SPEAKING PRACTICALLY

An Introduction to Public Speaking

HAROLD BARRETT

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To
John M. Fanucchi and Charles M. Guss

Gladly would they teach—and so very well.

PREFACE

Speaking Practically, the brief edition of the fifth edition of *Practical Uses of Speech Communication,* is for classes which because of length, size, or instructor's choice do not go beyond basic instruction in speech composition and presentation. From the fifth edition I have eliminated the chapters on small group discussion and speaking on special occasions, in addition to the appendixes on doing research and vocal production. Other cuts include selected speech outlines and model speeches, some exercises, the section on fact and opinion, and redundant pieces on language usage.

Though deleting almost one-third of the content of the fifth edition, I experienced no problem in maintaining unity and cohesion. The book is smaller, but whole.

As with prior editions, I want the book to reflect both functional and interpersonal dimensions of speech communication—or, more explicitly, to deny any premise that puts goals of successful speaking in conflict with humanistic goals. All face-to-face communication is rhetorical *and* interpersonal. Effect relates directly to concern for others.

Speaking Practically also maintains the provision for sequencing students' experiences in a step-by-step progression. One phase of instruction leads to another, which adds a new challenge while allowing for repetition of the former. Personally, I like the strategy of using Chapters 1-6 in order and augmenting instruction with other chapters along the way, for example, Chapter 9 on listening in the first two or three weeks of the course; Chapter 7 on language near the middle; and Chapter 8 on

delivery just before the last speeches of the course. But the book allows for other options.

I have prepared a manual that includes course plans, additional exercises, test questions, and other instructional material.

The following people contributed significantly to this edition: Professors John E. Baird, Janet Sprague, Waubonsee Community College; Scott Garman, Millersville State College; Clarence Johnson, New Jersey Institute of Technology; John Buchanan, Los Angeles Valley College; and Nancy J. Metzger, University of Pittsburgh; Maggie Hooper and Julie Taner; Lorraine Zeyen; Shirley Borden and Chris Saferite; and editors Roth Wilkofsky, Kathleen M. Domenig, Marjorie Marks, Carol Bliss and Edward Barrett.

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Harold Barrett

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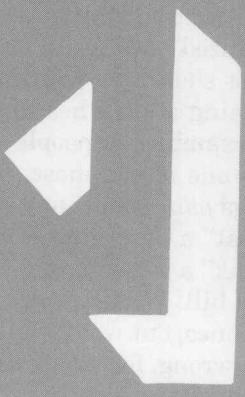
APPROACHING THE STUDY OF SPEECH COMMUNICATION



PREVIEW

This chapter is designed to answer basic questions that ought to be asked at the beginning of a class in speech communication.

1. What does it mean to say that speech is a "social act"?
2. In simple terms, what happens in the process of communication?
3. How can one come to interact more effectively with others?
4. How can practical speech tasks be handled efficiently?
5. What are the various uses of speech communication?
6. What is a speaking "situation"? What kind of situation is the class in speech communication?
7. How do speaking and writing differ?
8. What can one expect to get out of this class?
9. How should one go about getting it?

Whoever you are, wherever you go to school, whatever you hope to do with your life, you now find yourself enrolled in a class in oral communication. You may have enrolled by independent decision, or an adviser may have recommended it. Friends who have had the course might have suggested it, or speech communication may be required in your program. Of course, oral communication has always been central in your life; moreover, its importance is likely to increase as your personal inter-

ests and occupational experiences widen. The decision to take the course is another step toward greater strength in relating successfully with others.

SPEAKING AS A SOCIAL ACT

We are social creatures. For survival and enjoyment of the good life, we follow our communal sense and participate with others as members of organized society. In this way, we act upon others in various ways. A father shaking a warning finger at a child, a boy kissing a girl, a driver dimming a car's headlights, a politician deciding to run for office are a few examples of people committing social acts. Speaking, too, is a social act—one of the most common and significant. People use speech to do things *with* people and sometimes *to* people. An employer may use speech to "pat" a deserving worker on the back; a parent, through speech, may "spank" a misbehaving child; a legislator may "spur" a senate to vote for a tax bill. What we say does affect others. "Sticks and stones will break my bones, but words will never hurt me," shouts little Terry, proudly. But he is wrong, for words *can* hurt. "Nothing that you say, only what you do, will bring us together," says Linda to Don. She, too, is wrong, for saying *is* doing. To speak is to affect others.

THE PROCESS OF COMMUNICATION

What is involved in the act of speaking with people? Communication is a dynamic interpersonal process. It is a *process* in that it is ongoing; it is *dynamic* in that it happens under ever-changing conditions and follows the ever-changing behavior of people. Never is oral communication static. It is so highly complex that to discuss it is to be guilty of oversimplification. Nevertheless, we should review certain basics of the process.

