

# 5

## LANGUAGE

### Objectives

After reading this chapter, you should be able to:

1. describe the nature of language
2. differentiate the types of meanings
3. explain the attributes of effective oral language
4. suggest ways to achieve oral style
5. employ language in conversation and public speech that meets the criteria of clarity, directness, appropriateness and vividness

## INTRODUCTION

English being one of our nation's official languages has come a long way. The language introduced by colonizers has apparently charted a distinct path of its own. Today this "foreign tongue" is used, misused, and abused depending on who is the perceiver. How do we Filipinos understand its nature and use?

In 1977, former American President Jimmy Carter, on a trip to Poland, had to rely on Polish government interpreters because the American government could not find one who could speak modern Polish. It seemed natural that native translators "interpreted" his speeches and pronouncements in a way that fit Polish political sensibilities. So when he offered his condolences to dissident journalists who "wanted to attend but were not permitted to come," the interpreters translated it as "who wanted to come but couldn't." And thus the audience missed the point. Of course, this was long before *perestroika*.

In an article in the *Gentleman's Quarterly* in 1987, Kenneth Turan described some of the misunderstandings that occurred during the dubbing or subtitling of American movies in Europe. In one movie where a policeman tells a motorist to pull over, the Italian translator has him asking for a sweater (which is sometimes called a pullover). In another where a character asks if he can bring a plate to the funeral, the Spanish subtitle has him asking if he can bring a fig to the funeral.

Filipinos who certainly are reputed to speak good English have their slip-ups too. When a popular reader was asked where his lady was, he unashamedly responded: "You didn't see her? Oh, she just passed away." All the occasion needed was to delete that adverb!

These stories illustrate some of the many communication problems which may arise in the use of language. What is language? What is the nature of language? What are the attributes of effective oral language? The answers to these questions will be discussed in this chapter.

How are we using the term *language*? Language sometimes refers to different tongues such as Chinese, Nippongo and Spanish. In the early history of rhetoric, classical rhetoricians regarded language as one of the major canons: inventio (analysis), dispositio (organization), elocutio (language or style), memoria, and pronunciatio (delivery). Hughes defines it as a "system of arbitrary symbols by which thought is conveyed from one human being to another." According to DeVito, language is the code, the system of symbols, utilized in the construction of verbal messages. These last two definitions emphasize that language has to do with verbal symbols. It has to do with a system which involves pattern and order. It has to do with the human social context.

We must distinguish between language and speech. Language is not synonymous with speech because the latter covers the entire scope of human communication. More precisely, Knowler defines speech as "the ongoing multisymbolic behavior in social situations carried on to achieve communication". It is multisymbolic because it employs language, tones, pitch range, and non-verbal behavior simultaneously to represent what we mean. Language is a symbol system for both written and oral communication. We will be primarily concerned with oral or spoken language. This is the language of conversation and speechmaking.

## THE NATURE OF LANGUAGE

We need to understand the nature of language so that we can use words more effectively in the communication of our thoughts and feelings. Oftentimes problems arise that turn language into a

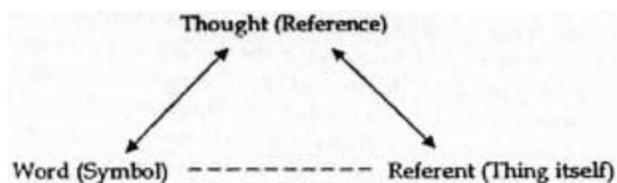
communication obstacle rather than a communication facilitator. To understand the characteristics of words is to understand the possibilities as well as limitations of these verbal tools.

## WORDS ARE ONLY SYMBOLS

Words are symbols which represent and substitute for objects, concepts, feelings, emotions, experiences and events around us. These referents may be concrete or they may be abstract. We use words to represent our meanings and to stimulate the listener to create his own image/representation of what we are talking about. The word is merely a symbol, it is not the actual thing itself. Alfred Korzybski, the father of general semantics, emphasized this fact when he said that the “map” is not the territory it stands for, the word “book” is not the collection of pages. What this means is that if you are looking at the map of the U.P. Diliman campus, you are not looking at Diliman, but a functional symbol that stands for that physical territory. The map is not the physical territory, the map simply represents the area referred to, in this case the Diliman campus. If you hear or see the word “book,” you are not seeing or hearing the book but a symbol that stands for it. These examples clearly remind us that as the map represents the Diliman campus, the word “book” only represents the actual object, it is not the thing itself.

Very often, though, people react to words as if they were the things symbolized. Have you ever discussed an operation or a disease with friends? Did you notice how they got squeamish at the mere utterance of such terms as “blood,” “pus,” “transfusion,” “incision,” or perhaps “infection?” It is probably because they were reacting to words as if they were the real things.

To further understand the symbolic nature of words, let us refer to the triangle of meaning formulated by Ogden and Richards in *The Meaning of Meaning*. The diagram illustrates the relationships of the word or symbol, the thought or reference and the referent or the thing itself.



