EXPLORING THE LISTENING PHENOMENON: THE EFFECTS OF RECEPTOR APPREHENSION AND COMMUNICATION COMPETENCE ON LISTENING STYLE

by

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Abstract

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Exploring the Listening Phenomenon: The Effects of Receiver Apprehension and Communication Competence on Listening Style

Thesis directed by Professor Sherwyn Morreale

This study examined the relationships between receiver apprehension and listening style, as well as communication competence and listening style. The researcher conducted a quantitative survey of college students from two different universities to measure their self-reports of the three variables consisting of receiver apprehension, communication competence, and listening style and performed partial correlation tests. The findings of the study indicate that receiver apprehension has a negative relationship with listening styles and that communication competence has a positive relationship with listening styles. Specifically, relational listening style had lower levels of receiver apprehension and higher levels of communication competence. By examining these relationships, this study helps to shed light on what individual factors are associated with specific listening styles.

Keywords: listening style, relational listener, analytical listener, task-oriented listener, critical listener, LSP-16, LSP-R
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CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION

Much of my time during my adolescent years was spent in a church or a church-related setting; Sunday morning services, weeknight youth group activities, and countless trips across the country to attend camps and events. Growing up in this type of environment, I was exposed to many different speakers over these important years of my youth. Although some speakers were admittedly more powerful than others, the overall goal of each speaker was to affect the beliefs, attitudes, or behaviors of the audience in some manner. I consider this time period as very influential and one of the most formative times of my life, due to the powerful speakers whose messages resonated with me and influenced my overall character. Many of the special, distinct memories of this time involve discussions that took place between others and myself, sharing how the message connected with each of us individually.

I remember being astonished by the depth of the conversations that took place. One message was presented to a group of people; however, there were many unique interpretations of the same message. It was eye opening to see how the message affected different people in various ways, sometimes drastically. I felt privileged to have the opportunity to listen to top-notch speakers whose messages were so life changing and thought provoking. I grew to respect and admire motivational speakers, believing they possessed a magical ability to powerfully share a message and consequently, change lives.

During the summer of my junior year of my undergraduate college career, I enrolled in an upper-division listening course, which was required for my major of
Interpersonal and Public Communication. I had taken a variety of speech-related courses, but this was the first listening course I had enrolled in, let alone the first time I had heard of a college-level course about listening. In light of this, I was intrigued. I spent the summer with the professor, two communication graduate students, and myself as the lone undergraduate. In short, this summer was another influential time in my life. Rather than being exposed to powerful speakers, although I was, I was exposed to the importance of listening in communication studies, which ultimately impacted my future as a scholar in communication.

Throughout my experiences in church and my communication program, emphasis was placed on the speaker as the limelight of the communication process. In church, I was mesmerized by the speaker’s message; believing the speaker had an influential power to change the way I think and perceive the world. In my undergraduate career, importance was placed on having competent public speaking skills, as I was required to deliver presentations and reminded that these skills are essential to being successful in life. However, during the summer listening course, I had an epiphany that shifted my mindset of speakers as the most important part of the communication process. I realized that speakers might not possess the ultimate power of the message like I had previously believed. A good speaker prepares an outline and develops an overall thesis to share with the audience; however, the overall communication outcome lies with the listener, regardless of what the speaker intended the outcome to be (Wolvin, 2010). Thinking back to my youth in church, it was clear that the listener’s understanding of a message truly defines the communication outcome, as I noted many people had different interpretations of one single message. Although I was exposed to phenomenal speakers
during this time, I realized that as the listener, I possessed the important role of giving
meaning to the message delivered in any context.

Realizing this epiphany and understanding how important of a role the listener
shares in the communication process has made all the difference in my studies as a
communication scholar. Instead of placing priority or importance on one individual in
the communication situation over the other, I have come to understand that both the
speaker and listener are equally important in any given communication situation. The
transactional process of communication further supports this conclusion, as it describes
that in every communication situation, the speaker and listener act simultaneously as both
parties by constantly sending and receiving information.

To highlight the importance of continuing the study of listening, scholars in
communication have widely examined the speaker in the communication context, but in
comparison, the listener has been somewhat neglected (Hewes & Graham, 1989).
Although there has been a great deal of work done on listening, there is much more to be
understood about the phenomenon of listening. The majority of research that examines
the role of the communicator looks at the sender or speaker rather than the receiver or
listener (Wolvin, 2010). To further stress the importance of listening, listening education
is not required at most universities and students who are required to take a basic
communication course receive approximately seven percent of instruction about listening
in one semester (Janusik, 2010). This is unfortunate considering 64% of a university
student’s instruction is delivered through lecture and discussion formats, all of which
require listening. Research is certainly warranted to help scholars better understand the
listening process and what may influence an individual’s listening ability. Learning more
about how individuals listen, based on many different variables, is essential to
developing a yet better understanding of the entire communication process. However, in
light of this, it is important to note that there are many listening scholars who have
molded and contributed to the fascinating study of listening, as we currently know it.
The following literature reviews the overall listening process and specific research
regarding listening styles.
CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

In 1995 a group of listening specialists met at a summer conference sponsored by the International Listening Association (ILA) to create a shared definition of listening to help guide listening research. This definition states, “Listening is the process of receiving, constructing meaning from, and responding to spoken and/or nonverbal messages” (An ILA Definition of Listening, 1995). This definition encompasses many different elements of the communication process that make up the phenomenon of listening, which also serve as theoretical framework claiming that listeners are engaged in the communication process (Wolvin, 2010). The physiological, psychological, sociological, and communicative perspectives of the listening process are discussed below.

The physiology of listening starts with being able to receive a message. This is a complex process involving the hearing mechanism. If there are issues with the hearing mechanism, this influences and could prohibit the listening process. The physiology of listening also involves the neurology process of storing and comprehending a message in the brain. The physiological perspective is at the core of the listening process. Listening cannot take place without being able to hear and comprehend the auditory or visual message.

A psychological perspective on listening entails the interpretation of a message. An individual’s memory system and perceptual filter influence the amount of attention given to a message. A listener’s perceptual filter is made up of one’s past experiences, including their demographic, psychological, and physiological characteristics. The
messages a listener hears are greatly influenced by the listener’s perceptual filter. After the listener has paid the message attention, interpretation occurs through his or her schemata. “Humans carry schemata, mental representations of knowledge, in the brain,” (Wolvin, 2010, p. 13). Individuals run new messages through existing cognitive schemata in order to assign meaning to new concepts.

The sociological background of the communication relationship also influences the listening process. As the ILA definition of listening states, listening includes the listener’s response. “This response, the listener’s feedback, takes listening beyond the internal, self-controlled cognitive processing and back into the communication relationship,” (Wolvin, 2010, p. 14). A listener’s response shows if the message was interpreted as the speaker intended, and it can show support for the communication relationship (Cooper & Husband, 1993). The listener’s response is based upon his or her own individual traits, including past experiences and cultural norms associated with listening. This response contributes to shaping and molding the outcome of the communication process as well as the overall communication relationship (Wolvin, 2010).

Effective listening and listenable speaking make up the communication aspect of the listening process (Wolvin, 2010). The attitudes of the listener and their goals for listening determine whether effective listening takes place. The listener should also be aware of what the speaker expects from the role of the listener. The communicative perspective focuses on the receiver and speaker in the communication relationship and how it influences the listening process. Indeed, listening is a complex process that is influenced by an individual’s physiological, psychological, sociological, and
communicative traits. These perspectives provide theoretical framework for contributing to the foundation of listening engagement and shows how listeners behave or ought to behave in communication situations (Wolvin, 2010).

**Relevant Theories**

*Engagement theory.* The listening research and models that have been developed, as we currently know it are largely based on the theory of engagement (Wolvin, 2010). Andrew Wolvin describes the engagement theory of listening as assuming that the listener is engaged in the communication situation with the speaker (2010). Due to the engaged communication relationship between both parties, listening is ultimately determined by the listener and speaker goals. Wolvin and Coakley (1979) determined five general purposes of listeners, developed from the engagement theory of listening. These five purposes or skills of listening act in a hierarchical structure and are determined by the goals of the speaker and listener involved in the communication relationship.

Listeners first engage in discriminative listening. This allows the listener to be able to receive the message at the sensory level. Once the listener receives the message, one can then move to comprehensive listening. Utilizing discriminative listening, the listener remembers and understands the message. From this stage, one can then move on to therapeutic, critical, or appreciative listening. Therapeutic listening provides support for a person through the listening process. The critical purpose of listening involves determining the credibility of the speaker’s message. Appreciative listening is simply enjoying the message. The purposes engaged in by the listener are determined by the communication goals of the speaker and listener.
As stated above, the definition of listening which encompasses four perspectives of the listening process point to an engagement theory of listening. Each perspective entails the role of the listener to be engaged with the speaker in the communication situation to various degrees. Research on goals of communicators during a conversation also helps to inform the engagement theory of listening. Research in this area shows that communication is goal-directed and goals are negotiated between the speaker and listener to reach a desirable communication outcome (Clark & Delia, 1979; Kellerman, 1992). Research on how listeners are engaged in the communication situation helps scholars to better understand the overall listening process.

