

## LESSON-12

### **Paralinguistic considerations in public speaking**

One of your personal and most important assets is your voice. This voice is your own and hence your trademark; it is that part of yourself that adds the human, personal and subjective element to your words. Writing does not have that immediacy because the words are static on a page. You can give extra life to your oral delivery by suitably modulating and varying the pitch, rate, and volume of your voice and this modulation and variation will give it more interest, appeal and the magic touch.

#### **Your Voice**

Naturally, your voice is your most important tool in speaking situations.

The first step toward improving your voice is to become aware of how you sound to others. Only then will you know what, if anything, needs improvement. Fortunately, you can significantly improve your voice quality by concentrating on a few simple techniques.

#### ***Self-Evaluation***

Tape yourself reading a few paragraphs from a book, magazine, or newspaper, using your normal speaking voice. Then use the Speaking Checklist at the end of Unit III (page 172). Try to listen objectively to the voice you hear as if it were someone else's voice. How does that voice sound?

- Is the volume appropriate?
- Is the rate of speaking too fast? Too slow?
- Do you pronounce words correctly?
- Do you slur words, drop word, endings, or add syllables?
- Do you say "um" frequently?
- Do you emphasize enough? Too much? Too little?

If you cannot be objective, ask someone for help—a coworker or a friend, for example. But be sure to select someone who has excellent speaking skills, who understands your objectives, and who can give you constructive criticism.

#### ***Vocal Quality***

Vocal quality refers to the quality of your voice and this includes things like your pronunciation, diction, flow, pitch, etc. The voice of two persons can easily be distinguished through the audible hints in the speech. The quality of your voice is dependent on various components of your mouth the most vital speech organ in any living being. Such components are the tongue, lips, teeth, vocal folds, sinuses, hard and soft palate, nose, etc. in their combined efforts that determine the vocal quality of the speaker.

## **The Use of Vocal Cues in Public Speech**

The vocal cues help the audience to differentiate emotions of the speaker and to form their judgments about his personality. The words, "I am glad to meet you" can give its verbal message and non-verbal message at the same time. The vocal cues can prove it either warm and affectionate or cold and insincere. The real emotions and feelings of the speaker can be easily identified by the vocal cues. Sometimes it may also show the feelings expressed by the

verbal cues. The way in which the speaker sounds his verbal message is important both in public speaking and also in informal conversations. The speaker must remember that he can spoil his good impression by using substandard diction and pronunciation. The use of standard diction, correct pronunciation, fluency and authoritative voice can create impressive and favorable image for him.

The speaker usually tends to be self-conscious about his appearance and the visual impressions he might make on the audience, but he pays very little attention to the specific aspects of his vocal quality and production. He can look into the mirror to confirm his good appearance and the other visual impressions like proper gestures, postures, facial expressions, etc. But he cannot listen to his own voice as the others do. He cannot exactly listen and inspect his own vocal qualities such as range, pitch, resonance and articulation. He cannot examine the worth and working of his vocalization such as laughing, crying, grunting, etc. unless he listens to a tape-recording of his own voice. The speaker must train his vocal qualities and vocalizations for effective speech delivery.

### ***Volume and Rate***

When you speak too loudly, your listeners become more aware of your volume than of the content of your message. When you speak too softly, you force listeners to strain to get your message. In either case, your audience will soon tune out. Be aware that you must adjust your volume to the room and the audience.

How do you know whether your volume is appropriate? Ask a friend or coworker to sit in the back of the room where you will be presenting and provide cues. Or ask the audience: "Can you hear me clearly in the back?" If audience members respond "No," then by all means speak louder. You may need to use a microphone when speaking in a large auditorium; if this is the case, practice using it before your presentation to increase your comfort level. When you begin your presentation, ask for feedback to find out if your voice is amplified to the right volume for your listening audience.

You also can work at controlling the rate at which you speak. If your rate of speech is too fast, your words will run together and listeners likely will miss much of what you are saying. If your rate of speech is too slow, you risk losing the listening audience to distractions.

There will be times when it is necessary to slow down your speech. When you want to get the audience's complete attention and provide emphasis for a statement, pause for a few seconds. When you present something technical or something you know your audience will write down, speak more slowly and repeat the information. In general, however, maintain a consistent, normal rate, a speed at which your listeners can comfortably keep up.