**The Triangle of Meaning**

Note that only broken lines connect the word or symbol and the referent or thing itself. This indicates that there is no direct relationship between word and the referent. The link between word and the referent is the thought or mental process. The relationship or connection is created in the mind of the user of the language.

Although it is often emphasized that there is no necessary connection between the symbol and that which is symbolized (the referent), a habitual confusion of symbols (words) with things symbolized persists. People treat words as if they were the actual objects or events to which they refer. For instance, there is a grain of fear about “death” and “dying” in almost all of us. In an effort to ward off this threat, we refrain from even pronouncing the words. If the topic cannot be avoided, the idea is circumvented with an array of metaphors: passing away, demise, departure, loss, has left us for the great beyond, wrote thirty and met his Maker. We use circumlocutions or euphemisms. A euphemism according to *Webster’s Ninth New Collegiate Dictionary (1991)*, is the substitution of an agreeable or inoffensive expression for one that may offend or one that may suggest something unpleasant, harsh or indelicate. Old people are referred to by gentle euphemisms such as senior citizens, the elderly,

advanced in years or the golden-age group. In the book *The Official Politically Correct Dictionary and Handbook*, its co-authors humorously offer some linguistic improvement. They suggest that instead of saying “bald” say “follicularly challenged,” instead of “fat” say “horizontally challenged.” They prefer “temporarily able” to “healthy.” A better word for “body odor” is “nondiscretionary fragrance” and for “lazy” is “motivationally deficient.” Other interesting entries include “ethically disoriented” for dishonest and “negative saver” for spendthrift. The familiar line “sticks and stones may break my bones but words will never hurt me” should be true but it is not.

## **MEANINGS ARE IN PEOPLE, NOT IN WORDS**

As communicators, it is your task to use words to create desired meanings in the minds of your listeners or receivers. However, no matter how carefully and precisely you select your words, they (words) do not automatically convey the same meanings from speaker to listener. Meanings are not stamped or imprinted on the words of the messages your listeners receive. Recall what you learned in an earlier unit on the communication process. Only sound and light waves come between the speaker and his audience. Meanings do not inhabit words. Instead, they are assigned by the individual who perceives the word. It should therefore be no surprise that there can be as many meanings or interpretations to a term as there are people who use them.

Barrameda tells us that the word “set” is the word with the most meanings in the English language. It has so far 58 uses as a noun, 126 as a verb and 10 as a principal adjective. How does a listener know which meaning a speaker is using? We see the same predicament when we speak Filipino. Dr. Lilia Antonio of the Department of Filipino and Philippine Literature in a research paper revealed that the Filipino word “labas” has 74 meanings in both simple and complex usages. It might just be a good idea to use index and dates as reminders that no word ever has exactly the same meaning twice. JP<sub>1918</sub> is not UP<sub>1965</sub> is not UP<sub>1980</sub> is not UP<sub>2001</sub>. Chair<sub>1</sub> is not chair<sub>2</sub> is not chair<sub>3</sub> is not chair<sub>4</sub> and so on. To do this is to be reminded that chair<sub>1</sub> is different from chair<sub>2</sub>; that even chair<sub>3</sub> does not tell us all about the “chairs” and that there may be characteristics left out in the process.

When we communicate with others, we can no longer consider only our meaning for a word. We have to consider what these words mean to those with whom we are communicating with in order to apply what Wilbur Schramm calls the common “field of experience.” Meanings are created in the minds of people and meanings have to be shared to facilitate understanding.

## **LANGUAGE IS DYNAMIC**

Change is true of all languages but is particularly prevalent in the English language. According to Kacirck, changing societal needs, the erosion of old customs and a call for elegance are some of the reasons for the growth and decline of language. Many words die a natural death. “Clapperclaw” for one, has disappeared from common usage and the simpler verb “to scold” has taken its place. “Iron curtain” and “Soviet bloc” are no longer in usage. Can you list more words?

Words are static while meanings are dynamic. Many words remain the same but take on a new and different meaning. In the history of words, there was a time when counterfeit meant a legitimate copy, brave once implied cowardice and garble meant to sort out, not to mix up. Many old words which once were used to describe one experience are now used to describe other experiences. If we were to look under a “hood” over 500 years ago, we should have found a monk. Today we find an automobile engine. It is also the abbreviated form of the word hoodlum. It may also denote the part of the

academic growth that indicates by color the wearer's college or university. Problems will arise if one reacts to words as if their meanings never changed.

Language is a function of time. Every generation evolves its own style of language. It was the state of modern English which led Prince Charles of England to wonder how Shakespeare's Hamlet would have delivered his famous "To be or not to be" soliloquy in today's language ("Prince Charles rewrites' Hamlet").

In Act III Scene I of Hamlet the protagonist says"

To be or not to be; that is the question:  
Whether 'tis nobler in the mind to suffer  
The slings and arrows of outrageous fortune,  
Or to take arms against a sea of troubles,  
And by opposing end them?

