Course Paper

LINGUISTIC AND SOCIO-CULTURAL PECULIARITIES OF BUSINESS COMMUNICATION

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Introduction

"Effective communication needs to be built around this simple foundation and realization: communication is a dialogue, not a monologue. In fact, communication is more concerned with a dual listening process." — Dr. Heinz Goldmann, Chair, Heinz Goldmann International Foundation for Executive Communications, Geneva.

Business communication has a long history, stretching back tothe origins of rhetoric as a scholarly endeavour and, even further,back to the origins of business practice. Today, business communicationexists as an academic fieldthat emphasizes research in this sphere, aiming at raising its effectiveness. Different domains of business communication have been researched by F.Briggs, R.D. Clarke, S.R. Covey, L.Ekroth, L.Ferrer, E.Shriberg, T.K.Gamble, M.Gamble, N.Gerber, R.I.Gesher, M.D.Winer, C.B.Gussenhoven, G.Harper, D.House, B.Lampton, A.Lieb, N.Payne, N.Qubein, L.Ramsey, A.Taylor, T.Rosegrant, A.Meyer, B.T.Samples, A.Thompson, A.J.Vasile, H.K.Mintz and many others. In the focus of their attention are such issues as studying the peculiarities of official and unofficial business communication, dealing with specific problems in business interaction, examining the content and structure of business presentations, and developing general guidelines of effective delivery.

Grounding on the results of previous researches, this paper presents an attempt to give an overview of contemporary achievements in the theory and practice of raising the effectiveness of business communication from the linguistic and socio-cultural viewpoint. The work consists of the introduction, two sections of the main part, conclusion and the list of references.

Characteristics of business communication

Communication is important in the work situation, which for most people is within an organization, a complex system that intentionally coordinates the behaviours of its members to meet certain goals. Communication channels follow both the formal and informal organization structures.

Organizational communication can take different forms. Some messages are written down, although certainly not all of them. Also, informal channels can be used.

A problem for many people at work is the need to communicate in an assertive manner. Assertive communication involves internalizing positive attitudes regarding one's rights and specific communication behaviours, including, persistence, a workable compromise, use of feedback, appropriate self-disclosure, fogging, negative assertion, and negative inquiry.[[1]](#footnote-1)

### Socio-cultural issues of business communication

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#### Business communication as a cross-cultural issue

On the one hand, "every communication is a cross-cultural communication" (i.e., coloured and influenced by each person's unique life experience.), as Larry Axelrod and Roy Johnson state in their book, Turning Conflict Into Profit.[[2]](#footnote-2)

On the other hand, advances in transport and communications technology combined with the development of a world economy have resulted in people from different nations, cultures, languages and backgrounds now communicating, meeting and doing business with one another more than ever. As we come together our cultural differences become accentuated as we start to realise that the rest of the world is not reading from the same book. One area where this is now being felt is in business.[[3]](#footnote-3)

Today some of the world's largest economies include Japan, China, Mexico, Brazil, India and Korea. As a result, doing business across borders (whether political, religious, cultural or linguistic) requires cultural sensitivity, meaning a sense of empathy, flexibility and creativity informed by cultural knowledge. Western organisations are feeling the impact that a lack of cultural sensitivity can and does have upon business performance. Many organisations are now investing heavily in cultural sensitivity training to address issues such as etiquette, protocol, communication styles and negotiation approaches. In a competitive world such businesses appreciate that greater cultural sensitivity will assist them in forging longer and more prosperous relationships.

A lack of cultural sensitivity can lead a company, individual or product to failure. This is reflected in two simple categories: culture and language.

Culture comes in many shapes and sizes, including areas such as politics, history, faith, mentality, behaviour and lifestyle. The lack of cultural awareness may harm a business. For example, a golf ball manufacturing company used to package golf balls in packs of four for convenient purchase. However, a failure of their sales in Japan made the company repackage the product because in the Japanese culture the number 4 is considered unlucky (equivalent to the number 13 in western cultures) due to its sounding like the word "death".

Business communication can also be damaged by poor translation due to the lack of cultural sensitivity. For instance, IKEA once tried to sell a workbench called "fartfull" — not a hugely popular product for obvious reasons.

The cited examples could easily have been avoided by conducting some basic research in respect to checking the concept, design, shape, colour, packaging, message or name in the target culture. If businesses want to succeed internationally, cultural sensitivity must be at the heart of everything they do; from their personal interaction and relationships with clients to the products/services they develop.

