Listening in Action

An Honors Thesis (HONRS 499)

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Abstract

Listening is essential to communication, but must be enacted in order to be efficient. However, when people believe they are listening, they may simply be on auto-pilot and not truly engaged in the listening process. I wanted to determine if people on average genuinely listen, or simply use listening "scripts," or automatic listening responses. I believed from my personal experience that people tend to use scripts more than they actively listen. To test this I asked 90 participants, divided into three groups, two sets of questions designed to determine whether or not the participant truly listened. I then conducted a chi-square analysis to determine the ratio of those who listened to those who did not across the groups. A follow-up chi square analysis was then conducted to determine if more listening occurred as the interviews progressed. Listening was shown to increase as more questions were asked.

Acknowledgements

- I want to thank Dr. Carrie Shue for all her help advising and aiding me in my analysis throughout this project. She has inspired me to continue my education and sparked my interest in research.

- I also want to thank Alison Mulert, for being confused when I ask oddly phrased questions, and thus inspiring this topic.

Over the years I have been told that I sometimes speak in a peculiar manner. I am aware of what message I am trying to convey, but sometimes it gets lost in translation. For instance, when asking for permission to do something, instead of asking "May I..." I ask "Do you mind if I..." While these two questions are asking for the exact same permission, the positive response to the former would be "yes" while a positive response to the latter would be "no." I began noticing that even though whomever I was speaking with approved of whatever I was asking, they would sometimes respond with "yes," even though the question sought a "no." This led me to wonder if humans communicate by listening to one another or if they simply assume how the social interaction will unfold and react accordingly.

Through this research I wanted to identify when people are listening to actual words or listening only for the intent being conveyed. I know that communication is a process of encoding and decoding, but I believe if we know how people interpret or listen to messages that this research could benefit communication in the future. By studying what people listen to in conversations, communication can become much more effective and this knowledge can help avoid potential conflicts that stem from miscommunication.

Psychological studies have focused on automatic responses humans have called scripts, which help people interact in basic social settings (Gioia & Poole, 1984). Though rooted in psychology, scripts are very important to my study as they provide groundwork for why humans react the way they do in communication settings. By drawing from both psychological and communication studies investigating how humans listen and learn to listen well, I believe that answers can be gained and then brought to light in the field of communication and effectively applied in order to enhance human social interaction.

lead him or her inside the building, but he or she subconsciously has a set of actions in mind for the situation.

There are certain schemata that apply only to how we interact with each other (Gioia & Poole, 1984). These schemata are called scripts. These are schemata that involve interactions with other people; the most common situation used to describe scripts is ordering from a restaurant (Abelson & Schank, 1977). Though one may have never been to a restaurant, how to acquire food is essentially the same in each establishment. People are not born with this knowledge, but acquire it from observation and repeated experience (Gioia & Poole, 1984). These scripts are then ingrained into a person's memory to be called upon unwillingly when he or she is in a situation in which the scripts can be applied. These scripts are very useful for smooth interaction with other people because most individuals have the same set of rules and the same basic scripts. However, because scripts are learned behaviors, they also vary from culture to culture, making it difficult to know how to behave when outside of one's native setting (Bartlett, 1932). Scripts can also be troublesome because they are subconscious and automatic. This can lead to people subconsciously inserting information into a situation that is not actually there, because they associate specific actions or characteristics with certain situations (Gibbs & Tenney, 1980). For example, a person may hear someone say "Let's meet after I'm done with work" and assume that this means 5:00pm because that is the time he or she associates with work being done, even though this assumption could be completely false.

Scripts are usually categorized as "weak" or "strong," weak scripts being the expectations held for a particular event while strong scripts are not only the expectations

of an event, but an understanding of how the event will unfold (Gioia & Poole, 1984). Even though scripts are invaluable to communication with others, it could also be the downfall to interpersonal communication (Bartlett, 1932). If people have strong scripts that predetermine how they think a conversation, or even a sentence or question is going to end, what keeps them listening? Their memory tells them that they know what will happen in the situation and what the outcome of the situation will be, so it is entirely possible that people listen only to the parts of the sentence their memory deems important (Bolles, 1988).

In some cases, these scripts are preventing effective communication from occurring. Because these scripts are subconscious and automatic, this is no fault of the individual (Gioia & Poole, 1984). If these scripts indeed affect the way people listen, in order to enable effective communication, how can these scriptural habits be broken to enhance communication? While it may be hard to rewire human thought processes to eliminate or modify the use of scripts, gaining information on scripts is key to learn how to better communicate. The first step is to find where these scripts and habits are learned.

Culture and Communication

Scripts are based on what people observe on a regular basis and experience routinely. This repetition builds a library of scripts that are called upon later subconsciously. But this repetition is not consistent from culture to culture. Each culture has its own way of teaching its constituents how to live and react (Purdy, 2000). Because of this, it can be assumed that culture shapes the way individuals communicate. This is because people learn what is important in their lives through what is important to culture (Silcock & Duncan, 2001). For instance, an individualistic culture, such as the United

States, has different cultural beliefs and practices then a collectivist culture, such as the Post Soviet Russian Federation (Dragan & Sherbloom, 2008).

