

COMMUNICATION SKILLS ARE ESSENTIAL FOR TODAY



T. Sreenivasulu

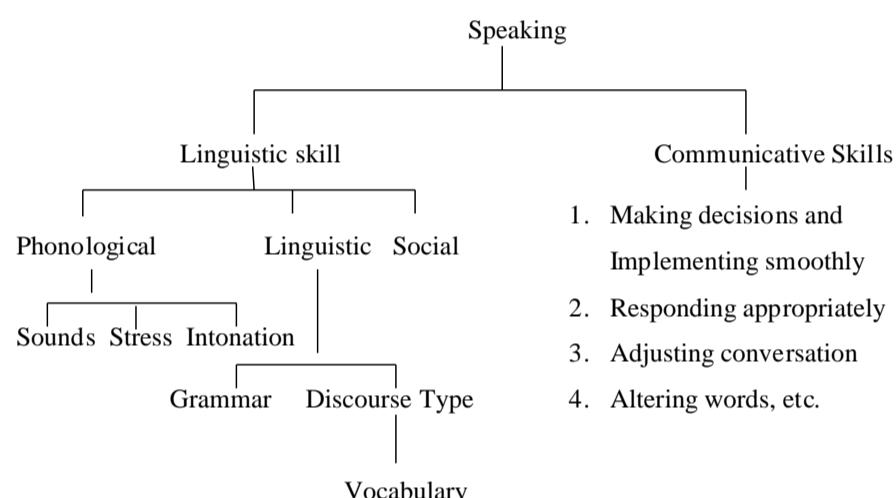
Associate Professor,
S.V Degree & P.G College, Anantapuramu.

Abstract: “ Education brings a gentle man, conversation completes him ” 1 The system of communication is commonly owned, accepted and recognized by the members of the community. It is essentially a social affair. There are three modes of communication which are generally used by people. Oral, written and gestures or signs.

Keywords: Communication skills , verbal interaction , linguistics skills .

1. INTRODUCTION

The oral communication is largely oral or verbal interaction in class-room teaching. Oral communication requires content first and then expression. The oral communication takes place between the teacher and student with the help of speaking and listening operations. This communication may be classified into four categories. Intra-personal, Inter-personal, group and mass communication. Intra-personal –it is a process through which one communicates with himself. The person has to talk within self before he speaks out his ideas, thinking, working out a problem etc. Inter-personal communication it is a process of interaction between two people .Group communication is a process of interaction within group of people and by groups of people to others. Groups may be small or large. Mass communication it takes place when communication is received by large number of people. Spoken language consists of two main skills, linguistics skills and communication skills. These skills are divided into different sub skills, it is shown by following diagram



There will be many opportunities or necessity for interaction between persons to communicate in any language at their work spots, travels, get-togethers, parties and at the time of interviews. To be able to speak correct language the students should improve their spoken language. While speaking he should use correct pronunciation and stress. To overcome the barriers of communication. The student must acquire good pronunciation, vocabulary and knowledge of grammar.

It is astonishing to note that English language has won an international status and “all the evidence suggests that the position of English as a global language is going to become stronger.”² The recent international, economic, technological and cultural changes are primarily responsible for placing English on the highest pedestal. A knowledge of this global English naturally provides competitive advantage over others. In this context, the role of oral communication presents a clear and major challenge at the international market. Particularly to make a professional presentation to an audience is a vital skill in everyone's armoury whether you're a student or the head of a large organization.

The art of oral presentation is most hyped in communication skill. One must learn 'this truly performance art' so as to enable him/her steer the way to a clear, effective, and memorable communication. There are three main requisites that make presentation viable and meaningful. They are voice, body language, and feedback. It is interesting to note that human speech sounds are produced when egressive air-stream mechanism is in operation. To put it in simple terms, we may say that the air from the lungs is sent into the outer atmosphere through various organs of speech. The air that we breathe out is modified into human speech sounds. So we have to keep our lungs active. In other words, good voice projection is made with the efficient working of the lungs, intercostal muscles and diaphragm.

