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USING the VOICE to COMMUNICATE

Objectives

After reading this chapter, you should be able to:

1. state why every person's voice is unique
2. describe the stages in voice production
3. identify the types of breathing
4. explain the various aspects of voice usage
5. identify the steps to improve the quality of one's speaking voice
6. identify the causes of poor articulation

INTRODUCTION

What kind of voice do you have? Is it rich and resonant, soft and alluring, thin and nasal? Is it deep and raspy, or harsh or irritating? Whatever the characteristics of your voice, you can be sure it is unique. Because no two people are the same physically, no two people have identical voices. This is why voiceprints are sometimes used in criminal trials as guides to personal identity.

The second major element of a speaker's presentation is the voice. Vocal delivery involves the mechanics of vocalization, vocal characteristics (including pitch, volume, rate and quality) and pronunciation. Inexperienced speakers often pay little attention to their vocal delivery, and that the voice cannot be altered in any way. Even though one's physical makeup influences vocal quality, much can be done to vocal delivery.

THE PHYSIOLOGY OF SPEECH

Two separate but related mechanisms are involved in the production of speech: the voice-producing mechanism and the mechanism of articulation.

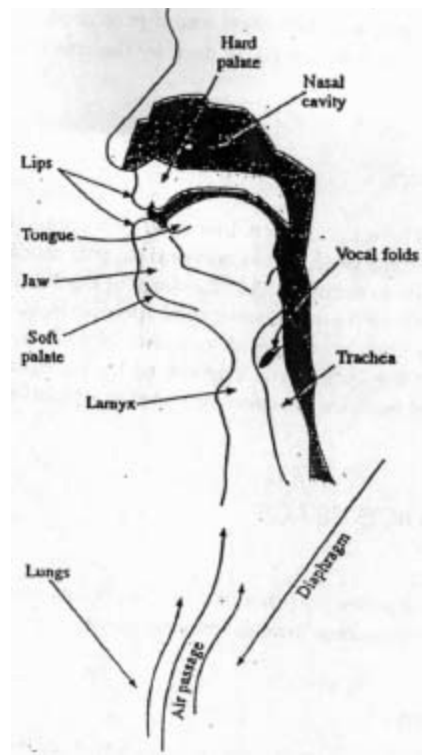
Voice Production

1. *Respiration*

You need a supply of air not only to survive but also to produce the sound needed for an effective vocal delivery. It is the diaphragm that is primarily involved in inhalation. The diaphragm is a dome shaped muscle attached to the base and sides of the lower ribs separating the abdomen from the chest. When you inhale, the diaphragm contracts and moves downward, while the ribs move upward and out.

As seen in Figure 1, voice production involves the passage of air from the lungs, through the trachea, and into the larynx. As you relax and contract your diaphragm and abdominal as well as chest muscles, air through the process of respiration is forced from the lungs into the larynx. The larynx, commonly known as the voice box, is connected above and below by muscles, which move it up and down. Sound is produced during exhalation when the vocal folds inside the larynx come together until there is only a slit between them. Air is forced up the trachea and through the vocal folds causes the folds to vibrate and produce a weak sound.

If you gasp for air or raise your shoulders when you inhale, you are possibly using *clavicular breathing*, or respiration from the top of your lungs. *Clavicular breathing* may cause unsteadiness in the air supply and creates tension in the neck and throat. *Diaphragmatic breathing* is feeling your stomach muscles move forward as you inhale. A good steady breath from the diaphragm produces the constant supply of air needed to produce sound.



(Figure 1: Voice Production)

2. *Phonation*

In simple terms, this process by which air is pushed through the vocal cords, which then vibrate to produce sound is **phonation**. This is not the sound others hear when you speak. The process of phonation is not complete until the sound produced in the larynx is resonated throughout the vocal chamber of the mouth, nose, and throat.

3. *Resonation*

The spoken voice first goes through a process of **resonation** in which qualities are added to the sound as it passes through a series of air chambers in the throat and head. Resonance is responsible for both the amplification and enrichment of the voice. The principal resonators of the voice are the upper part of the larynx, the throat, the nasal cavities, and the mouth. The role of these chambers can be understood by focusing on the role of the mouth to produce vowel sounds. As the mouth opens and closes, the size and shape of the oral cavity changes, and the vowel sound produced changes with it. The sound of your vowels is determined, in part, by the size and functioning of these resonators.