### ***Volume***

The very purpose of your speaking or oral presentation is lost if the listener in the last row of the audience is unable to clearly hear what you are saying. Think of a situation when one such listener shouts at you saying, "You are not audible, speak up louder." Would you relish such a comment from your audience? The volume of your speech is, therefore, extremely important, equally for you and your audience.

The speaker's message must be audible to the audience. If the audience are not able to hear the speech clearly, there will be no communication. The speaker's voice can be clearly and distinctly heard by all the audience if his voice has adequate volume. The volume is the relative loudness of the voice. The speakers having large volume can be barely heard by the listeners. The volume can be useful for emphasizing certain ideas or to show emotional intensity of the speaker. We are very sensitive to the volume of the sound and it is obvious when we show serious concern with the noise pollution. The feedback firm, the audience should, be used to check and adjust the volume. The volume should match the contents of the various parts of the speech.

### ***Rate***

Just imagine how many words do you use per minute as you speak? Most communication experts suggest that the range for public speakers lies between 80 to 200 words per minute. In more casual conversation some people may speak from 100 to 250 words per minute. This indicates that the rate of speech varies from individual to individual. Here, the key word related to rate is pause. We can compare the pauses between major thought groups as "oral white space", similar to the white space between paragraphs in a written document. As in writing, a pause in speaking lets your receiver reflect on the message and helps break the flow of thought. A pause lets you, the speaker, collect your thoughts and take time to move to a visual or rest your voice. In fact, a pause in your oral delivery also helps you to take a deep breath, which is very necessary in maintaining your mental composure.

Your rate, or the speed at which you speak, helps set the mood of your speech. Serious material calls for a slow, deliberate rate; lighter topics need a faster pace. For a speech to

be effective, there should be rate variations that reflect changes in the material being presented. These variations may include the duration of syllables, the use of pauses, and the overall speed of presentation. The rate patterns within a speech produce its rhythm. Rhythm is an essential component of all communication.<sup>15</sup> With rhythmic variations you point out what is important and make it easier for listeners to comprehend your message.

Beginning speakers who feel intimidated typically speed up their presentations and run their words together. What this rapid-fire delivery communicates is the speaker's desire to get done and sit down! At the other extreme, some speakers become so deliberate that they almost put themselves and their audiences to sleep. Neither extreme lends itself to the communication.

As we noted in Chapter 3, the typical rate for extemporaneous speaking is about 125 words per minute. You can check your speed by timing your reading of the excerpt from *Rainy Mountain*. If you were reading at the average rate, you would have taken about sixty seconds to complete that material. If you allowed time for pauses between phrases, appropriate for such formal material, your reading may have run slightly longer. If you took less than fifty seconds, you were probably speaking too rapidly or not using pauses effectively.

Pauses are a very important element in the presentation of speeches. A pause before or after a word or phrase highlights its importance. Pausing also gives your listeners time to contemplate what you have said. They can help build suspense and maintain interest as listeners anticipate what you will say next. Moreover, pauses can clarify the relationships among ideas, phrases, and sentences. They are oral punctuation marks, taking the place of the commas and periods, underlinings and exclamation marks, that occur in written communication.

Beginning speakers often do not use pauses effectively. They may be uncomfortable with silence or think they are not communicating unless their mouths are moving. Effective speakers use pauses to enhance the meanings of their words. Read the following passage aloud again, using pauses

(where indicated by the slash marks) and rate changes (faster pace indicated by bold type and slower pace indicated by capital letters) to enhance its meaning and demonstrate mood changes. This exercise will give you an idea of how you can use pauses and rate changes to emphasize and clarify the flow of ideas:

A single knoll rises out of the plain in Oklahoma / north and west of the Wichita Range //  
For my people / the Kiowas / it is an old landmark / and they gave it the name Rainy  
Mountain /// The hardest weather in the world is

there // Winter brings blizzards / hot tornadic winds arise in the spring / and in the  
summer the prairie is an anvil's edge // The grass turns brittle and brown / and it cracks  
beneath your feet // There are green belts along the rivers and creeks I linear groves of  
hickory and pecan, willow, and witch hazel // At a distance I in July or August I the  
steaming foliage seems almost to writhe

in fire / II LONELINESS IS AN ASPECT OF THE LAND // ALL THINGS IN THE  
PLANE ARE ISOLATE //I THERE IS NO CONFUSION OF OBJECTS IN THE EYE II  
BUT ONE HILL // OR ONE TREE II OR ONE MAN III To look upon that landscape in

the early morning I with the sun at your back I is to lose the sense of proportion // Your imagination comes to life // AND THIS I YOU THINK I IS WHERE CREATION WAS BEGUN.

