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SPEECH SOUNDS IN ENGLISH: WITH A SPECIAL REFERENCE TO SPEAKING AND WRITING

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Abstract

The researcher can examine physically and try to account for the behaviour of the transmitter and the receiver, but such an examination will, tell him only how signals are sent and received; and interesting and important though such knowledge is, it does not tell the observer all that he wants to know about the signals themselves, about what they are like and what they mean. The observer can also by means of introspection discover something of the processes of encoding, transmission, reception and decoding; but unless he compares his findings with those of a large number of similar observers and notes an equally large number of correspondences on all points, the record of his discoveries is not likely to be of much value except as an extract from his autobiography. This research paper discusses the most reliable way of studying language is by an examination of the physical embodiments, which can be recorded and reproduced and made publicly available so that all observers may have the same material to work upon, with the same tools. This research paper is to be discussed about “A Study on Speech sounds in English with reference to speaking and writing”

Keywords: Communication Skills, Speech Sounds, Motivating Pictures, Speaking Agencies, Sample Illustrations, Mind Attitudes, Physical Embodiment.

Introduction

Statement of the Problem

“Drawing on my fine command of the English Language, I said nothing”

Robert Benchley

A familiar language literary critique

Men communicate with; one another in various ways. The most obvious are speech and writing. But there are many others: gestures with the hands, facial expressions, nods, winks, smiles; the ringing of bells or the sounding of horns, sirens; the waving of flags; the flashing or changing of colors of lights; the moving of pointers over dials; carving of wood or stone or the shaping of metal or plastic' or some other material; drawings, paintings, sketches, maps, diagrams, still moving pictures; the playing of musical instruments; singing, dancing, acting, miming, and so on. All these ways of communicating, different as they are, have one characteristic in common, and that is the translating of something originating in brain or nervous system – some thought, idea, belief, opinion, emotion, feeling, attitude of mind – into some physical embodiment, something that can be perceived by one or more of the senses. Communication is an activity in which information of some sort is transferred from one 'system' to another by means of some physical embodiment. Communication - unlike language, which is a special form of communication – does not exist only in human beings; it can exist well among animals, or even in parts of animals as when nervous impulses are transmitted from one part of body to another, or when genetical 'information' is conveyed from cell to cell; or it can exist even in machines, as in servo-mechanisms, electronic feedback circuits, or in such simple devices as thermostats.

Language and Skills

Effective language use involves four skills namely listening, speaking, reading and writing. Of them speaking and writing belong to effective domain where the user is at liberty of expressing his intention. They also help in possible active interaction and involve in creativity. Many a time, speech and writing ensue misunderstanding among the people. Obviously listening leads to acceptable speech and voracious reading helps in intelligible writing. Acceptable accent may not be possible for non-native English speaker as it is not commonly available. Secondly, human vocal organs 'gets conditioned because of the geographical conditions and the non-native speaker cannot escape to be eclipsed by the influence of mother tongue in terms of syntax and sounds.

The act of communication can be analyzed into four constituent parts, which need five agencies for their operation. This can be illustrated by taking the simple case of one person talking to another - sending the message to another person by means of speech. The message is what the speaker wants to tell the listener. In order to be able to utter the message the speaker has first to select, from a large number of combinations of words available to him in the language he is using, those that will convey the message he wants and not any other. This selection goes on in his brain and nervous system. When it is complete, he utters the words he has chosen. His

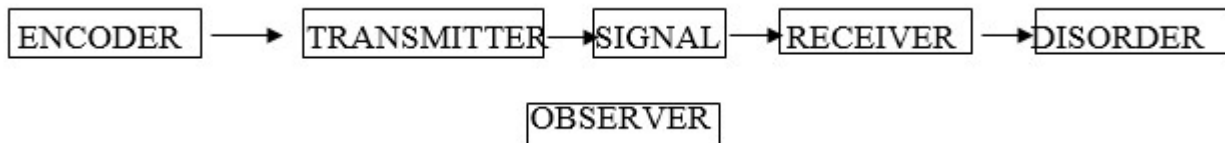


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vocal organs become the transmitter of the message, and the resulting sound-waves in the atmosphere make up the physical embodiment, or signal, by means of which the information that conveys the message is realized. The listener's organs of hearing become the receiver by picking up this signal and conveying it to the listener's brain where it is interpreted.

