

Considerations on using mindful listening in advising for language learning: A micro study

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Aktives Zuhören (*mindful listening*) gilt als eine der wichtigsten Gesprächstechniken, von denen die Qualität einer Sprachlernberatung in entscheidendem Maße abhängen kann. Von Sprachlernberatern wird erwartet, dass sie den Aussagen der Ratsuchenden ihre ganze Aufmerksamkeit zuteil werden lassen und sie dabei unterstützen ihren Lernprozess zu kontrollieren, Lernbarrieren zu erkennen und abzubauen. In diesem Artikel wird eine Sprachlernberatungssituation an der Universität Hull vorgestellt, um die Anwendung und das Potenzial des aktiven Zuhörens zu illustrieren. Darüber hinaus werden Vorschläge für ein systematisches Training dieser Gesprächstechnik unterbreitet sowie weitere Forschungsperspektiven eröffnet.

1. Introduction

The genesis of this article lies with research into practices of advising for language learning (Yamashita & Mynard 2015; Mynard & Carson 2012; Mozzon-McPherson 2012), and the value inherent in Kelly's (1996) advising macro and micro skills framework (see Table 1). The article extends from this research by utilising mindful listening techniques as a new means to reflect on the quality of advisers' communications skills when engaged in language learning conversations with advisees. This particular focus on mindful listening, as a distinctive self-reflective technique for advisers, contributes to enhancing their professional training. The article employs a specific advising conversation at the University of Hull to illustrate this application of mindful listening strategies.

'Mindful', as used in this article, describes a non-judgmental ability to observe what is immediately around/in us, and draws attention to habits that might impede effective communication – the latter begins with the core skill of listening. In this context, mindful listening is therefore the practice of bringing full awareness to an advisee's message, and helping them notice, and work through, their learning barriers. However, for this to work, advisers themselves have to develop the ability to notice their own filters, barriers in effect, and apply mindful listening techniques to redirect their thoughts, manage their emotions, and offer undivided attention.

Specifically, the conversational analysis of an advising session is used here to examine forms and functions of mindful listening (Langer 2016). This session is

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critically evaluated within the parameters of Kelly's macro and micro skills (as listed in Table 1) and in relation to mindful listening. Consideration is given to how the use of a self-reflective commentary by an adviser can function as a training tool which contributes to raising awareness of how the possibility of employing other questioning techniques might take a dialogue in a different direction, and might generate a different learning reflection and outcome. Whilst these techniques are extensively used in counselling, and other forms of coaching, as part of professional training, they are relatively new in the academic advising practice.

Table 1: The macro-skills of language counselling

MACRO SKILLS	Kelly's (1996: 95)
Initiating	Introducing new directions and options
Goal-setting	Helping the learner to formulate specific goals and objectives
Guiding	Offering advice and information; direction and ideas; suggesting
Modelling	Demonstrating target behaviour
Supporting	Providing encouragement and reinforcement
Giving feedback	Expressing a constructive reaction to the learner's efforts
Evaluating	Appraising the learner's process and achievement
Linking	Connecting the learner's goals and tasks to wider issues
Concluding	Bringing a sequence of work to a conclusion

Table 2: The micro-skills of language counselling

MICRO SKILLS	Kelly's (1996: 96)
Attending	Giving the learner undivided attention
Restating	Repeating in your own words what the learner says
Paraphrasing	Simplifying the learner's statements by focussing on the essence of the message
Summarising	Bringing together the main elements of a message
Questioning	Using open questions to encourage self-exploration
Interpreting	Offering explanations for learner experiences
Reflecting feelings	Surfacing the emotional content of learner statements
Empathising	Identifying with the learner's experience and perception
Confronting	Surfacing discrepancies and contradictions in the learner's communication.

The fundamental premise in this work is that advising sessions are co-constructed 'learning conversations' (Gremmo 2007) designed to help a language learner become a better and more autonomous learner. Ultimately, successful advising can be defined by the quality of the self-reflection and self-direction advisees develop. Consequently, they are able to decide a course of action, gather information from a variety of sources to address their situation/need/problem, consider options available, recognise and address barriers, plan, implement and finally review an agreed set of actions and reflect on their impact on learning.

To this end, a systematic analysis of adviser-advisee sessions is considered a useful professional practice to illustrate how a mindful, intentional and skilled use of language can:

- extend and enhance the learner's reflective process,
- help create the conditions for a successful learning experience,
- be crucial for the evaluation of the positive impact of an advising session,
- be instrumental in the development of a systematic professional training of advisers and the establishment of a community of advising practitioners.

The article concludes by offering suggestions for the development of a more systematic and structured preparation of advisers, particularly in relation to the act of listening within advising skills, and provides suggestions for future collaborative, comparative, and interdisciplinary research.

2. The historical context of advising in language learning in higher education

Advising in Language Learning (ALL) focuses on the skilled dialogic work inherent in assisting students in the process of learning an additional language. Distinctively, it offers particular attention to the inter-relationship between adviser and advisee with regards to both the micro, and macro skills involved (Kelly 1996), the interplay between the individual and social dimension in language learning and the connections between diverse learning spaces (Mozzon-McPherson 2017). Specifically, it centres on the intentionality of language interventions employed by an adviser; these have the purpose of eliciting the advisee's reflection and encouraging the development of sustained, self-managed language learning (Mozzon-McPherson 2013; Kato & Mynard 2015).

