

Vol. 7, No. 4: CLRI November 2020 | p 100-119

## Speaking, the Skill of Skills: A Comprehensive Study

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### **Abstract**

Speaking is primarily the skill of skills by which one expresses one's feelings, ideas, reflections, thoughts, etc. Grammatical accuracy, phonetic proficiency and non-verbal efficiency are the means of effective communication. Crying, grumbling, bemoaning, shouting, etc are also indirect forms for the expression of one's emotions, feelings, reactions, anger, pain, etc. By means of gestures, postures, signs and so on also express certain ideas. Emotional cries include sounds and expressions to signify the influence of joy, fear, anger, surprise, pain, wonder, shock, sorrow, etc by means of interjections. There are social utterances like greetings, polite expressions, utterances, words of emotions, claps, semi-linguistic noises, etc to communicate certain feelings, ideas, etc. One can

achieve the art of effective communication, especially as a student by practicing the other activities like story telling, joking, group discussions, debates, JAM sessions and so on.

The students with ordinary skills have stock expressions like 'thank you', 'sorry', 'Happy New Year, etc by which they convey their thoughts. The students with moderate skills mark a clear-cut difference in the level of their communication. The students with good skills certainly have an edge over those with moderate skills, as they are good at grammar and pronunciation. The students with excellent skills stand better as their communication reflects their body language apart from the correctness of language and the aptness of pronunciation. By virtue of communication skills, they can achieve the reward of employment and career in life.

**Keywords:** Art of speaking, phonetic proficiency, non-verbal efficiency, effective communication, communication skill.

## Introduction

Speaking is primarily the skill of skills and the gift of gifts of man. One expresses one's feelings, ideas, reflections, thoughts, etc. by virtue of the skill of speaking. The art of speaking that plays the most vital role in the expression of ideas, thoughts and feelings and so on depends on the key factors: the correctness of language, the aptness of pronunciation and the positive body language. One can therefore build up one's career par excellence by virtue of grammatical accuracy, phonetic proficiency and non-verbal efficiency. One should practice all speaking activities to achieve spontaneity and fluency.

## **Language, the Vehicle of Expression and its Skills**

Language is an instrument or vehicle to ventilate one's thoughts, feelings and so on. One speaks out one's thoughts, feelings and reflections aloud in a social set-up through language. All such mental acts, therefore, take the form of speaking, the verbal expression in the form of a language. When one expresses thoughts, feelings, and so on, others listen to them by means of attentive listening. Speaking and listening go simultaneously for the communication of thoughts, feelings and so on.

Listening and speaking are the primary skills and reading and writing, secondary skills and advanced skills. Of all the four skills, the art of speaking plays the most significant role and none can deny its prominence at all. It is primarily the skill of skills for communication. One can impress people more by speaking to them in person or on the phone than by the letter of correspondence, the art of writing. Only human beings have the art of communication as Palmer calls human beings "homo sapiens". It is the art of speaking which human beings acquire naturally when they step into the world. On its advent, the baby attracts the attention of the near and dear by crying, which is a human being's primary form of speaking. There are other forms of speaking like crying, grumbling, bemoaning, shouting, etc to express one's emotions, feelings, reactions, anger, pain, sorrow, etc.

### **Symbolic and Gesture Communication (without utterances):**

Gestures, signs, colors, postures, etc. serve as symbols to express certain ideas. Primarily language is according to R. H.

Robin's: **General Linguistics**, 'a symbol system' since words act as symbols that are concrete signs to stand for abstract ideas. By learning this, we can say that not only words but also gestures, postures, smiles, signs, colors, etc. express ideas, feelings and so on. For example, one expresses 'yes' by nodding the head and 'no' by shaking the head. In the same way, the concrete sign of the cross stands for Christianity. A skull and two bones laid across stand for danger and the wearing of black clothes, for mourning. The three colors of the tri-color (the Indian flag): saffron, white, and green are symbolic of toil and sacrifice, peace and green crops respectively. Similarly, the signals at the crossroads by means of colors: red, orange and green stand differently: the red to stop, the orange to get ready and green to proceed. Gestures like signs express certain ideas more effectively than words. Postures express moods. The signs of body language, therefore, speak volumes and various expressions.