**Trait theory.** Trait theory posits that humans have communication traits--specific to each person, and that these traits affect our behavior in communication-related situations (Littlejohn & Foss, 2009). The definition of a trait is a stable predisposition to exhibit certain behaviors. Trait theory posits that our communication traits are inherent, and we behave based on these traits, not the context of the situation. An individual’s communication traits explain why we communicate in a consistent manner in different situations with different people.

Several propositions of James McCroskey suggest that the way humans behave is mostly determined by inherent traits. While it is hard to imagine that the context or situations individuals have been and presently are in does not account for most of the influence on their communication behavior, two of McCroskey’s propositions provide understanding and acceptance of what he proposes.

McCroskey states, “Once we recognized that the impact of any context was mediated by how people perceived that context, and that such perceptions are also trait-
based, we began to comprehend the overpowering potential of traits,” and “Simply put, in terms of impact on communication behavior the context does not exist separate from the trait-based perceptions of the people within that context,” (McCroskey, 1997, p.3). These statements help to shed light on what exactly McCroskey was implying. He was not entirely writing off the situational impact, but rather realizing that the way we perceive any situation has significance on how we behave in that situation. With this perspective, one can assume that traits certainly have an impact on the way we communicate and may even precede the situational impact. The idea of trait theory, that inherent traits cause us to behave a certain way in communication situations is clearly relevant to the study of communication. Therefore, researching the listening phenomenon in relation to trait theory may help to explain why individuals listen the way they do.

Many listening studies and the research discussed in this paper have their foundation in the engagement or trait theory. The listening studies discussed here attempt to explain more about how listeners function as a result of engagement theory, and what traits or individual factors may affect the listening process as a result of trait theory. The listening phenomenon can be explored in many ways and this study seeks to broaden the understanding of this important communication process. The following literature discusses how different variables, mostly related to traits and individual factors, affect one’s listening style. First, the concept of a listening style is discussed followed by studies that examine relationships between different variables and listening style.
Listening Style

Shriffin and Schneider (1977) and Langer (1980) claim that individuals listen in a habitual manner and that individuals may be prone to utilizing a particular listening style in any situation. Based on this theoretical work, Watson, Barker, and Weaver (1995) developed the Listening Styles Profile (LSP-16), which is a 16-item scale used to assess one’s concerns and preferences while in the process of listening. The researchers developed a four-factor solution identifying four listening styles or preferences that people may take on. These preferences are characterized as people-oriented, time-oriented, action-oriented, and content-oriented listening styles. People-oriented listeners are concerned with how one’s listening influences relationships. These listeners try to find common ground and are caring, understanding, and remain nonjudgmental. Time oriented listeners highly value time and can be impatient. This style of listener is likely to display that they have a limited amount of time, and they may interrupt others. Action-oriented listeners are task oriented and prefer well-organized information. Due to their liking for organized information, this type of listener can be very critical. Content-oriented listeners carefully evaluate information and listen to details. This type of listener tries to remain unbiased while listening.

While the LSP-16 was the primary tool to measure listening styles for many years, researchers have consistently reported low reliability estimates for each listening style sub scale. Bodie, Worthington, and Gearhart (2013) created and validated a revised measure of the LSP-16, the Listening Styles Profile-Revised (LSP-R) so that researchers could utilize a reliable measurement when examining listening styles. This instrument also identifies four listening styles; relational listening (RL), task-oriented listening...
(TOL), critical listening (CL), and analytical listening (AL). Relational listening, most closely associated with the people-oriented listening style from the LSP-16, can be described as individuals who understand emotions and connect with others. Task-oriented listeners prefer well-organized information and focus on the task at hand. TOL is highly correlated with the action listening style and moderately correlated with the time listening style of the LSP-16. Critical listening, which is correlated with the action and content LSP-16 listening styles, tends to focus on inconsistencies and errors within a message. The last factor, analytical listening is described as hearing all sides of an issue before making judgment and responding. CL closely resembles the people and content-oriented listening styles of the LSP-16.

It is worth noting that many people may utilize all four of these listening styles in different situations depending on the specific communication context one is in. However, research has shown that individual traits or factors influence one’s listening style. The following studies examine how a variety of personal traits and behaviors tend to influence the style a listener takes on.

**Listening Style and Gender**

Johnston, Weaver, Watson, and Barker (2000) examined the four listening styles as a function of a person’s sex and gender role. The researchers wanted to look at gender role self perceptions separate from biological sex. They believe one’s perception of their gender can influence their communication behaviors, specifically their listening preferences. The study used two gender constructs that respondents could identify for themselves. One gender construct agentic, includes characteristics such as goal-oriented, assertiveness, and protectiveness and is overall more masculine-oriented. The other
gender construct was communal, which includes characteristics such as selflessness, openness, caring, kindness, and affectionate and is overall more feminine oriented. The researchers administered self-assessment tests of gender roles and listening styles to 1,722 students in an introductory communication course.

The results of the study showed that the respondents who identified as a communal gender role also identified themselves preferring a people-oriented listening style. The study also found that those respondents who identified with the agentic gender role identified themselves to have either an action, content, or time-oriented listening style. The study also discovered differences in listening style preferences, based on biological sex. Female respondents tended to have a people-oriented listening style and male respondents had an action, content, or time-oriented listening style. The findings of this research study concluded that both gender self perceptions and biological sex impact an individual’s listening style, although the two did not interact with one another.

**Listening Style, Gender Role, Personality Type, and Communication Competence**

Villaume and Bodie (2007) further examined the relationship between gender roles and listening styles, the relationship between three personality types and listening styles, and the relationship between listening styles and communication competence. Participants were recruited from communication courses and consisted of 180 undergraduate students. The participants were given both a masculinity and femininity score after averaging the items. Bem’s Sex Role Inventory (BSRI) was used to assess an individual’s gender role perception by asking how 60 adjectives describe the gender role self-perception.
The results found that gender role does have a systematic relationship with listening styles, though there is a small relationship. The study found that the people-oriented listening style is associated with both high femininity and high masculinity. However, the two gender roles accounts for a very small percentage of the variance, so the relationship between gender roles and listening style is not significant.

Villaume and Bodie (2007) also examined the relationship between three personality types and listening style. Eysenck’s (1990) BIG THREE personality dimensions consisting of extroversion, neuroticism, and psychoticism were examined for this study. Extroversion refers to the personality type characterized by sociability and an affirmative self-concept. In contrast, high neuroticism is characterized by anxiety and a negative self-concept. Psychoticism is characterized by deviation from societal norms and a heightened sense of self and independence. Respondents were asked to complete a short-form version of the Eysenck Personality Questionnaire and were given a score on each of the three personality dimensions.

The results of this study found a significant correlation between the personality types and listening styles. The first finding revealed that people-oriented listeners have high communication competence and tend to be more extraverted. This makes sense as high extraversion causes listeners to focus on their interaction with others. The second finding revealed that high neuroticism is associated with high action, time, and people orientations. This means that neurotics may be highly defensive focusing on managing negative reactions from others, which involves the listening styles of action, time, and people. The third finding reveals that high psychoticism is associated with high time-orientation. Psychotics may feel that listening is more of a chore and hence not
stimulating enough for them. They may become frustrated with people who talk, in their perception, too much. This particular study found a strong correlation between the personality dimensions of extraversion, neuroticism, and psychoticism and the four listening styles.

**Listening Style and Personality Type**

Worthington (2003) studied the four listening styles identified by the LSP-16 and their relationship, if any, with personality types. The personality types that were examined are those identified by the Keirsey Temperament Sorter (KTS), which are extraversion/introversion, sensor/intuitor, thinker/feeler, and judge/perceiver. The 174 participants were recruited from a communication courses and answered questionnaires about their personality, using the KTS, and about their listening style preferences, using the LSP-16.

The most significant correlation this study found was between those respondents who identified as having a people oriented listening style and those who identified with an extroversion, intuiting, and feeling personality type. The study also found correlations between respondents who identified as content oriented listener style and personality types of judging and thinking. Those who identified themselves as action oriented listener style had the personality type of sensing, thinking, and judging. Lastly, the study found that those who identified themselves with a time oriented listening style had the personality type of introversion, thinking, and sensing. The findings of this research study show that an individual’s personality type impacts one’s preferred listening style.
**Willingness to Listen, Receiver Apprehension, and Communication Competence**

Charles Roberts and Larry Vinson (1998) examined one’s willingness to listen and its relationship with levels of receiver apprehension, communication apprehension, communication competence, and dogmatism. A total of 94 students were recruited for this study and completed tests consisting of the Willingness to Communicate scale (McCroskey & Richmond, 1985), the Willingness to Listen scale (Roberts & Vinson, 1989), the RAT (Wheeler, 1975), the Self-Perceived Communication Competence scale (McCroskey & McCroskey, 1986), and the PRCA-24B (McCroskey, 1986). The results of the study found willingness to listen is positively correlated with communication competence and negatively related to receiver apprehension, sender-based communication apprehension, and dogmatism.

