



## Opinion Science Podcast

*Hosted by Andy Luttrell*

### High-Quality Listening with Guy Itzchakov

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#### **Andy Luttrell:**

That's Carl Rogers. He was a key figure in clinical psychology and research in psychotherapy. He's probably best known for what's called the "person-centered" approach to therapy, which he started developing back in the 1940s. He had this notion that everyone can change and improve and that the therapist's job isn't to tell a client what to do, but they should instead be an empathetic partner to the client, helping them see for themselves how to realize their potential.

And one of the ways to do this...is to listen. When your friend or partner or colleague is talking to you, you may think you're listening. But Rogers was like, yeah, there's listening... and then there's listening. Sometimes it's called "active listening" or "empathic listening" or "listening with understanding." To really listen is to shake away your preconceptions, shake away any judgment, shake away your own thoughts...and try to fully immerse yourself in the other person's perspective.

So when it comes to therapy, the idea is that when a therapist really earnestly listens to the client, that creates an environment for insight and change. In 1952, Rogers wrote in a popular magazine that "Good communication...within or between people is always therapeutic."

But it goes beyond therapy. Rogers once wrote, "whatever I have learned is applicable to all of my human relationships, not just working with clients with problems." Sure enough, those who knew him remembered him as an exceptional listener. He brought this stuff into his everyday life.

So in our everyday relationships, I guess maybe we have an inner psychotherapist yearning to change the basic personality of those around us? But more often, our hopes for other people are more humble. When someone believes something dangerous, holds opinions we find distasteful, supports a politician we don't care for, we may wish they could change their mind. And what if the answer is to just listen to them? Listen really, really well.

You're listening to Opinion Science, the show about our opinions, where they come from, and how they change. I'm Andy Luttrell. And this week, I talk to Guy Itzchakov. He's an Associate Professor in the Department of Human Services at the University of Haifa in Israel. I met Guy a few years ago. He had struck up some collaborations with mutual friends, doing this cool work on how listening to people could affect their opinions. And I was like, "who is this guy who just burst

onto the scene doing this interesting work with my friends?” A little while later, and I became one of those collaborators too. But the work Guy and I have been doing together isn’t actually about listening, so it was a pleasant chance for me to fire up another video call to Guy not about our project, but about the grand scope of his work on listening as a way to shape opinions. Here it is!

**Andy Luttrell:**

So, what’s listening? What is that? What does that mean? Here’s how I’ll put it: What’s the difference between high and low-quality listening?

**Guy Itzhakov:**

Okay. I will start by saying that listening is complex to understand. We all think we know how to define listening because it’s an everyday behavior, but the definition is quite complex. For example, there is a paper from 1989 that tried to organize the literature around listening definitions. I’m talking only about interpersonal listening. And this paper identified more than 50 different definitions. So, in order to answer what’s the difference between high and low-quality listening, I need to speak a bit about what is listening and how we define it.

So, the first dimension we identified is attention. Attention is usually conveyed by nonverbal cues, such as maintaining eye contact with the speaker, body posture that conveys interest, and facial expressions that reflect the attention dimension, which is a nonverbal but highly important one that we identified. So, the second dimension is comprehension or understanding, and this is the dimension which I think... I don’t have any data to speak for it because all dimensions are pretty integrated within one another or intertwined, but this is the... If I had to make a hypothesis, this would be the most important one because it conveys the speaker that you get them, that you really get them, and we all have an innate need to feel understood.

You know, even one of the predictors of interpersonal chemistry is that you feel that this person gets me, and so how do we show comprehension or understanding to our speakers? Two examples of behaviors of the listeners, which is by the way here, and I’m gonna talk about now the verbal component of listening. So, attention was nonverbal behaviors, but there are also verbal behaviors of listening, and this is why listening is not the same as being silent, or this is why listening is not the same as hearing. There also are verbal aspects.