Here is Prince Charles' version of how the soliloquy would be written in today's English. Note how the choice of words has changed.

Well, frankly, the problem as I see it  
At this moment in times whether I  
Should just lie down under all this hassle  
And let them walk all over me.  
Or whether I should just say OK  
I get the message and do myself in.

New words are created. Cyberspace, hi-definition television, holography, surrogate parents, genetic engineering, multinationals, computer simulation, browse the web, bioterrorism, jumbo jets are just few of the coinages that have gained currency in the past 30 years.

New situations create new meanings. Roget's *Thesaurus*, the 150-year old book of synonyms and antonyms was recently revised to reflect changes in language. It has eliminated words its editor says are biased, prejudiced, twisted, sexist, liberal, and narrow-minded. For one, it makes more explicit the existence of women. Also, the choices are more wide-ranging and neutral as possible. For example "mankind" has been changed to "humankind," "countryman" to "countrydweller" and "rich man" to "rich person." The revised volumes also contain entries under the new headings of micro-electronics and dates processing. It seems unclear that we cannot ignore change and assume that reality is static and unchanging.

We need to consider as well how place can affect the way our listeners process our words. Words are used differently in one country from the other. You may be quite familiar with a few of them; for example, lift/elevator, dustbin/garbage can, biscuit/cookie. In Britain, homely is a flattering expression (equivalent to homey); in America it means "ugly." In Britain upstairs is the first floor; in America it means second. In Britain "to table a motion" means to put it aside; in America it means to give priority. In Britain "presently" means in a little while; in America it means "now." In Britain the Royal Mail delivers the post, not the mail, while in America the Postal Service delivers the mail, not the post.

Language is also a function of culture. It reveals what a group of people might deem important in their everyday lives. This is most apparent in the differences of vocabulary from one tongue to

another. For example, Peruvian Indians have roughly 200 words for what we simply know of as ‘potato’ just as Filipinos have a roster of terms for their staple food ‘rice.’ This reflects their great economic dependence upon this crop, the special varieties of potato they have developed and the level to which they have raised the art of potato cultivation. The variety of kinship terms in a language, meanwhile, reveals how important these relations are within a culture. i.e., social structure. Since kinship relations are of paramount importance to the Australian bushman, he has separate terms to refer to his mother’s sister’s son, his father’s brother’s daughter, his wife’s father’s brother’s wife, and dozens of other relatives of varying and dizzying degree. The reason for this is that his rights and responsibilities differ with respect to each of them.

Many other interesting examples demonstrate how language as it varies from society to society reflects and reveals culture. Concepts which are important to a society are allocated a large number of terms. The residents of the Trobriand Islands of Papua, New Guinea, have a hundred words for yams. The Italians have over 500 names for different types of macaroni. Meanwhile, the Arabs are said to have 6000 words for camels and camel equipment. Money is extremely important to the American culture. As a result, they have many terms for it : “finances, funds, capital, assets, cash, pocket money, pin money, change, bread, loot” etc. We Filipinos have many words for rice. It is our staple crop and we find it on the dining table more than three times a day. Have you tasted “galapong,” “pirurutong” “pinipig,” “suman,” “bahaw,” and “tutong?”

Communicators would do well to be sensitive to how these differences in time and place or region affect the meaning of words. The tendency to ignore change and assume that words are static and unchanging can be a barrier to effective verbal interaction.

## WORDS HAVE MANY TYPES OF MEANINGS

There are at least five general types of meanings : denotation, connotation, structural meaning, contextual meaning and sound meaning. The first type of meaning is denotation. It is the objective, precise, literal or dictionary meaning of a word. Suppose we take the word “university.” The dictionary defines it as “an institution of higher learning providing facilities for teaching and research.” Denotation is like pointing to a referent or the object itself. We would more likely agree with the denotative meanings of words and have the same definitions.

Such is not the case, however, with connotative meanings. **Connotations** are more subjective, figurative and variable. The connotative meaning of “university” includes all the feelings, associations and emotions that the word touches off in different individuals. These experiences and memories may be pleasant or unpleasant, negative or positive, good or bad. For one person, the school might connote DQs, boring lectures, enlistment lines and term papers. Since connotations are extremely personal, fewer people would agree on the connotative meanings of a term. These meanings reside in the relationship between the object and the speaker or listener.

According to the late American Senator S.I. Hayakawa, author of *Language in Thought and Action* there are “snarl-words” and there are “purr-words”. The terms “politician” and “statesman” refer to the same denotation. But the term politician continues to have a sinister meaning hence, a “snarl-word.” “Statesman,” on the other hand, suggests a more desirable image of one who exercises political leadership wisely and without partisanship, therefore, a “purr-word.” Another pair of examples is “mellow” and “senile.” The word “mellow” is a complimentary synonym for the neutral term “old.” Mellow usually causes listeners to react favorably toward the object described. The word “senile” is often regarded as an uncomplimentary synonym. It causes people to react

unfavorably toward the same person or idea. It may be difficult to attain complete impartiality as far as word choices are concerned but by being aware of the favorable and unfavorable feelings that certain words can arouse, you can attain enough impartiality in writing and in speech.