#### Peculiarities of unofficial business communication

During the work time, the employees encounter the boss as the source of discipline, assignments, occasional reprimands and, typically, very little personal conversation, while an informal setting is meant to favour positive relationships in the workplace. The employees typically like to be around the supervisor who showcases humour, asks about their families and hobbies, and gives an unrestrained laugh.

However, the social scene does not erase the workplace lines of authority. There are certain peculiarities of after-hours communication,[[4]](#footnote-4) as the after-hours conduct may have a direct bearing on the business future.

Kinesics is restricted. Any touching, other than a handshake greeting or dancing with the group, is unwelcome.

The main purpose of a social event is to foster the good will, to bring together co-workers and colleagues for a bit of camaraderie and some well-deserved recognition.[[5]](#footnote-5) This makes it necessary for people to circulate among everyone present, not just the equals they feel most comfortable with, and stay long enough to interact with as many associates as possible, especially the key people. However, it is supposed that all of the company leave before the party time has elapsed in order not to be thought of as part of the clean-up crew.

Having an idea what to talk about may be critical. Therefore inappropriate humour is normally avoided, no matter how informal the setting is. Although people might laugh, it can happen they do so either out of courtesy or from discomfort. In fact such humour could jeopardize one's professional reputation.

The informal gathering does not welcome "shop talk", that is opinions about a five year plan, a drop in sales or the employee that had to be fired. Instead, people tend to demonstrate that they have an interesting, meaningful life away from the corporation: the unofficial conversations are focused on major sporting events, releases of new movies, great places to go on vacation, new restaurants, bestselling books and national events.

In his book The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People, Stephen Covey titled one of the chapters "Seek first to understand, and then to be understood."[[6]](#footnote-6) Accordingly, "motormouths" who dominate conversations are unpopular. On the contrary, it is common to allow other people to talk. For this reason, open-ended questions, often planned ahead, are prevalent. The best conversation starter begins with "tell me about..." and then, encouraging others to go on talking, one may use comments like "Very interesting," "Tell me more," and "What happened next?"

Moderation in eating and drinking, with special attention to the table etiquette, is an important issue, as people are there for the fellowship, not for the food. A social event is an opportunity to build business relationships and to promote oneself. Therefore, any mentioning of the importance of drinking should be avoided, even that at the end of the day "to help one unwind." Furthermore, frequent reference to the topic itself, leaving alone the impaired speaking and unsteady walk following the extra cocktails, can label one: "lush," "a drunk," "undisciplined," or something similar, which often leads to ruining the carer.

#### Specific patterns of problematic interaction

There are situations which can injure the integrity of the conversation by blocking its flow, creating frustration, and reducing understanding and satisfaction. These apply to most social and much business conversation. The most common communication problems are the following.[[7]](#footnote-7)

Some professionals suffer from the occupational hazard of talking too much – professors, clergy, speakers and trainers, and others who are paid to talk for a living. Involved in their own monologues, going on and on without giving the others their turn, such people soon frustrate others, losing the involvement of the listeners.

Another hazard arises when a talker begins a topic and the listener grabs it away and opens a "me-centred" monologue. Thus the initiator of the topic is unable to complete his or her thought. This is very frustrating, and eventually such behaviour, which is called the "take-away" and "me-too" syndrome, drives people away.

Unsolicited advice. Some people are quick to give advice as soon as the other person mentions a problem, intruding with "Have you thought of...?" or "Why don't you...?" Men seem especially prone to this tendency, although women are not immune from it. It is also prevalent among "professional know-it-alls" such as teachers, managers, administrators, and some lawyers, ministers, and counsellors. The advice-giver assumes the authority or even parenting role, and that can be off-putting. It is considered more appropriate to let the person finish and then, perhaps, to ask "Are you asking for my opinion?" or "What alternatives have you thought of?"

Interrupting can also be very annoying when a person is breaking in before the interlocutor has completed the thought. Usually this is done because the interrupting people are impatient and are afraid of not getting their thoughts expressed. Many such situations occur on TV interviews when the host has guests with opposing views. The guests butt in, over-talk, even shout in order to get in their words. According to some producers, this makes for exciting television, while many observers find it irritating.

Contradicting is the ultimate conversation-blocker. Although great in structured debate, direct disagreement ("I disagree with you" or the more gingerly "Yes, but") is not helpful in conversation, which is at its best when it is mutual and collaborative. Instead of the "I'm right, you're wrong" game, it is considered better to hear out the point of view being expressed, check the understanding, and then offer "My view is different from yours. Let me explain." People who feel heard and understood are more likely to hear and understand someone expressing a different view.