In an individualistic culture, the focus is on the individual. Each person is their own separate entity working in his or her best interest in order to make their life the best possible (Dragan & Sherbloom, 2008). Although they live in a community with many other individuals, their paths intersect only when the individuals desire interaction. This is probably because of the struggle for independence that has been a part of United States history since its fight for independence from Great Britain. A common theme seen in United States lore is the cowboy or lone hero who must strive on his own in order to make things right again (Dragan & Sherbloom, 2008). On the opposite side of the spectrum lies collectivist cultures, like Post Soviet Russia. Individuals in Russia are part of the greater whole, where all members of the community strive together towards a common goal (Dragan & Sherbloom, 2008). In this type of culture, the people do not strive to better their own lives, but to better the community. Each person is a member of the community and by improving the whole they are improving their own lives.

In the end it appears that both cultures are reaching the same goal of bettering life, simply through different means. However, these means are significantly different and affect the lives of each cultural member differently. In a study conducted by Dragan and Sherbloom (2008), they discovered that there is a significant difference in listening styles between United Statians and Post Soviet Russians. The results showed that United Statians scored higher on their listening test in regards to action oriented listening while Russians scored higher on the test in regards to community oriented listening (Dragan & Sherbloom, 2008). But why is this significant? Because it shows that an important part of

communication, listening, varies greatly when comparing two cultures. If listening is done differently between cultures, what other forms of communication could be affected?

In China, scripts are commonly used to determine how to speak to an individual (Ye, 2004). For instance there is a dyad that is very important in Chinese interaction: the difference between *shēngrén* (stranger, uncooked) and *shúrén* (acquaintance, cooked, ripe) (Ye, 2004). The relationship the speaker has to the listener and whether he or she views the listener as a stranger or acquaintance determines which social script is used (Ye, 2004). A person would not greet a stranger in the same way they would greet an old friend, or vice versa. Also, a person would not respond to a greeting from a stranger the same way they would an old friend. While this is probably not specific to only Chinese culture, the definitions of stranger and acquaintance are more clearly defined in Chinese culture than United States culture (Ye, 2004). This shows that even within a culture there are differences in what scripts should be used, and the way these scripts are applied are based on culture.

Culture is not only limited to ethnic groups; it is also present in how people assign themselves a gender role. A study done on listening styles and sex revealed that women were more likely to use a more people-oriented listening style and men were more likely to use a more action-oriented listening style (Johnston, Weaver, Watson & Barker, 2000). Even within this simple division of male and female, differences in how communication is perceived can be seen. Therefore, culture gives each individual a foundation for how to use scripts in any given situation, but these scripts are specific to each culture and are broken down even further within the culture. These combined communicative styles (scripts and listening) and other aspects defined by culture help people determine what is

acceptable and unacceptable (Silcock & Duncan, 2001). People are more likely to accept an idea presented to them automatically than reject it, meaning an individual is more likely to take his or her views of right and wrong from his or her culture than he or she is to reject the views of his or her culture (DiMaggio, 1997). Since the use of scripts in communication has already been explained, the next piece of the puzzle would be to investigate how people listen.

How We Listen

Most people are born with the ability to hear, and intrinsically learn how to hear from an early age. However, hearing and listening are not the same. The differences are well stated by John Kline (2001). He writes "Hearing is the reception of sound; listening is the attachment of meaning. Hearing is, however, a necessary prerequisite for listening and an important component of the listening process" (p. 11). Most people believe that because they can hear, they can also listen. This is usually not the case, because listening is a skill that must be learned, developed, and practiced (Wolvin & Coakley, 2000). Hearing is closely tied to scripts, because it is an automatic response to a situation, and scripts are human responses to situations (Johnston, et al., 2000). More specifically, hearing is the response to words or sounds going on or directed at an individual.

Although hearing is an essential part of listening, listening is also closely related to memory (Bostram & Waldhart, 2006). When listening, an individual must remember what has been said in order to respond either immediately or later in the future (Kline, 2001). When it comes to remembering, Bolles (1988) wrote that "We remember what we understand; we understand what we pay attention to; we pay attention to what we want" (p. 23). Listening therefore hinges on what the listener wants to hear. As defined

previously, what is important to the listener is what the culture defines as important for the individual. A great example of this cultural effect on listening and memory comes from the studies of Sir Frederic Bartlett when living among the Swazis in Africa.

Bartlett (1932) had heard rumors about the fantastic memory of the Swazi people, no matter what age they were. In order to test this legend, he gave a message of about twenty-five words to a Swazi adolescent to deliver to the other side of the village, which was approximately a two minute walk. Bartlett stressed how important remembering the message was to the boy before sending the boy off. Bartlett had another villager observe the boy to see how well the message was received. The boy omitted three important details from the message; Bartlett interpreted this to be about the same result an average English boy would also achieve. This he believed debunked the legend of incredible Swazi memory.