Many words carry with them a strong effect on the reactions of the audience. They are more specifically referred to as loaded words. Words such as instigate, failure, sequester, dictator, and seize are considered loaded words by many. They possess rich emotional coloration. Exercise care when using loaded words.

Meanwhile, **structural meaning** tells us that the meaning of a sentence is determined not by the word alone but also by the total arrangement and sequence of words. The pattern or order in which the words are used or encountered communicate certain meanings. Misplacing a modifier can change the meaning of an idea. White, in his language chapter cites that seven different meanings can be conveyed successively inserting the word *only* before each of the 7 words in the sentence : *She told me that she loved me.*

Examine the two statements below. Although they have exactly the same set of words arranged in the same sequence, two different meanings can be inferred depending on where the commas are placed.

Woman, without her, man is a savage.

Woman without her man, is a savage.

**Contextual meaning** is another important type of meaning. Linguistic and nonlinguistic factors can affect the contextual meaning of a word. Linguistic factors are the words with which a term is surrounded. In the sentence “A sensible diet must include vegetables and fruits such as bananas,” we can easily make a quick guess as to the meaning of the term banana simply by examining the words which surround it. The terms diet, vegetables and fruits provide clues as to the specific usage of the word “banana.” Similarly if one were to say “He’s the big boss in that company. He is the top banana!” the words “big boss” and “company” would give us the precise usage of the word “banana” in this particular instance.

Non-linguistic factors may include the following: the situation in which the term is used, the facial expressions and gestures which accompany the utterance of the word or words. To avoid ambiguity in communication, the speaker must indicate the context so that his listeners can be made aware of it. Read the following segment and note how awareness of the context adds precision to meaning of the word “volunteer.”

*“Just a minute. America is a nation of **volunteers**. In small towns, **volunteer** firemen are obedient and passionate. When their wives say go to the blazes, they do. Then they rush home to their flames. When their wives ask **for volunteers** to take out the garbage, husbands **volunteer** that they would rather go bowling. Wives reply : I have seen you bowl. It’s the same thing as taking out the garbage.*

*Ralph Frampton **volunteered** to send Alice to the moon. Lucky for Alice, she wasn’t married to Neil Armstrong. In time of war, officers ask privates to **volunteer** for dangerous missions. Ever hear of a private asking an officer to **volunteer**?*

*In Botany, a **volunteer** is a cultivated plant grown from an accidentally dropped seed. IN bar rooms, I have seen seedy guys drop accidentally and they were not cultivated. To serve in a submarine, you must **volunteer**. To serve a submarine, you got to work in a pizzeria. I think I will leave now, **voluntarily**.” (Transcribed from tape of “Just a Minute” segment by Gene Shalit of the*

**Sound meaning** is meaning derived from the way the word or words are spoken. The speaker's one of voice and subtleties of inflection may indicate meanings which are not apparent in the printed ext. Try saying the following sentence while accenting or stressing the different words: "She is beautiful." Differences in meaning are communicated depending on where the stress is placed. Or try uttering the word "well" in a variety of ways. Notice how those exercises reveal how vocal variations, volume control and even pitch are important in shaping meaning.

We have seen from this discussion that words have many different types of meanings. For language to work there must be a common understanding of what the words mean.

## THE ATTRIBUTES OF EFFECTIVE ORAL LANGUAGE

Effective oral language possesses the following characteristics: clarity, directness, appropriateness and vividness.

### 1. *Effective oral language is clear*

Imagine you are standing at the intersection of University Ave. and you see someone about to step into the path of an oncoming car. Do you say, "It would appear from available empirical evidence as if an unsuspecting person is in danger of being struck and injured by an approaching automotive vehicle?" Of course not. You shout, "Look out!" It is apparent from this example by Lucas that one can be accurate but not clear.

Clarity involves correctness, accuracy, simplicity and understandability.

- a. ***The first attribute of clarity is correctness.*** Your language must be grammatically correct. Aside from causing misunderstanding, errors in grammar can contribute to a lowered ethos or perception of the source. For instance, the verb of a sentence must agree with subject of the sentence. Clear language must also avoid mangled syntax.
- b. ***A second attribute of clarity is accuracy.*** Precise word choice involves choosing words that accurately depict your meaning. A speaker must first make certain what meanings he wants his receivers or audience to get. He then checks whether the words he has chosen are the most precise ones for expressing that meaning. Suppose you want to say that you are "terribly perplexed by the events." Is perplexed a better choice over puzzled, bewildered, confused, nonplussed or even dumbfounded? The words guess, prediction, estimate, foretell, forecast mean roughly the same thing. One of them can represent reality more precisely and can convey a shade of meaning that distinguishes it from the other words. The same is true of the following set of synonyms: gift, subsidy, award, contribution, inheritance, present, endowment and benefits. Each term in the preceding group is slightly different from the other. Choose your words carefully. Use a dictionary or thesaurus when in doubt.