## **Sounds and Utterances Communication**

Emotional cries include 'sounds' and expressions to signify the 'influence of joy, fear, anger, surprise, pain, wonder, shock, sorrow, etc by means of interjections: O!, Ah!, Oh!, Au!, Welcome!, Alas!, Hurrah!, Wow!, etc .

A baby cries on its advent to this earth and makes the near and dear elated by its presence but it may not have any purpose of crying. A baby cries to express its hunger or pain as long later as it does not know how to speak. In the later stages, it will therefore have some purpose to cry. An old man who is bed-ridden, grumbles, growls, rumbles, etc to draw the attention of the other dwellers in the house. The act of

grumbling or bemoaning serves as an instrument of expression or communication. As a result, some one who listens to the old man attends to him promptly and positively. A player during the game encourages his fellow players by shouting with the expressions like "Well done!", "Excellent!", "Lovely", etc. A man in troubles shouts or cries so that the people for help and so someone will come to his rescue.

One expresses one's impatience, intolerance, disgust, frustration, hesitation, sorrow, etc by uttering certain expressions to oneself. If something goes against one's expectations in spite of one's best efforts or trials, one scratches, pinches or hits the head by the hand and utter certain sounds (or expressions) to express one's feelings of impatience, intolerance or nervousness.

## **Emotional Expressions**

There are certain commonest linguistic expressions: 'Damn it', 'What a sight', etc. which are used to express one's intolerance, disgust, anger etc with certain expressions or utterances though none else is there to listen to one. Utterances to express emotions, according to David Crystal, are to "get rid of our nervous energy when we are under stress". Such utterances are mere expressions but not "the communication of ideas" in the absence of a person to listen to the speaker as David Crystal says, "An old man leans his walking stick against a wall, but it falls all over. He tries several times, and it falls all the times. He roundly curses the walking stick". He curses the walking stick by some utterance though he has no person to communicate with about its fall. He just

expresses his emotion of nervousness by cursing the walking stick impatiently.

## **Social Interactions**

There are greetings, utterances, words of emotions, claps, etc to communicate certain feelings, emotions, etc.

### **i. Utterances**

When a baby sneezes, the listener says "God bless you a long life!" when 'X', a grown-up does the same while eating, 'Y' says, "Bless you" or "All the Best" and 'X' responds to say, "Thank you". This all takes place not to communicate ideas but "rather to maintain a comfortable relation between people".

### **ii. Polite Expressions**

People use the expressions of social civilities along with the tilt of their eyebrows and all their moods and manners that play an important role in the maintenance of social relations. By the use of 'please' and 'thank you', 'sorry' and 'never mind', etc. as A. G. Gardiner says in his essay 'On Saying, Please', "We keep the machine of life oiled and running sweetly. The event of not saying "please" injures self-respect and causes humiliation on the part of the listener." 'Please', "thank you", 'sorry', 'never mind', etc. are not mere words or phrases to communicate with fellow people but to maintain social relations with them. If a wrong doer politely seeks apology by saying "Sorry or extremely sorry", the victim says "Never Mind" though the wrong doer hurts him. Certain words, expressing manners make the society run in a smooth manner. Whether

one's communication is soft or harsh depends on one's expressions or utterances in a given situation.

### **iii. Greetings**

Greetings like "Good Morning", "Hello", "Good Luck", "A Happy Journey", etc are used for the purpose of maintaining human relations in society but not for the communication of ideas in the usual sense. Well wishing is for well-being and well keeping. Not only greetings but also pleasantries reflect one's cordial concerns and relations with the other.

### **iv. Semi-Linguistic Noises**

Interjections are words to express sudden feelings or emotions. They are according to David Crystal, "Semi-Linguistic noises" but they have linguistic and literary function in language. Interjections: 'wow!', 'ugh!', 'ouch!' etc are noises providing "an outlet for our attitudes while we speak". The emotional interjections, Ah!, Au!, Pshaw!, Alas!, etc are used to express the involuntary exclamations of pain, pleasure, surprise, sorrow, etc.

### **v. Claps (Applause or Otherwise)**

Claps, during speaking, show that the speech is interesting. When the audiences are under good impressions with the ideas convincing, reasonable and interesting, they clap as an indication of the joy of concurrence. When the speech is boring, the audiences are likely to clap in a different way to disagree with the speaker.

