

If You Want People to Listen to You, Tell a Story

Guy Itzchakov, Dotan Castro & Avraham. N. Kluger

The Hebrew University of Jerusalem

Abstract

Listeners are known to influence the quality of the speaker's narrative (Bavelas, Coates, & Johnson, 2000; Pasupathi & Rich, 2005). However, the reverse is not clear: Does narration quality influence listening quality? We hypothesized that (a) speakers influence the quality of listening because when they share a meaningful story they make listeners listen well, and (b) that story-induced listening is positively associated with psychological safety and negatively associated with social anxiety (Rogers, 1951). We tested these hypotheses in three experiments, where we randomly assigned 30, 52 and 44 Israeli students to listening and speaking roles and either to a *meaningful* ("In the next six minutes please tell your partner about a meaningful event that you have experienced") or to a *descriptive* narrative condition ("... tell your partner about your daily routine" in Study 1 and Study 2; and "... describe the structures in the university and its area." in Study 3). In Study 2 and Study 3, we also assessed the manipulation with a narrative-quality manipulation check. Indeed, in these studies, listeners in the meaningful narrative condition rated it as having a higher narrative quality than listeners in the descriptive-narrative condition, $d = 0.83, p < .01$; $d = 1.59, p < .01$. More important, in all experiments, speakers rated the listeners of meaningful narratives, in contrast to descriptive narratives, as better listeners, $d = 0.64, p = .04$; $d = 0.61, p = .02$, and $d = 1.10, p < .01$, respectively. Moreover, we found that the listening induced by the narrative quality mediated the effects of narrative condition on psychological safety, and social anxiety (Study 3). Thus, the narrative determines listening: sharing meaningful stories makes people listen well and good listening benefits the narrator by increasing feeling of psychological safety and decreasing feeling of social anxiety.

To request a full version of this paper, and any correspondence concerning this paper should be addressed to [Guy Itzchakov](#) or [Dotan R. Castro](#), The Jerusalem School of Business Administration, The Hebrew University—Mt. Scopus, Jerusalem, 91905, Israel.

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