



Dialogic listening

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What is it?

Dialogic listening is a special form of listening that is a prerequisite for dialogue; indeed, it is usually asserted that dialogue cannot occur without this form of listening that lets the other happen to us.

Dialogic listening can be contrasted with hearing; where the former requires an engaged attention to the other, the latter is merely aural perception. Moreover, this active engaged attention requires more than just focused listening: it also needs listening-by-questioning—a form which preserves an orientation to openness, prevents premature closure and which involves genuine curiosity about the other.

Dialogic listening can also be distinguished from active or empathic listening. In the latter, emphasis is placed on getting into the other's "shoes" and thus accurately understanding the other's meanings. In contrast, dialogic listening orients participants to their joint activity where each participant's understanding is seen as a co-constructed process. In dialogic listening the focus is on what is going on between the participants, not what is inside their heads.

Who uses the concept?

The concept is used by a limited number of scholars in communication and dialogic philosophy who seek to draw attention to the communicative practices that are necessary to bring about any dialogic moment. The concept also plays a particularly important role in elaborations of communication or dialogic ethics: it is out of our listening that we offer our ethical response to the other.

Fit with intercultural dialogue?

The concept of dialogic listening is directly relevant to intercultural dialogue. Within the intercultural context the concept helps to draw attention to the importance of listening for the other across, sometimes wide, cultural divides. It also serves to highlight the importance of engaging in certain specific types of listening practices in order to increase the possibility of dialogue occurring.

What work remains?

Further elaboration of what it means to listen dialogically in intercultural contexts is required. For example, what is more or less likely to be attended to across different cultures? How does a listening-by-questioning approach fit with different cultures? Are there other ways of dialogically listening in different cultural contexts that still show the other they have truly been heard?

Resources

- Lipari, L. (2010). Listening, thinking, being. *Communication Theory*, 20, 348–362.
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- Shotter, J. (2009). Listening in a way that recognizes/realizes the world of "the other". *International Journal of Listening*, 23, 21–43.
- Stewart, J., & Thomas, M. (1995). Dialogic listening: Sculpting mutual meanings. In J. Stewart (Ed.), *Bridges Not Walls* (184–201). New York: McGraw-Hill.