

Recognising the different voices in practice

Research Insight

We carried out a voices recognition test with 109 participants, in which three different groups ('Novices' with no prior knowledge of VoicePrint, 'Intermediates' with about 4 hours acquaintance with it and 'Experts' with a minimum of 15 hours formal training) were asked to identify examples of the nine voices from a set of 30 audio clips. This short summary highlights the key insights that emerged.

Principal findings

- None of us understand what others are saying as well as we think we do.
- Even a limited (half day) of instruction can significantly improve the quality of our listening.
- The untrained ear has an approximate rather than an accurate understanding of intention.
- The trained ear doesn't work faster, but makes better use of the same time.
- Good listeners make better use of a 'momentary pause' when they are unsure, probably because they have a frame of reference (in this case VoicePrint) that helps them to differentiate and make more accurate sense of what they're hearing.
- Within each group (Experts, Intermediates, Novices) some individuals are much better listeners than others.
- There was no evidence (from this study at least) that women are 'better listeners' than men.
- Speaking and hearing are dissociated; the tendency to use a particular voice does not enhance our ability to recognise it when someone else uses it.
- Some voices are harder to recognise than others.
- *Inquire*, *Direct* and *Advise* are the easiest voices to recognise.
- *Probe* is often confused with *Inquire*, suggesting that the value of its focusing power is sometimes lost.
- *Diagnose* is by far the hardest voice to recognise, probably because much of it takes place as an inner voice.
- The distinction between *Diagnosing* (arriving at an understanding) and *Evaluating* (arriving at a judgement) is not generally well understood.
- *Articulate* is often interpreted as *Diagnosis* or *Evaluation*; its distinctive potential for synthesising and setting out a basis of shared understanding may not be fully recognised or appreciated.
- *Advocate* can be hard to recognise, perhaps because it can take many forms. It is often mistaken for the *Direct* voice, as a directive rather than an expression of personal opinion or feeling.
- *Challenge* too is often misheard as the *Direct* voice, as an instruction rather than an invitation to think again.

A full account of the study is available in our Related Insights paper, *How well do we listen? - The Voices Recognition Study*.