Imprecision may result from the use of all-purpose words. All-purpose words emphasize similarities but not differences. Remember the last time your mother asked you how you are doing in school? You probably said, "Okay" or "Fine." Try to give more precise and specific answers next time. "My professor gave me a 1.5 for a critique of a play which I watched recently" or "I flunked my third exam in Math 17." To say "the

car has been driven 30,000 kilometers and has never required repairs” is clearer than saying “It’s a *great* car!”

Imprecision may also result from the use of abstract words. Abstract words refer to general concepts, qualities or attributes. “Discipline,” “liberal arts,” “empowerment” are abstract words. Although they are sometimes necessary in order to express certain ideas and experiences they are easier to misinterpret than concrete ones. Concrete words refer to tangible objects, specifically people, places and things. “Blue book,” “lips,” “jeep” are concrete words. They evoke more precise mental pictures in your listeners’ minds. In order to avoid ambiguity, move from abstract to concrete and general to specific.

Compare the choice of words in the following sentences pairs.

*The patient is making a lot of improvement.*

The patient can now breathe on his own.

*I will not tolerate dishonesty in the classroom.*

I will not tolerate cheating on tests in the classroom.

*Business is good.*

For the first quarter, the volume of car sales increased by 25 %.

*I have a dog.*

I have a pit bull terrier.

In the first sentence of each pair, the italicized items are general and abstract. In the second sentence of each pair, the italicized items are concrete and specific. Make a conscious effort to be less general and abstract and more specific and concrete in your language.

Imprecision may result from exaggeration. Words like “awesome,” “colossal,” “stupendous,” and “terrific” have immediate and strong appeal. However, when there superlatives are used indiscriminately to describe anything and everything, they can cause misunderstanding.

- c. ***A third attribute of clarity is simplicity.*** Use a short, simple common word for a long unfamiliar one. A listener will have difficulty deciphering meaning if difficult words are used and too specialized vocabulary or technical jargon is employed. Say “difficult to understand,” rather than “esoteric,” “large” rather than “elephantine,” “to avoid” rather than “to eschew” or “building” rather than “edifice,” “imprisoned” rather than “incarcerated.”

A local insurance group has found the value of simplicity even in the face of high-tech sophistication. It recently introduced a new look in its policy contracts with insured parties by reducing the number of words to the barest minimum and eliminating legalistic terms in favor of laymen’s language. Thus, the first page of this firm’s insurance policy now reads: “We pay the face amount to you if the insured is alive on its termination date or to the beneficiary if the insured dies before the termination date, subject to the provisions of this policy.”

Here are some suggestions to achieve simplicity of language style.

Avoid verbosity or wordiness. Wilson cites that economy in language involves the right choice of words, in the right amount and in the best order for instantaneous intelligibility. It is relative to the topic and the receiver's needs. In addition, spoken language is understandably more ample than the written form because the listeners cannot review unless enough words are used by the speaker. This however, should not be an excuse for verbosity.

Use short and simple sentence construction. Clarity can be enhanced if sentences are not too lengthy. This is particularly true of persuasive messages. Ragsdale found that "brief messages produced significantly more attitude change than wordier versions of the same message that were indirect, repetitive, or included numerous compound sentences."

Avoid tautology and redundancy.

- Say "innovation," not "new innovation." An innovation is new.
- Say "refer to" not "refer back to." Refer just needs a "to."
- Say "revert to" not "revert back to." Revert actually means "go back" so just add a "to."
- Say "proceed," not "proceed on." Proceed only goes one way: ahead or forward.
- Say "unique" not "more or most unique." Unique means one of a kind.
- Say "reason," not "reason why" or "reason. . .because." Reason, by itself, means explanation.

The following paragraph further exemplifies this language problem:

*Meet Tautological Tessie. She's planning to redo her house over. A man she trusted turned out to be a dishonest crook. She likes the true facts and doesn't care to drive at a fast speed. At parties, she serves sherry wine. She was once courted by a rich millionaire and she thinks young teenagers are cute. It is her conviction that when studying a new subject she should learn the basic rudiments. She always sends flowers to sick invalids, and if there's anything she hates it's a gloomy pessimist. Fragrant perfumes attract her. A neighbor of hers was held up by a crazy psychopath. You'll never catch her going to see sad tragedies, as she prefers funny comedies. At a sideshow once she saw a tall giant (White).*

Avoid hackneyed phrases or trite expressions. Examples of such commonly used terms are "last but not the least," "at this point in time" and "in the last analysis." "In conclusion let me say" and "in the eventuality of" can similarly be avoided. Reword your intentions. Substitute these phrases for more original and fresh expressions. Also do away with verbal intrusions such as "you know," "basically," "actually," "I mean," "okay" and "really" in your oral speech. Eliminating such verbal fillers will help you convey your ideas more clearly.

