

Chapter 43

Designing “Concentrated Listening” for Advantageous Adult Learning With Multimedia

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ABSTRACT

In the online learning space, adult learners have access to a wide variety of sound-based content (podcasts, audio books, audio recordings, and others) and multimodal contents of which the audio element is a central part. This work explores research methods used to enhance “concentrated listening” to enable learners to acquire the most from the following: pre-recorded sound files, live audio, natural language discussions through speech, and other types of auditory-based learning online. This work explore some aspects of (1) learning designs to enhance both adult “concentrated listening” in an online learning context (both synchronous and asynchronous) and (2) some tactical designs of learning based around sound for general learning (vs. domain-specific case-based learning).

INTRODUCTION

Sound design is not a typical factor in the design of instruction even though sound is a critical element in multimedia, video, narrated slideshows, podcasts, multimodal text, audiobooks, audio recordings, and others. Oftentimes, the focus on sound has to do with offering other perceptual channels for information offered only through sound (like transcription, like closed captioning, and other approaches). In the research literature, there are various ways to enhance learning from sound and human oral speech and vocalizations—generally, and in specific fields. This work explores some of the general research and identifies various design categories for enhancing adult learning from natural language (presentations, speeches, podcast presentations, conversations, and other basic engagements in the learning context). This work proposes a type of “concentrated listening” and active engagement that may benefit learning from typical learning from sound, whether sound alone or sound in the context of other media.

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This work asks two basic questions from an instructional design perspective:

1. What learning designs enhance adult “concentrated listening” in an online learning context (both synchronous and asynchronous)?
2. What are some tactical designs of learning based around sound for general learning (vs. domain-specific case-based learning)?

This is an initial work which relies heavily on both a review of the literature and basic instructional design.

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Research in the late 1990s and early 2000s identified locations where sound patterns are recognized (in the posterior half of the brain’s cortex). In terms of human perceptions, the near senses are smell, taste, and touch because these require proximity to the stimuli; the far senses relate to seeing and hearing because these may be perceived from a physical distance from the stimuli. In another sense, though, distant signals like radio ones can be a form of intimate communications, with people receiving information from other people in a conversational approach. Listening is “supposed to be the earliest and the most widely used communication skill” (Brownell, 1996, as cited in Imhof, 1998, p. 81), with fetuses hearing “voices outside the womb as early as the fifth month of gestation” (Doğan, 2008, as cited in Canpolat, Kuzu, Yildirim, & Canpolat, 2015, p. 164). It is estimated that 70% of a person’s day is “spent communicating,” with “9 percent...spent writing, 16 percent reading, 30 percent talking, and 42 percent to 57 percent listening” (Cooper, 2011, as cited in Hamilton, 2012, pp. 145-146).

Where “hearing” (as a physiological process) is about perception, “listening” is more about attentive focus on sound and its processing. Listening is “a complex psychological function involving a considerable number of mental and behavioral subskills that are performed both sequentially and in parallel” (Imhof, 1998, p. 82), with one study identifying “15 separate clusters of listening behaviors that include a wide range of activities, such as active listening, subception, overt response, empathy, organization, and information storage...” (Witkin & Trochim, 1997, as cited in Imhof, 1998, p. 82).

Listening is not an inherently stand-alone activity; rather, it often occurs synchronously with social interactions like speaking. One writes:

Listening involves both verbal, and nonverbal responses and perceptions of effective listening are tied to these patterns of response. These patterns of response impact both the immediate communication and the relationship of those communicating. (Hall, 2012, p. 83)

Listening is often part of social intercommunications: conversations, discussions, debates, presentations, co-planning, co-design, dialogues and metalogues, and others. One researcher writes: “The average person does not actually speak for long periods in each day, and listening is the predominant interpersonal activity...Listening is...a fundamental pre-requisite skill upon which other skills are predicated” (Hargie, 2009, p. 982). Listening requires some level of focus on aural input, making meaning of the sounds, eliciting further inputs as needed, and applying the new learning in working memory and / or

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