Stingy contributors. This describes the people who listen, take and receive, but contribute little enthusiasm, information, self-disclosure, acknowledgement, compliments or other elements that lift a conversation. They like to "pick the brains" of others who share personal experiences, but give nothing in return, remain cool and contained with personal matters. This cautious, ungenerous style causes an out-of-balance conversation in which real trust can never exist.

Exhibiting one or more of the above mentioned communication patterns in a conversation makes one's interlocutor frustrated or annoyed. With heightened awareness, these mistakes can be avoided, and eliminating them from one's repertoire can reduce the interaction problems.

Linguistic features of business communication

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#### Content and Structure

Business communication presupposes speaking in a public situation, so its effectiveness much depends of the general rules of public speaking. The study of public speaking is guided by one overriding principle: what is effective depends on the speaker, the situation, and the listeners.

Preparation for speaking in public begins with establishing a goal. The choice of the topic is usually determined by the reason for giving the speech. The topic should always be related to goals. The first step in goal setting is to determine the general purpose of the speech. General purposes include informing, entertaining, and persuading. Next, a speaker establishes a specific purpose. Establishing a specific purpose involves answering the question, "What exactly do I want my audience to do, think, or feel when I am finished speaking?" The third step in goal setting is audience analysis. Answers to six specific questions can help determine what information you need about the audience[[8]](#footnote-8): (1) What do they already know about the topic? (2) What is their specific interest in it? (3) What are their attitudes and feelings about the thesis and purpose? (4) About the speaker? (5) About related subjects and issues? (6) How will the situation affect the speech? Answering the questions sometimes simply involves asking a few people; in other cases it requires inferring from demographic data. A good speaker will continue to use feedback from listeners while talking. What the speaker learned may require a revision of the purpose.

Next the speaker states the thesis, which is a subject-centred statement: it is a single sentence summary of the speech. A thesis is the main point or central idea of the speech. Developing a thesis requires organizing. Organizing thoughts involves outlining the speech, choosing two, three, or four main points that will be used to develop or support the theses. Several standard plans for choosing main ideas are the time pattern, the space pattern, and three specific topical patterns. After selecting main points, the speaker arranges them, using audience analysis. With a deductive structure, the thesis is stated early in the speech. With an inductive structure, the thesis is withheld until midway through or at the end of the speech.

Finally, main points are developed with sub-points and supporting materials and the speaker prepares the introduction and the conclusion. An introduction needs to get the listeners' favourable attention and to begin pointing their thoughts toward the subject of the speech. Introductions may use several techniques: humour, serious illustrations, quotations, questions, a startling statement or statistic, or in some situations direct reference to audience, occasion, or subject. A conclusion should refocus listeners thinking on the thesis and leave them in an appropriate mood. Techniques for conclusions are the same as those for introductions, with the addition of a summary. Combining one of the techniques with a summary is recommended, especially for informative speeches. Relating conclusion to introduction can also give a speech unity.

#### Language

Communicating effectively requires shared meaning between communicators. Meaning refers to the entire set of reactions people assign to symbols. Meanings are not directly related to the symbols that stand for them, though it is a common knowledge that words have meanings. On the contrary, it is people who have the meanings: only the user connects a symbol to the meanings it calls up.

Words are symbols people use to represent concepts, and concepts are the ideas people have to explain their experiences. People develop concepts by synthesizing, or combining, the mental images of experience into ideas. This is called conceptualizing, and to do it, people must be able to abstract. Abstraction refers to the process of selecting an element from a reality to distinguish it from other elements. In abstracting, people develop a category system of concepts. The complexity of a category system depends on the number of features on which a person can focus about any reality.

To use a category system to identify realities, people have to exclude some things. Whatever is said or whatever ideas are thought about any reality, some things are not said or not thought. Words also reflect different levels of meaning or abstraction. Concepts, and thus words, vary from specific to general, and the higher the level of abstractness, the more ambiguous words become.

The more possible things a word can be applied to, the more possible misunderstandings can occur in communicating. When the term abstract is applied to words, it refers to features of a concept that cannot be seen. The word concrete refers to features that are specific and can be seen.

Words also represent different types of meanings. Denotative meanings are the actual objects or concepts referred to; connotative meanings are the values people attach to the concept—a negative or positive reaction to the symbol itself or to the thing or experience the symbol stands for.

Communicators also share the system in which symbols are used. Language is described as a symbolic system involving verbal and nonverbal, vocal and nonvocal symbols. Grammar is what makes language systematic. Grammar consists of the rules of word arrangement and inflections that make individual words useful. Knowing grammar helps people interpret word relationships and word and sentence meanings.