The first extensive publication on advising (Mozzon-McPherson & Vismans 2001) mapped the practice within the UK and established a framework in relation to the academic profile and professional training required by advisers shifting the

focus from learner training and learner strategies to the skills involved in the act of advising to support the process of autonomous learning. A decade later, two additional, significant publications extended and expanded the study in this area by:

- reflecting on the theoretical and methodological frameworks which have informed advising research so far (Mynard & Carson 2012)
- analysing forms of reflective dialogues and their impact on the professional development of advisers (Kato & Mynard 2015).

A common concern in ALL research continues to be the need to develop an academic community of practice, and the desire to collaborate, connect with other disciplines, and integrate and adapt the skills of advising in different learning spaces, roles, contexts and discourses. Questions such as

- Which language to use in advising sessions? (Thornton 2012),
- Is advising gender-biased? (Yamashita & Mynard 2015),
- Which forms of advising (writing versus oral; face-to-face versus online, individual versus group advising to mention some) are mostly used and with what challenges for advisers and advisees? (Mynard & Carson 2012; Kleppin & Spänkuch 2014),
- How, and where, can micro and macro skills be developed ? (McCarthy 2016),
- What is the role of emotions in the advising session? (Tassinari 2015)

are contributing to shaping the foundations for a structured training programme for advisers and about advising, though this objective remains as yet unachieved. This article contributes to taking us a step closer.

3. Mindful listening in ALL

In oral communication, both listeners and speakers come to the process with pre-existing barriers (e.g. assumptions, beliefs, ready answers, emotions, and personality and perception filters) which in turn influence the quality of the interaction and its outcomes. How many times we have found ourselves interrupting or finishing the other's sentence? This kind of action is informed by these pre-existing frames. Active listening (Rogers 1951) is one technique that is often taught in counselling programmes to facilitate effective listening, 'effective' here meaning the ability to give undivided attention and show the other person genuine concern and interest. Guidelines for active listening include, inter-alia, maintaining eye contact to show you are listening, paraphrasing what has been

said in order to check understanding and matching body language (Frisk 2009). While these techniques are useful, they do not sufficiently emphasise that both the adviser and the advisee need to monitor their own thoughts and emotions, which may manifest themselves as listening barriers. This is where mindful listening – the practice of bringing full, moment-to-moment awareness to an advisee’s message – can help both adviser and advisee notice and work through their barriers (Shafir 2003). In the process of noticing, they also realise that communication is a complex and delicate act in which learning is a co-constructed experience at the end of which both parties emerge transformed (Mozzon-McPherson 2017). Consequently, mindful listening goes beyond active listening and puts both interactants in a unique position to determine when, and how, barriers are affecting how they process each other’s message.

Consequently, mindful listening requires the ability to suspend judgement. By suspending judgement, mindful listening encourages advisees to feel heard, and to learn to hear themselves as they unpick their language learning problem. It seeks not just the surface meaning but tries to trace where the advisee is 'coming from' – what purpose, interest, need or anxiety is motivating their conversation with the adviser. This means allowing the other person the space to express their complete idea, without interjection or interruption. This technique requires disciplined practice and reflection exercises on the part of the adviser. This study will discuss some of these techniques and exercises as applied at Hull.

In some forms of advising the application of this approach may be perceived to generate tensions and dilemmas in the advisers. This may be the case where the adviser is also the language teacher (Reinders 2012). Institutionally, this dual role carries different expectations and requirements which, in turn, may encourage the use of a more directive language within an advising session. These may be with an emphasis on labelling, diagnosing, rapid assessment, modelling and goal setting, mirroring more closely a teaching frame; though an adviser trained to use mindful listening can still maintain a non-directive communication style because they have embraced the message that self-awareness is fundamental to communicating effectively with others. Whilst it may seem paradoxical that, by paying more attention to ourselves as advisers we become better communicators, mindful listening training claims exactly that. As a clouded mirror cannot reflect accurately, reflection should therefore firstly be on the adviser to equip him with the confidence and knowledge to develop this intentional skilled use of language as pedagogic tool.

One of the underlying principles of ALL is that the learning process involves the whole person and requires the development of a relationship of trust and understanding in a non-threatening environment. This particular approach is informed by person-centred counselling work and guided by Rogers’ (1951) core

conditions – genuineness, respect and empathy – and Egan’s three-stage skilled helper model (1998), which provides a useful framework for advising sessions. Egan’s model includes: action planning, goal setting and reviewing, and emphasises empowerment to "help people become better at helping themselves in their everyday lives" (1998: 7). These additional three steps act as a map which helps interpret and explore the specific issue presented by an advisee and plan a course of action. This combination of Rogerian and Eganian models has helpfully been incorporated into Kelly’s macro and micro skills, widely adopted by advisers, and extensively referred to in analyses of advising interactions.