However, later in his travels, he met a Scottish settler who had also heard the same rumors, but suggested that only things that were culturally important could be so easily remembered. At the request of the settler, Bartlett performed another experiment with one of the Scottish man's herdsmen. In Swazi culture, cattle is the mainstay of life and very important to survival. As a test, he asked the helper for each cattle transaction the Scotsman had made in the last year. While looking at a record book of the Scottish man's dealings in the past year, Bartlett followed along as the helper rattled off each transaction. Only two minor mistakes were made, one in which the helper had rounded the price of one cattle bought up, and another where he stated a cow was black when the record stated it was red. Other than these two discrepancies the man accurately listed each transaction, including the persons involved in the deal, the quantity, price, and color

of the cattle traded. Bartlett (1932) concluded that humans only remember with such great details the things that are important in their day to day life. A Swazi could care less about what an Englishman told him about, but the tracking of cattle is of utmost importance since they are essential to life in Swaziland (Bartlett, 1932).

As these studies demonstrate, people remember what they understand; they understand what they pay attention to; and they pay attention to what they want and what is important to them (Bolles, 1988). A culture shapes what humans want or believe is important, and humans listen to what they want to hear. But listening is essential to effective communication, and communication deals with the sending and receiving of messages between two people (Wolvin & Coakley, 2000). According to Kline (2001), "We often hear or read what we expect rather than what was actually said or written" (p. 13). If one of the parties involved in the communicative process is only hearing what he or she expects, or only what he or she wants to hear, the message has been mistranslated. Even worse is that if the comprehension of the message is in the hands of the speaker, for instance, a superior giving a task to a worker who responds with generic positive remarks, the speaker may believe the message has been understood when it has not (Bentley, 1997). While the negative consequences can seem great, human assumptions about what is going to be said have grown that way because they are indeed sometimes correct, but the fact that this auto-pilot could misinterpret, or completely miss the content of a message could spell disaster for any situation.

My thought is that when people think they are listening, they are picking out the parts of the message that concern them, and the listening scripts they have acquired so far in life reinforce this behavior. By listening to the words that a messenger is sending, the

listener receives as much of a message that is audibly available to them. The conflict arises when the receiver of a message interprets only the parts of the message they deem important, because this can result in miscommunication (Schlesinger & Hurvitz, 2008). If this is different than the message the sender intended, miscommunication has occurred, and this simple miscommunication could be avoided if the receiver consciously cast aside all pre-formed notions of what might happen in the conversation and actively listened to what was being said. This study delves into whether or not active listening is occurring when a person is asked questions – which involves attending to the message, processing the information, and responding appropriately based on the sent message - or whether the listening response enacted is script based in nature.

Research question: Do people engage in active listening or do they rely on scripts to respond to questions posed?

Method:

The non-random research sample in this study was comprised of participants who volunteered to partake in the research. The study was interested in all people and not just a specific group, therefore any volunteer willing to participate in the study was accepted. This allowed for a wider range of participants and alleviated the need to find certain individuals to fit specific sample criteria. To establish a core set of volunteers I used network sampling; talking to close friends and family. I thought the use of snowball sampling would be the best course of action, but this proved to be very inefficient as participants' were not giving me the names of individuals that would help. I continued to use network sampling visiting popular on-campus meeting sites such as the library and food courts.

Consenting participants were assigned to one of three groups. The data collection procedures consisted of a listening test that was conducted as an interview. The listening test was conducted where I met the participant. The first group received questions phrased as we generally expect to hear questions – standard phrasing – for both interviews. Some examples of this standard phrasing include "May we start the interview?" and "Would you like to have one million dollars?" The second group received the standard phrased questions followed by uncommonly phrased questions. The questions in this interview mirrored the questions asked before in content, but were worded in a way where the response should be opposite of what the participant responded before in order to mean the same thing. For example, "May we start the interview?" was replaced with "Do you mind if we start the interview?" The third group received only the uncommonly phrased questions for both interviews. This allowed the results of the second group to be compared against two control situations to determine whether or not participants' answers change or stay the same because of the different wording. The interview took approximately 4 minutes to complete. Names were kept confidential. I requested permission to record each participant's age and sex and included it on their data sheet if they allowed.

After the interview the participants were debriefed about the study. I explained the reason for the study and what the indicated responses meant, assuring the participant that there was no right or wrong answer and thanking them for their time.

The study was a quasi-experimental design because participants were assigned to one of three groups depending on the order they volunteered. For example, the first participant was in Group 1, the second in Group 2, repeating until I had 90 participants,

30 in each group. Only one group received a change in the independent variable (Group 2), while the other two groups were control groups (Keyton, 2005).

I made sure that the participant was ready to begin the interview. I then asked interview questions that could be answered with either a positive or negative response (such as yes or no), and asked the participant to answer as concisely as possible. The participant was also asked to respond with the first response that came to mind. I read the questions for the first interview from a sheet of prepared interview questions and marked whether the participant answered with a positive response or a negative response on the same sheet. After the series of questions were asked, I wrote down the date on the interview guide and sometimes asked how the participant was that day. After this pause, the next part of the interview began. The second part of the interview was conducted in the same manner as the first

Overall listening was determined by noting whether a question was responded to similarly in both sections of the interview. Those that had even one inconsistency were labeled as someone who had "not listened." For Groups 1 and 3, listening was said be achieved when the responses match one another; for instance, a "yes" response for the first question in both the first and second set of interview questions. For Group 2, listening was said to be achieved when the responses were opposite. A participant in Group 2 was listening if a "yes" response for a question changed to a "no" response in the second set of questions. A chi-square analysis was computed to examine overall listening scores across the three study design conditions.