This idea of an act of communication can be generalized and a 'model' of a communication channel and its relationship to the observer of 'communicative events' can be given like this:



The four constituent parts of the act of communication are symbolized by the horizontal arrows: they are

- 1) selection from a code,
- 2) transmission,
- 3) reception, and
- 4) interpretation.

The five agencies that take part in the activity are those named in the upper line of the diagram.

It follows from this that if we want to study communication by means of language the only way available is the examination of the signals that are produced by speakers and writers of the language. People's thoughts; opinions, beliefs, emotions, feelings-all that goes on in the brains and nervous systems of individuals - are private and cannot be examined directly. The only way in which we know what is going on inside a person is by inferences we make from the outward physical signs, and so far, as linguistic communication is concerned the outward physical signs are the signals of speech and writing.

The researcher can examine physically and try to account for the behaviour of the transmitter and the receiver, but such an examination will, tell him only how signals are sent and received; and interesting and important though such knowledge is, it does not tell the observer all that he wants to know about the signals themselves, about what they are like and what they mean. The observer can also by means of introspection discover something of the processes of encoding, transmission, reception and decoding; but unless he compares his findings with those of a large number of similar observers and notes an equally large number of correspondences on all points, the record of his discoveries is not likely to be of much value except as an extract from his autobiography.

Studying English Language

The most reliable way of studying language is by an examination of the physical embodiments, which can be recorded and reproduced and made publicly available so that all observers may have the same material to work upon, with the same tools. The physical embodiment of language is two-fold. It is substance realized in sound-waves traveling through the atmosphere, or it is a kind of record of that substance realized in the marks of writing or printing. Even in those cases where writing is used as a means of communication in its own right, the author of what is written uses the same kind of marks as are used to record speech, so that what is written can always be read aloud and always has the implication of speech. The substance of language which is realized as sound-waves in the atmosphere is called phonic substance, and that which is realized as the marks of writing or printing is called graphic substance. Anything which exists physically and which can therefore be perceived, by the senses can be to have form, that is, a shape, or an arrangement of parts that makes any particular manifestation recognizable by the senses same, as, or different from, any other particular manifestation. The substance of language has form in this sense, and this form of language substance enables us to distinguish what is language from what is not. A random selection of, noises made by the vocal organs, the grunts and breathings of two men having a fight, is not language in this sense though it may communicate something. It is not language because it is not articulated into conventionally recognizable patterns, as are, the vocal sounds made by a radio announcer reading a news bulletin.

It is useful to be able to think of a language as a code. To do so is to invoke ideas derived from the mathematical theory of communication or what most people nowadays call information theory. This is a branch of science which has been developed in the recent years by communication engineers who have investigated problems connected with the transmission of messages of all kinds by telephone, radio and electronic devices. The main conclusions of Information Theory are reported and expressed in terms of mathematics of statistical probability. the ideas lead to a conception of what information means, and to an understanding of the



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differences between the conception of information and that of a message. When we look at a communication channel and note the various signs which make the signals that are sent across it, we notice that each sign is a kind of instruction from the encoder and the decoder will share the same kind of knowledge of what the signs of the code are, and we are justified in making this assumption because of our definition of a code as pre-arranged set of signs. When we observe instances of what we think are 'correct' responses to signals - the obeying of commands in the right way has made the same selection from the code as the encoder made when he transmitted the signal. It can be understood that the information conveyed by a sign as an instruction to make a choice from the items of the code, to choose this and reject those. The ideas about communication include the idea of meaning, the meaning of a sign. A sign is a physical mark or event that carries information. The meaning' of a sign is a kind of response to a stimulus. It depends on the relationship between the sign itself and the response it evokes, and this relationship is a matter of degree or scalar difference in the nature of responses to a given sign or a set of signs.