There are four important components in the voice presentation – quality, pitch, volume, and rate – that bring success while addressing the audience. The quality of one's voice depends on the role of the vocal cords. The normal quality of voice that is produced without strain is really a good quality voice. One

notices the following defects in a person's voice. 'Harsh voice' is produced when the larynged tension distorts the free vibration of the vocal cords. When the inflamed vocal cords do not close completely and they block the breath to escape it causes 'hoarse voice'. The 'breathy voice' is produced when 'the gush of air' passes through the vocal cords. Naturally the speaker wastes his breath and spends his energy. This leads to 'breathiness' in one's own voice. When oral sounds are produced through the nose it results in 'nasalization'. This really poses problems to the listeners. The glottal quality in the voice is as a result of deep resonance in the throat. During the production of this voice the tongue is retracted followed by an incorrect articulation of vowels. 'Muffled voice' is caused when the speaker doesn't use adequate energy as he speaks with his mouth covered. A good vocal quality is expected of a presenter.

The highness or lowness of the voice of a speaker is called pitch. It is usually determined by the length, thickness and the vibration of the vocal cords. When the breath egressed by the lungs strikes the vocal cords with sufficient energy it sets them into vibrating motion. The number of vibrations per second determines the pitch of the voice. The rapidity of vibration leads to the high pitch. The thickness of the vocal cords causes the low pitch. The presenter is supposed to modulate the pitch of his voice. This can be learnt by practice. Volume is the next step that decides an effective presentation. This can be achieved by an efficient use of the breath and the resonating chambers. The presenter must bear in mind the size of the room, the size of the class, and their understanding capacity. Naturally one must see the listener in the last row and adjust the volume of the voice.

Most importantly it is the speed at which a person speaks that influences the presentation. Usually the duration of sounds, the number of words spoken per minute, duration and frequency of pauses constitute the rate of speech of a presenter. Usually a normal rate lies in between 130 and 170 words per minute. Ideally speaking the presenter can practise well by recording his speech on a tape recorder and checking the rate of his voice. The mastery of the production of individual speech sounds, stressed and unstressed syllables and pauses between the phrases etc., can easily regulate a proper rate of speech.

Body language punctuates easily the important aspects of any presentation. Our gestures and bodily movements constitute a major part of body language. One must remember the fact that the body begins to speak the moment it faces an audience.³ Personal appearance influences audience's attitudes towards the speaker. Dress appropriately for the occasion. The speaker who is attentive, imposing and strong can create a favourable impression on the audience. Decent appearance coupled with assertiveness and self confidence would enhance the audience's interest in the presenter.

One must not shrink one's own body while facing an audience. He has to sit in a relaxed manner and walk straight before the audience. He must not play with his bunch of keys, or ball pen, or coins, or buttons. At his turn, he has to go straight to lectern and place his 'presentation material' and stand with feet about 6-8 inches apart, parallel to each other with toes pointed straight ahead, with knees slightly flexed. He may keep his hands on the lectern and project his look at the entire audience. Then he may pause for a while and start speaking in shoulders up and chin parallel with the floor. After the presentation, he must go back to his seat with the same confidence as he came to the podium. His posture and gait can communicate considerably to the audience.⁴

Gestures are a visual reinforcement of the words and ideas communicated to an audience. The movement of the head, hands, etc. would reinforce what you present orally. The most important point is that when gesturing one should use the upper quadrant of the body and make effective gestures with a proper coordination between them and the verbal material. For the sake of convenience, we may classify gestures into five categories viz. enumerative, descriptive, locative, symbolic, and emphatic. During the enumerative gestures, you mention a number and raise the fingers appropriately. The descriptive gestures show the appropriate size of an object with the hand raised and away from the body. They also indicate the direction of the movement of an object. The locative gestures indicate the location of an object or an area. Here you may raise your right thumb and tilt it backward to refer to the chart behind you. The symbolic gestures suggest an abstract idea to the audience. For example, to convey the meaning of opposition you may show your fingers in the position of letter 'x'. Emphatic gestures connote a definite movement of the hand or arm for emphasis. Here you raise your clenched fist and pound it in the air.

Eye contact plays a major role that can produce tremendous effect in oral presentation. Look consciously into one of the listener's eyes and then move to the other. Going back and forth between the two makes your eyes create the impression that the whole audience is being addressed. Another trick is to imagine a letter 'T' on the listeners face with the cross bar being an imaginary line across the eyebrows and the vertical line coming down the centre of the nose. Keep your eyes scanning that 'T' zone. This can establish powerfully a communicative bond with the audience.