4. The micro study

Our advising team is located in a language learning centre and appointments are bookable face-to-face or online. The team advises students university-wide, and 'clients' range from students who want to acquire a language through self-directed learning to those taking a degree in languages or take a language as complementary accredited modules. The advice is not language specific – that is they can advise for any language available at the university. Most of our advisers speak three languages and have a profile as language graduates and teachers; some work exclusively in the language learning centre, whilst others may also be involved in formal language teaching. Advising experience varies from 20 to 10 years, with some relatively new to the role. Some have undertaken the Hull accredited advising qualification, whilst others have learnt on-the-job. The adviser involved in this session has over 5 years’ experience. Advising sessions are normally recorded after a consent form has been obtained from the student. The recording is primarily intended for the professional development of advisers, but it can also be offered to the advisee as a personal record and a form of feedback and further reflection prior to a follow-up session. Advisers meet regularly to discuss and share strategies, reflect on each other’s sessions and support each other’s development.

Within the space limitation of this article, only one advising session will be used to examine a range of advising micro skills and reflect specifically on their role in mindful listening and advising training. The intention is to generate self-reflection in both adviser and advisee, and to assist the adviser in learning how to intentionally practise specific techniques aimed at encouraging learners to become aware of their learning processes, and systematically evaluate their application and impact. Our advisors are particularly encouraged to employ techniques such as mirroring, echoing, pausing, and noticing as valuable mindful listening strategies in their sessions. At Hull we have also encouraged the use of a technique

which we have labelled as Walk the walk. The latter consists in the adviser to walk a path of discussion and discovery emanating from the problem(s) initially identified by the advisee (of course, such a path may have many unexpected / unforeseen branches). This requires a 'thinking aloud' process in first person as if the adviser were the advisee. These will be the main strategies evidenced in this micro study and discussed in relation to professional training.

In the session examined, the advisee is an international student who made an appointment to see an adviser after receiving a low IELTS exam score. Following the work carried out in sessions with the adviser, the student passed her IELTS exam with a 20% improvement (51% to 70%) in her final mark for academic writing and is now a Masters candidate in education.

The 21.54 minutes recording has been divided into three sections (Extracts 1, 2 and 3). In the session, A stands for Adviser and L for learner, maintaining full anonymity of both parties. Readers should note that the transcript is verbatim and may therefore contain linguistic inaccuracies.

4.1 Extract 1

The first part of this learning conversation is intended to narrow the focus of the problem(s) identified by the advisee in a needs analysis which was submitted to the adviser prior to the meeting and involves the adviser's act of 'zooming in and out' through the frequent use of micro skills such as restating, questioning, paraphrasing and interpreting. These, and other skills, are reported in bold in square brackets [].

When mindfully applied, these strategies have the potential effect of eliciting the advisee's emphatic responses. This is evidenced in the adviser's opening line (Line 1: *you are saying here ...*) followed by a pause which generates a warm emphatic response from the advisee (Line 4: *Yes, Yes*) which is continued in Line 5 where the adviser gently zooms in on possible areas of weakness generating another emphatic reply (Line 6) where the advisee stresses agreement with the adviser's interpretation of her frustration and unhappiness (*Yes, Yes: that is right ... I have a problem in ... reading and writing are my weakness*). Lines 9 and 10 are intended to create a gradual alignment between adviser and advisee and develop a sense of rapport and trust, whilst gently delving into the potential barriers in the advisee's learning. The open question *Have you got an idea of why* seems to elicit an emotional response manifested in expressions such as *I don't know* (Line 12), *I feel dissatisfaction* (Line 14) followed by an explanation. The advisee feels the need to justify herself (Lines 13 and 14) so at this stage the

adviser needs to try to raise awareness in the advisee of what she has said; this is carried out through the use of pausing and mirroring (Lines 15-17).

Extract 1

- 01 A: I am just having a look at your needs analysis form. You are saying here [looking
02 at the advisee's completed needs analysis] that you are quite happy with your
03 speaking and listening in English [**interpreting**] [PAUSE]
- 04 L: Yes, Yes
- 05 A: But not so happy with reading and writing [PAUSE]
- 06 L: Yes, Yes: this is right ...
- 07 I have a problem in reading but I feel I am good, I am quite good, in speaking
08 and listening; reading and writing are my weakness
- 09 A: Have you got any idea why your reading and writing might not be quite as strong
10 as your speaking and listening; [**questioning; paraphrasing and empathising**]
11 [PAUSE]
- 12 L: I don' t know; I like writing and I do practise a lot, also reading I do lots of
13 practice and reading from past exams but maybe the exams are quite difficult or
14 I get a mock exam good result but the real exam I feel dissatisfaction
- 15 A: Yes ... [PAUSE] ok so when you say you do lots of reading practice do you mean
16 that you do lots of practice exams or do you read also other things, do you read
17 newspapers, websites [**interpreting; restating; mirroring**]
- 18 L: No, in the holidays I just focused on the reading exams. I have two IELTS books
19 and I read through these books
- 20 A: Ok, so you do the reading task, check your answers ... [**interpreting**] [PAUSE]
- 21 L: Yes, check my answers [**echoing**]
- 22 A: And then what ... [PAUSE]
- 23 L: Yes, I feel I do better from time to time but I don' t know what happens in the
24 exam, in the real exam
- 25 A: When you do a practice test if you get an answer wrong, do you go back to the
26 reading and try to find the correct answer? [**modelling, interpreting**]
- 27 L: Yes, in the IELTS book there is an answer in the last book
- 28 A: You mean the answer key? [**interpreting**]
- 29 L: Yes, and I try to see what is the right answer and I try again and I do best I can
- 30 A: Do you always, once you checked the answers, let's say True/ False/ Not
31 mentioned and you choose False and then the book says that it is 'not mentioned'
32 what do you do? [**modelling; restating; questioning**] [PAUSE]
- 33 L: Yes, this is the problem 'not mentioned' and false; [**echoing**] it is confused?
- 34 A: You mean it is difficult to decide? [**interpreting; paraphrasing**]
- 35 L: Yes it is ... [**echoing**]
- 36 A: Confusing? [**interpreting**]
- 37 L: Yes, confusing [**echoing**]
- 38 A: What about your writing, you said you do lots of writing practice as well?
39 [**linking; restating**]
- 40 L: **Yes**, in class I do well and J. [name of teacher] said it is very good. I choose essay
41 and reading exams and I write well but this is my result
- 42 A: What do you see the difference between the classes, the practice, and the exam
43 to be? What do you think changed? [**questioning**] [PAUSE]