Sign or Symbol

Further, a special kind of sign is symbol. It is a sign which conveys information both directly and indirectly. In so far as all symbols are signs, they are physical marks or events, but they have this additional property: they always convey more information than signs do. They may in fact convey two or more information that signs do. They may in fact convey two or three or even more bits of information simultaneously. They have therefore a greater amount of meaning. When signs are transmitted across a communication channel, they group themselves into signals, and each sign is an instruction to the decoder to differentiate that sign from others, to choose only the information which it conveys and not any other information, and thus to assemble to signal which is the message. But so far as the language is concerned, this kind of process can become extremely complex, because of the symbolic nature of language. The sounds which we speak when we utter words and sentences in conversation are symbols for our thoughts and ideas. And in graphic substance, the marks of writing or printing are symbols for sounds as well as other ideas. Different kinds of printed marks may even mean different kinds of things.

Communication in the Language

There is another concept of communication. Codes 'rules' for the use of signs brought some of this potential capacity of the code into communication channels when it was not 'really' necessary for efficient use of the channel. An efficiently used channel is very 'productive' and its 'productivity' can be measured as a ratio of 'input' to 'output'. If more is put into the channel by the encoder that is absolutely necessary for the assembly of the message by the decoder, then the ratio of 'input' to 'output' is high, and the channel is not used efficiently, for its productivity is low. Thus, anything which is brought into a communication channel when it is not really necessary, or any unpredictable interference with the transmission of signs across the channel, and therefore any addition to the bare minimum requirements of the signal, can be called noise.

The word 'communication', derived from the Latin word 'communicare' or 'communico' means to share. Communication is not merely transmission of idea from one person to other through sounds. As Uma Narula points out, "... in an active communication, the effort is for interaction, inter change, dialogue and mutual understanding. Communication presupposes a shared symbolic environment and social relationship among those who participate leading to social interaction"¹. Literally communication means the act of sharing or exchanging information, ideas or feelings. Giving or receiving some information in return for something else is possible only if there is congruity between transmission and reception. Failure in communicating effectively is the root of misunderstanding.

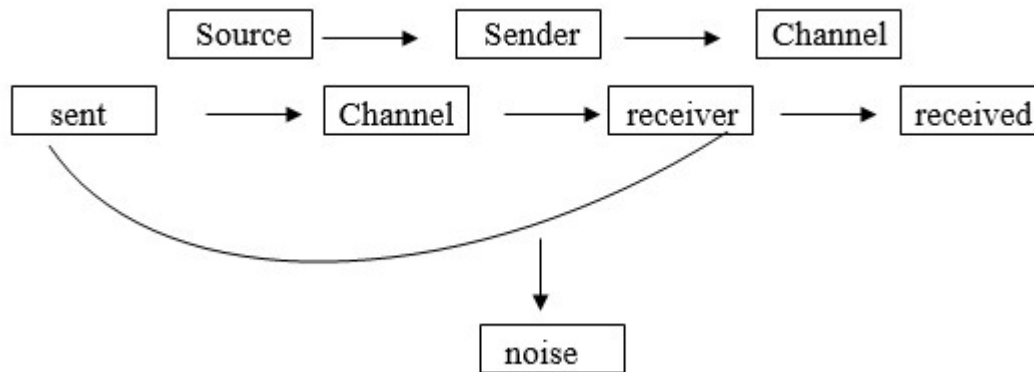
Communication is possible through gestures, postures or sounds. They are generally apt, suitable to the context and cannot be misunderstood as long as culture does not interfere. But in English language, communication, verbal or lexical is complex or complicated because of the incongruity between the graphical representation and the equivalent sound production. Clifford H. Pator rightly points out, "... on the theoretical level, it should be easy to convince ourselves that communication is an essential component of language – that language bereft of its communicative function is not language, at all but mere parroting". For centuries language has been a tool of communication. Though there are a number of means of communication, language is the most widely used one. The Collins Cobuild Essential English Dictionary defines language as, "a system of communication which consists of a set of sounds and written symbols which are used by the people for talking or writing". Though all communication among animals, birds and even primitive man has remained instinctive and through sounds, man alone is endowed with the power of speech. Later it was learnt that man has the ability to use his vocal cords, his tongue, lips and teeth to make sounds. Sounds took the shape of words and the systematic arrangement of these words formed language. Language is thus species-specific. Bernard Bloch defined language as a "system of arbitrary vocal symbols through which a social group operates and co-operates". Otto Jespersen defined language as "a set of human habits"⁵. The purpose of which is to give expression, to thoughts and feelings and impart them to others".