- d. ***A fourth attribute of clarity is understandability.*** Define your terms. When explaining an unfamiliar or difficult concept, for example, you can define by using a dictionary definition. You can also trace the word's historical and linguistic development. You can explain how a particular authority views the term. You can define by negation. Or you can give familiar examples. You may even define by analogy by comparing the term with

a known or familiar entity. You really have many options to choose from when presenting unfamiliar or difficult concepts.

Avoid technical jargon, slang and uncommon foreign words. Jargon is the technical language of a professional class. Lawyers, physicians, stock brokers and even professors have a specialized vocabulary that their respective professions use. Before using jargon, determine whether or not your audience or receivers share your technical or specialized vocabulary. For example, it would be understandable among doctors to say “singultus spasm” for hiccups or “bilateral periorbital hematoma” for blackeye. But to use such terms among laymen would confuse rather than clarify.

Slang is another kind of sublanguage, a variation from the general language. It is especially appropriate in contexts of extreme informality. Although used by the general public, it is not considered proper in polite conversation or appropriate in formal written communication. Words such as *humungous*, *turn off*, *hush money*, *booze*, *woozy*, *go with the flow*, *get my drift* are examples of slang. When used frequently, slang words are incorporated into the general language as acceptable terms.

There are a number of foreign words which are commonly used and understood by Filipinos. Some of these are *vis-à-vis*, *coup d'état*, *non sequitor*, *bon appetit*, *de rigueur* and *bona fide*. If you have to use other foreign terms, make sure that your listeners understand their meanings. Otherwise, use uncommon foreign words sparingly.

## ***2. Effective oral language is direct and conversational.***

When you are conversing with a friend or delivering a speech, you have a live listener or audience. Remember that it is an audience that is listening, not reading. Readers can go back to reread or even pause at their own leisure to ponder upon what the writer has said. This advantage, however, is not available to the speaker. Hence, you must make sure your language is instantly intelligible. This concern with instant intelligibility results from the simple fact that speech sounds are evanescent meaning they fade rapidly. So if your words are too technical, too difficult or too high-brow they may not be received at all. Blankenship suggest that language for spoken communication must be oral in style: it must be quickly comprehensible, less formal, contain more restatement, be more direct and personal and easily spoken.

Here are some suggestions to achieve oral style.

- Use short words instead of polysyllabic words. Conversational speech is elliptical, meaning it is marked with extreme economy of words. Use phone, instead of telephone, co-ed dorm for co-educational dormitory.
- Use personal pronouns to help you identify with your listeners. Say “our future,” “I believe” and “We can change.”
- Use contradictions such as *isn't*, *aren't*, *won't* and *didn't* in order to add an air of informality.
- Use shorter sentence length.
- Use simple but graphic words.
- Use direct and rhetorical questions. Oral or spoken language demands a response. Interrogations, both direct and rhetorical, evoke quick responses from listeners. Direct questions are answered by the speaker while rhetorical questions allow listeners to ponder upon the idea or subject.

- Employ idiomatic expressions.
- Use the active voice rather than the passive voice. Instead of saying “It is hoped that active verbs will be used in the oral style” say “Use active verbs in order to achieve a more effective oral style.” The active voice is a stronger and more vigorous verb form.
- Again, because of the temporal nature of the speech act, more repetitions and restatements must be used to ensure comprehension.
- Lastly, since you confront your audience face-to-face, refer to them more directly, as well as to the time, place and immediate occasion.

**3. *Effective oral language is appropriate to the listeners, the occasion, the speech purpose and the speaker’s personality.***

- a. ***Effective oral language is appropriate to your audience.*** Adapt your language to your audience’s needs, attitudes, interests, knowledge and field of experience. Use words that they will understand, accept and respond to. Your words should reflect respect and friendliness toward your receivers or listeners. Audience analysis will help you determine if you should be formal or informal. The varsity basketball coach of the UP Maroons might address the players of the team as “you guys” while the speaker in a more formal situation such as a conferment rites for a visiting dignitary will start with “ladies and gentlemen” or “distinguished guests.” Although you can use certain words when conversing with your close friends, those same expressions may not be suitable for a public audience.

Professions such as medical, legal, engineering, etc. have developed jargon that is relatively incomprehensible to outsiders. If you were speaking before an audience of doctors, you will be understood when you say “*parotitis*” when referring to a viral disease marked by the swelling of one or both of the parotid glands. But if you were addressing a non-medical group, you will probably need to simply say “mumps.”

Here are two versions of the Lord’s prayer played regularly over a local Christian radio station. Read each one carefully. Note the differences in word choice. How well does the second one (children’s version) adapt to the special needs of child listeners?