- 44 L: Nothing! [PAUSE] the practice helps me to, and my mistakes helped me, to focus
 45 on what is my weakness to improve myself.
- 46 A: Yes, I understand ... did you feel ... [PAUSE]
- 47 L: I feel in the exam there is limited time ... This is what I feel
- 48 A: Hmm ... ok. So maybe it is time ... it is time management that you were not
 49 happy with. [PAUSE] [**mirroring**]
- 50 L: Maybe I wrote more than the required word number, more than 350 words. I
 51 think this is the problem but I do not know but J. said it is not this the problem;
 52 maybe it is my grammar [**reflection in action**]
- 53 A: Hmm ... did you have a kind of an idea on how you were going to use the time
 54 in the exam? For example, for the reading you had what ... two hours to read?
 55 ... was it two texts or three texts? ... [PAUSE]
- 56 L: three texts
- 57 A: Three ... and before the exam did you think ok 40 minutes – 40 minutes 40
 58 minutes..? [**questioning; guiding**] or did you just kind of ... [PAUSE]
- 59 L: No, I don't divide the time.
- 60 A: Yes, I see ... [PAUSE]
- 61 L: I try to finish the topic and move to the next and every time I check the time when
 62 I stop ...
- 63 A: Can you remember more or less how long it took to do the first passage?
 64 [**questioning**]
- 65 L: Maybe half an hour
- 66 A: Ok. That is good, isn't it? [**empathy; giving feedback and supporting**] in terms
 67 of time ... [PAUSE]
- 68 L: Maybe I worked fast and maybe this is the problem [**reflection on action**]
- 69 A: Ok! so quite often it is the case that things you can do in class or in the language
 70 centre when you take an exam maybe there are extra pressures, [**empathising**] it
 71 might be the time ... [**mirroring**] You might not have enough time [**mirroring**]
 72 or you might even have too much ... [**mirroring**] so by taking 30 mins for the
 73 reading you actually could have taken a few more minutes ... maybe think about
 74 it [Adviser takes the role of the advisee] "Oh! that answer is that really right? I
 75 just check it again ... just to make sure" – so often it can be that; you might think
 76 [adviser takes again the role of the advisee] "I know that one is true but this one
 77 Mmhh! Ok, I have 5 more minutes so I check this again ..." Often it is how
 78 you use the time that is important ... [PAUSE] [**walk the walk**]
- 79 L: Yees ...and the problem is I understand the reading but ...

Mirroring is an effective strategy in mindful listening and involves the partial, or full, repetition of a statement by the adviser (Lines 48, 71, 72). It is meant to be heard by the advisee as a request for elaboration and often generates further clarification (Ferrara 1994). Mirroring is non-directive, unlike the more direct forms such as 'say it again' or 'can you give me an example'. To be effective, mirroring requires not only an alignment of words but also of tone and tempo. In Line 15 (*so when you say you do*) this technique asks further information from the advisee and also generates further positive alignment with the adviser (Lines 18-19). This is illustrated by the advisee's subsequent forms of echoing such as: *Yes, check my answers* (Line 21), *Yes, this is the problem 'not mentioned' and false* (Line 33) and others (Lines 35, 37). Echoing involves the repetition, by the

advisee, of the adviser's utterance using the same intonation, sometimes allowing for a pause. Echoing has the function of signalling emphatic agreement similar to confirming utterances such as 'I know', 'you're right', and 'I am with you'. Within mindful listening, mirroring and echoing interventions are useful 'reflectors' of engagement and can signal empathy, interest and /or concern. Mirroring/echoing acts are connection builders and in the counselling/coaching literature, as well as in leadership and communications training, these are widely practised strategies. The adviser needs to pay extra care and attention to ensure this alignment. The skill of this, apparently simple, strategies is that of being able to be fully present and, through intentional language work, tease out the main theme from what may seem an incoherent, fragmented conversation. Such strategies require disciplined training and practice. Two activities adopted for training purposes at Hull are as follows:

Activity 1 – Practising Paraphrasing / Mirroring

Stage 1 (3 mins)

Person 1 talks about a language issue they have encountered and had real problems with

Person 2 reflects back to Person 1 by paraphrasing at appropriate times the content of what said

Please stick to factual information

Debrief on the experience

Activity 2 – Practising Paraphrasing / Mirroring

Stage 2 (3 mins)