## **vi. The Power of Sound**

Laborers sing songs to feel inspired by their melody, tone and content to work happily and forget their strain of reality at work. Children play while singing rhymes to maintain rhythms. Boatmen have their own songs called 'boat songs' sung during rowing. The power of sound, 'the sonic potential of language' leaves inspiration and positive effect on the users or listeners.

## **vii. Gestures**

Smiles bloomed in faces spread cordial atmosphere. The smile of a beloved keeps her lover happy. The smile of a teacher reflects his or her love and care for the students. Positive facial expressions leave good impact for the sunshine of atmosphere in society. Nods reflect to agree. Shakes display to disagree though nods and shakes of the head are gestures.

## **Human Communication Vs Animal Communication**

There is a clear-cut contrast between human communication and animal communication. Human communication has verbal (spoken and written) and non-verbal communication (body language) whereas animal communication has characteristic or limited sounds. Birds and animals have a limited number of sounds to attract one another. Male animals and birds attract the female ones by their respective sounds. The hen makes some sound repeatedly as a sign of danger or risk to its chicks when it expects some dangerous incident to them. Any how the animals make limited sounds in contrast with human beings who are 'homo sapiens' and 'species specific' by virtue



of their speaking, the art of speaking, the skill of skills and the gift of gifts.

## **Significance of Verbal Communication**

Speaking is a reflection of thoughts and an outlet of emotions. One's thoughts must be clear to enable one to speak clearly. One should use speaking inevitably to give, extract or transmit information in normal and everyday situations. One can clearly communicate with others when one has clear basic-verbal communication. The way one speaks decides whether one gets friends or enemies. One can impress others by one's impressive and pleasing communication. Interpersonal skills are to be in practice for harmonious relations with officials, colleagues, businesspersons, fellow-beings, strangers, etc. One should know what matters much in speaking to be amicable and amiable to others. John Morley says it clearly. "Three things matter in speaking; who says it, how he says it and what he says. And of the three the last matters the least". Basic verbal communication enables one to communicate with others without much aptness or correctness of language that is required for effective Verbal Communication on all occasions.

## **Kinds of Activities to Promote Speaking Skill**

Students promote their communication skills by practicing face-to-face conversations, telephone conversation, video conferencing, negotiating, debate, role play, public speaking (extempore or prepared), interview skills, JAM (Just A Minute Sessions), descriptions of objects, situations and people, information transfer, asking for and giving directions, group discussions, situational dialogues Oral reporting, etc. One

should be thorough in presenting all the activities of speaking by knowing the procedure and objectives for a successful interaction in different socio-cultural and professional contexts and situations.

### **Extra Activities a Must**

One can achieve the art of effective communication, especially as a student by practicing the other activities like story telling, joking, sharing sessions, etc. It is also highly essential to listen, to speak, to read and to write with a rapt attention to accomplish mastery in the field of one's profession. One should make a note that one can achieve accuracy and fluency by the study of novels, biographies, magazines, journals, etc. One should have a rich treasury of vocabulary to be an accomplished speaker or writer. One needs an adequate treasure of word-knowledge to present any speaking activity at ease without fumbling or stumbling for words and junk (filling) words. One proceeds to speak effortlessly, spontaneously and fluently in different socio-cultural professional contexts when one possesses the knowledge of vocabulary: synonyms and antonyms, prefixes and suffixes, word-origins, one-word substitutes, idioms and phrases, etc. To have command over English, one ought to follow the TIS rule (Think it, ink it and sink it). To enrich one's language, one should be conversant with idioms and phrases. The WIN principle: Word-treasure, Idioms and phrases and No flaws of grammar and pronunciation for effective communication. One's command over a language enables one to speak successfully, making the audiences spellbound.

## **Right Style and Right Word for a Right Cause**

The speaker of any activity is supposed to select the appropriate style and the right language to suit the context, situation or setting. When one speaks to friends, relatives of equal age and equals, one resorts to informal style without minding politeness, social behavior, etc. In a formal presentation, the speaker ought to judge the standards of audiences to the extent possible and employ language and style to make his presentation enjoyable. One employs the formal language when one refers to officials, superiors, strangers and so on as a mark of respect. One expresses in a formal way: "If you could lend your helping hand, I should feel rewarded for it." "Could you please forgive me if I am wrong?" Sometimes one uses strong language without minding anything when one is confident of a fact or truth in the matter. "He did it all wrong. He was foolish to do so". There is blunt language which is used without minding to hurt others." To speak the truth, you are not at all fit for the job." "Your status is too low to be in their professional matters. They encourage their customers by using inspirational language. A doctor has to inspire a serious patient saying, "You are going to be all right. I am sure of that". A teacher can encourage a failed student with his inspirational words, "If you work a little harder than before you will be able to get through the ensuing examination. I have confidence in you. Failures are stepping stones to success." He should never say, "You will fail many times." The student consequently feels despondent rather than confident. In the same way, the other professionals have to deal in their professional matters to be successful.