So, for example, one of them is question asking. I’m from Israel and we have a tendency to ask closed-ended questions, or questions where the answer is intertwined within the answer, so he shouldn’t have done it, right? This type of question. And so, there is, by the way, an entire literature about question asking, so a good question needs to be open and not give what you, as the listener, think is the correct answer. And it’s the tone of the question, but it’s also the words that you use. For example, there is a great book about parenting called *How To Speak So Kids Will Listen and How To Listen So Kids Will Talk*, and they build a lot on Gestalt’s psychology, and give an example of, for example, a how versus a why question. So, I can ask one of my daughters, “Why did it happen,” versus, “How did it happen?” Of course, it depends how I say it, but a why question usually elicits more defensiveness because I need to explain myself. Why? Because this and that. And how is usually more open, and there are other nuances to how we ask the questions, but when speakers are asked good questions, especially when they’re done talking... So, something I have consistently found in my listening experiments is that regardless of the topic, people can talk for

like two, three minutes almost about anything. And in this, I call it the automatic pilot, so during the automatic pilot the listener is important, but not as important as when the speaker is out of words.

And there, I remember the first time I became aware of it. I was a graduate student, and I brought a trained listener. She was one of the best listeners. I saw how she helped the speaker with her questions to introspect deeply, so this is where the listener really comes in, whether we're gonna have some awkward silence or whether I'm gonna ask you a good question that will help you think deeply about your attitude. So, question asking is very important, and another thing that is behavior. Comprehension is paraphrasing or reflection, so repeating what you heard and asking afterwards did I understand correctly, and do you have anything else to add? And this is quite important because studies show that even when we listen well we remember up to 50% of what the other person said, and so the reflection when I ask, "Did I miss anything?" So, you would complete the parts that I've missed with parts that were important to you, so you would help me to be a better listener as we continue our conversation, because I will be like, "Okay, I missed it, and it was important for Andy to know that, so it's probably important for him, so I'm gonna pay attention now that he's going to talk about it." So, you help me as a listener to complete my gaps.

And I also help you, because when you will hear what you said from a third-party perspective thing, what I've found, that it really helps people to look at things in a different way. And even if I missed a lot, or I didn't understand you as you wanted to, I signal that I really want to understand you, which is very important and also something that I usually start my lectures with what is not listening. So, one of the things we do, and Carl Rogers, which a lot of my work is based on his observations, said that we have a tendency to evaluate what we hear. And often we think we understand in the beginning because we interpret it based on our own inner world, and then usually we stop listening or we shut ourself down internally and wait for our turn to speak, or we reply. But if we really listen further, we will often realize that what we initially thought the speaker said was not really what they meant. So, this is the comprehension dimension.

And the last dimension-

**Andy Luttrell:**

Well, let me take a page out of this book and clarify that I'm understanding. And also, as a summary point for folks who are listening, so what I'm hearing is that listening involves... Well, one way to put it is I can communicate to you that I am listening through my body language, actions, nonverbal expressions that communicate my attentiveness to the points you're making. I can also communicate to you that I'm listening by verbally asking questions, clarifying, pausing to help get a sense that I'm actually understanding you and not just passively hearing the sounds that your mouth is making. So, so far, listening is two pronged. Attention and understanding. Well, one, did I get that right? And what's next?

**Guy Itzhakov:**

Yeah. You're a good listener. I think-

**Andy Luttrell:**

I have to say this is making me very self-conscious to have someone talk to me about listening as I'm interviewing them and having to be a listener, and the things that you're saying do come up in the interviewer space, because a lot of these are dilemmas, like a bad interview for a product like this, like a media interview goes poorly when it's clear the interviewer is not listening, doesn't care, asks questions that clearly are out of sync with what the person is actually interested in and a listener can tell. A listener to the podcast can tell. And so, these are all helpful notes for me as we're on episode 75 or so of this show, so things that I ought to know by now.

**Guy Itzhakov:**

And a few years ago, I had a great conversation with a freelance writer. She writes for The Atlantic and The Washington Post and she became really interested in listening after she realized that she and her colleagues are not good listeners at all, because they have their own prior agenda when they interview someone they disagree with, or agree with, and she really did a transformation. She was one of the best listeners I've conversed with, and so I know that in this profession, and I know that's not your profession, you do it as a hobby, but with interviews and for reporters, this is often what we see nowadays is actually a lot of the opposite of listening, because at least where I come from the interviewer will speak more than the interviewee.