Person 1 talks about a language issue they have encountered and had real problems with

Person 2 reflects back to Person 1 by paraphrasing at appropriate times the content of what said

This time stick to emotional expressions

Debrief on the experiences

These training activities have an initial purpose of focusing on mindful listening strategies (i.e. pay undivided attention to the speaker, focus on the language used by the advisee, interpret the message and elicit information through intentional targeted mirroring). Secondly, they enable a shift to another aspect of mindful listening by asking the adviser to notice their own inner dialogue:

- Am I busy formulating questions I would like to ask?
- How easy is it to paraphrase?
- Where is my mind wondering?
- Are distracting thoughts acting as interference?
- Have I moved on and as the end approaches am I now preparing a summary in my head and have stopped listening?
- How much am I observing of the body language?
- The speaker's filters used in their account?

Thirdly, they have the additional effect of helping team building and bonding. In our practice this is very important as some advisers work different rota and may not see each other regularly. The informal feedback received from advisers who have undertaken these activities stress how difficult and challenging these tasks are, especially the intentional use of word repetition, but how useful and insightful this is in relation to their self-awareness and the tangible, different directions a conversation might take. These activities are currently being developed to form part of an accredited professional development online module for advisers.

It may be observed that there is limited use of mirroring in this extract. For instance, mirroring could have been applied in Lines 19 (*Reading through?*), 44 (*Nothing?*), 52 (*Your grammar?*). In all these cases it might have produced a deeper understanding of the filters applied by the advisee when describing her problem(s) and it may also have helped the advisee to reflect on her expectations and emotions involved in learning, and potentially contributing to act as stumbling blocks.

Pausing is another technique repeatedly used by the adviser in this extract. The adviser deliberately pauses whilst restating or paraphrasing what the advisee has said in order to offer her the opportunity to finish the sentence and, in so doing, provide valuable information to more clearly self-identify the nature of the language problem. It is interesting to note how the advisee uses this silent slot to volunteer further information or to reinforce what the adviser has just said. This is particularly evident in Lines 3-6; 11-12; 20-21; 22-23; 43-44; 46-47; 49-50; 60-61; 67-68 and 78-79.

Pausing is here employed as a form of validation because it signals undivided attention and consideration on what has been said. It serves to create the necessary space to enable the adviser to notice and the advisee to reflect. It is also very important for the adviser to observe the kind of representational systems used to communicate and describe the process. This activity can help align the advice provided and enable it to be more effectively received by the advisee. For example, some students are more visual in their description; some are more auditory or kinaesthetic. This student is clearly more kinaesthetic and this is apparent

in her frequent use of the word 'feel', 'do' and 'try' as in *I feel dissatisfaction* (Line 14), *I feel I do better* (Line 23); *I try* (Line 29). Mindful listening enables the adviser to notice these descriptors and underlying values and emotions; for example, her sense of frustration and unhappiness, her clear sense of right and wrong, good and bad, confusion and hesitation (*I don't know, maybe, quite*). From an adviser's perspective noticing the language used by the advisee is useful as he can match it to empathise, and gradually guide the advisee out of an unsatisfactory situation. Here the adviser positively matches the advisee's descriptors as evidenced in Lines 42-43 and 46.

In this context, Activity 3 is an example of an exercise aimed at practising the effect of silence and pauses: a positive strategy in mindful listening. This task extends from Activities 1 and 2, but is aimed at making the adviser notice the inner dialogue and frames which, even when in silence, are present in us and still act as road blocks and distractors. In mindful listening, silence is not the absence of words but the grounded presence in the moment where judgment is suspended and attention is paid to our thoughts, sensations, beliefs and the impact they have in our interpretation of our surroundings and in informing the content and type of advice we give.

Activity 3 – Practising silence and pauses

Stage 1 (3 mins)

Person 1 tells a story about a language problem encountered when studying ...

Person 1 is given instruction to increase breaks between sentences

Person 2

Listen without interrupting

Change over

Share and reflect the experience

In this first extract, the adviser has paced the learning conversation well, has allowed space for clarification and elicited additional information, and an initial agreement has been reached to focus on time management strategies for reading exams. The adviser then assists the advisee by suggesting some relevant resources related to preparing for an IELTS reading task in exam conditions. There are, however, areas where, on reflection, a different strategy may have elicited a very different response and where the adviser seems to have chosen to be more directive, possibly limiting the breadth and depth of the advisee's learning reflection. Before moving on to Extract 2 of this advising session, Extract 1 is now rewound and an example of an adviser's reflective commentary is provided from a mindful listening perspective. The purpose of this activity is to show the kind of inner

dialogue an adviser trained in mindful listening would regularly adopt, and how such parallel exercise should be used amongst advisers – as part of peer evaluation – and individually as part of a process of self-reflection. The benefits of this approach are to sharpen self-reflection and moment-to-moment awareness of one’s performance in communication and trace the impact this technique has on our advisees and their learning process. Listening back, and following the approach adopted in the training activities 1, 2, and 3, one might ask oneself:

- What has just happened here?
- What skills did I engage in this learning conversation?
- Did I do this effectively?
- Is there anything else I could have done?
- Would I do anything differently? Why?
- What do I notice about the advisee?
- What do I notice about me?
- What did I miss?