Each language system has differences of dialect and style. A dialect is a language variant used by a group of speakers that is different from the language of the general community. Dialects may be ethnic, geographical, or social, and they involve differences in word choices, grammar, and sound. Dialects influence communication because they activate any biases communicators have in favour of or against the group or community with which they identify the dialect. Style differences are primarily related to the degree of formality in language use. Styles vary according to situations as well as the relationships among the communicators. There are five styles of formality: frozen, formal, consultative, casual, and intimate.[[9]](#footnote-9)

All the above stated is important from the viewpoint of the listener: a speaker, in order to be accepted and properly understood, needs to consider the audience and speak their language.[[10]](#footnote-10)

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#### Peculiarities of delivery

Through verbal communication, people learn about others' thoughts, ideas, products, and services. However, often how we say things conveys more meaning than what we say. In fact, voice quality is said to convey about 38% of the meaning.[[11]](#footnote-11) The accent may give away one's national or regional origin. The tone of voice will tell people whether the talker feels elated or sad, excited or bored. One's involvement — the true feelings and attitudes — is often sent by means of the vocal and physical cues, and sometimes a speaker may send conflicting messages through different channels: words, body, face, and tone.

As it is known, about 93% of communication is non-verbal.[[12]](#footnote-12) Much of it is unconscious, but a great deal of a wordless message can be consciously controlled. We convey feelings, moods and attitudes through a variety of intonation parameters, such as, volume, speed or pace, stress and some others. If motivated, anyone can become steadily more conscious of others' needs, feelings, and messages by intentionally growing the communication skill of awareness. For instance, in order to make the presentation interesting, a speaker will change the delivery, however not to obviously, e.g.: speed or pitch of voice.

Some intonation patterns may be completely colourless in meaning: they give to the listener no implication of the speaker's attitude or feeling. They serve a mechanical function – they provide a matrix into which all sentences may be poured so that they achieve utterance. Such intonation patterns represent the intonational minimum of speech.[[13]](#footnote-13)

The distinctive function of intonation is realized in the opposition of the same word sequences which differ in certain parameters of the intonation pattern. It is difficult to classify all the fine shades of feeling and attitude which can be conveyed by slight changes in pitch, by increasing or decreasing the loudness of the voice, by changing its quality, and in various other ways. On the other hand, it is quite possible to make a broad classification of intonation patterns which change the meaning of the utterance. Applied to intonation it can be of the greatest service in guiding speakers in the correct use of the tones and accents.[[14]](#footnote-14)

##### Pitch

Vocal pitch, the highness or lowness of the voice on a musical scale, is an extremely important variable in communication. Since variety contributes to attention, the natural variety of pitch is desirable in business communication.

Different combinations of pitch sections (pre-heads, heads and nuclei) may result in more than one hundred pitch-and-stress patterns, but they all convey the most general meaning expressed by the nucleus itself, and different pitch sections (pre-heads or heads) either add some additional attitudinal meanings to the patterns or intensify them. Broadly speaking, any sentence type can be linked with any tone group and the particular meaning of every pattern occurs only in a certain context and with reference to a particular style and type of speech. [[15]](#footnote-15)

We tend to identify higher pitches with female voices and lower pitches with male voices. We also learn vocal stereotypes specific to this or that culture. We associate low-pitched voices with strength, sexiness, and maturity and high-pitched voices with helplessness, tenseness, and nervousness.[[16]](#footnote-16)

The pitch of the voice is very difficult to control without practice, and this makes it a highly accurate verbal indicator of how a speaker feels about the subject he or she is presenting. In most western cultures listeners normally impute strength and confidence to the person who speaks with a low-pitched, well-modulated voice. When the speaker's voice rises to a high pitch, listeners attribute it to excitement, panic, and lack of control.[[17]](#footnote-17) So, if a speaker slows down and uses the lower end of the voice range, he or she is perceived as calm, confident and competent. We can vary the pitch with which we talk by changing the tightness of the vocal folds, the pressure with which we exhale air, and, to a limited extent, the elasticity of our vocal folds.

The hardest time to control the pitch of the voice is at the beginning of the speech. Most presenters – whether novices or experts – begin their speeches at a higher that normal pitch because the stress they are experiencing tenses and tightens their vocal cords so that they vibrate at a higher frequency. With relaxation, the vocal cords relax and assume their normal tension.[[18]](#footnote-18)

However, if a speaker is excited or passionate about his subject, he or she will likely have difficulty masking the emotions – and the pitch of the voice will be raised. A high pitch indicates emotional engagement. If you're also speaking quickly, the combination usually indicates your stress level is elevated. Although you may worry that you sound nervous or anxious, the audience will interpret the intonation shifts as vocal prompts.