4. *Articulation*

The tongue, teeth, lips, jaw, gum ridge, the hard and soft palates, in addition to the nose, throat and oral cavities modify the resonated sound, enabling us to articulate it in the form of distinct speech. Through the movements of these articulators of speech, the size and shape of the oral cavity for the production of specific consonants and vowels can be changed. The quality of the spoken voice produced by these physiological mechanisms is expressed in terms of several vocal characteristics that add variety to speech.

The aspects of voice you should work to control are *volume, pitch, rate, quality, pauses, emphasis, variety, pronunciation, articulation, and dialect.*

1. Volume

Volume is the intensity or loudness of your voice. Each of us has a volume range that allows us to project various degrees of loudness, ranging from a whisper to a scream.

At one time, a powerful voice was all but essential for an orator. Today, electronic amplification allows for even the most feeble speakers to be heard in any setting. However, in the classroom, you will speak without a microphone. When you do, you have to adjust your voice to the acoustics of the room, the size of your audience, and the level of background noise. If your audience cannot hear you, your speech serves little purpose.

While the most important point is simply to be heard, you can also adjust volume to add to your overall presentation. Variation in volume makes you sound more dynamic. It can also emphasize your main ideas and add impact to the verbal message.

2. Pitch

The pitch of the voice refers to how high or low the voice sounds. A person's natural pitch is determined in part by the length and width of the vocal cords. Women's vocal cords are characteristically thinner and longer than men, and so they have high pitched voices. The faster sound waves vibrate, the higher their pitch; the slower they vibrate, the lower their pitch.

In speech, pitch can affect the meaning of words or sounds. Pitch is what makes the difference between saying "yes" is an upward pitch as if to ask a question and saying it in a downward pitch to mean affirmation.

When you have developed control of your pitch you use this skill through your advantage. Through pitch variations, color and vitality is added to your delivery. It can also be used as means of emphasis. The most boring speakers use little pitch variety, ending up speaking in monotones.

3. Rate

Rate refers to the speed at which a person speaks. Most speak within the range of 120 and 160 words per minute. Rate is another important vocal characteristic that helps audience comprehension. If you speak too quickly, the audience will not be able to keep pace. At the other extreme, if your speaking rate is slow, the audience is bound to lose interest and get bored. An effective speaker will vary the rate of speech, pausing and slowing down to give emphasis to some material and speeding up at other points.

Speech tension may affect your normal pattern. Under the pressure of giving a speech, you might speed up or slow down. Rate is also affected by delivery style. If you read a manuscript rather than speak extemporaneously, your rate of speaking is affected. In addition to message comprehension, research has shown that the speech rate also affects the ratings of speaker competence and social attractiveness. One way to monitor the rate of your speech is recording your voice on tape.

4. Quality

One of the most difficult characteristics is vocal quality. Vocal quality refers to the timbre of the voice, a characteristic that distinguishes one voice from another. A resonant quality is

desirable, so that the voice sounds deep and mellow. Voices that are too thin, strident, nasal, or breathy sound unpleasant and should be improved. Each of these qualities is the result of poor phonation.

5. Pauses

Learning when and how to pause is a major challenge for most beginning speakers. However, as you gain more poise and confidence, you will discover how useful the pause can be. Pauses add color, expression, and feeling to a speech. They are used deliberately to achieve a desired effect like pausing when you introduce a new idea, giving your audience time to absorb what you are saying, or make a dramatic impact to a statement. Pausing also helps in verbal phrasing, as you move from one thought to the next.

Some speakers talk continuously until they are out of breath. Others pause every three to four words resulting to a choppy delivery. Those that read their speeches may pause at the wrong times. Proper pausing can communicate self-confidence because you deliver the nonverbal message that you are relaxed enough to stop talking for a moment.