And by the way, speaking of understanding, one thing that is a sign of not listening is to tell your speaker, "I know what you mean," and it's usually a sign of not listening because if you want to show that you know what your speaker means, it's like telling someone, "Trust me." It won't help them to trust you. You need to show them that you can trust you. So, through these behaviors you can show that you understand, but usually after we say, "I know what you mean," we start talking and giving examples from ourselves. So, we become the speaker, so this is often a catch for listeners.

And the third dimension is we call it intention or positive intention, which refers to the mindset of the listener to help the speaker, to be helpful, or to be benevolent towards the speaker. Because you can say, "Well, the first two dimensions you just spoke about, attention and comprehension, you can see it in an interrogation of a suspect in the police station, or at the courtroom where a lawyer interrogates a witness from the opposite side," and usually I've found that listening is a very positive, powerful process, but taking these two examples into account, these are very aversive experiences, but the dimensions are there. Many of the behaviors are there, so what's the difference?

And the difference is that there is no positive intention, so the speaker does not feel a positive intentions from the speaker. And this is, I think, the most complex dimension to exemplify my behaviors, because it's usually the perception. One way, by the way, to do it, is called hedging, where instead of saying what you think, which is very Israel-like, so, "I think you should do this and that." It's like, "Would it be helpful or perhaps," using actually words that convey some uncertainty. Perhaps, maybe, and another very important aspect is to be non-judgmental towards your speaker, which is difficult, and being non-judgmental is not the same as agreeing with the other person. Non-judgmental means that I accept your freedom to express what you think. So, agreeing is not the same as non-judgmental. Even use words like validation. Validation is not

validating your attitudes, so like, “Yeah, Andy, you’re correct. I agree with you.” Validation is validating the person.

For example, to say, “Thank you, Andy, for sharing it with me. I’m sure it wasn’t easy for you.” This type of stuff that are independent of the content that you shared but do show appreciation of the fact that you shared it with me. So, this is like... Relatively, the umbrella of the dimension. The interesting thing, though, is that speakers’ perception, which is what I focus on in my research, speakers’ perception of the listening they receive is usually holistic. For example, when someone listens to you, you don’t go after, “Well, his attention was three out of five and the comprehension was...” You have this holistic perception of how well you were listened to.

**Andy Luttrell:**

I wondered that. As you were talking, I was thinking how... Because I know that you measure perceptions of am I being listened to, and is it that one of these matters more, or that people separate these out? And for sure, there can be cases like you say of someone who’s completely silent, actually is taking everything in, so I hear, I see that you’re attending to my speech, but you’re not showing me that you understand. I have to sort of assume, hopefully, that you are. So, that’s sort of like halfway to good listening. It sort of seems like you’re saying if you only have one out of these three, the experience is probably not gonna be, “Oh, I feel quite listened to.” There’s sort of like all three of these I need to feel like are interlocking in this conversation.

**Guy Itzchakov:**

Exactly. And I often do an exercise in my class called time sharing, and usually in time sharing we have turns, and each one of us will speak for three minutes while the other person just listens without verbally responding. And usually when I ask for reflection afterwards, half of the speakers find it really challenging, because they need the feedback from the listener, and half like, “Oh, it was so great to speak without anyone interrupting.” And now there was an interesting research just recently published that found that this time sharing exercise benefits more people who are high on narcissism, so it reduces their social anxiety, but it increases social anxiety for people high on depression.

And I saw this diversity whenever I give this exercise. Some people really like it, but I think even more than 50% really find it awkward. The silence is really weird for people, and this is something we train our RAs, to not be afraid of silence. Silence can be constructive. When we really want to think, we need our quiet time, and we need to introspect, and we need to... We need this quietness. But usually during a conversation, especially with a stranger, people are really uncomfortable with silence because they think that, “Oh no, I can’t allow this silence to be,” and then they just try to complete the silence. And if you learn to accept the silence, then more meaningful contact can come afterwards. It’s like you have to dig deeper in your mind in order to get to the more profound information.