Just as the right use of a pause can work for you, the wrong use of a pause can be a liability. Some speakers habitually use “urns,” “wells” and “okays,” or “you knows” in the place of pauses without being aware of it. These vocal distractions may be used to fill in the silence while speakers think about what to *say* next, or they may be signs of nervousness. To determine if you have such a habit, tape record yourself speaking extemporaneously about one of the main points for your next speech. Often simply becoming aware of such vocal distractions is enough to help you guard against and control them. If you had too many vocal distractions in your recording, retape yourself trying to talk without them. Also, don’t use “okay,” “well,” or “you know” as transitions in your speech. Plan more effective transitions (see Chapter 7). Practice your presentation until the ideas flow smoothly. Finally, don’t be afraid of the brief strategic silence that comes when you pause. Make silence work for you.

If your natural tendency is to speak too slowly, you can work to develop a faster rate in practice sessions by reading light material aloud. The following selection by Mark Twain calls for a lively pace. Reading at between 160 and 175 words per minute, you should take about 70 seconds to complete this selection. In the story, the narrator knows absolutely nothing about farming but must write a story to meet a deadline for an agricultural newspaper. In his desperation he fabricates an advice column that causes a farmer to burst into his office.

“There, you wrote that. Read it to me - quick! Relieve me. I suffer.”

**I read as follows:**

“Turnips should never be pulled, it injures them. It is much better to send a boy up and let him shake the tree.

“Concerning the pumpkin, the custom of planting it in the front yard with the shrubbery is fast going out of vogue, for it is now generally conceded that the pumpkin as a shade tree is a failure.

“Now, as the warm weather approaches, and the ganders begin to spawn. . . .”

The excited listener sprang toward me and said: “There, that will do.

I know I am all right now, because you read it just as I did, word for word. But stranger, when I first read it I said to myself, now I believe I *am* crazy: and with that I fetched a howl that you might have heard for two miles, and started out to kill somebody, because I knew it would come to that sooner or later, and so I might as well begin. I burned my house, crippled several people, and have one fellow up a tree where I can get him if I want him. Then I thought I should stop in here to check with you. I tell you, it is lucky for that chap up in the tree that I did Good-bye, Sir. Good-bye.”<sup>16</sup>

Different cultures and even different subcultures within cultures have different speech rhythms. These differences can involve the overall rate of speaking, such as in the case of Northerners speaking more rapidly than Southerners in the United States. The mythic differences also may be more subtle, as when the usual lengths of pauses are different. When the speech rhythms between groups are out of sync, misunderstandings can occur.

For example, Californians use longer pauses than New Yorkers. Consequently, Californians may perceive New Yorkers as rude and aggressive, while New Yorkers may see Californians as too laid back or not having much to say.

The ramifications of such rhythm problems can go beyond simple misunderstandings. Ron Scollon, a sociologist and communication consultant, reports that Native American Alaskans show deference to authority by slowing down their speech and pausing before speaking or responding to questions. Unfortunately, non-Native law enforcement officials in the area often interpret these rhythmic variations as signs of antagonism or hostility, and the Native Americans typically receive longer jail sentences than do non-Native Americans in the area)? Guard against stereotyping individuals on the basis of what may be culturally-based speaking rate variations.

loudness

No presentation is effective if the audience can't hear you. Similarly, your presentation will not be successful if you overwhelm listeners with a voice that is too loud. When you speak before a group, you usually need to speak louder than you do in general conversation. The size of the room, presence or absence of a microphone, and background noise also may call for adjustments. Take your cues from audience feedback. If you are not loud enough, you may see listeners leaning forward, straining to hear. If you are speaking too loudly, they may unconsciously lean back, pulling away from the noise.

You also should be aware that different cultures have different norms and expectations concerning appropriate loudness. For example, in some Mediterranean cultures a loud voice signifies strength and sincerity, whereas in some Asian and American Indian 'cultures, a soft voice is associated with good manners and education)8 When a variety of cultural and ethnic groups is represented in your audience, be especially attentive to feedback on this point.