**The Lord’s Prayer**

Our Father who art in heaven  
 Hallowed be Your name  
 Your kingdom come  
 Your will be done on earth  
 As it is in heaven  
 Give us this day our daily bread  
 And forgive us our trespasses  
 As we forgive those who  
 Trespass against us  
 And lead us not into temptation  
 But deliver us from evil  
 For Yours is the kingdom,  
 The power and the glory

For ever and ever.

Amen.

### **The Lord's Prayer** (children's version)

Dear Lord in Heaven

I'm not sure where that is

But I bet it's beautiful

You take care of us

and You love us and

Your Name is very special

We hope one day

It will be just like heaven right here

If we all did what you want us to do

it would be just like heaven here

Please help everyone to find

enough food for today

Please help us to make sure

no one goes hungry tonight

Please don't be angry when

we make mistakes

All children make mistakes,

even big children

And please help us to love You

And Your other children when

they make mistakes

Sometimes we get angry and

that's a mistake for everyone

Sometimes it looks so easy to

do the wrong thing

and so hard to do what's right

Please don't let the wrong things look so easy

Please help us to stay out of trouble

God it's your world

You can do anything and

You're the Greatest

That's the way it's always gonna be.

We love you, Amen.

Another important consideration is that as a speaker or user of language, you must avoid alienating your listeners. In conversation as well as in public speaking, avoid language that belittles your receivers because of their gender, disability, race, age or other characteristics. Your words must be considerate of not only the people you are talking to but of the people you talk about. Do not use obscene and questionable language in a speech.

b. ***Effective oral language is appropriate to the occasion.*** Just as you do not attend a debut

in shorts and sandals but in appropriate formal attire, a speaker will have to determine the nature and the degree of formality of the speech occasion. Varying situations and circumstances affect language style. The even could be solemn or humorous; business-like or casual. The language used in the state-of-the-nation address is expectedly more formal than a speech of tribute in a testimonial dinner. Everyday conversation would use informal language. Although the mood in a funeral may be different from the atmosphere in a graduation ceremony, you may occasionally hear the speaker delivering a eulogy tell a light or amusing anecdote about the deceased. On the other hand, speeches to entertain can have serious and earnest goals.

- c. ***Effective oral language must be appropriate to the speech purpose.*** If you are speaking in public, remember to vary your language style according to your speech purpose. The language that is used to transmit information and the language that is used to persuade and influence behavior are different. The language of informative discourse is characterized by accuracy of vocabulary, explanation of technical terms and concreteness of language. The words you choose in informative speaking must be able to draw precise denotative meanings in your listener's minds. If your general end is to persuade, that is to modify attitudes and behavior, the language style is expected to focus on feelings and changing emotions and attitudes. There will be a tendency to employ more abstractions because these have immediate emotional appeal.
- d. ***Effective oral language is appropriate to the speaker.*** The words you choose must be reflective of your own character and attitudes, as well as your intellectual and social background. Use words that you understand and are comfortable with. Your personality also dictates the options you make when expressing your ideas.

It is clear therefore, that to achieve stylistic propriety in language demands an understanding of the particular speaker, the particular topic, the particular situation and the immediate needs of the listener.

#### ***1. Effective oral language is vivid.***

Colorful language that appeals to sight, touch, smell, and taste enlivens your speech. Vividness may be achieved through the use of imagery. These word pictures or images let you "see" the colors and designs of the various Katipunan flags, or "hear" the cacophony of sounds created by frogs after a long rain, "feel" the cold Baguio air against your face, "smell" the aroma of freshly-baked bread or "taste" the sourness of a green mango. The seven types of imagery are visual (sight), auditory (hearing), gustatory (taste), olfactory (smell), tactual (touch), kinesthetic (muscle strain) and organic (internal sensations). Victor Ketcham refers to them as the "Seven Doorways to the Mind" because they are doors which the speaker must open so that his listeners can relive or experience the event or situation he is describing.

Through the use of **visual imagery** you can try to make your audience see the objects or situations described. Detail the physical appearance, describe the size, the color, the position. In the following example, visual imagery is employed to describe the famous Taj Mahal in Agra, India.

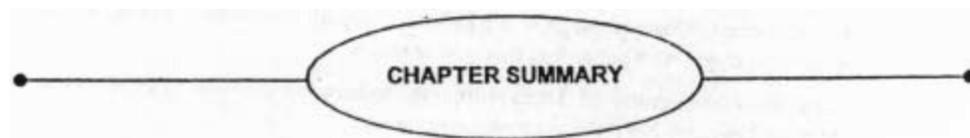
*"The Taj rises on a high red sandstone base topped by a huge white marble terrace on which rests the famous dome flanked by four tapering minarets. The dome is made of white marble, but the tomb is set against the plain across the river and it is in this background that works its magic of colors that, through their reflection, change the view of the Taj. The colors change at*

*different hours of the day and during the seasons. Like a jewel, the Taj sparkles in moonlight when the semi-precious stones inlaid into the white marble on the main mausoleum catch the glow of the moon. The Taj is pinkish in the morning, milky white in the evening and golden when the moon shines.” (Doronila)*