This process of searching and reconstructing, whether carried out initially individually and then with peers, allows a constant self-reflective dialogue and contributes to sharpening the act of mindful listening and noticing. For example, in this first extract there is a prevalence of *WHY?* (*Have you got an idea of why?*) and *WHAT?* questions (*and then what?; what do you do?*). Could this have been done differently? And if so how? One difference would have been in shifting away from *Why?* and *What?* into more *HOW* questions. The latter provide a better opportunity to see the structure of the problem and engage towards change, whilst *WHY?* questions and *WHAT?* reinforce the status quo (O’Connor & Seymour 1993). For example the adviser could have replaced *Have you got an idea of why?* with *How did you come to this conclusion?* This might have guided the advisee to explain her process and become aware of the steps she has taken and where she has failed to make progress. Equally, as already mentioned, more extensive use of mirroring might have been applied.

4.2 Extract 2

- 80 L: The problem is that I understand the reading
 81 A: That to me suggests that the problem may be in the format of the exam or the
 82 way in which you are actually answering the question ... and so you need to
 make more of a connection between what the question asks and the information
 83 that you have in the passage
 84 L: Yes, maybe this is the problem yes
 85 A: and maybe check yourself when you do it, think how confident am I that I have
 86 chosen the right answer? [**evaluating**]

- 87 L: Yes, yes [**echoing**]
88 A: Am I happy, not happy, so so ... you might even put a little question mark with
89 your pencil and then you might check this later and if I have time later I'll go
90 back and check them again and that might be a way ... and you can certainly
91 build this into your practice, any practice you do in class or here in the centre
92 try to replicate the conditions that you would have in the exam... [**walk the**
93 **walk**]
94 L: Yes, yes ... [**echoing**] and another point ... when I have chosen the answer, for
95 example what is the meaning of *unintended*; there are three choices but there is
96 the same meanings and I don't know ... the same
97 A: Yes, some time there is quite a small difference in meaning [**mirroring**]
98 L: Yes, a small difference but in the exam how can I prepare? [**echoing**]
99 A: Mmhh ... how can you prepare? [**mirroring**] In part unfortunately that is luck;
100 yes there might be a vocabulary question and if you are not that familiar with
101 that particular word it might be just a case of ... guess
102 L: [She laughs]
103 A: You can try to avoid that as much as possible by when you are practising
104 vocabulary in class think more about words if you learn a new word like
105 *unintended* how do you learn the meaning of that word? do you look for a
106 translation in Arabic? [**giving feedback and guiding**]
107 L: First I looked at the translation but now I have changed my strategy and I read
108 all the paragraph and try to understand the meaning from that context
109 A: That is certainly a good strategy for reading exams ... [**positive reinforcement**]
110 because if you can work out ... you might not know the word but there might
111 be something in the surrounding context that means you make a better guess.
112 And I would probably say another strategy [**guiding**] could be ... let's say you
113 learn a new word: how much do I know about that word? Do I know how to
114 spell it? Do I know how to say it? ... [PAUSE] what about synonyms? how
115 close are the synonyms? [**walk the walk**]
116 L: Yes, I try to put it into a sentence and I try to tell this vocabulary to another
117 person, this has helped me not to forget it
118 A: That is good, really good. [**positive reinforcement**] It also takes time as well
119 to develop a big vocabulary. The good thing is that you are very dedicated to
120 your study ... and you come to the LLC almost every day, don't you?
121 L: Yes
122 A: It may be the case of thinking if I go to the LLC for four hours; obviously take
123 some breaks but maybe do different things you might spend 20 minutes
124 reviewing vocabulary and asking those questions, do I know a synonym for this
125 word, these two words are quite similar, do I know the difference between them,
126 do I know when to use this word and when to use the other word ... What this
127 does is it builds a network so your vocabulary, instead of being a series of
128 separate items, you are making connections ... and that takes time but if you do
129 this type of work in your reading and asking these questions you stand a better
130 chance for a network to develop. [**walk the walk**]
131 L: Yes yes and I try to take advantage of the centre as much as possible. I do my
132 homework, I read, I find new vocabulary, I do practice, I make an appointment
133 with a native speaker, I think my English is generally improving ... but this is
134 difficult for my result
135 A: Yes, it is very difficult [**mirroring**] when the hard work you do you feel is not
136 represented in your results.

- 137 L: Yes, it is [**echoing**]
 138 A: To be honest this is quite a common pattern with Arabic speakers quite often
 139 the listening and speaking scores are much higher than the reading and writing
 140 and slowly the reading and writing comes up. I think it is worth reviewing how
 141 you use your time in the LLC; make more of these appointments and say I have
 142 done this reading passage, I have done these vocabulary exercises, can we
 143 discuss what I have done and see if this is working we can then be able to work
 144 out together some new strategies, suggest new steps for you to develop your
 145 vocabulary skills. [**walk the walk**]
 146 L: Ok wonderful!

In this second extract, the adviser starts to link, model, confront and evaluate in order to pace the conversation towards agreed goals. To ensure positive impact he uses the *Walk the walk* technique and enacts a step by step thought process in which there is careful, constant checking of the advisee's state of thinking. Attention and intentional questioning and paraphrasing are central in this second half of the advising conversation. This is illustrated in Lines 88-93 (*Am I happy? Not happy? So so*); Line 126 (*Do I know when to use this word*); Line 125 (*do I know the difference between them*); Lines 142-143 (*I have done this reading passage, I have done these vocabulary exercises, can we discuss what I have done?*).