**Listening Style and Communication Apprehension**

Sargent, Weaver, and Kiewitz (1997) examined the relationship between one’s preferred listening style and communication apprehension. Communication apprehension is the anxiety or fear an individual associates with real or anticipated communication with another person. The four contexts in which apprehension can emerge have been identified as public speaking, speaking in a group, speaking at a meeting, and speaking in a dyadic interaction. Participants for this study were recruited from an introductory communication class, consisting of 571 students. The participants were administered the Personal Report of Communication Apprehension (PRCA-24; Richmond & McCroskey, 1992) which consists of 24 items used to assess communication apprehension across the four settings. The participants’ preferred listening style also was measured using the LSP-16.
The results of this study found that those participants preferring a people-oriented listening style are less apprehensive in group, meetings, and interpersonal situations but are indifferent about communication apprehension in a public setting. The study also found that those preferring a content oriented listening style are less apprehensive about communicating in a group, meetings, and interpersonal settings. They did not find a correlation between the action and time listening styles and communication apprehension in group and interpersonal settings. These results show a weak relationship between communication apprehension and listening styles. However, this study calls for further research examining preferred listening style and other apprehension dimensions, such as listening anxiety or encoding anxiety.

**Listening Style, Communication Style, and Receiver Apprehension**

Bodie and Villaume (2003) examined communication apprehension, receiver apprehension, and communicator style in relation to one’s preferred listening style. Communicator style is how an individual generally acts when communicating with others. The Communicator Style Construct was used to assess one’s general communication style. Communication apprehension is anxiety related to communication. Receiver apprehension is the fear of misinterpreting or not being able to process messages of others. The Receiver Apprehension Test (RAT; Wheeless, 1975) was used to assess this variable. The participants were recruited from communication courses at a large southeastern university and included 301 undergraduate students. The participants were asked to respond to a questionnaire that contained all items from the LSP-16, the Receiver Apprehension Test, the Communicator Style Construct, and the Personal Report of Communication Apprehension instruments.
The results of the study showed that those respondents with a high people-orientation listening style are associated with a more friendly and open pattern of communication. The respondents who identified themselves as a people oriented listener also had a pattern of low apprehension. The study also found that those who had high content and action listening orientations tended to have argumentative and impression leaving communicator styles. The third finding revealed that those associated with a time and action listening orientation, and no content orientation, were more forceful and dominating communicators and also had higher levels of receiver apprehension. This study shows a relationship between different listening styles interacting with one another to produce effects on communicator styles and apprehension. The effect of the interaction between listening styles on one’s communication behavior should be further researched.

**Aggressive Communication and Informational Reception Apprehension**

Schrodt and Wheeless (2001) examined the relationship between the concepts of aggressive communication and informational reception apprehension (IRA). IRA is described as a pattern of anxiety that filters informational reception, perception and processing, and/or adjustment associated with complexity, abstractness, and flexibility (Schrodt & Wheeless, 2001). The concept of aggressive communication was studied by looking at the constructs of argumentativeness and verbal aggressiveness. The concept of informational reception apprehension was studied by looking at the constructs of listening anxiety and intellectual flexibility.

Participants were recruited from a basic communication course including 374 undergraduate students, and of note, 87.2% of the participants said they had not taken an
argumentation course. Participants were given a survey to measure the constructs. Trait argumentativeness was measured using Infante and Rancer’s (1982) Argumentativeness Scale, composed of 20 Likert-type items that measure motivational tendency to approach arguments and motivational tendency to avoid arguments. Trait verbal aggressiveness was measured by using Infante and Wigley’s (1986) Verbal Aggressiveness Scale. Wheeless, Preiss, and Gayle’s (1997) Informational Reception Apprehension Test was used in the survey to measure IRA. This scale is composed of 20 Likert-type items, 13 measuring listening apprehension and seven measuring intellectual flexibility.

The results of the study show that information reception apprehension has a moderate, negative association with trait argumentativeness. Another finding reveals a positive relationship between listening anxiety and intellectual flexibility and trait verbal aggressiveness, however only accounting for three percent of the variance. Apprehension with processing or receiving information is related to a decrease in trait argumentativeness. These findings suggest that informational reception apprehension has a stronger, negative relationship with argumentativeness than verbal aggressiveness. According to the researchers, trait argumentativeness and one’s listening concerns, preferences, and habits should be further examined.

**Listening Style and Verbal Aggressiveness**

Worthington (2005) examined the relationship between listening style preference and verbal aggressiveness. Verbal aggressive messages are intended to harm the self-concept of others and are destructive. Verbal aggressiveness is considered to be a stable communication trait and an aspect of one’s personality (Worthington 2005). Participants
were recruited from an introductory public speaking communication class, consisting of 167 students. The participants completed a 50 minute-long questionnaire assessing their listening style and verbal aggressiveness. The LSP-16 was used to measure the participants’ listening style and Infante and Wigley’s (1986) Verbal Aggressiveness Scale was used to measure the students’ tendency to engage in verbally aggressive behavior.

The researchers discovered a weak, inverse correlation between the people and content listening styles and the communication trait of verbal aggressiveness, implying that people-oriented listeners were less likely to engage in verbal aggressive behavior, such as character and competence attacks against others. This finding also suggests that content oriented listeners are less likely to engage in verbal aggressiveness.

**Listening as a Goal-Directed Activity**

Christopher Gearhart, Jonathan Denham, and Graham Bodie (2014) examined listening as a goal-directed activity. Listening styles are widely researched in listening literature and are thought of as an individual’s preferred style of listening. While individuals may indeed have a preferred listening style, these researchers attempt to determine if a preferred listening style changes across various situations. A survey was distributed to 382 student participants. The researcher’s first measured the participant’s listening style, using the LSP-R and then asked students to recall and provide a short narrative of a listening situation. Then, participants responded to questions about the nature of the listening interaction.

Consistent with the researcher’s hypothesis, the findings show that listening styles vary according to the nature of the listening situation. The researchers state, “…the current study implies that cognitive schemas are utilized by listeners to interpret features
of the situation and match appropriate listening styles” (Gearhart, Denham, & Bodie, 2014, p. 680). Specifically, the researchers found that listening styles do vary according to various functions of the communication situation, including empathy, depth, and perspective.

**Individual Differences and Listening Style**

Based on the literature reviewed, including the relevant theories and research studies which serve as the foundation to the current researcher’s inquiry, the relationships between the individual traits or factors of receiver apprehension and communication competence and an individual’s preferred listening style are examined.

Apprehension is a communication trait that is widely researched in the discipline of communication. A form of apprehension, receiver apprehension is defined as, “The fear of misinterpreting, inadequately processing, and/or not being able to adjust psychologically to messages sent by others” (Wheeles, 1975, p. 263). This communication trait has its foundation in listening and may have a significant effect on the habits and preferences one takes on while listening.

Communication competence, as a construct, has been examined in relation to willingness to listen and listening style (Roberts & Vinson, 1998; Villaume & Bodie, 2007). Communication competence can be described as reaching one’s goals in a communication situation in the most effective and appropriate manner (Spitzberg, 2000). Effectiveness can be described as achieving one’s objectives in a communication situation or reaching the most preferable outcome. Appropriateness means the communication was used in a way that is relevant and suitable to the situation. It is important for the communicator to consider the established rules of that particular context
to ensure its appropriateness. This definition also entails three components that contribute to effective and appropriate communication (Spitzberg, 2000). First, communicators must be motivated to want to communicate competently. Second, communicators must be knowledgeable about the communication situation and the audience involved. Lastly, communicators must have the skills to communicate appropriately and effectively in the given communication situation. An individual’s level of self-perceived communication competence may be related to the habits and preferences one takes on while listening.

The studies examined in this literature review generally show positive correlations between traits, communication competence, and listening styles. The traits that have been studied largely focus on biological sex, gender role self-perceptions, personality types, apprehension, argumentativeness, aggressiveness, and communicator style. Based on the findings of these studies, the present study seeks to further examine the relationship between receiver apprehension and listening style and between communication competence and listening style. Certainly, fear of receiving information or one’s level of communication competence may significantly impact the listening style or a combination of listening styles in which an individual engages. Previous studies show a strong correlation between listening styles and gender, therefore the researcher controls for the effect that gender may have on the other variables (Johnston, Weaver, Watson, & Barker, 2000; Villaume & Bodie, 2007). Therefore, the following research questions are proposed:

1. For college students, controlling for gender, what is the relationship, if any, between receiver apprehension and listening style?
2. For college students, controlling for gender, what is the relationship, if any, between self-perceived communication competence and listening style?
CHAPTER 3

METHODS

Participants

The sample for this study included students, undergraduate and graduate, enrolled in communication courses at the University of Colorado Colorado Springs (UCCS) and Mississippi College (MC). The student participants were all 18 years of age or older. UCCS is a public university located in the mid-west U.S. with approximately 11,000 students while Mississippi College is a private university located in the southeast U.S with approximately 5,150 students. A convenience sample was used as the researcher had access to the communication departments at both universities, and the survey was distributed online to attract a larger sample. The sample included a total of 230 participants with 160 being UCCS students and 70 MC students, including a total of 79 males and 151 females. Of the participants, 69.9% indicated their ethnic origin as white, 8.5% as Hispanic, 6.4% as Asian, 5.5% as African American, 1.3% as Native American, and 7.7% indicated the other category. Furthermore, the participants included 13.5% freshmen students, 14.4% sophomore students, 29.7% junior students, 29.7% senior students, 12.2% graduate students, and 12.2% of the participants indicated the other category. Of the participants, 48.4% indicated their area of study as a communication-related subject. The diversity of the sample increases the external validity of the study.