Take the example of one person greeting another. The sender, the speaker, encodes a cordial message, using words, vocal expressions, and perhaps physical movement. Specifically, the symbols are the words "Good morning," a warm voice, and a wave of the hand. The receiver, understanding the symbols, decodes or interprets the message. But it does not stop there, for the receiver usually makes a response of some kind, with words, vocal expressions, and possibly physical movement. The response of the receiver is called *feedback*. Feedback is the message sent back, the other person's reaction. It's the frown that says "I don't understand," the lowered head that says "I'm sorry," or the little word "Wow!" that stands for "What a nice thing to do!" Feedback lets people know how the interaction is going, and it gives cues on what to say or do next.

With feedback—even a grunt or a nod—the receiver assumes the

role of sender. And so goes the interaction: back and forth—sending and receiving—messages sent and messages sent back. On and on.

People send messages and receive feedback in three ways then: *verbally*—with words; *vocally*—with utterances like "Hum" or "Eee or "Sss!" and dozens of other expressions that cannot be reproduced with our regular alphabet; *visually*—through gestures, bodily movements, winks of the eye, smiles, and other physical action.

All three modes are vital to communication; all can carry message content and can have positive or negative influence on the final effect.

Communication involves much more than the use of words and sounds. All behavior gets into the act of shaping messages. Sometimes, as the old saying goes, "Actions speak louder than words"; that is, nonverbal acts sometimes are more powerful than verbal acts. Therefore, in relating interpersonally to others, it helps to be aware of all parts of a message: the hand gesture serving as punctuation, the sad look in the eye that contradicts the happy words of the mouth, the kick of the foot into the air that communicates disgust, and so forth. Real understanding requires sensitivity to all stimuli and their meaning. In this regard, we shall examine nonverbal communication more completely in other chapters.

Effectiveness in communication depends on any number of conditions. Especially significant are the participants' knowledge and experience, their social or cultural values, their feelings of the moment, their verbal-vocal-visual skills in communication, and other such variables.

The model in Figure 1.1 is a simple graphic representation of the process as it is initiated. Though seeming to reflect the emphasis of the book on so-called public speaking, the model can be used to explain other kinds of interaction: conversation, for example. That is so because the basic "ingredients" are the same in all varieties of speech communica-

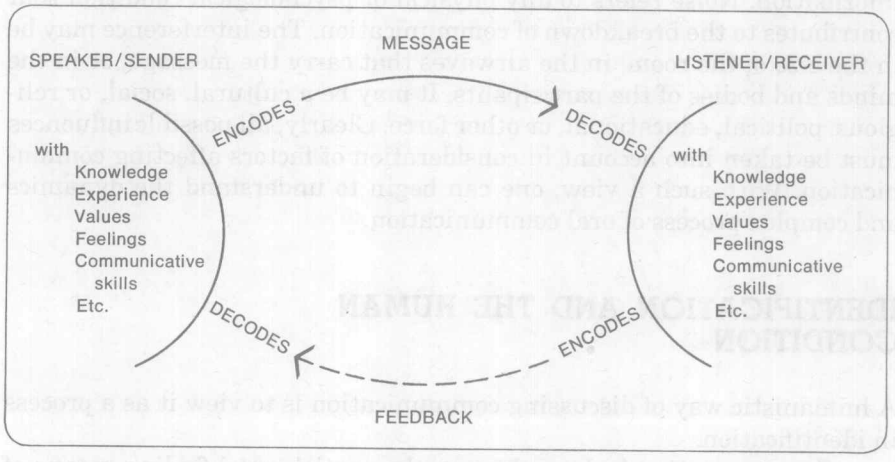


Figure 1.1

tion. Note the five key variables that may affect sending and receiving of messages.

One variable is *knowledge:* how much does the speaker know about the subject at hand? How much does the listener know? What knowledge do they share? And so forth.

Similar questions can be asked about variables of *experience, values,* and *feelings.* For example, when the topic is soccer, how many listeners have seen (experienced) a soccer game? What are their positions on the general worth (value) of such games? Do their emotions (feelings) play a part in their reaction to the subject? What relevant experiences, values, and feelings do speaker and listener share? What are the differences? Are the differences major?

The large variable of *communicative skills* refers to the fundamentals of effective speaking and listening. Though very vital, a message may never be communicated if the parties involved in the exchange are untrained.

The *Etc.* on both sides of the model covers "everything else"—all other variables. And this brings up the name theorists use to label all sources of difficulty in communication: noise.