Results

Ninety individuals participated in the study – 30 in each of the three groups. The participants included 27 males and 63 females. The ages of the participants ranged from 18 to 55 (mean age = 22.68, SD 7.325).

The results of the chi-square analysis indicated a difference in the overall score on the listening test between the three groups ($\chi^2 = 31.86, p < .001$). Group 1 had the greatest proportion of participants who listened (97%) followed by Group 3 (37%) and Group 2 (31%). Another chi-square analysis was computed to see if there was a difference in overall listening as compared to participant sex. This however, proved to be nonsignificant with 52% of men listening and 56% of women listening ($\chi^2 = .161, p = .688$).

The primary purpose of the study was to determine whether or not people use scripts while listening. However, I also wanted to see whether or not participants began to actively listen at some point during the test. To answer this question, individual chi-square analyses were computed for each item in Groups 2 and 3, the only groups in which significant listening differences were discovered. Tables 1 and 2 provide the proportion of participants who listened to the question and the resulting chi-square analyses for each.

By comparing the listening scores in the second group (standard question phrases followed by uncommonly phrased questions) to the first and third groups (two rounds of standard questions and two rounds of uncommonly phrased questions) I am able to determine whether or not there is a difference in the proportion of participants who listen as measured by response consistency across question rounds in each of the three groups.

This will help determine if participant answers are based on scripted responses or active listening.

Table 1

Group 2

Item "May/Do you mind"	**Proportion of Participants who Listened**	**Chi-Square, *p* - value**
"May we start the interview?"	37%	2.133, $p = .144$
"Can I ask another question?"	80%	10.800, $p = .001$
"Can you answer concisely?"	70%	4.800, $p = .028$
"May I sit down?"	93%	22.533, $p < .001$
"Can I have $50?"	90%	18.241, $p < .001$
"Would you like $1,000,000?"	90%	18.241, $p < .001$
"Can we put anchovies on the pizza?	89%	17.286, $p < .001$
"Can we get ice cream later?"	79%	9.143, $p = .002$

Table 2

Group 3

Item "Do you mind if…"	**Proportion of Participants who Listened**	**Chi-Square, *p* - value**
"…we start the interview?"	60%	1.200, $p = .273$
"…I ask another question?"	77%	8.533, $p = .003$
"…you answer concisely?"	67%	3.333, $p = .068$
"…I sit down?"	97%	26.133, $p < .001$
"…I borrow $50?"	93%	21.552, $p < .001$

"...you had $1,000,000?"	100%	Constant
"...we put anchovies on the pizza?"	90%	19.200, $p < .001$
"...we get ice cream later?"	97%	26.133, $p < .001$

Discussion and Conclusion

The results of my study provided significant results, showing that approximately 44% of those interviewed were not listening. This however was also coupled with the stringent criteria that an individual was not listening if their answers did not align with each other even once over the course of the test (for example, if a positive response became a negative response when a question was asked again). The majority of those not listening occurred in Groups 2 and 3, the groups that contained the uncommonly phrased questions (for example, "Do you mind if I ask another question?"). This led me to conclude that when presented with a situation in which one is asked an expected question and then an uncommonly phrased one, or when presented with entirely uncommonly phrased questions, the situation does not fall within the perceived understanding of how the event will unfold. This is significant evidence that supports the claim that people do indeed use scripts when listening. There could be numerous reasons for this to be the case.

This could simply mean that people are not actively listening when not engaged in a situation. I approached people that were going about their day-to-day activities before I interviewed them. People only listen and understand what is important to them (Bolles, 1988). Because the research did not involve them to the fullest extent, it is possible that to the participant they were merely answering questions to help a student. This low level of

investment on the side of the participant would not illicit a need for first, attention to the questions being asked other than the minimum required, and secondly, remembering the questions that had been previously asked because the questions were not important to them (Bolles, 1988). The questions were not an important part of the participants' lives, merely a break from the routine to which they were accustomed. They therefore did not listen to, or possibly even remember, the previous questions or any differences that may have occurred when asked similar questions again. According to Kline (2001), participants were not listening if they did not attach meaning to what was being said.

This would also explain why those in Group 1 were able to answer correctly both times they were asked. The questions were worded in a commonplace way and the two sets of questions were exactly the same. While they were probably just as minimally invested in the interview as those in Groups 2 and 3, the questions did not fall outside of what the participants considered a "normal" wording. The questions fulfilled the expectations of how a question should be asked, aligning with the scripts that all participants used (Gioia & Poole). The most interesting data I discovered was that even though approximately 44% of participants did not listen according to my criteria, the quantity of individuals who listened increased significantly after the first question, and increased higher still in after the third question in Groups 2 and 3 (see Tables 1 and 2). I believe this indicates that while people were relying on scripts before the interview happened, they quickly realized that the situation was not going to be a normal experience and adjusted their listening style. This suggests a number of interesting findings.