And this is something I’ve found through observations and through my experiments that it requires training to teach people it’s okay to have a silence. It’s okay when after your speaker says something, and now there is a few seconds of silence. Don’t be afraid to jump in with something. It’s okay. Let the silence be. So, you asked for a definition. I answered... I went around.

**Andy Luttrell:**

So, now we know. Well, so one question I still have is as I understood it as you were setting it up, this is what listening is, which is different from high-quality listening, or I'm getting lost a little bit in that distinction, right? Because when I was reading some of the stuff that you've written about what listening is, I couldn't tell like, "Well, this sounds like good listening," but is good listening all these things and more? Or a combination of these three is high-quality listening?

**Guy Itzhakov:**

So, it's a good question. I think it's the combination. When I create listening conditions in my lab, what we do is we play with the behaviors. So, for example, in the high-quality listening condition, I'll have my research assistants, we have a protocol that we build. They will provide reflection, ask questions, eye contact, and I haven't done a poor listening condition in a while, because I'm interested in the high quality, the benefits of high-quality listening, so I usually compare them to a moderate listening condition, but when I construct the lower quality listening, so there are less questions. The eye contact is there, but it's not always there. They're not ignoring the other person, which I've also done in the past when I wanted to have a poor-quality listening condition, but basically I play with the quality of the behavior.

So, if we take facial expressions, for example, you can have facial expressions of high-quality listening are to show interest, to show that you're with the other person, body posture, you lean towards the person. So, now if you want to reduce its quality, let's take it to the extreme, so it would be more clear. Let's take it to the negative end. I will, for example, during the conversation, I will raise my eyebrow a few times, or I might nod my head in disagreement. Even modestly, like this, this stuff makes a difference, and it's called... By the way, it's called backchannel behavior. This is the channel through which the listener impacts the conversation. I've often noticed a misperception that listening is passive, and it is the speaker who determines the role, and this cannot be further away from it. The listener determines at least 50% of where the conversation will go using all this backchannel behavior.

So, this is how I create the... For example, in the poor-quality listening condition, we will not have a paraphrase. They will not paraphrase. Or I've never tried it, but they can paraphrase in a completely wrong way, or ask an irrelevant question, or this is also annoying. We found when someone speaks and you try to get into their sentence, like, "Eh, eh, uh, eh-" and stuff like this, this really annoys people because it's like you don't really want to listen to me. Just waiting to cut into the lane. So, we'll do this kind of stuff if you want to do poor-quality listening, so basically we take the dimensions and we play with their quality in order to create different valence conditions more positive or more negative.

**Andy Luttrell:**

Would you say... It kind of almost sounds like it's that listening is an either/or sort of thing. You're either listening or you're not. And if you are listening, you can do it really well, or just the bare minimum, right? It just sort of seems like there's this threshold at which you go moderately good listening is, "Yeah, you're doing all the things. You're listening." But you can communicate better that you are listening. I'm assuming you're not actually gonna take a strong stance that it's dichotomous, but I just wanted to push it in that direction to see how wrong is that? Or is listening really continuous, on a continuum?

**Guy Itzhakov:**

Yeah, so we are finding that listening is on a continuum because what you describe is like to do the just enough to come across as an okay listener, this would be what we call like a moderate listening, and when we talk, and when we want to study changes that occur within speakers, being just okay or coming off as an average listener would not impact the construct that I'm interested to focus on.

For example, if we're talking about attitude change, so I've found in my studies that when speakers speak to a listener exhibiting good quality, high-quality listening, their attitude becomes more clear of them. Now, if you're just okay listener, it will not be strong enough in order to produce this type of change. Or become aware of, and this is what I took from Rogers. Rogers talks about multiplicity within ourselves, that we are more able to recognize and become aware of, and be non-judgmental towards ourself about holding maybe other points of view that might be an opposite or initial attitude, like ambivalence, for example, when we feel that our listener is not judging us. But this takes... This is a process that has to be... Those have to be strong enough in order to see some effects.