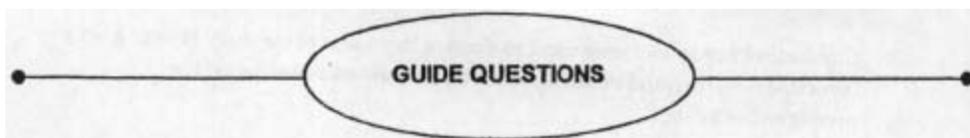
**Auditory imagery** calls attention to details of sounds which you are describing. These may include loudness, rhythm, pitch and quality. **Gustatory imagery** provides the opportunity for your audience to taste what you are describing. Details may include saltiness, tartness, sweetness or tanginess, sourness.

**Olfactory imagery** allows your audience to smell the odors and aromas associated with the matter you are describing. **Tactual imagery** is concerned with the sensations which we get through physical contact, particularly sensations of texture and shape, pressure, heat and cold. **Kinesthetic imagery** concerns muscle strain and movement. **Organic imagery** details internal feelings such as hunger, nausea, dizziness.

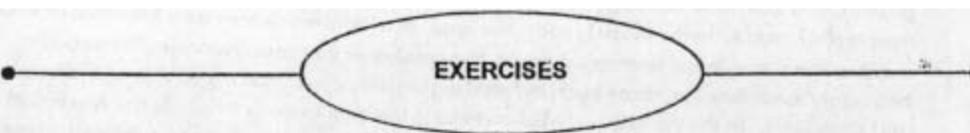
Use as many of these types of imagery in your speech.



Language is the system of symbols human beings utilize in the construction of verbal messages. To be able to effectively use words in the construction of verbal messages, we should understand the characteristics of words. Words are only symbols. Their meanings are created in users' minds. Language is dynamic and constantly changing. Words have different types of meanings. Effective oral language is characterized by clarity and appropriateness to the listeners, the situation, the speaker's purpose and personality. It must have directness and vividness.



1. Explain the word-thought-referent relationship. Cite an example of a communication breakdown that may occur when people are not able to distinguish the world of words and the world of things.
2. What are the differences between denotation and connotation?
3. Explain the other types of meanings. How might you use them to convey your verbal messages more effectively?
4. Explain the four criteria for using oral language effectively.
5. How is oral or spoken language essentially different from the written style or form?



1. Prepare a language intensity chart consisting of three columns. Label the first column,

uncomplimentary synonym; the second column, neutral word, the third column, complimentary synonym. List down five neutral words or expressions in the middle column. For each of these terms, find a word that you think may cause your receivers to respond negatively toward the term. Also look for a word that you think may cause your receivers to respond positively toward the word. Place the synonyms in the appropriate columns. (Monroe and Ehninger)

2. Clip a short feature story from a newspaper or magazine. Imagine that you are to read this story to a new and different audience each time. Rewrite the article making sure that the language is appropriate to the each of the following specific audiences: an audience of your peers, a professional group and elementary school pupils.
3. Listen to an advertisement over tv or radio. You may evaluate a print ad. Check for the use of loaded words. How does the use of such words affect your logical response to the product. Substitute neutral or more objective words or expressions. Does this change weaken the persuasive power of the ad? Share your observations with the class.
4. Listen to the way college students or your classmates talk. Take notes. What adjectives would characterize their language style. Make similar observations of other groups (professional and non-professional) and jot down your observations.
5. Choose one concept or abstract entity from the list below. Prepare to JAM (speak or the topic in just a minute). Pay attention to clarity and other details. Keep language as specific and concrete as possible.

Empowerment

Courtesy

Character

Honesty

Globalization

Family Cohesiveness

Dedication

Human Rights

Gentlemanliness

Tact

Ecotourism

Sibling rivalry

Embarrassment

Kindness

Responsibility

Discipline

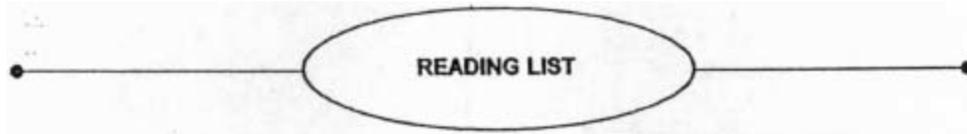
Fidelity

Pinoy English

5. Rewrite a complicated message (insurance policy, agreement for a credit card or loan, difficult passage from a textbook, clause from legal agreement or treaty) in simple words. Do not sacrifice accuracy of language. Read both entries to the class. (Gronbeck)
7. Describe orally one of the following. Try to use language that is vivid and original.

Your college crush (female or male)

The buffet table at your favorite restaurant  
A view of the Sunken Garden  
Traffic at a busy intersection  
Last two minutes of a basketball game  
Sounds in an amusement arcade in SM



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