The objective of this technique is to provide advisees with the tools to model a similar self-reflection and inner questioning as a form of learning check list. It is also worth noticing how the adviser uses positive reinforcement to ensure that good strategies are already in place, are recognised by the advisee, are celebrated and a feeling of achievement encouraged as evidenced in Lines 109 (*That is certainly a good strategy*); 118 (*That is good really good*); and 119 (*The good thing is that you are very dedicated to your study*). The choice of adverbs such as *really, certainly* is intended to stress certainty and elicit confidence to compensate for the advisee very hesitant language. Equally, the adviser softens the use of strong language with selected use of words such as 'a *small* difference' (Line 97) 'That to me suggests' (Line 81) or the conditional 'I would probably' (Line 112).

In this second extract, the adviser applies effectively Egan's three step approach and moves towards goal setting, action planning and reviewing in an effort to create the condition for the advisee to help herself. This is possible because the adviser has gained trust and has paced the learning conversation to ensure that the advisee is in agreement with the direction of travel proposed. The adviser paused and carefully retraced his steps when he noticed that this was not the case, matching the advisee's concerns, restating them, interpreting them, and then guided the advisee to explore an alternative way forward (Lines 103, 112, 122-130). Finally the adviser used a combination of macro and micro skills (linking, summarising and concluding) to bring a sequence of learning conversation to an end before progressing to the next topic of discussion: writing strategies.

Once again, by applying a self-reflective training technique within a mindful listening framework, this second part of the advising conversation can be rewound and a series of guided, mindful questions asked. For example, what would have happened if the adviser, instead of immediately providing a reason for the problem (Line 80), would have responded with a mirroring strategy? (*'The problem?'* raising the tone of voice upwards). One possible outcome might have been an offer of explanation with regards to why she considers this to be a problem, providing the adviser with thicker data about her frame of mind and emotions. What can the adviser notice regarding his language in this section? That it is fairly directive and pausing is limited. One could argue that a different balance may have generated additional, or different, insight. However, the introduction of the *Walk the walk* technique has a positive impact on the advisee as observable in Line 93 where she signals satisfaction and takes the turn to move the conversation to another point. This second part concludes with a very positive (Line 146) sense of progress.

One possible, and only partly valid, criticism to these self-reflective exercises might be the absence of advisee's feedback on each of these different dialogic frames. Because advisees are not directly involved in this self-reflective process, there is a lack of evidence on the long term impact of these strategies on the advisee and their learning experience. Indeed, this highlights an area for potential collaborative research which will be addressed in the concluding section of this article. Nevertheless, this individual self-reflective dialogue, however hypothetical and speculative, creates the necessary self-discipline to generate self-awareness for the adviser. Further, it offers a structure to search for alternative dialogic frames and to develop the confidence to try new strategies when engaged in advising. This approach, if recorded/logged, can eventually form part of a meaningful database of experiences to be shared, and used, in the development of training programmes for ALL.

4.3 Extract 3

- 147 A: The other thing you talked about was about your writing, you said there were
148 occasionally some grammar problems, do you know what grammar problems
149 you have with your writing [**questioning**]
150 L: I try to learn about the grammar; I have a grammar book but in the exam when
151 I write I don't know if there is a mistake because I am fast I focus on the idea
152 A: Again this is very common. What is the grammar book you use? [**supporting**]
153 [they move to the centre and pick the grammar book] [Back in advising room]
154 Is this one book you use a lot?
155 L: Yes one book
156 A: What do you do? [**questioning**]

- 157 L: I study this for example and I tried to solve this exercise
 158 A: and then you check your answers?
 159 L: Yes
 160 A: Yes that is ok but there might be a slightly different way that you could use it;
 161 what might work and is worth trying is: you have your explanation here, you
 162 read this information and then you close the book, and you think about it; you
 163 might do something else, you might make dinner, go for a walk, you might do
 164 the ironing something different but while you are doing something different you
 165 continue thinking about those rules, how much do I remember about that tense?
 166 Can I think of any of the examples in the book? Do I understand the examples?
 167 Could I use it? then later you go back, you go back, you open the book, read
 168 again the rule very quickly to remind yourself, look at it again and then do the
 169 exercises and then you check the answers and then if you got any problem with
 170 the exercise, and if you have made a few mistakes you ask yourself why have I
 171 made a few mistakes? you read the explanation section again and then compare
 172 and at the end of the week you read this again and this is thinking and reflecting
 173 about it. Otherwise what tends to happen is ... you may read this, do the
 174 exercises, read this, do the exercises, read this, do the exercises, read this, do
 175 the exercises ... **[Walk the walk]**
 176 L: Yes, **[SHE LAUGHS]**
 177 A: And it becomes very mechanical and you are actually not taking in the informa-
 178 tion
 179 L: Yes ... **[SHE LAUGHS]**
 180 A: So what you need to do with this explanation is personalising it, thinking more
 181 about how well you understand it, how well you can apply it, if you were to use
 182 this rule in your practice writing could you do it? And that is the best way to get
 183 more out of this book ... **[initiating; modelling; linking; guiding]** Does it
 184 sound like something it might work for you? **[questioning; empathising]**
 185 L: Yes yes that is good. I'll try that.
 186 A: Try that and then come back and let me know how it goes and then we can try
 187 other strategies and techniques.
 188 L: I can start to read section by section **[echoing]**
 189 A: Yes, and if you put them on card you can read them maybe on the bus ...
 190 L: I need to read section by section because when you read one big section and
 191 another big section that may not work **[echoing]**
 192 A: Exactly you are not taking all the information in
 193 L: Yes, but sometimes each section relate to the other sections, sometimes there is
 194 a connection
 195 A: Oh yes, there is always going to be a connection between the sections but
 196 because you are focusing on a section at a time it might be more helpful; ...
 197 **[PAUSE]** **[paraphrasing; mirroring]** See how it goes; you might find that you
 198 are able to remember more effectively the grammar rule
 199 L: Yes
 200 A: And if it does not work we can look at other strategies ...
 201 L: Thanks
 202 A: Try not to worry **[reflecting feelings]**
 203 L: Thanks.