So, this is why I measure it on a continuum. I do create the conditions, but when we have what we call the manipulation check, we have their validated states of listening, and you can really see where people stand on the different conditions, and it varies.

**Andy Luttrell:**

Okay. Okay. Great. Now we have it. You sort of teed us up, so this seems like a good chance to transition to the applications of listening that you've looked at, and one of the things that it wasn't super clear to me until after reading a little bit was the powerful conclusion I think you can draw from your work, which is if I want to be a persuasive person, if I want to encourage people to rethink their opinions and beliefs, one of the things I can do is not find the best arguments for my position, is not to generate a bunch of talking points, but just to become a better listener, right? I could become a more influential person not by saying anything differently, really, but by becoming a better listener.

So, with that framing, would you agree with that framing?

**Guy Itzhakov:**

Completely.

**Andy Luttrell:**

Or how would you modify it?

**Guy Itzhakov:**

I couldn't have framed it in a better way. And one of the reasons I started this line of research about listening, connecting listening to attitudes, I remember when I first presented my work in the Attitude Preconference, I was rejected from a poster presentation because people thought... I came from like, "Where are you coming from? This is listening and this is attitudes." But I've been intrigued by a process I often see in my culture, where people argue with each other, and we now

as society is becoming more and more polarized, we see it in our daily lives. And what I've noticed is that not only you don't change the other person's attitude, you actually make it more entrenched, or more extreme, and then I learned it's called the boomerang effect, and we know that when people resist persuasion, they're more certain in their attitudes.

And I relied a lot on Rogers's work, and what... I was looking for the common denominator, like why are these processes of arguments... I also come from... I did my PhD in an organizational behavior program, so we see the same thing, by the way, when employees receive feedback. Because people do not like being told stuff about themselves. And then they become very... Not every time, but a lot of times they become very narrow minded. And I was looking for, "Okay, so why?" Why does it happen? And the thing that I, reading the literature about it, which really came from different places. This is what I tried to integrate it, was that it's a process of defensiveness, of when... So, remember, when we argue, when it's your turn to talk, instead of really listening to you, I will think how I'm gonna react, right? How I'm gonna counter argue.

So, basically we did not listen to one another. We just conducted an exercise in how to bolster our own attitudes. And then, when I read the work of Rogers, and there are other... For example, for motivational interviewing stuff, eliciting ambivalence through asking questions, this type of stuff, I noticed that it's all about creating open mindedness within the speaker. So, I thought, "Okay, so if by being a good listener when someone speaks and being better than an okay listener, but in a good listening situation when people talk about their attitude they might..." The structure of the attitudes might change because they'll be able to recognize maybe other points in their attitudes.

We had other evidence from role clarity in the workspace where I thought, "Okay, maybe it can be also applied to attitude clarity." The attitude will be clear. They will maybe want to share their attitude more, but not necessarily to persuade other people. And so, what I found in my first set of studies, that in good listening, interestingly, it didn't change the valence of the speaker's attitude. So, for example, in one of the studies we've asked about organ donation. So, if you are in favor of organ donation, if someone listened well to you, you wouldn't become against organ donation or vice versa. But your view will become more complex on average. You will feel that... You will recognize that there are other aspects that are not in line with your original thinking that make sense.

Recently... Not so recently. 2020, building on this research, it was a study I conducted with my colleague, Netta Weinstein, from the U.K. We found that when speakers are listened to well, when they talk about their prejudiced attitudes, they become less prejudiced. Now, there is a caveat for all of this. It depends or requires that you have some initial ambivalence to begin with. So, if you're a completely one sided, this is what I found. If we're completely one sided, it won't change your attitude. At least the 10 to 15 minutes conversations that I've been doing in my lab. If you're only one sided, we don't see a change. We don't see it become more complex. But if there is some, so to the question does listening create complexity or ambivalence, or does listening increase ambivalence or complexity, and we found it's more likely to be the second.

So, you do have to have some minimum level of readiness, but on average this is what... The same with prejudice, for example. Speakers who are completely prejudiced about a specific social group,



even they rated the listening as very good, they faked a sense of relatedness, but when you see the attitudes pre-post, nothing. There are lots in between.