The listening scripts I was attempting to discover do indeed exist, but as defined by Gioia and Poole, they are weak scripts (1984). This means that this is a script that can be easily broken or changed, as it only gives the listener an idea of what to do next, not how the interaction will unfold (Gioia & Poole, 1984). Listening scripts therefore, while predetermining the way one listens, can also be easily overwritten to adapt to the situation at hand. This shows that by default people are using these scripts until they are engaged in some sort of listening process. I believe this means listening scripts can potentially be corrected or at least not used when a delicate situation calls for it.

The solution lies within the results of Group 3. Group 3 was presented with the same questions, yet only 37% of the group listened. The results on Table 2 show that while the first questions yielded a listening rate of 60%, this number rose to 97% by the fourth question, and retained a listening rate of at least 93% for the rest of the interview. These results showed that many more people listened after the first question, especially when compared to the results of Group 2 (see Table 1). I believe this is because after the initial surprise of hearing an uncommonly phrased question, the participants in Group 3 abandoned their old script and adjusted their listening styles to what they believed was going to happen for the rest of the interview.

In order to engage a participant in active listening, something is needed to jar the person's normal scripts, in this case, a few to several strangely worded questions. By upsetting the listening norms that the participant is currently using, the weak script is derailed. If a new script has not been developed yet to handle the new situation, active listening may be the route upon which individuals rely. Active listening works best when there is repetition of subject matter (Parkin, Wood, Aldrich, 1988). Perhaps this is why

those in Group 3 were able to listen more as the interview progressed because they had heard all the uncommonly phrased questions once before and only moments earlier, while those in Group 2 had a harder time adapting because their questions were not consistent. This may suggest that in order for active listening to gain full potential after the weak listening script has been broken, whatever the new style of communication is occurring is, it needs to stay constant (Parkin et al., 1988). Perhaps those who were marked as having listened in Group 2 were the individuals that were already actively listening instead of relying on scripts. Regardless of which a person chooses (active listening or new scripts), once the old pattern is abandoned, a new pattern will more than likely be adopted automatically (Gioia & Poole, 1984).

Limitations

There were some limitations to the study as I collected data. I intended for the eight questions to have two purposes. The first four questions in both sets were meant to be general pleasantries, trying to confuse the participant with whether the interview had actually begun or not in order to illicit a genuine first response. The next four questions in both sets were meant to be polarizing in nature, there should have been a definite response each time (either a person wants one million dollars or they do not). The polarizing questions gave me some interesting responses.

First, the question about anchovies was not as polarizing as I had hoped. While most of the time it was, there were some participants that did not care whether or not anchovies were put on the pizza. This resulted in some of the responses to this question being thrown out for being invalid. Second, the question about ice cream was perceived in a way I had not anticipated. Participants, both male and female, sometimes interpreted

the request to get ice cream as an invitation for a date. I began to notice this when a male participant looked at me very strangely after I asked the question and gave me a negative response. After this point I asked participants after the interview if they thought the ice cream question was a proposition for a date and a few participants said they did feel that way. I asked this once or twice during the break between interview sections, which may have changed participants' responses the second time the question was asked.

The question about whether or not I was allowed to sit confused some individuals in my first interviews. They saw I was already sitting and did not know how to respond. To counteract this confusion in proceeding interviews I simply asked if the participant minded if I was sitting, or if the participated was comfortable with me sitting. One participant, when asked the question, requested that I not sit so that my face could be better seen. This response switched during the second round of questions, accounting for the one individual not listening in the Group 1 interviews.

There was also a strange pattern in the data in which participants in Groups 2 and 3 had a higher listening percentage on question two, but it then dropped back down in question three (see Tables 1 and 2). The only explanation I can think of for this unique situation is that a few times people asked me to define "concisely." It could be possible that other participants were not sure of the definition of the word but simply did not ask for me to define it. Other than this reason, I am unsure why participants as a whole would listen less as the interview progressed, seeing as the trends in data showed the opposite.

The Future/Personal Findings

These results and conclusions answered many questions for me that I did not intend to discover the answer to, but make sense in the larger world of communication.

For instance, speeches and presentations usually contain an attention getter at the beginning to engage the audience; my research has simply defined one of the possible reasons why this is necessary. This introduction into the field of research has piqued my interest and I would like to continue the process in the future. While I do not know whether or not I will continue in the area of script theory, I would like to find out more about the way people listen and interact with each other to maximize communication and minimize conflict.

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The following proposal was submitted to and approved by Ball State University's Institutional Review Board

Title: Listening in Action

Primary Investigator: Leland Fecher, Ball State University Student

Faculty Supervisor: Carolyn Shue, Ph.D., Assistant Professor, Ball State University

Purpose of study: The purpose of the study is to investigate whether in conversation people listen to actual words or only the intent being conveyed. I would like to determine when asked two sets of questions that contain the same content but vary in wording, if there is a difference in participant response. The objective of this research is to determine whether participants are carefully listening to the words of each question, or if the participant only listens to the overall intent of each question.