6. Emphasis

Think of the many ways you can say—depending on how they are said together with a nonverbal behavior. These changes give meaning to a word or phrase. By emphasizing certain words you add color and avoid monotony in your speeches. Note how the meaning varies with the word being emphasized:

WE must fight terrorism
We **MUST** fight terrorism.
We must **FIGHT** terrorism.
We must fight **TERRORISM**.

Emphasis can be achieved by applying several techniques. You can change the volume of your voice throughout the speech to emphasize contrast. You can also vary your pitch to avoid monotony, letting your audience know what you are saying is important.

Changing your rate at which you speak and pause can also draw attention to what is to be said next. Finally, emphasis comes naturally when you speak with emotions or expressing your deep feelings about the topic of your speech.

7. Variety

Just as variety is the spice of life, so is it the spice of public speaking. A flat, unchanging voice is no comparison to a lively, expressive voice in delivering a speech. To effectively communicate your ideas and feelings, you have to vary the rate, pitch, volume, and pauses in your speech. Vocal variety is a natural feature of ordinary conversation. There is no reason then why it should not be as natural a feature of your own speeches.

FACTORS INFLUENCING YOUR VOICE

There are other factors that can influence your voice. The first of these is your *physical makeup*. This factor involves the various parts of the vocal mechanism described during phonation like the

ungs, vocal cords, larynx, and resonating organs.

Psychological factors also influence a person's voice. When you are anxious or excited, the tension may create a higher pitch than normal. In contrast, if you are relaxed and at ease your voice will sound more pleasant.

Another factor that influences voice is *past and present environment*. Members of the same family often seem to have similar voices, which is genetic as well as environmental. You have a tendency to pick up inflections from the people around you like family and friends.

In addition to the influence of immediate circle of acquaintances, your voice is also affected by *regional dialects*. Different regions of the Philippines have varying speech and voice patterns that make their use of voice and language unique. Even intonation patterns can make a difference in the meaning of words. Most often though, regional differences usually affect your pronunciation patterns and voice quality.

Your voice will reveal your basic personal adjustment as you experience different emotions like anxiety, anger, and defensiveness. It can also be further enhanced through formal training like voice lessons. Finally, your voice is *affected by your reactions to particular communication situations like public speaking such as being a confident, nervous, indifferent, or enthusiastic speaker*.

CHARACTERISTICS OF AN EFFECTIVE VOICE

Knowing how the voice is produced and its various aspects of voice usage, you should analyze your voice to enable you to initiate a program of planned and directed practice. The characteristics of an effective voice are audibility, being pleasant, fluency, and flexibility.

1. Audibility

To be heard is good but to be understood is better. This characterizes audibility, which is an effective use of force and the need for vocal projection. A speaker must be able to adjust the volume of his/her voice to the size of the audience and to competing noises.

Exercises in improving breath control and projection are recommended for proper audibility. For breath control, breathe deeply and utter the alphabet in one breath, maintaining a steady, clear tone throughout a to z. Another exercise is to pant several times, later substituting it for counting numbers as a platoon leader counting cadence.

An exercise for projection is uttering a sentence four times, each on a different breath in the following situations: first to a friend within three to four feet; the second time, conversing around the table with twenty friends; the third time, to a calling out to a neighbor across the street; and the fourth time, speaking before an audience of over a hundred people.

2. Pleasant

Your voice is said to be a blueprint of your personality. Therefore being pleasant is associated with a speaker's appearance, likeability, and personality. To produce pleasing vocal quality, one's speaking mechanism must be relaxed. This will produce a well-modulated, smooth and resonant voice. Unpleasant voices are those that are *nasal, shrill, raspy, breathy, weak and whiny*.

Achieving *optimum pitch* at your *natural pitch*, your voice will sound most pleasant. You can

determine this by singing on a scale from do to do. The tone in the middle range will be your optimum pitch. The term *habitual pitch* is what you have been used to and not necessarily your natural pitch.

3. Fluency

Fluency is the smooth, easy and ready flow of utterances. This can be produced by a general tempo suited to the occasion, message, or the speaker. The use of appropriate pauses and eliminating hesitations are necessary for a speaker's fluency.

4. Flexibility

Vocal flexibility helps hold attention, clarify meaning, and gets the desired response. The proper use of the aspects of voice such as pitch, rate, volume and quality enhances the meaning and mood to be conveyed. A stage actor or even a newscaster will be able to deliver their messages in a variety of pitch and force to capture the audience's attention.