To speak at proper loudness, you must have good breath control. If you are breathing improperly, you will not have enough force to project your voice so that you 'can be heard in the back of a room. Improper Wreathing can also cause you to run out of breath before you finish a phrase be come to an appropriate pause. To check whether you are breathing properly for speaking, do the following:

Stand with your feet approximately eight inches apart. Place your hands on your lower rib cage, thumbs to the front, fingers to the back. Take a deep breath - in through your nose and out through slightly parted lips. If you are breathing correctly, you should feel your ribs moving *up and out* as you inhale.

Improper breathing affects more than just the loudness of your speech. If you breathe by .raising your shoulders" the" muscles in your neck and throat will become tense. This can result in a harsh, strained vocal quality. Moreover, you probably will not take in enough air to sustain your phrasing, and it will become difficult to control the release of air. The air and sound then all come out with a rush when you drop your shoulders, leading to unfortunate oral punctuation marks when you don't want or need them., To see if you have a problem, try this exercise:

Take a normal breath and see how long you can count while exhaling. If you cannot reach fifteen without losing volume or feeling the need to breathe, you need to work on extending your breath control. Begin by counting in one breath to a number comfortable for you, then gradually increase the count over successive tries. Do not try to compensate by breathing too deeply. Deep breathing takes too much time and attracts too much attention while you are speaking. Use the longer pauses in your speech to breathe, and make note of your breathing pattern as you practice your speech.

You should vary the loudness level of words and phrases in your speech, just as you vary your pitch and your rate of speaking. Changes in loudness are often used to express emotion. The more excited or angry we are, the louder we tend to become. But don't let yourself get caught in the trap of having only two options: loud and louder. Decreasing your volume, slowing your rate, pausing, or dropping your pitch can also express emotion quite effectively.

To acquire more variety in loudness, practice the following exercise recommended by Hillman and Jewell: "First, count to five at a soft volume, as if you were speaking to one person. Then, count to five at medium volume, as if speaking to ten or fifteen people. Finally, count to five, as if 'Speaking to thirty or more people.'"<sup>19</sup> If you tape-record this exercise, you should be able to hear the clear progression in loudness.

An average speaker can deliver 120-150 words per minute. Uniformity in rate is considered boring. Avoid continuous word delivery. Generally, All-India Radio news reading pattern keeps high range but, in practice, it is not suited to speech-making. Reading at a speed of 120-150 words per minute is acceptable for a short or brief speech or announcement.

A speed of about 90-120 words per minute is considered ideal. The speaker whose rate of speech goes above 140 words per minute should make conscious efforts to slow down the rate for better comprehensibility of his message. In order to minimize errors in speech and to maintain steady and even fluency the speaker should not allow his speech rate to be too fast. Though every individual has almost stable speaking rate, his speech rate may get faster when he expresses his fear, anger or joy, but it may get slowed down while expressing grief, depression or sorrow. Many speakers find it difficult to slow down their speech rate unless they reduce intensity of the pitch and volume. When the speaker is possessed with certain emotions but tries to maintain control over his speech rate, the strain of it becomes obvious in other vocal and visual cues. The increased dynamism of the other vocal and visual cues are the result of the speaker's conscious efforts to maintain control over the rate. The speaker must always be careful that his rapid as of speaking does not paralyze his audience. If his delivery is as rapid as that of the machine-gun, the message would be almost unintelligible. He has to insert more spaces between words and sentences if he wants to sound clear by using distinct articulations.

***Pitch***: Pitch is the placement of your voice on the musical scale. Vocal pitches can range from low and deep to high and squeaky levels. For effective speaking, you need to

find a pitch level that is comfortable for you and others and that allows ‘maximum flexibility and variety. Each of us has a habitual pitch, or level at which we speak most frequently. Additionally, we all have an optimum pitch, or a level at which we can produce our strongest voice with minimal effort and that allows variation up and down (the scale. You can use the following exercise to help determine your optimum pitch:

Sing the sound *10* down to the lowest pitch you can produce without feeling strain or having your voice break or become\ rough. Now count each note as you sing up the scale to the highest tone you can comfortably produce. Most people have a range of approximately sixteen notes. Your optimum pitch will be about once-fourth of the way up your range. For example, if your range extends twelve notes, your optimum pitch would be at the third note up the scale. Again, sing down to **your lowest comfortable pitch, and then sing up to your optimum pitch level.** 13

Tape-record this exercise, and compare your optimum pitch to the habitual pitch revealed during your first recording. If your optimum pitch is within one or two notes of your habitual pitch, then you should not experience vocal problems related to pitch level. If your habitual pitch is much higher or lower than your optimum pitch, you may not have sufficient flexibility to raise or lower ‘the pitch of your voice for changes in meaning and emphasis. You can change your habitual pitch by practicing speaking and reading at your optimum pitch.

Once you have determined your optimum pitch, use it as a base or point of departure in your practice. :Read the following paragraphs from N. Scott Momaday’s *The Way to Rainy Mountain* at your optimum pitch level, using pitch changes to provide meaning and feeling. To make the most of your practice, tape-record yourself so you can observe both problems and progress.

A single knoll rises out of the plain in Oklahoma, north and west of the Wichita Range. For my people, the Kiowas, it is an old landmark, and they gave it the name Rainy Mountain. The hardest weather in the world is there. Winter brings blizzards, hot triadic winds arise in the spring, and in the summer the prairie is an anvil’s edge. The grass turns brittle and brown, and it cracks beneath your feet. There are green belts along the rivers and creeks, linear groves of hickory and pecan, willow, and witch hazel. At a distance in July or August the steaming foliage seems almost to writhe in fire. . . . Loneliness is an aspect of the land. All things in the plain are isolate: there is no confusion of objects in the eye, but *one* hill or *one* tree or *one* man. To look upon that landscape in the early morning, with the sun at your back, is to lose the sense of proportion. Your imagination comes to life, and this, you think, is where Creation was begun.14

The purpose of this exercise is to explore the full range of variation around your optimum pitch and to make you conscious of the relationship between pitch and effective communication. Tape yourself reading the passage a second time and exaggerate the pitch variations as you read it. Play back both of the taped readings. If you have a problem with a narrow pitch range, you may discover that exaggerating makes you sound more effective.

When you speak before a group, don’t be surprised if your pitch seems higher than usual. Your pitch is sensitive to your emotion\_ and will usually go up when you are under



pressure. Before beginning to speak, hum your optimum pitch to yourself so you start out on the right note.

It is a listener's interpretation of frequency of sound. The high pitch is, in many cases, the result of emotional and physical tension. Through practice and experience it is possible to adjust the pitch and use different levels and give inflections to enhance the effect. Two irritating features of the quality of voice must be avoided like

(i) Muffled effect

(ii) Breathlessness or whispering effect.

Pitch is the frequency level of the voice. This frequency level is determined by the person's larynx. The pitch range of the speaker depends on the shape and size of the vocal cords or bands which are at the top of the larynx. Though many speakers use a high pitch in public speeches, the audience like a voice which is varied in pitch. A voice without any variations in pitch sounds monotonous. The monotonous speaker who do not impart any information about his emotions by changing the pitch levels becomes quickly unpopular and the audience does not like to concentrate their attention on his speech. It has been also found that the speaker can even more be disliked by the audience if he exaggerates the pitch -changes. The changes in the pitch levels-must be spontaneous and the speaker should have maximum control over the pitch variations.

### **Articulation, Enunciation, Pronunciation**

Perhaps the most common reason for "mispronouncing" words is not the difficulty of making particular sounds but the reality of our speaking most often in informal situations-situations in which listeners are not evaluating our speech. Often, too, we may have learned certain words through reading and do not know the correct pronunciation. Another reason, of course, is that correct pronunciation is relative to geographic location. People in different parts of the country (and certainly in different parts of the world) pronounce sounds and sound combinations slightly differently.

Though mispronouncing words can be a problem, a bigger problem for many speakers is not enunciating clearly-not pronouncing syllables and sounds clearly. No matter what the reason, you can change speech habits and learn to say words differently (and in some cases, more accurately).

*Articulation:* Some people have trouble making certain sounds. For example, they may substitute a *d* for a *th*, saying "dem" instead of "them." Other sounds that are often misarticulated include *ʃ*, *l*, and *r*. Severe articulation problems can interfere with effective communication, especially if the audience cannot understand the speaker or the variations suggest low social or educational status. Such problems are best treated by a speech pathologist, who retrains the individual to produce the sound in a more acceptable manner.