Procedure

The researcher was granted approval from the Institutional Review Board to begin this study. A 68-item, electronic survey was employed to measure self-reported receiver apprehension, communication competence, and preferred listening style or styles. Of the
68 items, five of these were demographic variables, which included the participants’
gender, ethnic origin, year in school, major field of study, and which university the
participant is affiliated with. The researcher asked all professors from the UCCS and MC
Communication Departments to distribute the online survey to their spring 2016 classes.
A form of consent was included with the survey administered to all participants. The
survey was open for approximately three weeks to allow time for enough responses.
Some professors offered extra credit to their students for completing the survey while
other professors did not offer any type of compensation. The participants had the option
to list their name and course information on the survey to receive extra credit if offered
by their professor. The participants’ identification was erased from the data before data
analysis took place, ensuring identifying information was not in any way associated with
individual survey responses.

Measures

Demographic variables were first collected for more in-depth information about
the sample of college students. The demographic information that was collected included
gender, race/ethnicity, year in school (e.g., “freshman,” “sophomore,” “junior,” “senior,”
and “graduate,” etc.), and major field of study. These data yield information of potential
interest related to the students’ background and other variables that have been examined
in past and similar studies.

Receiver apprehension measurement. Receiver apprehension serves as the
independent variable in the first research question, and is operationalized using
Wheeless’ (1975) Receiver Apprehension Test (RAT). The RAT consists of 20 items
assessing students’ general anxiety or fear associated with listening and information-
processing activities (e.g., “I often feel uncomfortable when listening to others,”
“Receiving new information makes me feel restless”). Participants indicate their
responses using a five-point Likert scale that ranges from (1) “strongly disagree” to (5)
“strongly agree.” All 20 items are averaged together to create composite receiver
apprehension scores. According to the National Communication Association’s
publication of communication mental measures (2010), this instrument is shown to be
valid and reliable. The instrument has a split-half reliability of .91. This measurement
has been validated and deemed reliable by previous studies as well (Beatty, 1981; Ellis,
2004).

**Communication competence measurement.** To measure the second independent
variable, communication competence, the researcher utilized a short-form version of
Spitzberg’s Conversational Appropriateness and Effectiveness Scale (1985), combined
with items from Spitzberg’s Conversational Skills Rating Scale (1985). The assessment
instrument has a total of 20 self-report items that measure the participants’ level of their
own self-perceived communication competence during a conversation. The instrument
consists of 20 Likert-style items that ask participants their skill level for certain
communication behaviors. The participants respond using a seven-point scale ranging
from one to seven with one being “extremely below average” and seven being “extremely
above average.” The instrument asks questions about appropriateness (e.g., “I avoid
saying things that might offend someone,”) effectiveness (e.g., “I generally get what I
want out of interactions,”) clarity (e.g., “I get my ideas across clearly in conversations
with others,”) satisfaction (e.g., “I am generally satisfied with my communication
encounters,”) and attentiveness (e.g., “I nod my head in response to my partner’s
statements”). The Conversational Appropriateness and Effectiveness Scale was chosen as this measures an individual’s self-report of communication competence, as defined by Spitzberg. Items that measure the construct of attentiveness from the Conversational Skills Rating Scale were added to the Conversational Appropriateness and Effectiveness Scale, as attentiveness is clearly associated with the listening process. Overall, this combination of instruments provided by Spitzberg assesses one’s overall communication competence.

This instrument appears to have strong reliability and validity as stated from published research. The instrument has a reliability score of .86 for appropriateness, .93 for effectiveness, .88 for clarity, and .93 for satisfaction. As for attentiveness, these items come from the CSRS, which has a consistent reliability of over .80 (Spitzberg, 2007). The scale appears to have strong content validity, as a leading researcher in the field of communication competence developed it and has provided expert judgment regarding the scale. The researcher has defined communication competence as reaching one’s goals in a communication situation in the most effective and appropriate manner. This instrument is in line with Spitzberg’s definition of communication competence in that it measures both appropriateness and effectiveness. The factors of clarity, satisfaction, and attentiveness are related to one’s feelings of communication competence. Specifically, one must feel understood (e.g., clarity) and accomplished (e.g., satisfied) in order to perceive oneself as a competent communicator. While researchers varyingly define communication competence, this scale is in line with how Spitzberg and the researcher of the proposed study define this construct, further showing this scale measures the study’s intended variable.
**Listening style measurement.** Preferred listening style serves as the dependent variable for both research questions. Many researchers use the LSP-16 to measure participants’ listening style despite the consistent reports of low reliability for the subscales of the instrument. Bodie, Worthington, and Gearhart (2013) created and validated a revised measure of the LSP-16, the Listening Styles Profile-Revised (LSP-R) which was utilized for the current research study. This instrument also identifies four listening styles; relational listening (RL), task-oriented listening (TOL), critical listening (CL), and analytical listening (AL). Relational listening, most closely associated with the people-oriented listening style from the LSP-16, can be described as individuals who listen to understand emotions and connect with others. Task-oriented listeners prefer well-organized information and focus on the task at hand. TOL is highly correlated with the action listening style and moderately correlated with the time listening style of the LSP-16. Critical listening, which is correlated with the action and content LSP-16 listening styles, tends to focus on inconsistencies and errors within a message. The last factor, analytical listening is described as hearing all sides of an issue before making judgment and responding. AL closely resembles the people and content-oriented listening styles of the LSP-16.

The LSP-R is a 24-item, Likert-type scale that asks participants to respond to items on a seven-point scale, one being “strongly disagree” and seven being “strongly agree”. Participants are asked to respond to items about the four factors; relational listening (e.g., “When listening to others, it is important to understand the feelings of the speaker” and “I listen primarily to build and maintain relationships with others,”) analytical listening (e.g., “I wait until all the facts are presented before forming
judgments and opinions” and “When listening to others, I consider all sides of the issue before responding,”) task-oriented listening (e.g., “I am impatient with people who ramble on during conversations” and “I prefer speakers who quickly get to the point,”) and critical listening (e.g., “I often catch errors in other speakers’ logic” and “When listening to others, I notice contradictions in what they say”).

Bodie, Worthington, and Gearhart (2013) developed a reliable and valid revision of the LSP-16. These researchers report averages of the reliability estimates of the subscales of the LSP-R as follows: .84 for RL, .91 for AL, .89 for TOL, and .86 for CL. Discriminant and concurrent validity was examined and findings support the validity of this instrument.

**Data Analysis**

A Microsoft Excel file of the online data responses was downloaded from Survey Monkey and exported into IBM SPSS and analyzed by performing descriptive frequencies and partial correlation tests. Questions that were skipped were marked as missing data using the code 999 and all surveys of participants who skipped or declined the consent form were erased from the dataset. The researcher added value labels for each variable so that they are easily identifiable in the SPSS output.

The researcher ran frequency tests for the demographic information collected. These variables included the participants’ university, gender, ethnic origin, year in school, and their area of study or major. When percentages were reported, the researcher used the valid percent to account for any missing data.

*Data reduction, development of new variables, and reliability analyses.* As each receiver apprehension variable measures one’s overall level of receiver apprehension,
these items were combined to make a composite receiver apprehension measure. First, the researcher of the current study recoded seven reverse-coded items, which were as follows: RA1 “I feel comfortable when listening to others on the phone,” RA3 “When listening to members of the opposite sex I find it easy to concentrate on what is being said,” RA4 “I have no fear of being a listener as a member of an audience,” RA5 “I feel relaxed when listening to new ideas,” RA14 “I enjoy being a good listener,” RA15 “I generally find it easy to concentrate on what is being said,” and RA16 “I seek out the opportunity to listen to new ideas.” These seven items have positive connotations regarding receiver apprehension, which provoke different responses than the majority of the other items with negative connotations; therefore the items must be recoded. Due to the recoding of data, the higher the participants responded on each receiver apprehension item indicates higher levels of receiver apprehension.

After recoding these items, the current researcher checked for the reliability and internal consistency of all receiver apprehension items. By performing a reliability analysis, it was shown that all items had strong internal consistency with a Cronbach’s Alpha score of .852. Due to the strong internal consistency, all items were reduced and averaged to one composite item titled “ReceiverApprehension.” The RAT is a 5-point Likert scale with responses ranging from (1) “strongly disagree” to (5) “strongly agree.” Responses for receiver apprehension ranged from 1.05 to 3.60 (M = 2.15, SD = .47).