Noise

Communication is a demanding process and may break down at any phase or point. Any problem or condition that appears as an obstacle to communication is called *noise,* a term borrowed from information theory. Insufficient knowledge can constitute noise. Irreconcilable differences in values, feelings, and experiences may enter in as noise. Of course, noise may be actual physical noise, as of a train passing by, or it may be less obvious, such as a listener's dislike of a topic, the threat of a controversial proposal, a speaker's lack of interest, or a speaker's withholding of vital information. Noise refers to any physical or psychological condition that contributes to the breakdown of communication. The interference may be in the size of the room, in the airwaves that carry the message, or in the minds and bodies of the participants. It may be a cultural, social, or religious, political, educational, or other force. Clearly, all possible influences must be taken into account in consideration of factors affecting communication. With such a view, one can begin to understand the dynamics and complex process of oral communication.

IDENTIFICATION AND THE HUMAN CONDITION

A humanistic way of discussing communication is to view it as a process in identification.

Communication is dependent on the participants' finding means of

identifying with each other. To succeed in communicating is to find contact points for establishing a base of common interest. Though people are necessarily social creatures, they are separated from others by private experience and by differing philosophies and life-styles, religious, political, and social views, and ethnic backgrounds. Think of this diversity as you reflect on the membership of your class. To identify with them, and therefore to communicate, is to discover and make use of foundations for *mutual* understanding.

Certainly no condition is more painful, personally or socially, than alienation; conversely, no condition is more satisfying than union of thought, goal, or feeling. Alienation is common to the human condition, especially in this day of huge, impersonal institutions and a frenetic pace of life. One result is loss of individual status as well as estrangement from others. The condition makes even more apparent the need for learning about identification and its relation to communication.

People want to be in harmony with themselves and others; societies work vigorously to achieve and maintain cohesion. In some societies, behavior that threatens cohesion is the greatest wrong. For this, people may be ostracized in one way or another. Convicts in prison who receive solitary confinement are shut off from contact with others, alienated. Cadets in military schools at times impose the "silent treatment" to punish someone. All of us know people who use the silent treatment against others and thereby deny them the sustenance and joy afforded by communication. "Excommunication" takes many forms. It hurts to be ignored, as we all know.

To communicate, then, is to find elements of kinship in others, bases for building a cooperative relationship and understanding. From this view it follows that in order to communicate—in class and out—it is necessary to know something of what others value, their outlooks on life, their interests and inclinations, and so forth.

In Practical Terms

At this point, let's put the theory of identification into terms of practical speaking. In affecting others through oral social action (speech), we seek ways to *reach* them, to *meet* them, to *get together* and *share* with them. Indeed, the dictionary defines "to communicate" as "to cause another or others to partake of or share in." Oral communication is a study of the means of sharing messages and of the reciprocal influence of people on people in the process. Though the messages vary from situation to situation, the basic process remains the same. For example, a student's attempt to explain a certain theory of music to the speech class will be fundamentally similar to an instructor's well-prepared lecture. Both speakers want to be influential in sharing an informative message.

Henry Clay spoke before the United States Senate in 1850 to convince his colleagues that his compromise proposals should be adopted for

the good of the *entire* nation. He was successful; he found ways to cause a majority to share in his ideas and to be aware of the probable *common* good to result. Similarly, a group of student leaders recently discovered means for showing the administration and faculty of their college that registration time could be shortened. The students' success came from their ability to demonstrate benefits available to the entire college. Their goal was desired by all.

Newspapers reported the success of a college student who, on the ledge of a high building, was able to communicate the value of living to an elderly man bent on suicide.

These are examples of useful speech employed well to accomplish a purpose. They reveal the indispensable condition in communication that is the mutual concern of speaker and listener, a common ground for thinking and acting. A person separated from another in idea or attitude, and at a loss to find ways to bridge the gap, cannot hope to achieve communication. The problem is inability to locate a basis on which minds can meet. This difficulty partly explains the problem in communication sometimes experienced by people of different generations, of persons in different cultures, of a boy and a girl who have "drifted apart," of you and someone you might name with whom you cannot seem to "make contact." The fundamental question is simple but difficult: *On what bases can speaker and listener identify and communicate?* This course is planned to offer you theory, methods, and experience in answer to that question.

USES OF SPEECH COMMUNICATION

For our purposes, all of the principal uses of speech can be classified as either (1) speech for personal and social growth or (2) speech to get things done.