We make use, of the tongue, lips palate, vocal cords and other speech organs to a particular different speech sounds. For the articulation of different sounds, the tongue takes distinct positions in the mouth cavity. The front or the back of the tongue be raised high towards the palate. It can be kept low to

interfere as little as possible with the flow of the air in the passage. Even the tip or the blade of the tongue is involved in the articulation of certain sounds; for example, the sounds such as /d/ in moth or /tʃ/ in that, 'etc. Lips are involved in the articulation of the sounds such as /p/ in pat, /b/ in bat, /m/ in mat, etc. In case of some sounds such as /m/, /n/ and /l/ in (giving), the air stream is checked in the mouth, but it passes freely through the nose. The sounds such as /w/ in win or /j/ in yet are consonants but they are made by the combination of vowels. If /f/ in fan and /v/ in van are articulated by the contact of upper teeth and lower lip. Thus, different organs of speech help to articulate the speech sounds. When the speaker is unable to produce certain sounds, he just omits them or substitutes it with some other inappropriate sound' The omission of necessary sounds is not the result of mere inability the speaker to articulate it, but it can also be due to care articulation in rapid speech. Some speakers distort the sound by using wrong vowels; for example, -they may use /i/ for /e/ or /o/ for /a/ etc. This may make their 'feed' sound such as 'fid'. and 'harsh' sound like 'harsh'. The use of inappropriate and distorted sounds may irritate the audience and it may also result in misunderstanding of the message.

**Enunciation.** Enunciation refers to the way you pronounce words in context. In casual conversation it is not unusual for people to slur their words - for example, saying "gimme" for "give me." However, careless enunciation calluses credibility problems for public speakers. Do you say "Swatuh thought" for "That's what I thought"; "Harya?" for "How are you?"; or "How ado?" for "How did you do?" These lazy enunciation patterns are not acceptable in public speaking. Check your enunciation patterns on the tape-recordings you have made to determine if you have such a problem. If you do, concentrate on careful enunciation as you practice your speech. Be careful, however, to avoid the opposite problem of inflated, pompous, and pretentious enunciation. Very few speakers can make this work without sounding phony. You should strive to be neither sloppy nor overly precise.

**Pronunciation.** *Pronunciation:* Inaccurate and faulty pronunciation reduce the credibility of communication. There are great variations of pronunciation based on national and regional characteristics. But with practice and effort, pronunciation can be improved and stabilized.

Particularly, in the Indian context, it is often noticed that we easily forgive pronunciation errors in foreign speakers than in native speakers. You are expected to be correct in the business world. In fact, we subconsciously react negatively when any word is mispronounced, as compared to our own concept of how it should be pronounced.

Pronunciation involves saying words correctly. It includes both the use of the correct sounds and the proper accent on syllables. Because written English does not always indicate the correct pronunciation, we may not be sure how to pronounce words that we first encounter in print. For instance, does the word *chiropracist* begin with an *sh*, a *ch*, or a *k* sound?

If you are not certain how to pronounce a word, consult a dictionary. An especially useful reference is the *NBC Handbook of Pronunciation*, which contains 21,000 words and proper names that sometimes cause problems.<sup>21</sup> When international stories and new foreign leaders first appear in the news, newspapers frequently indicate the correct pronunciation of their names. Check front-page stories in the *New York Times* for guidance with such words.

In addition to problems pronouncing unfamiliar words, you may find that there are certain words you habitually mispronounce. For example, how do you pronounce the following words?

government  
February  
ask  
nuclear  
athlete  
library  
picture  
secretary  
just  
get

Unless you are careful, you may find yourself slipping into these common mispronunciations:

Mispronunciation of such common words can damage your ethos. Most of us know what words we chronically mispronounce and are able to pronounce them correctly when we think about it. The time to think about it is when you are practicing and presenting your speech.