Next, a reliability analysis for all items that measure communication competence was performed. The results indicate a very strong internal consistency with a Cronbach’s Alpha score of .902. Therefore, all items were reduced and averaged to one composite item titled “CommunicationCompetence.” This is a 7-point Likert scale ranging from
(1) “not at all true of me” to (7) “very true of me.” Responses for communication competence ranged from 3.0 to 6.7 (M = 5.3, SD = .70).

Lastly, reliability analyses were performed on each individual listening style, as each listening style had six items to measure that particular orientation. Reliability analyses were performed for each individual listening style and each had strong internal consistency. The relational listening style had a Cronbach’s Alpha score of .87, the analytical listening style had a score of .92, the task-oriented listening style had a score of .84, and the critical listening style had a score of .87. Due to the strong internal consistency, a new variable was computed and averaged for each individual listening style titled “RelationalLS,” “AnalyticalLS,” “TaskOrientedLS,” and “CriticalLS.” Each listening style had a 7-point Likert scale ranging from (1) “strongly disagree” to (7) “strongly agree.” Responses for the relational listening style ranged from 3.0 to 7.0 (M = 5.4, SD = .92). Responses for the analytical listening style ranged from 1.83 to 7.0 (M = 5.0, SD = 1.1). Responses for the task-oriented listening style ranged from 1.0 to 7.0 (M = 5.0, SD = 1.1). Responses for the critical listening style ranged from 1.7 to 7.0 (M = 4.8, SD = 1.1).

The relational listening style was measured using the following items: LS1 “When listening to others, it is important to understand the feelings of the speaker,” LS5 “When listening to others, I am mainly concerned with how they are feeling,” LS9 “I listen to understand the emotions and mood of the speaker,” LS13 “I listen primarily to build and maintain relationships with others,” LS17 “I enjoy listening to others because it allows me to connect with them,” and LS21 “When listening to others, I focus on understanding the feelings behind words.”
The analytical listening style was measured using the following items: LS2 “I wait until all the facts are presented before forming judgments and opinions,” LS6 “I tend to withhold judgment about another’s ideas until I have heard everything they have to say,” LS10 “When listening to others, I attempt to withhold making an opinion until I’ve heard their entire message,” LS14 “When listening to others, I consider all sides of the issue before responding,” LS18 “I fully listen to what a person has to say before forming any opinions,” LS22 “To be fair to others, I fully listen to what they have to say before making judgments.”

The task-oriented listening style was measured using the following items: LS3 “I am impatient with people who ramble on during conversations,” LS7 “I get frustrated when people get off topic during a conversation,” LS11 “When listening to others, I become impatient when they appear to be wasting time,” LS15 “I prefer speakers who quickly get to the point,” LS19 “I find it difficult to listen to people who take too long to get their ideas across,” and LS23 “When listening to others, I appreciate speakers who give brief, to-the-point presentations.”

Lastly, the critical listening style was measured using the following items: LS4 “When listening to others, I focus on any inconsistencies and/or errors in what’s being said,” LS8 “I often catch errors in other speakers’ logic,” LS12 “I tend to naturally notice errors in what other speakers’ say,” LS16 “I have a talent for catching inconsistencies in what a speaker says,” LS20 “When listening to others, I notice contradictions in what they say,” and LS24 “Good listeners catch discrepancies in what people say.”
CHAPTER 4
RESULTS

Partial correlation tests were performed to test the researcher’s inquiry by determining the relationship between each listening style and the variables of receiver apprehension and communication competence. Partial correlation tests were chosen to control for gender as a possible third variable. In previous listening style studies, gender has shown to have a relationship with listening styles (Johnston, Weaver, Watson, & Barker, 2000; Villaume & Bodie, 2007). By performing partial correlation tests, the possible effect of gender is held constant so the relationships can be examined without gender affecting the results. The findings indicate various directions (e.g. positive and negative) of significant, small to moderate relationships between receiver apprehension and listening style, as well as communication competence and listening style.

Research Question One

The first, two-tailed research question asks, “Controlling for gender, what is the relationship, if any, between receiver apprehension and listening style?” Partial correlation tests showed a negative correlation between receiver apprehension and two listening style (see Table 1). Specifically, it was found that receiver apprehension is significantly, negatively correlated with the relational listening style, \( r = -.28, p < .001, N = 227 \) and the analytical listening style, \( r = -.24, p < .001, N = 227 \). By calculating the coefficient of determination, it was found that receiver apprehension shared 7.8% of the variability in the relational listening style and 5.8% of variability in the analytical listening style. These findings indicate a small, but definite negative relationship between those participants with receiver apprehension and who have a relational or
analytical listening style. While negative correlations were also found between receiver apprehension and the task-oriented listening style, \( r = -.03, p = .67, N=227 \) and the critical listening style, \( r = -.09, p = .17, N=227 \), these findings were not statistically significant. By calculating the coefficient of determination, it was found that receiver apprehension shared .1% of variability in the task-oriented listening style and .81% of variability in the critical listening style. The partial correlation tests between receiver apprehension and the task-oriented listening style, as well as the critical listening style, were the only results of the current study that did not reach the necessary significance level.

**Table 1**

*Correlations Between Receiver Apprehension and Listening Styles*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Analytical</th>
<th>Task-oriented</th>
<th>Critical</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Receiver Apprehension</td>
<td>-.28*</td>
<td>-.24*</td>
<td>-.03</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\( N=227 \)

*\( p < .001 \)*

**Research Question Two**

The second, two-tailed research question asks, “Controlling for gender, what is the relationship, if any, between communication competence and listening style?” Partial
correlation tests showed positive correlations between communication competence and each listening style (see Table 2). The results indicated a correlation between communication competence and the relational listening style, $r = .50, p < .001, N = 227$. Other significant, positive correlations were found between communication competence and the analytical listening style, $r = .35, p < .001, N = 227$, the critical listening style, $r = .22, p < .001, N = 227$, and the task-oriented listening style, $r = .20, p < .005, N = 227$.

By calculating the coefficient of determination, it was found that communication competence shared 25.3% of the variability in the relational listening style, 12.3% of variability in the analytical listening style, 4.8% of variability in the critical listening style, and 4% of variability in the task-oriented listening style. The results regarding communication competence and the relational listening style indicate a moderate, substantial positive relationship between the variables. The findings also indicate a small, but definite positive relationship between the variables of communication competence and the analytical, critical, and task-oriented listening styles.
Table 2

Correlations Between Communication Competence and Listening Styles

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Relational</th>
<th>Analytical</th>
<th>Task oriented</th>
<th>Critical oriented</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Communication</td>
<td>.50**</td>
<td>.35**</td>
<td>.20*</td>
<td>.22**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Competence</td>
<td>N=227</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*p < .01

**p < .001
CHAPTER 5

DISCUSSION

Continuing down the lines of listening style research which explores how various individual factors and trait-like variables are related to one’s preferred listening style, the current study sought to explore the relationship between receiver apprehension and preferred listening style, and communication competence and preferred listening style. The results indicate small to moderate relationships between each independent variable and listening styles, although findings between receiver apprehension and two listening styles were not found to be statistically significant. The findings of the current study are in line with previous research, showing definite relationships between individual differences and preferred listening style.

Based on the theoretical work that claims individuals listen in an habitual manner and may prefer a particular listening style across situations, this study continues this line of research by discovering what individual traits, behaviors, and overall differences may contribute to an individual’s preferred listening style.

Receiver Apprehension and Listening Style

It is not surprising that a negative relationship was found between receiver apprehension and two listening styles. Separate from communication apprehension, receiver apprehension is a fear or anxiety associated with receiving information or information-processing activities. Regardless of which listening style is preferred, research has found that receiver apprehension is negatively associated various aspects of the listening process overall (Preiss, Wheeless, & Allen, 1990). Of the four partial correlation tests performed, two of these results were significant.
A significant correlation was found between receiver apprehension and the relational listening style. While this correlation is small, it does show a definite negative relationship between these variables. Those who prefer a relational listening style are focused on understanding the feelings of the other person in the communication situation. The relational listener is concerned with building relationships and connecting with others. This style of listening requires the listener to be fully involved and attentive during the communication process. If individuals have high levels of receiver apprehension, they may be less likely to prefer the relational listening style as their fear may inhibit their ability to listen to connect and build relationships. The fear of receiving information may overpower an individual’s preference to understand the emotions of the speaker in the communication process.

A second significant correlation was found between receiver apprehension and the analytical listening style. This correlation is also small, but nevertheless, shows a definite negative relationship between the fear of receiving information and the analytical listening style. Those who prefer an analytical listening style like to listen to the entire message before forming an opinion about the speaker’s message. These listeners withhold judgment until all facts are presented before responding to the message. It is not surprising that receiver apprehension is negatively associated with this specific listening style. Similar to the relational listening style, the analytical listening style requires the full attention of the listener. As they are concerned with hearing all sides of the issue and understanding the entire message before responding, attention to detail and discipline are key characteristics of those individuals who prefer this listening style. Individuals with high levels of receiver apprehension may be less likely to prefer the
analytical listening style as the fear of listening may overpower their ability to listen to a message’s entirety before forming an opinion. While partial correlation tests showed a slight, negative relationship between receiver apprehension and the critical and task-oriented listening styles, these results did not reach a level of statistical significance. While the researcher is uncertain of exactly why these results did not reach a necessary significance level, it may be that task-oriented and critical listeners do not give much thought to the listening process. Critical and task-oriented listeners tend to focus on inconsistencies within a speaker’s message and are impatient while listening. Participants who utilize these listening styles may not care about listening and therefore, the results regarding these two listening styles could not reach a necessary significance level.