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The aspect of communicating through a language requires the knowledge of a code consisting of arbitrarily evolved symbols. This diagram entails a clear understanding of the various components and their inter-relationships in the process of communication.



The success of communication depends on effective transmission of the message and on the result intended as well. The diagram also states that the entire event of communication takes place within a common frame of reference called communicating environment. The source is the point of origin of a message which is 'encoded' by the sender and transmitted through the channel to the receiver. The reception of the message exercises an impact in communicating environment leading to a response. The response is called feed-back. Sometimes the message sent is not same .as message received. The sender or receiver would be able to express meaningfully the message if the context is well-defined giving way to semantic difficulties in the light of sender's use of ambiguous expressions or highly specialized vocabulary inappropriate to the situation.

According to H.A. Gleason, the elements involved in the process of language communication are:

1. A code, an arbitrary, prearranged set of signals. A language is merely one special variety of code; and the science of linguistics deals, in its strictest delimitation, only with this aspect of communication.
2. A channel, some medium by which the signals in the code are selected or conveyed. It may be a language.
3. The process of encoding, by which certain signals in the code are selected and put into the channel.
4. An encoder, the person or device which performs the process of encoding
5. The process of decoding, by which the signals are identified and a course of action is affected by them.
6. A decoder the person or device by which the process of decoding is performed, and whose course of action is thereby affected⁸.

Thus, decoding resulted in speaking and writing as means of effective communication. Acceptable speech is the outcome of listening. Listening is the sensible response of brain that is voluntary, retainable and recalled. To pronounce words in a language as they are to be, the 'skill of listening becomes inevitable. It is a natural process that a baby imitates the sounds from its surroundings out of its need to communicate. Thus, acceptability in speech is possible only through listening. Acceptability and intelligibility are the hallmarks of a language.

The dynamism and flexibility of language also serve as aids for effective communication. Listening leads to acceptable speaking and intelligible writing. When the relationship between speaking and writing is incongruous misunderstanding ensues, technically called 'noise', Language is not only a sound; it is a chain of a number of sounds arranged systematically. Palmer defined language as "habit-forming process". Non-English speaker bordering on suspicion as far as acceptability and intelligibility are concerned gives way for noise in speech.

Importance of Language Trends

Every language is a code. In the process of coding and decoding messages, difficulties may arise when signals confuse the elements of code. The confusion or incongruity arising out of spoken language is called noise. Referring to noise, H.A. Gleason remarks, "The obvious way to avoid noise is to introduce redundancy". An effective code must have sufficient redundancy to compensate for any noise in the system. Gleason also opines, "Since a language typically has an appreciable amount of redundancy inherent in its structure, it is always possible to use it in the presence of a moderate amount of noise"¹². When the amount of noise is



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greater, more redundancy is needed, as speech operates under a wide variety of conditions like reverberation; resonance in the environment and impact of culture and habit. In a language what is called "quiet" there are considerable possibilities of what mayhem called "noise".

Rules safeguard the tradition and richness in a language. A rule in a language describes what is usual or correct. Rules must have scholarly explanation, for the user to respond to the language intelligibly. If language is to be guarded by hard and fast rules, then there should be an explanation for every exception.

The beginner finds the use of mother tongue instinctive and learns it with ease. He is unaware of the rules of grammar or phonetics. The learner enjoys using the language and his mistakes are accepted and corrected. While learning the second language such as English, the beginner has to acquaint himself with rules in the beginning. Learning becomes imposed and is deviated from the natural way. The beginner is afraid of not being accepted and thus lose intelligibility. On the other hand, the essence of communication is the presence of a thought that a speaker wishes to share with the listener. Communication implies the absence of external control.

One of the common ways of making English prevalent is to make it easily learnable. The process of teaching and learning phonetic language is a difficult task because the rules have many exceptions. The situation worsens when language regulations are passed on without any clarifications which leads to mere parroting. Thus, a plateau exists in creative communication graph of teaching learning process. It is also observed that the learner avoids language usage fearing his intention is not properly communicated. The succeeding chapter deals in detail how some phonetical and grammatical rules that are arbitrary cause noise in language.