PRONUNCIATION

Pronunciation describes the combinations of vowels, consonants, syllables, and accents that a speaker chooses to emphasize a specific word. Pronunciation can be important to the improvement of both speech and voice.

Standards of pronunciation are often determined by geographical area or imposed by occasion or education. Certain situations such as job interviews or press conferences require careful pronunciation. Any person speaking before an audience should pay special attention to pronunciation. The audience's attention may be temporarily distracted when a speaker makes a pronunciation error, thus creating a bad impression at times.

Education affects pronunciation because the exposure to language through reading, speaking, listening, and writing results in increased vocabulary and knowledge of the way different words are produced. If you are unsure of the way a word is pronounced, look it up in the dictionary.

The International Phonetic Alphabet is the standard guide for pronunciation for vowels and consonants.

ARTICULATION

Articulation is the process of forming meaningful oral symbols through the manipulation of the articulators – the tongue, soft and hard palates, teeth, gums, lips and jaw. Pronunciation and articulation are not identical. The failure to form particular speech sounds as crisp and distinct is a result of sloppy articulation. It is one of the many causes of mispronunciation but not all errors in pronunciation are results from poor articulation. For example, you can articulate a word perfectly and yet mispronounce it like sounding the “p” in *pneumonia*.

There are many common articulation problems among Filipinos. Substitution of the vowels (long or short sound of a, e, i, o, u) and consonants (*f to p, b to v, th to t and vice versa*).

Examples:

Vowels	Consonants
divine – dip (i)	flower people (f – p)
deep-delimit (e)	very beautiful (v-b)
<i>pot – nook(o)</i>	<i>think tough (th-t)</i>
<i>ham – educate (a)</i>	
useful – shut (u)	

There can also be omissions like the letter h in words like heavy and prolonging the letter s in *sneakers, sparkles*. There are additions like adding the consonant i before words beginning with s like (i-stair, i-step.)

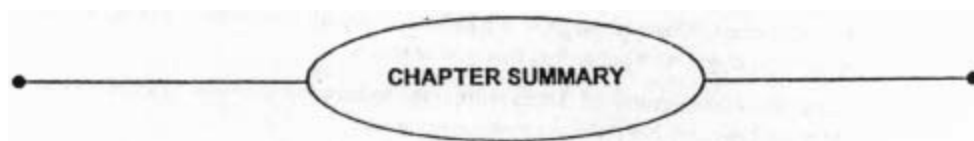
Errors in articulation can be from organic causes like a cleft palate or a large tongue; social conditioning like the influence of your family and friends. It can also be from physical problems like wearing braces or spaces in your teeth; and from nervous tension.

If you have sloppy articulation, work on identifying and eliminating your common errors through practice. The results will be worth it as your speeches will be more intelligible.

DIALECTS

Most languages have dialects, each with a distinctive grammar, accent, and vocabulary. Philippine dialects are based on regional or ethnic speech patterns. Over the years, linguists have conducted researches on dialects. Their conclusion is that no dialect is inherently better or worse than any other nor is there linguistic badges of inferiority or superiority. They are shaped by our regional and ethnic backgrounds and so every dialect is “right” for the community and people who use it.

When is dialect appropriate in public speaking? The answer depends on the composition of the audience. Heavy use of a dialect may spell trouble for a speaker if the audience does not share the dialect. In such a situation, members of the audience may make negative judgements about the speaker’s personality and competence. Therefore, using a dialect should be with caution after an extensive audience analysis.



The impact of a speech is strongly affected by how (be speech is delivered. You cannot make a good speech without having something to say. However, having something to say is not enough. You must know *how* to say it. A primary factor in delivery is the speaker’s voice.

The physiology of speech involves the mechanism of voice production and articulation. Volume, pitch, rate, pausing, emphasis, and variety determine voice quality. Patterns of articulation, and mispronunciation can be affected by regional dialects.

Voice is the relative highness of your voice, and pitch is the relative highness or lowness. Rate refers to the speed at which you talk. Pauses, when carefully timed, can add impact to your speech.