Some use harsh language without minding or knowing to hurt the feelings of others. For example, a boss may say to his subordinate, "You, foolish .You have spoilt the system and it is beyond repair." Similarly, a doctor says, "You are to die soon." It will be very harsh and disheartening to the patient.

Some are open and frank in expressing their views in a direct language rather than in a diplomatic language, "I am sure. You are capable of doing the work assigned."

To sum up, it is inevitably prominent on the part of the speaker to speak to people in a style and a language suitable to the social context and the prevalent situation. The speaker must be meticulous about accuracy of language and pronunciation and the positive body language for the presentation of communication of skills in a quite effective manner.

At the outset, one should have a strong and persistent desire for the swiftness of progress in communication through initiation and practice of verbal or oral activities. One gains confidence through preparation. Lincoln used to prepare himself before speaking with the subject widening and enlarging in his mind. In the same way, famous speakers prepare their addresses well in advance. One should promote strong memory to present one's speaking as per his plan. Change of pitch , vary the rate of speaking, bearing smiling face, good start arousing curiosity in the audience, raising a laugh, quoting fitting verse of poetry, suitable conclusion etc. are essential factors of communication. The body's physical movements that communicate volumes without words must express one's activeness and sharpness. One should therefore be aware of Kinesics (nonverbal communication): personal

appearance, postures, gestures, facial expressions, eye-contact etc. Proxemics, a study of physical space in interpersonal relations tells the importance of space to signal power and status in professional dealings. It is the part of cultural variation. At the same time, one should be conversant about para-linguistics that deals with quality (the unique voice), volume, rate of words per minute, pauses for speaking effect etc. Finally, one should be conscious of cronemics, the study of time followed for participation or presentation.

## Levels of Communication Skills

“Effective communication is the back bone of success.” The speaker must be sharp enough and have acuity to judge the standards, aptitude and mood of the listeners or the audiences before performing a speaking activity. Students or employees are successful in their fields when they have effective communication. All especially the students need to practice all verbal skills to have a successful future career. The levels of the communication skills of students are as follows.

1) The students with **ordinary skills** have stock expressions by which they convey their thoughts, ideas, experiences, etc. They can express thoughts by means of broken sentences, broken spoken English, incomplete thoughts, use of mixed languages, etc.

2) The students with **moderate skills** are somewhat better than those with ordinary skills are in their communication for they know the principles of grammar. The use of correct, chaste and pure language by means of the rules of grammar: Singulars, plurals, Persons, Agreement of the verb with the subject, conjugation of verbs, actives and passives, direct and

indirect speaking, analyses of simple, compound and complex sentences, synthesis of sentences, degrees of comparison, figures of speaking, so on. They consequently frame correct sentences but they lack in the skill of pronunciation and the knowledge the positive body language. The life of language is grammar: the appropriate use of verb (tense) form, the correct sequence of words and appropriate use of words: nouns, adjectives, adverbs, prepositions, articles; punctuation marks, etc. One must know a clear-cut distinction between the active voice and the passive voice. One student wrote a letter to his father regarding his payment of fees: "I was paid fees yesterday" did not know what it meant for him. What he meant is different from what it meant. People use passives where actives are used. In the same way "I was completed Intermediate", "I was bought the text book" etc are due to inadequate knowledge of grammar. Another student wrote in his letter, "I am well and I hope that you are in the same well." What he thinks of conveying in his letter is different from what the sentence means. He thinks of the correspondent's well-being but the sentence does not mean so.