Communication encompasses not only transfer of idea or message but also expression of feeling or intention. It is language that matters, not the rules that subordinate language. Language exists in a frame of rules reasonable and flexible to satisfy the basic needs of communication. As long as intelligibility in communication prevails, spoken and written forms of the language are acceptable. The study attempts to put these twin aspects of language and the noise in the speech entail into a perspective.

On balance, the arguments and evidence presented above favor the multidirectional theory and behavior analytic support of that theory. This support is clearer in contemporary behavior analysis than in early S-R psychology. The if-then simplicity of early S-R theory is no longer an ideal for all behavioral accounts, and any tendency to see the relationship between speech and writing as a simple one-way relationship receives little support now from dispositions toward a Mechanistic World View (which were fairly pervasive at the turn of the century). Instead of an exclusive reliance on paired correspondences between stimulus and response, modern accounts of behavior have largely shifted to a more systematic, functional analysis of behavior in terms of functional antecedent correspondences to behavior, functional consequences, and the functional contexts of settings. Instead of a general description of behavior in terms of stimulus and response (S-R), behavior is now more appropriately described in terms of antecedents, behavior, consequences, and setting. The main practical issue to be resolved is which ways will be better ways of applying modern behavioral theory.

Since the multidirectional view undermines any theoretical need for a priori one-way sequences of instruction, a variety of other ways might well be considered and implemented for developing literacy. Instruction, for example, might be continually modified by teachers on the basis of student self-recorded progress in a variety of literacy skills. Revising their instruction on the basis of reported data, inside and outside of their classroom, teachers might then pull together a variety of multidirectional practices in different ways from a variety of behavioral technologies. The resulting reading program may then appear as bits and pieces connected by unifying themes-a status which has been claimed for behavioral technology in general. Such a collection of bits and pieces may be disconcerting to those who like tightly integrated end products. But such an arrangement may be an advantage if it encourages components to be changed and modified. Perhaps more progress in literacy would occur by selecting from competing components rather than competing total packages. Giving teachers more instructional discretion in doing this, however, will probably mean giving teachers more support in advancing record-keeping both as a fundamental literacy skill and as a method for evaluating instruction in literacy skills.

And lastly, there are the many interesting cases of what has been called mixed medium. Here we choose to use either speech or writing, but the reason for choosing one may require us to bear in mind the existence of the other, and this then influences the nature of the language we use. When we choose to speak, we usually intend our utterance to be heard immediately. But there are several interesting exceptions.



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Conclusion

When we choose to write, we normally intend that what we have written should be read; and the norm, at least since late classical times, has been for the recipient to read silently. Here too there are several exceptions; for example, we may write with the intention that what we have written should be read aloud, as with those who prepare scripts for radio or television drama or news. There are also a few situations where speaking and writing are mutually dependent: the language used is partly made up of speaking/listening activities and partly of reading/writing activities, in proportions that are sometimes difficult to disentangle. For example, when we address a group of listeners using an overhead projector, we may keep up a running commentary while we write. In such a case, an audio recording would tell only half the story, as would a photograph of the written work. Both mediums here work together to produce a successful use of language. The differences noted between speech and writing are best thought of as trends rather than as absolute distinctions. For example, while it is true that a great deal of speech depends on a shared context, and thus uses many situation-dependent expressions (such as this/that, here/there), it is not true of all speech. A spoken lecture is usually quite self-contained, except when it refers to handouts or board diagrams. On the other hand, such written material as office memos and personal letters regularly depends on a shared context. 'Send me another one, will you?', begins one such memo. There are few, perhaps no, absolute differences between speech and writing, and there is no single parameter of linguistic variation which can distinguish all spoken from all written genres. Rather, the range of potentially distinguishing linguistic features provides a 'pool' of resources which are used by spoken and written genres in various ways. When we appreciate this, the distinction between speech and writing, far from being obvious and transparent, becomes a complex and intriguing domain of linguistic enquiry.

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