Communication Competence and Listening Style

The findings of the partial correlation tests performed between communication competence and each individual listening style shows small to moderate, positive relationships between communication competence and each listening style. Communication competence is described as using communication in an effective and appropriate manner to reach one’s goals in a communication-related situation. Competent communicators use communication in an appropriate manner based on the context at hand and reach the preferable communication outcome according to a particular situation.

One correlation found was between communication competence and the relational listening style. This finding indicates a moderate, substantial relationship between communication competence and those who prefer the relational listening style. This
finding indicates that those individuals who think of themselves as a competent communicator may be more likely to be relational listeners. As mentioned previously, the relational listening style is very involved in the listening process as the receiver tries to connect with and understand the emotions of the speaker. These characteristics of a relational listener are in line with the reported findings (Villaume & Bodie, 2007), as this listening style may require communication behaviors associated with a competent communicator.

Another significant finding indicates a small, positive relationship between communication competence and the analytical listening style. Analytical listeners attempt to understand the entire message of the speaker before making a judgment or forming an opinion. Similar to the relational listening style, the analytical style may also require communication behaviors of a competent communicator as they listen to fully understand the speaker. Those individuals who think of themselves as a competent communicator may prefer the analytical listening style.

The third significant finding shows a small, positive relationship between communication competence and the critical listening style. Those individuals who prefer a critical listening style focus on inconsistencies within a speaker’s message. Rather than attempting to build relationships or fully understand a speaker’s message, the critical listener notices errors of the speaker’s message during a conversation. Although there is a positive relationship between communication competence and the critical listening style, this correlation is low and should be noted.

The last finding indicates another small, positive relationship between communication competence and the task-oriented listening style. Task-oriented listeners
are impatient with speakers who get off topic and who ramble on during a conversation. Although there is a small relationship between those individuals who think of themselves as competent communicators and who prefer the task-oriented listening style, it should be noted that this correlation is smallest of the previously mentioned findings. It is likely that competent communicators will prefer the relational, analytical, or critical listening styles before preferring the task-oriented listening style.

**Implications**

The findings of this study show definite relationships between receiver apprehension and listening styles, as well as communication competence and listening styles. These findings further support that individual differences are associated with an individual’s preferred listening style. Determining what individual differences may be related to certain preferred listening styles helps researchers to better understand the listening process as a whole. Based on previous findings related to receiver apprehension and listening style, as well as communication competence and listening style, implications are discussed below.

**Apprehension and listening styles.** In the discipline of communication, there have been many studies to examine the relationship between apprehension and communication behavior. Specifically, there have been a few studies to determine the relationship between communication or receiver apprehension related to one’s preferred listening style. In a study by Sargent, Weaver, and Kiewitz (1997) it was found that the people and content oriented listeners appeared less apprehensive in group, meeting, and interpersonal situations; however, there were no correlations found between the action and time-oriented listening styles. The findings of the current study are in line with these
results, as the relational or people-oriented listener, as well as the content or analytical-oriented listeners had low levels of receiver apprehension. Based on these findings, it can be assumed that these styles of listeners are less apprehensive when receiving information.

In a study by Bodie and Villaume (2003) the relationship between apprehension and listening styles was examined. The researchers found that the people-oriented listeners had low levels of apprehension and the time and action-oriented listeners had high levels of apprehension. Similar to these findings, the current study found that the relational listener had the strongest, negative relationship with receiver apprehension. The findings of the current study also found that while the task-oriented and critical listeners also had negative relationships with receiver apprehension, these relationships were small. Similar to the findings of Bodie and Villaume (2003), this weak, negative correlation may indicate that the task-oriented and critical listeners may have higher levels of receiver apprehension. Based on these findings, it can be assumed that relational listeners are less likely to be apprehensive when receiving information while the task-oriented and critical listeners are more likely to be apprehensive when receiving information.

These findings indicate that the results of the current study are in line and similar to other studies that also examined apprehension related to one’s preferred listening style. Although these studies utilized the LSP-16 to measure the participants’ listening styles, it should be noted that the people-oriented listener resembles the relational listener of the LSP-R, the content-oriented listener resembles the analytical listener of the LSP-R, the
time-oriented listener resembles the task-oriented of the LSP-R, and the action-oriented listener resembles the critical listener of the LSP-R.

**Communication competence and listening styles.** The current study found that the relational listening style had was associated with high levels of communication competence. These findings are similar to those of Villaume and Bodie (2007) as they found the people-oriented listeners also had high levels of communication competence, more than the relationships between other listening styles and communication competence. These findings indicate that relational listeners may be more competent communicators in any given situation.

**Relational and analytical listening styles.** Findings show significant relationships between receiver apprehension and communication competence and the relational or analytical listening styles. Of each partial correlation test performed by the current study, the relational and analytical listening styles had higher correlations with the variables than the task-oriented and critical listening styles.

It should be noted that the relational and analytical listening styles are associated with more positive evaluations than the task-oriented and critical listening styles. For instance, relational listeners try to understand and connect with the other person in the communication situation. The analytical listener attempts to fully understand the speaker’s message before forming an opinion or responding. These two listening styles differ from the task-oriented and critical listening styles as these have more negative connotations associated with them. For instance, the task-oriented listener can be impatient when listening and in a hurry. Furthermore, the critical listener easily identifies errors within a message and focuses on inconsistencies stated by the speaker.
The current findings of this study indicate that the relational and analytical listeners have lower levels of receiver apprehension, as there was a negative relationship found between these listening styles and the variable of receiver apprehension. The findings of the current study also indicate that the relational and analytical listeners have high levels of communication competence, as positive relationships were found between these listening styles and the variable of communication competence. The findings may indicate that relational and analytical listeners are more competent communicators and are less apprehensive about receiving information than the task-oriented and critical listeners. The correlation tests between the task-oriented and critical listening styles and receiver apprehension did not reach a level of significance, and this could be explained by the idea that task-oriented and critical listeners may not care or give much thought to the listening process.

**Listening Style Measurement**

This study utilized the Listening Styles Profile-Revised to measure the variable of listening style. Many studies that have examined listening styles have used the Listening Styles Profile-16 to measure this variable, despite the consistent low reliabilities reported for each sub scale of the LSP-16. The current study was successful in using a reliable and valid measure of listening styles, as the concurrent validity proved to be strong for each sub scale of listening styles. The reliability estimates were similar to or in the same range as other published studies that have utilized the LSP-R to measure one’s preferred listening style. These studies and researchers who have utilized the LSP-R report the following reliability estimates for each listening style subscale: relational listening reliability estimates ranged between .81 and .88, analytical listening estimates ranged
between .86 and .93, task-oriented listening estimates ranged between .79 and .89, and
lastly, critical listening estimates ranged between .82 and .91. The reliability estimates of
the current study were as follows: relational listening estimate was .87, analytical
listening estimate was .92, task-oriented listening estimate was .84, and lastly the critical
listening estimate was .87. Utilizing a reliable and valid measurement, such as the LSP-
R, is crucial to producing significant findings related to listening styles that can be
confidently shared in academia and the research-community without being scrutinized.

Limitations

There are limitations of the current research study that should be noted. First, the
sample of this study serves as a limitation as all participants were college students. The
study could have benefited from a more diverse sample including participants other than
college students, such as adults who have had professional experience in the working
world. However, it should be noted that the sample does include college students from
two different universities (e.g., UCCS and MC) and students with a variety of different
majors or areas of study. Including students from two different universities and from
different backgrounds of study may have allowed the sample to be more diverse than
other studies using college students as their participants.

A second limitation of the current study involves the measures of receiver
apprehension, communication competence, and listening style, as they are all self-report
measures. When utilizing self-report measures, it is likely that participants may provide
biased answers and do not answer truly of themselves (Gearhart, Denham, & Bodie,
2014). The variables that were measured in this study analyze participants’
communication behaviors; therefore participants may want to portray themselves as good
communicators and answer in ways that are false. For example, as participants assessed their personal level of communication competence, they may answer in ways that they believe are the correct responses to portray themselves as competent communicators. Similarly, participants who possess apprehension related to receiving information may not indicate this fear so that they appear to be a less apprehensive communicator. Furthermore, participants may also respond to the listening style measurement in ways that are true of the listening style they assume to be the best, but may not be true of the individual.