**Andy Luttrell:**

Okay. Yeah. That does help as I sort of parse the difference between some of the different findings. So, just to recap and put myself in the mind of someone who's being listened to in these kinds of studies, if I enter into this conversation with at least some nagging sense that there might be some complication, like I have my own view on this issue, but I understand it's generally... It's not a sealed and shut case. I am encouraged to explain my opinion to you. Let's call it organ donation, like you said, right? I have a certain stance on this and I'm now in a position to explain where I'm coming from to someone. And they seem to be really attentive, and they're really locking eyes on me, and they're asking questions that show that they've been actively listening, and it seems like they truly want the best from this conversation.

I find myself in this conversation exploring the complexities of organ donation and thinking, "Oh, maybe this is something that's not an obviously good or only bad sort of a thing. Maybe there's some nuance here that now I realize and I'm willing to acknowledge is the case." I feel quite clear about where I stand on all these things, but I also kind of openly acknowledge the complexity just by virtue of the fact that you gave me the platform in this open sort of way. Does that capture the kind of phenomenon that you're seeing?

**Guy Itzhakov:**

Exactly. And it's interesting because we know from the attitude literature that usually when we feel ambivalent about something, we feel less clear about it.

**Andy Luttrell:**

I was gonna ask you about that.

**Guy Itzhakov:**

Yeah. And this is actually thanks to the other dimension or the antecedent of certainty that is you will become more clear, but you don't necessarily feel you're more correct, and I think what's... I just want to say a bit more about the process because I think it's like the interpersonal becomes intrapersonal, because when there is good listening, we call it in our review paper a sense of togetherness, and there are a lot of work from even the emotion literature that shows that when people are... they're feeling more calm, they're more able to be creative and open minded, so if there is good listening between us, you will feel more psychologically safe. And this will allow... We call it reflective self-awareness or non-defensive introspection that you will be also more authentic with yourself and there is a better chance that you will acknowledge the complexity.

Because the world is complex. There are sides to everything. But usually, we need to be ready to acknowledge this openness in this way. So, yeah, there are... We've only tried it with relatively weak attitudes, so we've never done... Now, I have a process about listening during disagreements. The results are really interesting, but so far what we've published are on relatively weak attitudes. I'm sure that if we were to take the same settings, the same procedures to let's say political attitudes, I don't think we find differences there because these are attitudes that are difficult to change.

I do think, by the way, it's not that I don't think the process works. I do think it works. But it needs more time. For example, if you have an hour conversation with a great listener and there are actually some... I read a few... It was stories about... For example, stories of people who were antisemitic, so when they really talked but a long time, then they suddenly started seeing things differently. So, I think, and again, I've never tested it, but I think the stronger the attitude, the higher dose of high-quality listening you need.

**Andy Luttrell:**

Part of me also thinks that it's also just harder to engage in high-quality listening, like for people to do that, because one of the things that I was thinking about is this is why the nature of political chat shows and interviews are never gonna go anywhere, because the whole point is to say, "You're wrong. We're right. My questions are only to try to show how stupid you are." And everyone tuning into listen is just waiting for you to fail, so it's just... There's no point at which you go... Because it seems like that safety question just isn't present in these sort of popular media type interviews. Whereas, if I go, "Hey, if I realize oh, you know what? I might have been wrong. It would be nice if I could acknowledge that," and the listener goes, "Oh yeah, that's fine. You're neither good or bad for whatever you said before but this is a comfortable place to explore that."

I just think it's we load politics up with our moral convictions so much that it's hard for us to actually, legitimately engage in that process. Or you know, maybe it's even difficult to believe that someone is genuinely listening, right? We have in the back of our mind like, "I get it. It looks like they're listening. But they're just waiting to pounce on me. I can tell." What person is not gonna try and catch me up for being inconsistent?