In this third, and final, extract the session introduces the second topic of concern: writing. The adviser, as in Extract 1, uses strategies such as questioning, restating and interpreting to help the student clarify the main difficulties regarding writing. He then models, links, guides and evaluates the advisee's writing problem through the same empathising technique used in Extract 2. He puts himself in the advisee's situation and *walks the walk* as if he were her. This adviser's turn lasts 2:33 minutes. In two moments the advisee laughs (Lines 176-179). These two moments are significant as they signal her full engagement, and recognition of the picture painted by the adviser. By using this very visual expedient of talking with an imaginary self she tries to reproduce a possible inner dialogue which the advisee can adopt and adapt. In this final extract he leaves little room to questioning, mirroring/echoing or pausing. This is also evident in the use of words such as *what you need to do* (Line 180), and *that is the best way to* (Line 182) and in his question *does it sound like something it might work for you?* (Lines 183-184). The latter is aimed at checking if the advisee is aligned and bringing the session to a conclusion. Whilst the adviser remains fairly directive he ensures that the lines of communications remain open for a follow-up session and signals genuine concern and interest in the advisee's problem and its resolution as suggested in *Try that and then come back and let me know* or *If it does not work we can look at other strategies* (Lines 186-187), *See how it goes* (Line 197) or *And if it does not work we can look at other strategies* (200).

This student continued to attend advising sessions and, as noted earlier, passed with an excellent result. By applying a mindful listening frame, one can notice how one of the adviser's filters here is fear of running out of time, and this may have influenced his use of language. This is signalled in the limited use of open questions. As in Extracts 1 and 2, if this exchange were rewound and viewed through a mindful listening perspective, one could argue that a fuller use of mirroring and pausing might have been made (e.g. *You try? You don't know? Because you are fast?* – Lines 150-151); HOW questions could have been adopted (e.g. *How do you try to resolve it?* Line 157; *A connection? How? Can you give me an example?* Lines 193-194) instead of a response with an assertive statement (Line 195).

To this end, the fourth and final training activity which can be used in this context to help develop the mindful listening technique of noticing involves a third party acting as an observer.

As in the first three exercises, the aim is firstly to train one's mind to stand still and notice the surroundings, hear the messages hidden in the words, the tones and the body language; secondly, to highlight the complexity of communication and the kaleidoscopic possibilities available (through the use of the third person); thirdly, to observe the crucial role that our own boundaries and filters play; and

finally to highlight the significance of being able to reflect, share and analyse an event using common descriptors and techniques.

Activity 4 Practising noticing

Talk about your week / your holiday / a problem you had at work

Stage 1

- Person 1 talks for 3 minutes
- Person 2 listens for 3 minutes
- **Person 3 observes** – you are asked to notice use of language, tone of voice, matching body language in Person 1 and 2

Stage 2

- Person 2 re-tells
- Person 1 checks and adds
- **Person 3 observes** – you are asked to notice use of language, tone of voice, matching body language in Person 1 and 2

Person 3 reports
All reflect on task

5. Conclusion

Through a focus on the use of mindful listening strategies in ALL, and its application to the conversational analysis of an advising session, this study has illustrated an alternative framework to examine the language used by advisers when engaged in learning conversations. It has discussed how mindful listening techniques can enhance the significance of the values advisers and advisees bring to a conversation, the expectations they find and raise, the type and quality of interaction they establish, and the degree of intentionality they use.

By integrating examples of self-reflective commentaries and introducing some existing activities adapted from mindful listening training techniques, the study has argued that, if advising is a skilled work of communication, these skills need to be learnt through systematic de-/construction and reflection, subsequent regular practice, and continuous attention to, and development of, self-awareness informed by interdisciplinary research.

This micro study, despite its limited scope, has highlighted the necessity for a longitudinal and interdisciplinary approach. This should involve a larger corpus of advising sessions triangulated with advisors' reflective accounts over a sustained period of time, and advisee's feedback on the impact of these sessions.

Finally, the combination of conversational analysis of an advising session through the lens of mindful listening strategies, and its integration with both a self-reflective commentary as a form of professional training practice and additional exercises as practice reinforcement, has demonstrated the necessity to create a systematic, structured, training programme in advising skills. This remains uncharted territory.

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