



## Review of “Second Language Listening: Theory and Practice”

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<b>Year of Publication</b>	2005
<b>ISBN</b>	0-521-78647-9
<b>No. of Pages</b>	xiv + 223
<b>Place of Publication</b>	New York, USA
<b>Publisher</b>	Cambridge University Press

### Reviewed by Misako Suzuki

As suggested by the title, this book discusses theories of and practical applications for teaching second language listening. Its intended readers are teachers of languages, curriculum developers, students and others concerned with the nature of the process of second language listening. The book is composed of eleven chapters, which are grouped into three parts: Historical Background, A Pedagogical Model and its Application, and Key Issues in Teaching and Testing. Each chapter begins with an introduction, followed by the presentation of the content, including a number of practical tasks which allow readers to analyze their own classroom situations, students, and materials. Furthermore, after the conclusion of each chapter, the authors provide discussion sections in which they pose three or four good questions related to the topic of the chapter for discussion. The questions in these sections will be quite applicable to and suitable for discussion for classes in Applied Linguistics and SLA.

In Part I (Chapters 1-5), the authors concisely summarize the theories of SLA listening that have been proposed so far, including approaches and methods (Chapter 1), models of the listening process (Chapter 2), the meaning and nature of spoken text (Chapters 3 & 4) and learning styles and strategies (Chapter 5). Although five chapters of literature review can become quite tedious, the authors tactfully attract readers' attention by pointing out some inadequacies of previous models of the listening processes and announcing that they will present a “new”, “innovative” model of the listening process in Part II (Chapters 6–8). As a reader, one feels like skipping to Chapter 6 right away, but this is difficult to do, as the chapters build on each other: Chapter 3 promises to be fully explained in Chapter 4, and everything will make sense in Chapter 6. By the time one has finished with this section, the authors have created a great deal of expectation for the “new”, “innovative” model promised for Part II.

In Chapter 6, the authors propose a new model of second language listening comprehension which adds eight new “dimensions” of listening to the previous models of the listening process (i.e. top-down, bottom-up and interactive). These dimensions are: Individual Variation, a Cross-cultural Dimension, a Social Dimension, a Contextualized Dimension, an Affective Dimension, a Strategic Dimension, an Intertextual Dimension, and a Critical Dimension. The explanation of each dimension is generally well delivered. Although a number of minor points seem rather difficult to apply to second and foreign language classrooms, their arguments are generally convincing and non-controversial. For example, for the Strategic Dimension, the authors refer to the findings in recent research that learners use specific strategies to enhance their learning and

that good language learners have *metacognitive* ability. Thus they see the necessity of reserving a special place for metacognitive strategic dimension in a model of L2 listening. Most experienced teachers of second and foreign language probably find it easy to agree with them, mostly because many will have already employed these dimensions in their own teaching. In Chapter 7, the authors analyze some listening activities in textbooks and demonstrate how each activity fits into the Model. The applicability of these textbooks to this Model itself suggests that the model itself is not especially new, rather what is new is the fact that someone has presented it in writing for the first time in the field of SLA. This is an important contribution; although I found their ideas rather familiar and agreeable, I was also quite surprised that nobody has written about it until today. This supports the authors' suggestion that listening is somewhat disregarded in language teaching, treated – in the authors' words – as “the Cinderella of the four macro-skills” (p. xi) and thus of pedagogical research as well.

Although each dimension was well described, I would have preferred to see the authors add a bit more on the social, affective and intertextual dimensions to help readers to understand their analyses in Chapters 7 and 8. When reading this book, I found it necessary to constantly revisit my understanding of these dimensions to understand the authors' analysis of each listening activity and case study. For example, Chapter 6 argues that “any comprehensive model of listening needs to take conversation into account” (p. 89) and that “conversation may be considered as a paradigm case for social dimension of listening” (p. 89). This gives the impression that conversation and/or interaction with others in an activity is the key element of the “social dimension”. The authors' analysis in Chapter 7 does not uncover any social dimension to a low-intermediate activity in which the students gather information about their partners through interviews (chap. 7.3.3, pp. 103–104), whereas it is present in some intermediate class activities, all of which involve students' discussion in pairs and small groups (chap. 7.4.3, pp. 107–108). It may be more helpful for readers if the authors explained their definition of conversation; otherwise, readers might find it difficult to understand the difference between the two activities above until they read Chapter 8, at which point the authors finally indicate that a dialogue which is “scripted and focus exclusively on form” provides “little or no exposure to the social dimension” (p. 128).

The model presented in Part II is applied to the discussion in Part III where the authors argue three key issues that all language teachers have to deal with in order to help learners develop listening skills: how to use technology, how to ask questions and how to test the listening ability in order to improve learners' listening skills. The authors comment at the end of each chapter on how their model may help teachers take care of these issues. The discussions and suggestions they make in the latter two chapters of this section are quite practical and they may serve as good guidance for the assessment of learners' listening skills.

With plenty of practical suggestions, task questions and discussion questions, I recommend *Second Language Listening* as valuable reading for language teachers as well as students of Applied Linguistics, SLA and Foreign Language Education. For teachers, it provides useful resources and criteria to judge if they are doing the right job in teaching listening. For students and novice teachers, it serves as a good introduction and guide to teaching listening. It is a surprise and a shame that a practical, resourceful book on listening like this has not been published until recently. Had such a book been around when I was a novice teacher, it would have saved me a great deal of time spent struggling with creating listening activities!