### **Pronunciation Checklist**

Use the following categories to discover the kinds of pronunciation and enunciation errors you tend to make:

- **Do you drop sounds at the end of words?** For example, do you drop the *g* in *-ing* words and say, for example, "runnin' ," "eatin' ," "working`"? Do you drop the final *t* when you say words such as *list* and *tourist*? Do you drop the final *d* in words such as *field* and *build*?
- **Do you omit some letters and sounds?** Do you omit letters (that is, sounds) from words such as *interest*? The correct pronunciation is "IN-ter-est," not "IN-trest."
- **Do you add sounds?** Do, you add sounds when you say certain words, such as "ATH-a-lete"? The correct pronunciation is "ATH-lete."

- **Do you alter vowel sounds?** For example, do you say "GEN-you-in" (correct) or "*GEN-you-ine*" (incorrect)? "NU-clee-er" (correct) or "NU-cue-ler" (incorrect)? "REAL-ter"(correct) or "REA-/a-ter" (incorrect)?
- **Do you stress the wrong syllable?** For example, you should say "inCOM-pa-rale" (not "in-com-PAR-a-ble") and "in-SUR-ance" (not "IN-sur-ance").
- **Do you mispronounce words?** Many people make the mistake of pronouncing words just as they appear in writing. For example, do you pronounce *epitome* "ee-PIT-i-me" (correct) or "EH-pi-tome" (incorrect)? Another common mispronunciation is "aks" (incorrect) instead of "ask" (correct),
- **Do you use different forms of the same word correctly?** For example, for the verb form of *orientation*, do you say "orient" (correct) or "orientate" (incorrect)?

You can heighten your awareness of appropriate pronunciation and enunciation by paying attention to the speech patterns of national newscasters and radio announcers. These people are paid very well to articulate carefully. Another help is the dictionary; use it when a question of pronunciation comes up.

**Dialect.** A dialect is a speech pattern typical of a geographic region or ethnic group. Your dialect usually reflects where you were raised or lived for any length of time or your cultural and ethnic identity.<sup>22</sup> In the United States there are three commonly recognized dialects: eastern, southern, and midwestern. Additionally, there are local variations within the broader dialects. For example, in South Carolina one finds the Gullah dialect from the islands off the coast, the Lowcountry or Charlestonian accent, the Piedmont variation, and the Appalachian twang.<sup>23</sup> And then there's always "*Bah-stahn*" where you buy a "*lodge budded pup con*" at the movies!

There is no such thing in nature as a superior or inferior dialect. However, there can be occasions when a distinct dialect is a definite disadvantage or advantage. Listeners prefer speech patterns that are familiar to their ears. Audiences may also have stereotyped preconceptions about people which speak with certain dialect patterns. For example, those raised in the South often associate a northeastern dialect with brusqueness and abrasiveness, and midwesterners may associate a southern dialect with slowness of action and mind. You may have to work to overcome these prejudices against your dialect.

Your dialect should reflect the standard for educated people from your geographic area or ethnic group. You should be concerned about tempering your dialect only if it creates barriers to understanding and identification between you and your audience. Then you may want to work toward -softening your dialect so that you lower these barriers for the sake of your message.

### ***Emphasis***

When you are writing, you can emphasize a word by underlining, italicizing, or using capital or bold letters. The word is emphasized because the other words are not underlined, italicized, capitalized, or bolded. How do you provide emphasis when you are speaking?

When speaking, you can stress a word to make it stand out from the others by simply raising the volume of your voice.

- "I repeated it clearly: NO!"
- "NEVER have I heard of ANYTHING so silly!"

You can also provide emphasis by raising the pitch of your voice. Pitch describes how high or low a sound is. You have learned to raise the pitch of your voice to show surprise, most often in questions such as these:

- "I don't believe she said that, do *you*?"
- "You mean he didn't *know* that the procedures had been changed?"

Another effective technique for emphasizing words is simply to pause; the word or words following the pause receive extra emphasis. You also can "introduce" the words you want to emphasize. The words preceding the pause prepare listeners to attend to important information:

- "Now here is the key to increasing profits: (pause) We must all work harder."

When speaking, you cannot emphasize everything you say, and the opposite, emphasizing nothing, is equally ineffective. Speech that is **monotone** is delivered with the same *intonation*, stress, pitch, and volume. It offers no variety and, worse, no emphasis. From it we derive the adjective *monotonous*, meaning "tedious, dull, boring" the last characteristics you want for your presentation!