One must be very careful about the use of adverbs in the correct position. In a chart of principles, a sentence with the use of an adverb in a wrong way conveys differently. For example, "Students shall follow the principles that College evolved scrupulously." Here the sentence means differently from what the framer means. It means that the principles were evolved scrupulously. Here the position of adverb is wrong. In fact, it is to be written as "Students shall scrupulously follow the principles that college evolved." What one learns from the use is that one should be very careful about the arrangement

of words since the structure gives life to a sentence. A student with the knowledge of grammar can express and communicate clearly without ambiguity, confusion, etc. The mistakes made by non-native speakers are innumerable and they are “common mistakes”. The speaker must be meticulous about the appropriate use of nouns, verbs, adjectives, question tags, pronouns (Objective and Subjective), relative pronouns, singulars, plurals, articles, prepositions, words, sequences, etc.

3) The students with **good skills** certainly have an edge over those with moderate skills, as they are good at grammar and pronunciation. Communication with good skills is a better category than that of communication with moderate skills as the accuracy of language and the aptness of pronunciation are maintained in it. The speaker ought to have the knowledge of accurate pronunciation with the right tone, accent and intonation apart from that of correct and appropriate language with structural and syntactical patterns. The most standard pronunciation to be followed is ‘the Received Pronunciation’ (RP) which is accepted as the most standard one all over the world. It is the non native speakers who face the problem of pronunciation as their languages are phonetic as their pronunciation sounds in accordance with spelling and so the non-native speakers are under the influence of their respective Mother Tongues’ Influence (MTI) on their English. They mispronounce many English words and let the listeners identify their respective mother tongue because of MTI on them. English is different from other languages especially Indian languages because they are phonetic but English is not. Indians tend to let others know their identity or mother

tongue or lingua franca when they speak English. Bernard Shaw once said, "No matter how well is man dressed or behaved, he betrays his origin the moment he opens his mouth. This holds true for an Indian." When one aims at achieving excellent pronunciation, one must make meticulous efforts to minimize and overcome Mother Tongue's influence (MTI) on one's English pronunciation, stress and intonation. Certain letters in words receive stress and others do not. One must be very meticulous regarding the stress shift and the pronunciation of adjectives, verbs and nouns. One should refer to the dictionary to know the appropriate pronunciation of words and the rising and falling tones of intonation, etc.

4) A student with **excellent skills** stands better than that with good skills of communication minds the accuracy of language and the aptness of pronunciation which alone are not enough to make one's communication impressive and effective. Apart from the correctness of language and the aptness of pronunciation, the positive body language with its gestures, postures, facial expressions, eye contact, etc. is very essential on the part of the speaker to be successful in effective communication in all situations and contexts. The student with excellent skills stands best in the art of speaking.

We should 'get in touch with the way the other person feels. Feelings are 55 percent body language, 38 percent tone and 7 percent words' as quoted in **Communication Skills for Engineers**. The facial expression plays more an important role on the part of the speaker than postures. The speaker can make his speaking interesting by attracting the attention of audience by virtue of eye contact. According to Patricia Ball,



“To effectively communicate, it’s not always what you say, but your body says that makes the difference.”

The student with **excellent communication skills** builds up confidence to have competence to speak in all situations. He is bold and fearless to speak to audiences. He modulates his speaking to be convincing and interesting to the audience. The excellent presentation mainly depends on the eyes, the voice, the expression, the appearance (dress style) and postures. The success of one’s speaking mainly rests on the correctness of language and pronunciation with a felicity of expressions, a mosaic of quotations, a fine array of idioms, a series of examples in the comprehension of the content, fluency (speaking flow), and preeminently the positive body language with gestures, straight standing and brisk walking, postures, eye-contact, facial expressions, etc. The presenter can attain authority over speaking by presenting the points, to be precise five or six, in a logical order. One can make one’s presentation more effective and impressive by the use of visual aids and information charts.

## **Conclusion**

The world in the 21<sup>st</sup> century with its growing challenges invites students with the command or proficiency of English in the global employment market. A student with great or excellent communication skills; the accuracy of language, the aptness of pronunciation and the positive body language should be competitive enough to reach his goal and have victory in the competitive job market. He builds up excellent career and comes up with flying-colors in all the fields. A manager with excellent communication skills is successful in

his professions. Managerial skills depend on how he communicates or interacts with others. The heads of all departments are supposed to have command over communication for harmonious co-ordination and smooth administration. It is the excellent art of speaking which bestows on all especially on the students the reward of employment and success in life.

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