There are a few steps that must be followed before and during the presentation. Decide the objectives of your talk and the main points you want to make. Remember that careful preparation, practice and research would bring tremendous success to your presentation. Before giving a talk, collect the

material from different sources. A major part of the presentation can be constructed from the books which you already have in your personal library. Sometimes, keep in touch with the most advanced learners and seek clarifications on the topic from them. Do not hesitate to collect recent data and accurate figures from the governmental agencies like district collectorate and the public relations officer. The major source of material can be acquired from good research libraries. It is advisable to keep in touch with the librarian and gather a wealth of information from him. Moreover, encyclopaedias, dictionaries, year books, indexes, gazettes, journals, magazines, atlases would also help you in collecting the material.

Make a rough outline of what you want to say. Suppose you find an irrelevant material, delete it mercilessly. See whether there is consistency in your presentation. Don't read from a script as you have to encourage the learner to be independent of the text/script. Be thorough with most of the main points you want to convey. Prepare cue cards that have key words and phrases on them. Don't forget to number the cards. Mark on your cards and the visual aids that go with them so that the right PowerPoint presentation can be made. Rehearse your presentation at first yourself and later in front of your friends and cull their honest opinions on your venture. This infuses a sense of confidence in you.

Make the actual presentation by greeting the audience, for example (good morning, ladies and gentleman). Tell them who you are and what you intend to present. Don't deviate from the actual topic. If you don't stick to the plan for presentation you will waste your time and end up your dead end with no escape. Devote a part of your presentation to the clarification of doubts. In a pleasant manner try to clarify the doubts of the audience.

With regard to the actual delivery, you make it a point to speak distinctly, clearly, and as naturally as possible. Don't rush or talk deliberately. Make some silences and pauses at key points. This has the tremendous effect of emphasizing the importance of a particular point you are making. To make your presentation interesting follow some variations in the pitch of your voice. Look at the entire audience as much as possible. Pitch your presentation towards the back of the audience especially in larger rooms/halls. Don't obscure the display screen. Don't place it behind you and talk to it.

A judicious use of visual aids would enhance easily the transmission of your complex or multifaceted ideas. As a matter of fact, 75% to 90% of all that we learn comes to us through visual pathways. It is important to note that the traditional dramatic monologue type of lecturing would lead to 1/3 of learning whereas an effective use of non-verbal communication including visual aids would achieve 2/3 of learning.⁵ Make PowerPoint presentation most meaningfully. You can operate the equipment and display the material. Arrange before hand your material and your slides. If you use a slide twice duplicate it. Always check your slides – for typographical errors, consistency of fonts and layout.

Slides should contain the most relevant information. To do otherwise risks making them unreadable or will divert audience's attention to spending their time in reading them rather than listening to you. Try to limit words per slide to a maximum of ten. Use a reasonable size font and a typeface which will enlarge well. Typically use a minimum 18 pt Times Roman on OHPs and preferably larger. Use colour on your slides but avoid orange and yellow which do not show up very well when projected. For text only, white or yellow on blue is pleasant to look at and easy to read.

A word about room lighting. Too much light near the screen will make it difficult to see the detail. On the other hand, a completely darkened room can send the audience to sleep. Try to avoid having to keep switching lights on and off. If you have to do this you must know where the light switches are and how to use them. The main point to be remembered is that you have to determine the communication needs and select the right one among a great many visual aids – Slides, LCD projectors, Laptops, LCD panels, Video, Multimedia, Sound Laser Pointers, Lapel Microphones, Overheads, Photo-quality printer, Postal printers etc.

Most of the presenters leave their presentation abruptly without culling a feedback on their presentation. It is expected of the presenter to receive the feedback and incorporate the positive and concrete suggestions offered by the audience on your presentation like a) What were their expectations? b) Have they been realized at all? c) How can you improve your presentation further? He must bear in mind that the presentation is a continuous process and that he can make impressive, persuasive, and convincing presentations by incorporating the suggestions of the audience. Here we may recall David Graddol's warning/advice

We need a paradigm in order to convey our presentation so as to reach it the wide variety of stakeholders in the global English enterprise.⁶

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T. Sreenivasulu

Associate Professor, S.V Degree & P.G College, Anantapuramu.