A third limitation of this study involves the type of data analysis that was chosen to examine the relationships between the variables of receiver apprehension, communication competence, and listening style. Partial correlation tests were performed between receiver apprehension and listening style, as well as communication competence and listening style as the researcher’s questions were to explore the relationship between these variables, not to test specific hypotheses. Partial correlation tests were also chosen so the possible third variable of gender was controlled for. While the strength and direction of the relationships were determined, the results do not provide information about causation between the variables. Therefore, it is uncertain if an individual’s level of receiver apprehension and communication competence affects one’s preferred listening style, or if an individual’s preferred listening style affects their levels of receiver apprehension and communication competence.

Based on the limitations of the current study, future studies may consider utilizing a different or larger sample to include participants other than college students. This may allow for a more diverse sample and for the results of the study to have stronger external
validity. Future studies examining the variables of receiver apprehension, communication competence, and listening style may utilize different measurements that are not self-report. This may allow for participants to provide answers that are true of themselves and free of bias for accurate depictions of their communication behaviors.

Lastly, future studies examining listening styles and other individual factors may consider using a different method of data analysis. Rather than performing correlation tests, other types of analyses may provide insight as to the causation between these variables rather than only providing correlation information.

Future Research

*Listening style profile-revised.* Future research which attempts to explore the relationship between individual factors and one’s preferred listening style should continue to utilize a reliable and valid listening style measurement, such as the LSP-R, to measure an individual’s preferred listening style. Although many studies have utilized the LSP-16, which has shown to produce low reliability estimates consistently across studies, the LSP-R continues to show strong reliability estimates for all listening style subscales. Future listening style research should utilize a reliable scale to provide more accurate information about what researchers currently know about listening styles.

Researchers may also consider replicating previous studies that measured listening styles using the LSP-16, so that the original researcher’s inquiry can be tested using a reliable measurement such as the LSP-R. It would be of interest to listening researchers to see if the published results are consistent or are altered after using a reliable, new listening style measurement.
**Comparing other individual variables.** Future research that analyzes one’s listening style, similar to the current research study, may consider including other variables to analyze along with receiver apprehension, communication competence, and listening style. Although demographic items were collected in the current study such as gender, ethnicity, and academic major, these items were not included in the correlation tests. These demographic items and other individual factors could have been collected with the intention to perform correlation tests between all variables. Research on listening styles frequently examines the relationship between the styles and many different individual variables, such as gender, personality type, and various communication behaviors; however, many researchers of these studies utilized the unreliable LSP-16 measurement. By performing correlation tests between other individual variables and listening style utilizing the LSP-R, this would yield information about the relationship between listening styles and individual differences in a reliable manner. Specifically, it may be of future researchers’ interest to explore the relationship between listening competence and preferred listening style. While communication competence was examined in the current study, it would be interesting to note the relationship between how competent an individual thinks of themselves as a listener and their preferred listening style.

Future research may also include participants who have taken a listening course or have received some type of listening instruction versus those who have not received listening instruction. It may be of interest to researchers to analyze the difference of responses between the two groups of participants, as participants who are familiar with the listening process may answer differently than those who are not.
Listening styles across contexts and cultures. As noted previously, listening styles can be described as one’s preferences and concerns they possess as the listener in a conversation or their preferred style of listening. Many research studies that examine listening styles treat these styles as a habitual or constant way of listening. While it may be true that individual traits and differences influence the style of listening one prefers, researchers such as Gearhart, Denham, and Bodie (2014) examine the claim that listening styles represent habitual patterns of listening by measuring listening styles across contexts or situations and as a goal-directed activity. The findings of this study indicate that listening styles do vary across contexts, according to the demands of the communication situation. Future research may continue down these lines of research, examining if listening styles remain constant or vary in certain situations, and which variables impact the style of listening chosen for a certain situation. Gearhart, Denham, and Bodie (2014) suggest that listening style research may benefit from implementing a study that looks at listening styles used over a long period of time. Future research may examine the relationship between receiver apprehension and communication competence and listening styles, but also explore how these variables may change across contexts or situations.

Future research may also consider performing a listening style study across cultures. Much of the listening style research is conducted in the U.S. using American citizens, typically college students as the sample of the study. It may be of interest to researchers to conduct a study that examines the listening style of individuals from cultures other than the U.S and to explore the possible differences of the listening process between cultures. When discussing what is known about the listening process, Purdy
describes that individuals not only learn about listening as they grow up, but the listening process and associated skills are reinforced through one’s family and culture (2010). In light of this, exploring the listening differences between cultures should certainly be of interest to listening scholars.

Qualitative listening research. Most of the research that has been done on listening has largely been quantitative in nature. Many listening scholars have created measurements and scales to determine one’s overall listening comprehension ability. The majority of the research studies discussed in this paper are also quantitative in nature and quantified the data collected. Measurements of one’s listening comprehension or preferences mainly consist of self-report surveys or questionnaires.

As researchers look for ways to continue the study of listening, qualitative research is highly suggested. Michael Purdy (2010), a listening scholar, explains that one must first begin to examine the experience of listening before attempting to quantify and measure what listening is. Purdy (2010) also suggests the use of phenomenology or descriptive research when approaching the study of listening. Purdy (2010, p. 35) describes phenomenology as, “a very rigorous descriptive method which allows the experience of the facts to speak for itself” and “doesn’t reduce the contextual data to numbers; all experience, behavioral and otherwise, is allowed its richness and diversity.” Phenomenology is qualitative research at its core purpose, to simply observe interesting experiences for what they truly are. While quantitative research is an important part of listening research, studying the listening process by using qualitative research methods is vital to broadening the current understanding of the listening process.
Listening researchers may consider performing qualitative studies using methods such as focus groups, interviews, first-person ethnographic narratives, or ethnographic case studies to examine the listening process in more depth. While quantitative studies, such as the current research study, provide helpful statistical information about what we currently know regarding the listening process, it may be wise for researchers to engage in qualitative research to provide more descriptive information about listening. For instance, interviews or focus groups with participants could be conducted to learn more about why individuals choose a specific listening style based on different situations. The current research study informs us about the direction and strength of the relationships between individual variables and listening style; however, a qualitative listening style study may provide more in-depth information for why an individual prefers one listening style versus another style.

Performing research on listening from a multidimensional approach is also important for any listening scholar to be aware of. The four perspectives of the listening process, physiology, psychology, sociology, and communicative elements, must be taken into consideration when studying the listening process. Some listening research only focuses on the process from the physiological or psychological perspectives. In order to fully grasp the complex process of listening, it is important to incorporate all perspectives when looking at listening.
CHAPTER 6

CONCLUSION

Listening is a complex process made up of physiological, psychological, sociological, and communicative elements that work together to constitute the phenomenon of listening. Listening is vital to the communication process, but the receiver in communication research is somewhat neglected. This research study and many other listening style studies, grounded in an engagement theory of listening, attempt to further understand why individuals listen the way they do.

Continuing down those lines of inquiry, the current study sought to explore the relationships between receiver apprehension and listening style, as well as communication competence and listening style by utilizing the LSP-R. The findings indicate significant relationships between the variables examined. Specifically, the research found small, negative relationships between receiver apprehension and listening styles, as well as small, positive relationships between communication competence and listening styles. This research is in line with other listening style research, as individual traits or factors were found to be associated with an individual’s preferred listening style.

This study helps researchers better understand what factors may influence an individual’s choice in listening style. From the findings, it can be assumed that receiver apprehension has a negative relationship with all listening styles, but most strongly the relational listening style. It can also be assumed that communication competence has a positive relationship with all listening styles, but most strongly the relational listening style. These results indicate that the relational listener may be less apprehensive to
receive information, as well as more competent of a communicator than all other 
listening styles.

Thinking back to my youth and my undergraduate career, I’m elated about my 
mindset-change and progression towards being a more listener-centered communicator. 
When discussing listening-centered communication, Judy Brownell says, “Speakers, 
from this perspective, are at the mercy of the listeners who – literally – have the last 
word” (2010, p. 143). While speakers still possess an important role, they no longer hold 
the limelight for me in the communication process. I have grown to understand the 
importance of broadening our understanding of the listening process in order to help 
individuals grow as communicators. Research is warranted to help scholars better 
understand the listening process and by publicly sharing this information, we help better 
educate the world on what is known about listening and related skills. My hope is that 
this research contributes to the communication discipline’s knowledge of the listening 
process and further encourages future research to study the role of the listener. The art of 
listening was once described as a communication process that “helps to give birth to ideas 
in the mind of the other” and, furthermore, “to listen is to gather our world” (Fuimara, 
1990, p. 1). Learning more about why individuals listen the way they do, across contexts, 
must be further explored to enhance our understanding of not only the communication 
process, but understanding the world around us.
References


Appendix A: Survey

**Exploring Listening: A Self-Report**

Please answer the following questions and mark all boxes that apply to you. 

After the five personal questions right below, then you will respond to three sets of questions regarding your opinions about listening.

