


## Teaching and Researching Listening (2nd ed.)

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<b>Author:</b>	Michael Rost (2011)	
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Michael Rost's *Teaching and Researching Listening* combines a broad theoretical description of how listening works with an overview of theories, approaches, materials, task types, and assessments for teaching listening. The volume also includes a section on researching listening, with several suggested research projects. It is a great resource for listening teachers who are truly interested in the nuances of this skill, or for teacher trainers in the enviable position of teaching a course on listening instruction. The book seems not to be aimed at teachers looking for quick ideas to implement in the classroom, but they too will find some sections to be of great interest.

In Section I, Rost defines listening in terms of neurological, linguistic, semantic, and pragmatic processing, and then considers the latter three types of processing in terms of automaticity, L1 acquisition, and L2 acquisition. Neurological processing includes the mechanisms of hearing, as well as explanations of consciousness and attention, and cognitive models that can explain some individual differences in listening ability. Linguistic processing refers to components of decoding and parsing the incoming speech stream, also known as bottom up processing. Non-verbal signals are considered in this section as well. In contrast to linguistic processing, which “originates in the speech signal,” Rost explains that semantic processing “originates in the listener’s memory” (p. 75). These aspects of listening are often referred to as top-down

processing. Here, Rost discusses how incoming information interacts with prior knowledge to confirm or update information, cause understanding or misunderstanding, permit inferences and reasoning, and eventually result in new memories, or learning. Finally, in his discussion of pragmatic processing, Rost considers the effect of social interaction on listening, including the various roles taken by listeners in different situations, conversational expectations, listener responses, and the affective consequences of all of these. It is clear that all of these levels overlap, and some concepts appear in more than one chapter.

In the second part of Section I, Rost considers developments in the ability of computers to listen to language, on the levels of linguistic, semantic, and pragmatic processing. This section is fascinating, but it is probably an aside to most teachers of L2 listening. Luckily, this chapter is followed by a description of linguistic, semantic, and pragmatic processing in terms of language acquisition, considering first L1 acquisition, and then L2. Here the focus is on what skills must be acquired and brief descriptions of theories about mechanisms; the concepts presented in the first part of the section will support teachers in following the discussions in this part. The chapters on L2 listening development are particularly enjoyable to read, as they provide insights into the challenges facing learners and the principles and processes that underlie some common “mistakes” seen in the language classroom.

The description of listening processes during acquisition leads us to Section II, in which Rost describes instruction in L2 listening as “a conscious attempt to develop all of these processes” (p. 145). The first chapter of this section begins at a more foundational level than I had expected or frequently considered, discussing the social context of language learning and the relationship between language education and basic theories in the area of second language acquisition. Building on these principles, Rost then considers the effects of many aspects of input and interaction on the process of L2 listening instruction. For example, text genre, authenticity, difficulty, and simplification are considered, as well as interaction strategies for listening. Here, key words are introduced and explained with a few references to research. Teachers may well find some new ways to think about the process of text selection for listening courses.

In Chapter 9, Rost comes to Instructional Design, the chapter I can most wholeheartedly recommend to L2 teachers. In fact, this chapter might change the reader’s way of thinking about listening instruction entirely. Rost defines six types of listening practice that teachers should aim to offer students in balanced proportions. The types are: intensive, selective, interactive, extensive, responsive, and autonomous. Each type is defined, the value and importance of each is stated, and then Rost discusses important considerations for implementing each type of listening practice, including suggested activities for intensive and responsive listening, possible content to focus on for selective listening, principles to implement in interactive listening, and strategies to support extensive and autonomous listening. Even if you don’t read the rest of the book, I suggest taking a look at this chapter. Reflecting on your instruction in terms of these six practice types may help you balance your curriculum by adding supplemental activities for those listening types that you find underrepresented.

Rost finishes Section II with a treatment of assessment in listening instruction. Here the focus is not on classroom testing but on large-scale proficiency examinations, considering aspects of the testing construct for listening, and then various possible forms of assessment. Finally, a consideration of factors that affect performance leads to a discussion of how to prepare learners for listening exams.

The final section of this book is focused on researching listening. Separate chapters consider sociolinguistic, psycholinguistic, and developmental orientations towards listening research. In each chapter, Rost defines the orientation then suggests several exploratory research projects, including for each one a list of research questions, a data sample, and an outlined plan that the reader can follow to collect his or her own data. In addition, each project is used to exemplify a particular research tool (e.g. making transcriptions) or principle (e.g., ethics in research). These projects are not mostly directly applicable to ELT instruction, as the projects in the chapter on developmental orientations focus on student's perceptions of tasks, selecting published materials, and creating a self-access center and a teacher-training course. No suggestions for research into how students learn to listen in their L2 are included.

Teaching and Researching Listening is impressive in its scope and depth. Rost explicitly discusses ideas that many books aimed exclusively at ELT treat as background assumptions. The book is often quite theoretical, but it is made accessible to a wide audience through an extensive glossary (with defined words in bold face in the text), in-text concept boxes to explain tricky ideas, and the words of practitioners sprinkled throughout in the form of anecdotes, teaching suggestions, and quotes. The time spent working from basics up to language instruction will not be every language teacher's cup of tea, and I was occasionally surprised by the number of typos in this book, including missing and switched words. On the whole, however, this book is a valuable addition to the language teacher's library. It will deepen your understanding of the listening skill, allow you to reassess your listening curriculum with new eyes, and maybe even open a door into listening research.

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