exhibit?

- a) Free art supplies

- b) Workshops on art techniques
- c) Historical artefacts
- d) International artists' works

Candidates listen to an interview between two speakers and answer eight multiple-choice questions. Each question has three written options (A, B, or C), which may be words, phrases, or short sentences. The questions test understanding of details, opinions, ideas, and implied information expressed by the main speaker. Each question is worth one mark.

Tasks 2: (Transcript) Interviewer (Emily): Welcome, Mr. Emenike. Thank you for joining us to discuss the causes and consequences of unsafe migration, as well as possible solutions. To start, what are some of the primary causes of unsafe migration?

Mr. Emenike: Thank you, Emily. Unsafe migration is often driven by a combination of factors. Economic hardship is a major cause, where individuals seek better job opportunities and living conditions. Political instability and conflict in home countries also push people to migrate unsafely. Additionally, natural disasters and environmental changes can force people to leave their homes abruptly.

Emily: Those are certainly pressing issues. Can you elaborate on the consequences of unsafe migration for individuals and communities?

Mr. Emenike: Absolutely. For individuals, unsafe migration can lead to exploitation, human trafficking, and severe physical and mental health risks. Communities may suffer as well, with increased social tensions and strains on local resources. Moreover, the loss of skilled workers can adversely affect the development of the migrants' home countries.

Emily: It's clear that the impact is significant. What are some of the underlying evils associated with unsafe migration?

Mr. Emenike: One of the biggest evils is human trafficking, where migrants are exploited for labour or sexual purposes. There's also the issue of smugglers who profit from migrants' desperation, often providing dangerous and inhumane transport conditions. Furthermore, unsafe migration routes can lead to a high number of deaths and disappearances.

Emily: That's truly heartbreaking. Are there any solutions or measures that can be implemented to address these issues?

Mr. Emenike: There are several potential solutions. Firstly, addressing the root causes, such as poverty and conflict, is essential. This requires international cooperation and aid. Secondly, providing legal and safe migration pathways can reduce the need for dangerous journeys. Additionally, improving border security and cracking down on trafficking networks are crucial steps.

Emily: These solutions sound promising. How important is international cooperation in solving the problem of unsafe migration?

Mr. Emenike: International cooperation is vital. No single country can tackle this issue alone. Cooperation is needed to share information, resources, and strategies. It also involves international organizations, like the UN, working with countries to create comprehensive migration policies and provide humanitarian aid where necessary.

Emily: Thank you, Mr. Emenike. Finally, what role do you think public awareness and education play in mitigating unsafe migration?

Mr. Emenike: Public awareness and education are crucial. Educating potential migrants about the dangers of unsafe migration and their rights can help them make informed decisions. Awareness campaigns can also reduce stigma and promote understanding and support for migrants within host communities.

Multiple-Choice Questions

1. What is a major cause of unsafe migration according to Mr. Emenike?
 - a) Political instability
 - b) Better healthcare facilities
 - c) Cultural exchanges
2. What consequence does unsafe migration have on individuals?
 - a) Improved social status
 - b) Exploitation and health risks
 - c) Increased job security
3. What is one of the evils associated with unsafe migration mentioned by Mr. Emenike?
 - a) Increased tourism
 - b) Human trafficking
 - c) Enhanced cultural diversity
4. What solution does Mr. Emenike propose to reduce unsafe migration?
 - a) Promoting luxury travel packages
 - b) Providing legal and safe migration pathways
 - c) Reducing educational opportunities
5. Why is international cooperation important in addressing unsafe migration?

- a) To promote sports events
 - b) To share information and resources
 - c) To reduce travel expenses
6. What role does Mr. Emenike believe public awareness plays in mitigating unsafe migration?
- a) Increasing migration rates
 - b) Educating migrants about dangers and rights
 - c) Encouraging illegal migration
7. What does Mr. Emenike identify as a factor that pushes people to migrate unsafely?
- a) Availability of safe housing
 - b) Environmental changes
 - c) Access to public transport
8. How can host communities contribute to addressing unsafe migration, according to Mr. Emenike?
- a) By promoting local tourism
 - b) By reducing stigma and supporting migrants
 - c) By restricting access to public services

Task 3: Interview Exercise

Description

Students participate in an interview exercise where they practice identifying implied meanings, attitudes, and feelings. This task helps develop the ability to understand refined communication in real-time conversations.

Exercise Example

Scenario: Students pair up and interview about their favourite books. Each student must infer the partner's feelings and attitudes based on their responses and provide feedback on their findings.

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