1. Please indicate which university you are affiliated with:
   - [ ] University of Colorado Colorado Springs
   - [ ] Mississippi College

2. Gender
   - [ ] Male
   - [ ] Female
   - [ ] Other

3. Ethnic Origin
   - [ ] White
   - [ ] African American
   - [ ] Hispanic
   - [ ] Asian
   - [ ] Native American
   - [ ] Other
4. Year in School

☐ Freshman

☐ Sophomore

☐ Junior

☐ Senior

☐ Graduate Student

☐ Other

_________________________________________________________________________________________

5. Please list your major field of study:

_________________________________________________________________________________________
Receiver Communication Behaviors

The following statements apply to how various people feel about receiving communication messages. Please respond using the scale: (5) strongly agree, (4) agree, (3) are undecided, (2) disagree, or (1) strongly disagree. For each statement, circle your answer in one of the five columns.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statement</th>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Undecided</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. I feel comfortable when listening to others on the phone.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. It is often difficult for me to concentrate on what others are saying.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
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<tr>
<td>3. When listening to members of the opposite sex I find it easy to concentrate on what is being said.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. I have no fear of being a listener as a member of an audience.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. I feel relaxed when listening to</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
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new ideas.

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<tr>
<td>6.</td>
<td>I would rather not have to listen to other people at all.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.</td>
<td>I am generally over excited and rattled when other are speaking to me.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
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</table>

8. I often feel uncomfortable when listening to others.

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9. My thoughts become confused and jumbled when reading important information.

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10. I often have difficulty concentrating on what others are saying.

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11. Receiving new information makes me nervous.

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12. Watching television makes me nervous.

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<td></td>
<td>13. When on a date I find myself tense and self-conscious when listening to my date.</td>
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<td>14. I enjoy being a good listener.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>15. I generally find it easy to concentrate on what is being said.</td>
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<td>16. I seek out the opportunity to listen to new ideas.</td>
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<td>17. I have difficulty concentrating on instructions others give me.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>18. It is hard to listen or concentrate on what other people are saying unless I know them well.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>19. I feel tense when listening as a member of a social gathering.</td>
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<td>20. Television programs that attempt to change my mind about something make me nervous.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
Personal Communication Skills

The following statements apply to how various people feel about their personal level of communication skills and communication competence during a conversation. Please respond using the scale: (7) very true of me, (6) mostly true of me, (5) somewhat true of me, (4) undecided, (3) mostly not true of me, (2) somewhat not true of me, or (1) not at all true of me. For each statement, circle your answers in one of the seven columns.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>1. I avoid saying things that might offend someone.</th>
<th>Not At All True of Me</th>
<th>Somewhat Not True of Me</th>
<th>Mostly Not True of Me</th>
<th>Undecided</th>
<th>Somewhat True of Me</th>
<th>Mostly True of Me</th>
<th>Very True of Me</th>
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<td>1</td>
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2. I

| 1 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |
3. I get my ideas across clearly in conversations with others.

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4. I am generally satisfied with my communication.

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<td>4.</td>
<td>Not at all</td>
<td>Somewhat Not True of Me</td>
<td>Mostly Not True of Me</td>
<td>Undecided</td>
<td>Somewhat True of Me</td>
<td>Mostly True of Me</td>
<td>Very True of Me</td>
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<tr>
<td>5.</td>
<td>I nod my head in response to my partner's statements.</td>
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<tr>
<td>6.</td>
<td>I pay as much attention to the</td>
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7. I consistently achieve my goals in interactions.

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<td>WAY I say things as to WHAT I say.</td>
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<td>8. My comments are consistently accurate and clear.</td>
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<td>9.</td>
<td>I enjoy my interactions with others.</td>
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<td>10.</td>
<td>I ask my partner questions during a conversation.</td>
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<td>11.</td>
<td>I never say things that offend the other person.</td>
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<th>Somewha</th>
<th>Mostl</th>
<th>Undecide</th>
<th>Somewha</th>
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<td>12. My interactions are effective in accomplishing what I set out to accomplish.</td>
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<td>13. My messages are rarely misunderstood.</td>
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<td>14. I feel good about my conversations.</td>
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<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
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<tr>
<td>15. I encourage my partner to talk.</td>
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<td>6</td>
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<tr>
<td>16. I am careful to make comments and behaviors appropriate to the</td>
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<td>6</td>
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<td>situation.</td>
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<tr>
<td>17. I am effective in conversations with others.</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Not At All True of Me</td>
<td>Somewhat Not True of Me</td>
<td>Mostly Not True of Me</td>
<td>Undecided</td>
<td>Somewhat True of Me</td>
<td>Mostly True of Me</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18. Other people appear to understand and me</td>
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<td>when interacting with me.</td>
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<td>19.</td>
<td>I am generally pleased with my interactions.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
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<td>5</td>
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<tr>
<td>20.</td>
<td>I speak about my partner’s interests.</td>
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<td>2</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

**Listening Behaviors**

Below are several items that people use to describe themselves as a listener.

Please respond using the scale: (7) strongly agree, (6) agree, (5) somewhat agree, (4) undecided, (3) somewhat disagree, (2) disagree, or (1) strongly disagree. For each item, circle your answer in one of the seven columns.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Somewhat Disagree</th>
<th>Undecided</th>
<th>Somewhat Agree</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. When listening to others, it is important to understand the feelings of</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
2. I wait until all the facts are presented before forming judgments and opinions.

3. I am impatient.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>with people who ramble on during conversations.</th>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Somewhat Disagree</th>
<th>Undecided</th>
<th>Somewhat Agree</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>4. When listening to others, I focus</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
on any inconsistencies and/or errors in what’s being said.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>5. When listening to others, I am mainly concerned</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
<th>6</th>
<th>7</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
6. I tend to withhold judgment about another's ideas until I have heard everything they are feeling.

| 6. I tend to withhold judgment about another's ideas until I have heard everyth | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |
I get frustrated when people get off topic during a conversation.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Somewhat Disagree</th>
<th>Undecided</th>
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<td>8. I often catch errors in other speakers' logic.</td>
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<td>9. I listen to understand the emotions and mood of the speaker.</td>
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<td>10. When listening to others, I attempt to withhold making an opinion until I've heard their entire message.</td>
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<td>11. When listening</td>
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ng to others, I become impatient when they appear to be wasting time.

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<th>12. I tend to</th>
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naturally notice errors in what other speakers' say.

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<th>13. I</th>
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<td>listen primarily to build and maintain relationships with</td>
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<td>14. When listening to others, I consider all sides of the issue before responding.</td>
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<td>15. I prefer speakers who quickly</td>
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y get
to the
point.

16. I have
a
talent
for
catching
inconsistencies in
what
a
speaker
says.

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<th>Strongly Agree</th>
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<th>Undecided</th>
<th>Somewhat Disagree</th>
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<td>17. I enjoy listening to others because it allows me to connect with them.</td>
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<td>18. I fully listen to what a person has</td>
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<td>19. I find it difficult to listen to people who take too long to get their ideas.</td>
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<td>20. When listening to others, I notice contradictions in what they say.</td>
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<td>21. When listening to others, I focus on understanding</td>
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standing the feelings behind words.

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<th>Strongly Agree</th>
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<th>Somewhat Disagree</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
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<tr>
<td>22. To be fair to others, I fully listen to what they have</td>
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23. When listening to others, I appreciate speakers who give brief, to-the-point
24. Good listeners catch discrepancies in what people say.
Appendix B: IRB Approval Form

University of Colorado
Colorado Springs
Institutional Review Board (IRB) for the Protection of Human Subjects

Date: 2/16/2016
IRB Review

IRB PROTOCOL NO.: 16-137
Protocol Title: Exploring the Listening Phenomenon: The Effects of Receiver Apprehension and Communication Competence on Listening Style
Principal Investigator: Jordyn Fletcher
Faculty Advisor if Applicable: Sherwyn Morreale
Application: New Application
Type of Review: Expedited 7
Risk Level: No more than Minimal Risk
This Protocol involves a Vulnerable Population: N/A (No Vulnerable Population)
Expires: 15 February 2017

*Note, if exempt: If there are no major changes in the research, protocol does not require review on a continuing basis by the IRB. In addition, the protocol may match more than one review category not listed.

Thank you for submitting your Request for IRB Review. The protocol identified above has been reviewed according to the policies of this institution and the provisions of applicable federal regulations. The review category is noted above, along with the expiration date, if applicable.

Once human participant research has been approved, it is the Principal Investigator’s (PI) responsibility to report any changes in research activity related to the project:

- The PI must provide the IRB with all protocol and consent form amendments and revisions.
- The PI must promptly inform the IRB of all unanticipated serious adverse events (within 24 hours) All unanticipated adverse events must be reported to the IRB within 1 week (see 45 CFR 46.103(b)(5)). Failure to comply with these federally mandated responsibilities may result in suspension or termination of the project.
- The PI must notify the IRB when the study is complete.

If you have any questions, please contact Research Compliance Specialist in the Office of Sponsored Programs at 719-255-3903 or irb@uccs.edu.

Thank you for your concern about human subject protection issues, and good luck with your research.

Sincerely yours,

Michele Okun, PhD
IRB Reviewer

www.uccs.edu/~osp/compliance
1420 Austin Bluffs Parkway, Colorado Springs, CO 80918
719-255-3221 phone 719-255-3764 fax

Revision 2/12/13

External funded: ☒ No ☐ Yes
OSP #: Sponsor:

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Revision 2/12/13