

Listening skills: Context, Body language, and Hidden meaning

Part 1: What is listening?

Please **read** the following three paragraphs at home and **be prepared to give examples** of the words in bold when you come to class.

*There are many ways to “listen;” it is not simply understanding all the words. **Context** affects the way you understand what you are listening to. For example, if you are sitting in class and the topic for the day is “Marie Antoinette and the French Revolution,” you will form ideas about what you will hear even before the class begins. Your **background knowledge** of the subject of Marie Antoinette and the French Revolution will start to fill in information before class begins and it will help you understand what is being said during class.*

*If you are speaking to someone on the street, you will be paying close attention to their **body language**: are they making an aggressive or a friendly posture? If they are smiling you may assume they are happy and are saying something friendly to you. If their voice is raised and they are frowning and shaking their fist, even if you can’t understand the words they are saying, you may assume that they are mad and are not saying nice things.*

***Hidden meaning**, or the meaning found by listening “between the lines,” affects how you understand meaning. Intonation of voice is often important here. For example, the statement: “Oh, that is so interesting” could take on multiple meanings depending on how it is said. If said in a sarcastic tone it could actually mean the opposite of the literal words, meaning instead that it is not interesting at all! Also, meaning can change due to **cultural expectations**. For example, in the U.S. it is generally not OK to tell someone they are overweight: it would be perceived as being rude. However, in other cultures it is OK to tell someone they have put on weight and is not considered rude. If you are not familiar with this cultural norm, you might misinterpret the intention of what is said.*

Part 2: Non-verbal and verbal listening practice

Let’s practice by watching a short video clip. **Write all answers on a separate piece of paper**

1. *Establishing a context:* We are going to watch a short clip from the film [insert film of choice from target culture (C2)]. First look at the film poster and consider the title of the film: What do you think this film might be about? What genre (comedy, romance, drama, etc.) do you think it is?
2. *Reading non-verbal cues:* Your teacher will play the clip **without** sound twice. Pay attention and take notes on the following:
 - a. List the main characters in the clip (you won’t know their names, but you can identify them in other ways *Ex. woman 1, tall woman, woman in black, etc.*)
 - b. Do the characters know each other? How do they know each other?
 - c. What are the characters’ facial expressions?
 - d. What body language do they use?



- e. Where are the characters in this clip?
 - f. Why are they there?
 - g. What are they doing?
 - h. How do they feel?
3. After the second viewing, discuss your ideas to #2 with a partner.
4. *Combining non-verbal with verbal cues*: Now your teacher will play the clip twice **with** sound. Think about the questions in #2 again and take notes.
5. After viewing the clip twice with sound, discuss your ideas to #2 again with a partner.

Part 3: Reflection

Let's reflect on what you heard. **Write all answers on a separate piece of paper.** Be prepared to share your ideas with a partner and/or the whole class.

- a. Did the body language and facial expressions help you understand what was happening? Why/why not? Provide an example.
- b. Did anything in the clip surprise to you? What? Why was it surprising to you? Be specific.
- c. Were there any historical or cultural references or body gestures in the clip that changed or influenced the meaning? (i.e. The icon "Rosie the Riveter" has a lot of history and cultural significance attached to it in the U.S. If you did not know the context behind this – women working in factories during World War II-- you might miss some of the intended meaning or significance of what you heard)
- d. How do you think your own cultural values, experiences and expectations helped you to understand the clip?
- e. How might these same values experiences and expectations make it more difficult for you to understand this clip?