**Guy Itzchakov:**

I completely agree. I just saw today, I saw an interview of a political person in the Israeli government, and she interviewed with... Nowadays, we know which channel supports which side, so a reporter who's very recognizable with the other side, and she was like, "I should get rewarded for doing an interview with you," and for the entire conversation he was raising his eyebrows, and nodding, you saw the dynamics in the conversation. And the questions were questions that are not really questions, or like, "You were wrong before," et cetera, et cetera. "Is it right that you were wrong?" To put someone on the... There wasn't really a conversation.

And we talked about defensiveness. This is what we see in television, and we see the defensive nature because of the argumentative nature of the discussions. And when we have such an utmost fear of lack of psychological safety, there is no chance we can bridge divides. This is why I push listening a lot. We're researchers, so we need to be cautious about what we say based on our findings, but I do think there is suggestive evidence or some hope that... some preliminary evidence that if we really listen well to one another we can bridge divides between many, many, across many topics.

The question is, as you mentioned, how can you listen to someone you really disagree with? But often this is the first thing, so if I'm not ready to listen to you and we're holding different views, we're gonna be arguing in a very short time after the conversation starts. So, how did you listen to someone you had stereotypes towards? And just focus on the listener because the speaker is one

side, but the conversation is a two-way street. So, what about the listeners? How can we listen better to people which we know hold opposite attitudes or belong to a social group that we have negative attitudes towards? This is also I feel a challenge that as a listening researcher I need to address, because I don't have the solution at this point. I'm intrigued with the question but don't have the answers yet.

**Andy Luttrell:**

So, one other thing that I wanted to hit in terms of the stuff that you had just been talking about was... So, it's clear, I think, that listening provides an opportunity for speakers to explore in an open way where they stand on something, which seems a little out of sync to me with the findings you get in the prejudice effect, right? Where you say when it's about attitudes it's not making people reliably more positive or more negative, but it seems like with prejudice it's all moving in one direction, right? And so, why wouldn't listening just create change in any direction as people just explore openly? Instead, you're finding that people are reliably moving in the direction of less prejudice when they feel they're listened to.

**Guy Itzhakov:**

It's a good question. I think we can think about it in terms of attitude extremity. So, because ambivalence and extremity are associated, so the more you're ambivalent, the less extreme, the less one sided you are. The way we measured it, in our prejudice paper we measured the attitude favorability towards the social group they discuss on a thermometer scale from one to 100, and if you think of it in an attitude extremity framework, so you do see that the extremity reduces. They get less deviated from the midpoint of the scale. Usually in the... So, if I was negative, I'm now less negative.

Now, it's not that... Let's take the midpoint of the scale. Let's take 50, which is the midpoint, so let's say I was 10 towards this group. It's not now that I'm turning into a 60. I'm now positively warm about this group. But I will be let's say like a 25, or 20 even, so I do move towards the midpoint of the scale, which is consistent with what we found about the reduced extremity in this sense.

**Andy Luttrell:**

I'm less intensely negative toward them.

**Guy Itzhakov:**

Exactly. So, it's not that now that you love them, and now after this conversation that you change the valence of your attitude from being negative about them to being positive about them, but you did become more moderate in your views about them. I think this explains it. The less prejudice towards the group. I hope it answers the question.

**Andy Luttrell:**

Yeah. And again, just to put it in perspective, it's like I think a lot of people would talk about the importance of listening in persuasion as like, "Oh, you want to actually understand where this other person is coming from so you can tailor your messaging to them." Whereas, you're saying like, "No, no, no. Just listen." Just listening provides this space for people to actually reason themselves into more nuance than they had before, right? And so, you can be a powerful agent of influence

just by giving people that chance to talk. The cultural thing that you were talking about too reminds me, just as a trivia point, there was an episode of this podcast a while ago on this program that IBM made that debates people, so an artificial intelligence machine that debates people, and it's IBM Haifa that was really at the center of doing this, and the guy... All the key figures in hatching the idea were Israeli.

And part of all of my interviews with people for that episode that didn't end up making the show, but I thought was interesting, was how important was being Israeli to you as giving you a background to think about debate. And everyone said, "Oh, there's this culture of everyone argues with each other and where else in the world would someone have the idea like let's teach computers to do this?"