Research Question: To what degree do individuals answer questions based on the actual question asked (active listening for question intent) versus answering questions based on what they believe is being asked (employing question scripts in the answering of questions)?

Rationale: Communication is essential to social interaction, and effective communication can minimize the occurrence of misunderstandings. However miscommunication is very common. Some miscommunication occurs because people have certain expectations about communication. People learn to recognize these expectations and create schemata or "scripts" based on these patterns (Gioia & Poole, 1984). The most popular example of a script in action is the restaurant script. A person can enter a restaurant that they have never been to before, yet he or she knows what actions must be taken in order to get food and pay for a meal (Abelson & Schank, 1977). This knowledge is not instinctual, it is gained through observation and repeated experience, and people can then call upon their "restaurant script" when faced with a restaurant situation to know how to behave accordingly (Gioia & Poole, 1984).

Scripts are very much a part of the communicative process. When listening to one another, people may employ their "conversation script" and not listen to the words that are actually being said because they assume it is like the countless other conversations in which they have partaken. This can sometimes be very useful. For instance, if a person is trying to communicate with a stranger, he or she knows that it will be much different than if he or she were to act with friends (Ye, 2004). Being able to use scripts helps people to adjust their speaking and listening styles to meet the needs of various conversation partners and communication situations.

However, scripts can also be a problem in communication. If scripts are used to guide social interactions, whenever a conversation occurs that is not within the standard norms there may be miscommunication. A person may omit or add information to a conversation because he or she expects the conversation to play out in a specific way

(Gibbs & Tenney, 1980). This can be a very difficult fix because scripts are automatic and subconscious (Gioia & Poole, 1984). By relying on these automatic scripts, I believe people are less inclined to actually listen to what is being said to them.

My research will focus on seeing how influential scripts are during face-to-face question asking and answering. I will accomplish this by asking questions that are grammatically correct yet distinctly different from expected, generally scripted questions such as "Do you mind if I step outside?" The positive answer to this question is a "no," but from my experience, the positive response usually given is "yes." By comparing the differences in responses to questions phrased uniquely to questions phrased as expected, I hope to discern whether participants are listening to the question being asked or the question they believe is being asked. This information would provide one indicator to the extent to which scripts are utilized during the asking and answering of questions. Knowing the frequency of scripts usage could provide a basis for future research involving script theory and interpersonal communication

Number of Participants: There will be approximately 90 to 120 participants involved.

Participant Population Description: There are no population restrictions based on sex, race, or ethnicity. A convenient sample will be selected from the population of Ball State University consisting mainly of students and professors.

Population Inclusion/Exclusion Criteria: Participants must be at least 18 years of age to be included in the study.

Method of Participant Recruitment: I will employ a variety of methods to recruit study participants. First, participants will be recruited by an e-mail (see Attachment A) describing the research process. Second, I will personally ask classmates and other students on campus to see if they are interested in participating in the research. Finally, I will employ a snowball sampling technique; after each participant finishes the research protocol, I will ask him/her for names/contact information of individuals who may be interested in participating in the study (Keyton, 2005).

Description of Methods: Participants will be asked to meet with the investigator in a Ball State University communication classroom or a location of the participants' choosing whichever is more convenient for the participants. Upon arrival they will be greeted by the investigator and given some background about the research project (see Attachment B) and an informed consent form to sign (see Attachment C). Participants are not disclosing personal information, the focus of the research involves an exercise of initial responses to benign questions, and names are not being recorded in this study.

Before they arrive the participants will have been assigned to one of three groups. The investigator will explain to the participants that they are to answer a list of questions with either a yes or no response, whichever comes to the participants' minds first. The investigator and the participant will sit down, and when the participant is ready, the interview will begin. The interview will be a two-step process.

Group 1 participants will be asked a series of questions that are phrased in a style that is easy to understand and consistent with typical question scripts. The participants' answers should be in a yes or no format, or some variation thereof (e.g., sure, nope). The participant's answer will be recorded on a sheet that has the list of questions and yes or no response boxes (see Attachment E). After a short break, the participants will be asked the same set of questions again and his/her responses will again be recorded. Group 2 participants will also be asked the questions phrased in a manner consistent with question scripts until the break. After the short break the participants will be asked a set of questions that are directly relate to the previous set of questions asked, yet uniquely phrased (see Attachment F). Group 3 participants will be asked the set of uniquely phrased questions for the first part of the interview. After the short break, they will be asked the same set of questions again (See Attachment G). All participants will be asked a final open-ended question regarding their perceptions of the question/answer process. All participant responses will be recorded on question sheets for later analysis. No participant names will be recorded on the answer sheets. Only demographic data will be recorded.

After the two sets of questions are asked, participants will be offered an opportunity to learn more about the nature of the study (see Attachment D). If they so choose, the investigator will explain in further detail what the study hopes to find, and how the results can be implemented in the future. Participants will be given the option to know what their individual results of the questionnaire are, with assurance from the investigator that the results do not reflect level of intelligence or any other factor, and that there are no correct or incorrect answers.

The investigator will then thank participants for their time and ask them if they can recommend other people that would be interested in the study. The investigator will then ask if the participant has any questions regarding the research and answer those questions to the best of the investigator's knowledge. The entire process should last approximately 10 minutes.