For Personal and Social Growth

From earliest infancy we send out signals in quest of self-identity, seeking information to help determine who we are and where we fit in. We interpret the signals sent back by people and objects and thus learn our status in the whole of things. Of course, the human beings with whom we interact and communicate are the chief source of feedback. In exchanges with others we become *somebody* and have opportunities for creatively shaping a self. "The self becomes aware of its identity in a social context," observed Rollo May. A child, for instance, "finds that it is a self when it sees itself in relation to and differentiated from the other persons in the family."[1] In this manner we gather information regarding abilities, roles,

[1]The relevant source note will be found at the end of this chapter. All notes follow this pattern.

prospects, and potential. Thus we build dimensions of the self such as personal values and a philosophy of life.

The great quest cannot succeed without contact with others. Indeed, people cannot exist as whole selves without relating to others, without touching (verbally, vocally, visually, or physically), without being involved interpersonally in communication with others. Researchers tell of well-fed, well-housed babies who withered and died because no one responded to their need for someone to react to them. They reached out but got no response: no stroking, no caressing, no warm vocal soothing. Nurses neglected all but their vegetative needs and were indifferent to overtures for attention. Eventually the babies gave up. Human beings cannot endure such deprivation. Through communication they strive for selfhood and meaning, for identity as people.

Perhaps it is no exaggeration to assert that life is an identity crisis. The process of shaping and reshaping the self goes on and on, through social interaction and self-analysis. Thus we learn social form and strategy, how to interact successfully with fellow human beings. Since personal and social growth is one of the major uses of communication, a class in oral communication offers experiences to sharpen awareness and powers of perception and empathy, to encourage recognition and acceptance of one's unique, individual self, and to foster awareness of one's self in relation to others in the family of man.

To Get Things Done

Speaking is commonly and appropriately viewed as a practical art and a means of accomplishing specific tasks. The history of the United States is replete with illustrations of a practical people going about their vocational, political, social, and spiritual lives with frequent use of speaking. The story of nearly every great man or woman in that history is in some measure the story of purposeful speaking. Roles of Abraham Lincoln come quickly to mind: this backwoods politician and lawyer influencing his fellow pioneers, this young legislator arguing bills in state and national assemblies, this stump campaigner effectively engaging the mighty Stephen A. Douglas in those debates now bearing the names of both men, this President seeking in his Second Inaugural Address "a just and lasting peace among ourselves and with all nations." On all occasions, Lincoln spoke *for a purpose;* he had jobs to do. Even the memorable Gettysburg Address is an example of practical work. Mr. Lincoln did not speak at Gettysburg merely to say a few *words* or to set down a speech that eventually would appear in anthologies of literature. No, he was imbued with an immediate purpose, and he used speech to carry it out. At Gettysburg for the dedication of that cemetery, Lincoln wanted to pay homage to dead soldiers of the Civil War and to urge the nation to carry on.

The Lincolns and other great persons handle but a minority of the

daily speaking chores that must get done. Consider all the speaking that keeps the airlines operating and helps run the Department of the Interior, the City of Kalamazoo, the First Methodist Church, as well as Wisconsin State University and Continental Can. Speaking is an important, practical means of communication. Here are other specific examples: a superintendent's report to the vice-president, a defense attorney's summation speech in court, a professor's lecture on Kierkegaard's philosophy, a school board's deliberations of policy on adopting textbooks, a campus visitor's talk on air traffic control, a girl's interview for a job as recreation assistant, a family's discussion on how to find homes for Tabby's litter of six kittens. Although these instances hardly represent all of the myriad occasions for functional speaking, they make the main point: speech has a purposeful, practical end; it is used to get things done.

SITUATIONS IN SPEECH COMMUNICATION

The specific situation is a powerful force on the kind of communication to take place. The purpose of the event, the degree of formality, physical and psychological distance separating the participants, numbers of people present, the physical setting, the way things are organized, and expectations of participants are but a few of the elements that characterize a situation. From their interpretations of the situation, people decide such matters as whether to wear a dress or slacks, how long to talk, where to place themselves, what kind of humor to use (if any), how much personal information to disclose, whether to applaud at a given point, whether it would be appropriate to leave before the event is over, and so forth. Needless to say, sensitivity to features of various situations is essential for successful functioning in this society.

This Class and Classroom Situation

The people involved with you in this situation—this class in oral communication—are a collection of *individuals,* put together through the registration process; by accident, we might say. The individuals differ in sex, social background, academic major, political view, age, religion, ethnic background, life-style, aspirations, and so forth. Each is unique.

One of the individuals is the instructor, whose background, knowledge, set of values, and goals will affect the experiences of everyone in the group.

Add to the "mix" the room as colored, shaped, ventilated, and arranged; the time of year and hour of day; along with the textbook and other instructional materials. Include also the events that take place on the occasion of your meetings—planned and unplanned, formal and informal, brief and lengthy.