**Guy Itzhakov:**

As an Israeli, I should tell you I disagree with what you just said. There is a sentence called two Israelis, four opinions. I think nowadays it's six opinions. And I just wanted... So, when you said in the attitude literature, when you talk about [inaudible 0:41:30.2], how to frame my arguments, I wouldn't say by just listening to them. I would say by genuinely listening to them. Because just sounds like I'm doing... Another important thing is called a listening attitude, and it is the extent to which it's also relevant to the workplace... If you want to elicit change in another person, the question is where do you stand on what is the source of this change?

So, what do I mean? If you have what we call the strong listening attitude, you will probably... Your mindset will be that the solution to this person's problem lies within them, within the speaker, and your job as the listener is not to argue, or to provide arguments on either side. Doesn't matter. But to help them produce the solution that already lies within them. Now, a weak listening attitude will be that I think the solution should come from outside, and for example, these will be people who are quicker to give advice or unsolicited advice, which can be very frustrating for people sometimes when you just want to share, so it depends, but I do think good listening is an important antecedent when we talk about our attitudes. We often talk about as the message provider and the message recipient, but what happens to the quality of the conversation? How does the quality of the conversation impact, by the way, both sides? As now I'm becoming more and more interested in also in the listeners, as I mentioned, like what happens when in the conversational attitude... Does my attitude as a listener change or maybe become also more ambivalent when I heard an opposite attitude? Maybe it might even become more extreme if I couldn't share it with you.

So, there are a lot of open questions that we don't know, but it's all relating to sharing our perspectives with each other.

**Andy Luttrell:**

That's great. As a way of wrapping up, I just need to ask. How did I do listening to you today?

**Guy Itzhakov:**

I'll send you a report afterwards.

**Andy Luttrell:**

Give me my grade.

**Guy Itzhakov:**

You listened really well. And the fact that, for example, I know that the audience were not able to see the video, but I noticed that your nodding was really... It was timed. And the questions were very relevant. And your reflections were very accurate. Now, it reminds me now I can say that all the advice I give for good listening, basically you can take them, you can throw them into the garbage. You know why? Because if you have an interest in the other person, in the speaker, you don't need to, and I know often when I talk to people they... Okay, how do I... You also mentioned this. How do I come across as a good listener? How do I make myself be perceived as a good listener? If you listen well, you will be perceived as a good listener in the majority of the time.

You can basically... Of course, I'm exaggerating, but you can take all the stuff I said about nodding, and facial expressions, throw them out the window. Try to learn new things about the person you're talking to. And I think this is what you're doing in this podcast. You read the papers and you have a learning goal orientation. But if you really have an interest in the other person, you don't have to think about the verbal and nonverbal behaviors, right? When you listen to your daughter, right? You don't need to think about now am I nodding in the right time, am I smiling? You listen to her because you love her. And so, we can't love everyone, strangers and stuff, but a task I give my students, for example, that I tell them during the following week... I teach in the Department of Human Services. It's organizational behavior. Each day, learn something new about a colleague.

And they often come to me with reflections like, "Well, I suddenly have these really deep conversations with people I've been working a lot for a long time, but I've never really knew them." And this is just... Take an interest in the other person. So, it's not easy to achieve, but if this happens, most of the times the other behaviors will be... It doesn't need to be faked, or played, or doing just the right behaviors to come across as a good listener.

**Andy Luttrell:**

You've got it completely wrong. I faked the whole thing. I just did tricks. I don't care about you or what you do.

**Guy Itzhakov:**

We're also working together, so we have a lasting relationship, so I'll get back to you. It's okay.

**Andy Luttrell:**

Well, thanks to you so much for coming and talking about all this stuff. This was super interesting. It was great to learn more about it.

**Guy Itzhakov:**

Thank you for inviting me.

**Andy Luttrell:**

Alrighty, that'll do it for another episode of Opinion Science. Thanks so much to Guy Itzhakov for sharing his work. As always, check out the episode webpage for links to learn more about Guy and the research we talked about today.

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Okeedoke. That's it for this week. Thanks for LISTENING. And I'll see you in a couple of weeks for more Opinion Science. Buh bye...