Anonymity/Confidentiality: The data will be collected in the form of two data sheets. These sheets will have the list of questions being asked with a check box for "yes" and "no" responses. The investigator will simply check the box that applies to each participant's response and keep the two data sheets together for comparison. The participants will only fill out information regarding their age and sex, but not their names or race so their identities will remain completely anonymous. Data sheets collected will be kept in a locked filing cabinet in the faculty advisor's office. Only the investigator and faculty advisor will have access to the filing cabinet. After the research data has been electronically recorded the data sheets will be shredded.

Potential Risks: This study poses minimal risk.

How Risks will be Minimized: No measures need to be taken in order to prevent risk other than those used to maintain anonymity.

Potential Benefits: The research can help develop further listening studies or improve the way listening is taught in communication courses. Participants may even discover they do not listen as precisely as they thought they do, which could help improve communication in future relationships. This research will serve as a foundation for future studies in listening and communication.

Incentives: No incentives will be provided for the participants.

Financial Expense: There will be no financial expenses for participants in this research.

Financial Compensation for Injury: None required.

Informed Consent: This research falls under category 2 of the Exempt Protocol Review being that the research involves interview and survey procedures that do not threaten participants' confidentiality. Because participants are not required to give their name and only the demographics of age and sex, the research results cannot be linked back to the individual. However, I am going to have participants sign an informed consent form to document that the correct procedures have been followed to inform participants (see Attachment C).

References:

Abelson, R., & Schank, R. (1977). *Scripts, plans, goals, and understanding: an inquiry into human knowledge structures (artificial intelligence)*. Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum.

Bartlett, F. (1932). *Remembering: a study in experimental and social psychology*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Gibbs, R., & Tenney, Y. (1980). The concept of scripts in understanding stories. *Journal of Psycholinguistic Research*, *9*(*3*), 275-284.

Gioia, D., & Poole, P. (1984). Scripts in organizational behavior. *Academy of Management Review*, *9*, 449-459.

Keyton, J. (2005). *Communication Research: Asking Questions, Finding Answers*. New York City: McGraw-Hill Humanities/Social Sciences/Languages.

Ye, Z. (2004). Chinese categorization of interpersonal relationships and the cultural logic of Chinese social interaction: An indigenous perspective. *Cultural Pragmatics*, *1*(*2*), 211-230.

Attachment A
Solicitation for Participation E-Mail

How well do you think you listen? Would you like to find out?

My name is Leland Fecher and I am conducting a research project about the way people listen and communicate. I am in need of several participants to help me in my study. The study would involve meeting with me at the location of your choice, wherever you feel most comfortable, or in a BSU communication classroom. There you will be asked a set of general questions – not questions that involve disclosure of personal information, take a short break, and then asked another set of questions. The entire process should take approximately ten minutes of your time. Your responses will remain anonymous because no personal data except your sex and age will be linked to your responses.

If you are interested in participating, please e-mail me at dlfecher@bsu.edu for more information. Here's your chance to find out how you listen!

Leland Fecher, Principal Investigator
dlfecher@bsu.edu
(630) 723-7794

Carolyn K. Shue, Ph.D., Faculty Advisor
Assistant Professor
Department of Communication Studies
Ball State University

Note: This study has been approved by BSU's Institutional Review Board – Approval Date:

Attachment B
Interview Introduction Script

Welcome, and thank you for meeting with me today. First I wanted to let you know that this study and the procedures have been reviewed and approved by BSU's Institutional Review Board.

I'll be asking you a series of nine questions. The questions are not of a personal nature and do not require you to disclose any personal information. All I need from you is the first thing that comes to your mind. All the questions can be answered with a "yes" or "no" response. There is no right or wrong answer, so don't worry about being correct, your first natural response is all that matters for the study. At the end of the process I'm going to record your sex and age on my data sheet. I will not be recording your name on any of the study materials.

If something confuses you or you need to stop the interview at anytime for any reason, please let me know. You are not required to complete the interview once we have begun.

Do have any questions for me before we begin?

(pause for questions, answer any)

Great! Let's begin then.

(start the question asking and answer recording process.)

Attachment C
Informed Consent Form

Study Title: Listening in Action

The purpose of this research study is to see how people listen. This is to help improve the way people listen in the future. For this study you will be asked two sets of questions with a short break in between. The questions do not require you to disclose personal or identifying information. You will be asked to answer the questions with the first yes or no answer that comes to your mind. The interview will last about 10 minutes. Any questions you have will be answered by the interviewer.

You will not be asked for any personal information, so nothing about you will appear on the data sheets that are being filled out, or in any other form after the study is complete. Your question responses will be kept in a locked filing cabinet in the faculty advisors office, only accessible by the advisor and the interviewer. This information will stay confidential. The risks that could be involved from participating in this study are minimal.

A benefit that you may gain from participating in this study is learning about the way you listen, which could improve the way you communicate in the future. If you have any questions before signing the Informed Consent Form, feel free to ask. If you have any questions before or during the study, please ask and the interviewer will be happy to answer them.