## **USING YOUR VOICE EFFECTIVELY**

Your voice plays an important role in the meanings listeners find in your words. By varying the rhythm, pace, emphasis, pitch, or inflection you can easily change these meanings. Consider the following simple sentences:

I don't believe it. You did that.

Give me a break.

How many different meanings can you 'create, just by varying the way you say them?

How your message comes across to your audience depends a great deal on the adequacy of your voice. *A good speaking voice conveys your message. clearly and enhances your*

*ethos*. It must convey not only the meaning but the feeling of your message. Additionally, the way that you speak has an effect on all dimensions of your ethos. If you sound tentative, people might think you are not very competent. If you mumble, people may think you are trying to hide something and mistrust you. If you are overly loud or strident, listeners may not find you very likable.

Some people resist changing the way they talk. This is natural because how you talk -is part of your identity. Your voice even may represent your personality to many people. Someone who talks in a soft, breathy voice may be labeled “*sexy*”; another, who speaks in a resonant and forceful voice, may be considered “authoritative.” Some speakers may wish to maintain a distinct dialect as part of their ethnicity.<sup>11</sup> Listeners may respond positively or negatively to any of these factors. While you may not want to make any drastic changes in your speaking style, minor improvements in the way you talk can bring about positive changes in how others may respond to you. You should work on your voice to eliminate harsh or shrill sounds and to pronounce and enunciate words ‘clearly so that you have the most pleasant and effective speech you are capable of producing.

To speak more expressively, your voice needs careful attention. As one voice specialist put it, “Though speech is a human endowment how well we speak is an individual achievement.”<sup>12</sup> With a little effort and practice, most of us can make positive changes in the way we speak. We caution, however, that simple vocal exercises will not fix serious speech impairments. If you have such a problem, contact the speech pathology clinic on your campus or in your community for professional help.

The first step in learning to use your voice more effectively is to evaluate how you usually talk. Tape-record yourself both speaking spontaneously and reading. When you hear yourself, you may say, “Is that really me?” Most tape recorders will slightly distort the way you sound because they -do not exactly replicate the spectrum of sounds made by the human voice. Nevertheless, a tape recording gives you a sample of how your voice may sound to others. Listen to the tape and ask yourself the following questions:

1. Does my voice convey the meaning I intend?
2. Would I want to listen to my voice if I were in the audience?
3. Does my voice present me at my best?

If your honest answers to any of these questions are negative) you may need to work on pitch, rate, loudness, variety, articulation, enunciation, pronunciation, or, dialect. Save your original tape so that you can hear yourself improve as you practice.

### ***Variety***

The importance of vocal variety shows up most in speeches that lack it. Speakers who drone on in a monotone, never varying their pitch, rate, or loudness, send a clear message. They tell us that they have little interest in their topic or in their listeners or that they are afraid of the situation they are in. Variety can make speeches come to life by adding color and interest to a speech. One of the best ways to develop variety is to read aloud materials that demand it to express meaning and feeling. A- *you* read the following selection from *the lives and times of archy and mehitabel*, strive for maximum variation of pitch, rate, and loudness. Incidentally, archy is a cockroach who aspires to be a writer. He leaves typewritten messages for his newspaper-editor mentor but, because he is a cockroach, he can’t type capital letters and never uses punctuation marks. His friend

mehitabel, whom he quotes in this message, is an alley cat with grandiose dreams. and a dubious reputation.

archy what in hell have i done  
to deserve all these kittens  
life seems to be just one damn fitter after another after all archy i am an artist  
this constant parade of kittens  
interferes with my career  
its not that i am thy on mother love archy  
why my heart would bleed if anything happened to them and i found it out  
a tender heart is the cross i bear  
but archy the eternal struggle between life and art  
is simply wearing me out 1°

Tape-record yourself while reading this and' other favorite poems or dramatic scenes aloud. Compare these practice tapes with your initial self evaluation tape to see if you have improved in the use of variety in your presentations.

### **Patterns of Speaking**

People often make judgments about others based on their speech patterns. If you slur your words, mispronounce familiar words, or speak with a dialect that sounds unfamiliar to your audience, you may be seen as uneducated or socially inept. When you sound "odd" to your listeners, their attention will be distracted from what you are saying to the way you are saying it. In this section we cover articulation, enunciation, pronunciation, and dialect as they contribute to or detract from speaking effectiveness.