The Institutional Review Board at Ball State University has approved this study. If you have questions regarding your rights as a research participant, you may contact: The Office of Academic Research and Sponsored Programs, Ball State University, Muncie, IN 47306, (765) 285-5070.

I, _____, agree to participate in this research project called "Listening in Action." I had the study explained to me and my questions have been answered to my satisfaction. I have heard the description of the study, read the consent form, and give my consent to participate. I understand that I will receive a copy of this informed consent form to keep for future reference.

_____ _____

Signature Date

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Attachment D
Post-Interview Script

Thank you for your participation and responses. Without your participation this study could not have happened. Would you like to know more about what the study means?

If No: Do you have any more questions for me? Well thank you again for your time, and please try not to discuss the exact questions/procedures in this research with anyone who may be participating in the study in the future. I appreciate you coming in and helping. Have a wonderful day!

If Yes: The research is meant to see how well people listen. People often run their day to day interactions based on what are called "scripts." These are patterns based on things we see and do on a regular basis. For example, if you went to a restaurant you had never seen before in your life, you would have a basic understanding of how to order food. This is because you have a "restaurant script" that tells you the basic social norms and ways of communicating while at a restaurant. This script comes from watching people go to restaurants, watching people in the media go to restaurants, and your previous restaurant experience.

(Group 1) You were part of a control group and asked normally phrased questions for both parts of the interview. Hopefully your answers were the same both times and we can compare your results to those who have received similar but not the same questions for both interviews and those who received uniquely phrased questions both times. I hope that the results of the study will shed some light on how much people actually listen and how much people are on listening auto-pilot, or simply running their listening script.

(Group 2 and 3) What my study is looking at is how people use "listening scripts." The questions I am asking are worded in a way that unless you are listening carefully, it is easy to answer the question that you *think* is being asked as opposed to the one that is actually being asked. I hope that the results of the study will shed some light on how much people actually listen and how much people are on listening auto-pilot, or simply running their listening script.

Without your participation, this could have never occurred, so thank you for your time and cooperation. Do you have any more questions for me?

Well thank you again for your time, and please try not to discuss the exact questions/procedures in this research with anyone who may be participating in the study in the future. I appreciate you coming in and helping. Have a wonderful day!

Attachment E
Group 1 Data Sheet

Group 1, Checklist 1

Sex: **Age:**

	Yes	No
May we start the interview?	☐	☐
Can I ask another question?	☐	☐
Can you answer the questions concisely?	☐	☐
May I sit down?	☐	☐
Can I borrow fifty dollars?	☐	☐
Would you like having a million dollars?	☐	☐
Can we put anchovies on the pizza?	☐	☐
Can we get ice cream later?	☐	☐

Group 1, Checklist 2

	Yes	No
May we start the interview?	☐	☐
Can I ask another question?	☐	☐
Can you answer the questions concisely?	☐	☐
May I sit down?	☐	☐
Can I borrow fifty dollars?	☐	☐
Would you like having a million dollars?	☐	☐
Can we put anchovies on the pizza?	☐	☐
Can we get ice cream later?	☐	☐

So, what are your thoughts about the questions I asked you today?

Attachment F
Group 2 Data Sheet

Group 2, Checklist 1

Sex: **Age:**

	Yes	No
May we start the interview?	☐	☐
Can I ask another question?	☐	☐
Can you answer the questions concisely?	☐	☐
May I sit down?	☐	☐
Can I borrow fifty dollars?	☐	☐
Would you like having a million dollars?	☐	☐
Can we put anchovies on the pizza?	☐	☐
Can we get ice cream later?	☐	☐

Group 2, Checklist 2

	Yes	No
Do you mind if we start the interview?	☐	☐
Do you care if I ask another question?	☐	☐
Do you mind answering the questions concisely?	☐	☐
Do you care if I sit down?	☐	☐
Do you mind if I borrow fifty dollars?	☐	☐
Would you mind having a million dollars?	☐	☐
Do you care if we put anchovies on the pizza?	☐	☐
Do you mind if we get ice cream later?	☐	☐

So, what are your thoughts about the questions I asked you today?

Attachment G
Group 3 Data Sheet

Group 3, Checklist 1

Sex: **Age:**

	Yes	No
Do you mind if we start the interview?	☐	☐
Do you care if I ask another question?	☐	☐
Do you mind answering the questions concisely?	☐	☐
Do you care if I sit down?	☐	☐
Do you mind if I borrow fifty dollars?	☐	☐
Would you mind having a million dollars?	☐	☐
Do you care if we put anchovies on the pizza?	☐	☐
Do you mind if we get ice cream later?	☐	☐

Group 3, Checklist 2

	Yes	No
Do you mind if we start the interview?	☐	☐
Do you care if I ask another question?	☐	☐
Do you mind answering the questions concisely?	☐	☐
Do you care if I sit down?	☐	☐
Do you mind if I borrow fifty dollars?	☐	☐
Would you mind having a million dollars?	☐	☐
Do you care if we put anchovies on the pizza?	☐	☐
Do you mind if we get ice cream later?	☐	☐

So, what are your thoughts about the questions I asked you today?