As tension usually tightens the vocal folds, raising the pitch and causing problems for presenters, women speakers particularly need to be cautious about pitch, since tension can increase their pitch to unpleasant levels, thus reducing their effectiveness as speakers.

In business communication one must also remember that a person whose pitch is too high, too low, or monotonous (on the same level) may not only transmit a negative impression when communicating, but risk losing customers completely. Some individuals, however, overuse one tone to the exclusion of all others. They have monotonous or monotone voices, which are characterized by having too little variety in pitch. Other individuals speak toward the upper end of their pitch scale, producing very fragile, unsupported tones.[[19]](#footnote-19) Nervousness can give the sentences a rising intonation, with each one sounding like a question in a forced, unsynchronized over-inflection that results in a bewildering melody.[[20]](#footnote-20)

Another problem for some speakers is a habitual and repeated pitch pattern. A regular rising and falling pitch pattern is often described as speaking in a "sing-song" manner. Not only is this pattern unnatural, it quickly becomes boring.[[21]](#footnote-21)

As Ann Thompson summarizes, "There is an important observation about voice pitch. Voices that are normally pitched in a low or middle range have much better carrying power than high-pitched voices. Besides, the higher the pitch, the more effort the speaker must exert to be heard. As a matter of general practice, a speaker should try to keep voice pitch to a middle range, except for a change of pitch to emphasize meaning. The relaxation of tension for speaker and audience is immediate. An audience finds a high-pitched voice irritating and, more often than not, turns the sound off".[[22]](#footnote-22)

The range between high and low pitch varies from individual to individual, and from one linguistic population to another. International speakers should be aware of the fact that the English generally have a greater range than Americans do.

##### Sentence stress

Depending on the situation or context, in a sentence or an intonation group some of the words are of greater importance than the others. Words which provide most of the information are brought out in speech by means of sentence-stress: a special prominence given to one or more words according to their relative importance in a sentence.[[23]](#footnote-23)

The main function of sentence stress is to single out the communicative centre of the sentence which introduces new information.[[24]](#footnote-24) The prominence is realized by variations of pitch, force, length and quality. The syllables of the words marked by sentence-stress are pronounced with possible changes in pitch, greater force, greater length of vowels and their full quality, that is the stressed words are pronounced more distinctly. The most prominent part of a sentence is the last stressed word which takes the nuclear tone. The second in weight is the first stressed word which often has the highest pitch and is fairly loud.

The distribution of stresses in a sentence depends on the semantic value of words and is closely connected with the lexical and grammatical structure of the sentence. The ability to move smoothly and steadily from one stress to the next and to fit in the unstressed syllables between them forms the basis of a natural English accent.

Stress shift plays a crucial role in the delivery conveying subtle shades of meaning. The same sentence can demonstrate various degrees of curiosity, impatience, or sarcasm.

##### Rate

An application of the general sense of this term in Phonetics and Phonology is to refer to speed of speaking; alternatively known as tempo.[[25]](#footnote-25) Languages and people vary in their overall rate of articulation (measured in such terms as syllables per second, words per minute, incidence of pauses). Within a given norm, however, it is possible to vary one's rate for particular semantic or social effects, e.g. the 'meditative' sense of we-e-ll, produced very slowly.

The rate of speech can be normal, slow and fast. The parts of the utterance which are particularly important sound slower. Unimportant parts are commonly pronounced at a greater speed than normal.

The rate or speed at which a speech is delivered can indicate to the audience how the speaker feels about his material. A deliberate, plodding delivery often indicates solemnity or seriousness; a quickened pace suggests urgency or enthusiasm. Of course, speed of delivery varies from speaker to speaker, but most North Americans speak at a rate of around 160 words per minute.[[26]](#footnote-26)

Varying the delivery speed of different parts of a speech help to highlight the main ideas and influence listeners' subconscious interpretation of the message. A modulated delivery is less predictable, and can hold the listeners' interest by requiring them to actively vary their responses.

For listeners, an average speaking rate of from 140 to 170 words a minute allows them time to digest the words of a speech. There can, however, be no fixed rate of delivery that applies to every speaker. Nor should the rate of delivery be uniform throughout a speech. Emotional moments in a speech seem more spontaneous if the words rush out. Deliberative moments, when a new idea is being considered or a conclusion stated, should be presented more slowly. Highly charged moments, as for instance memorable words at the end of a speech, should be delivered slowly and impressively.[[27]](#footnote-27)

If a speaker wants to elicit a serious response, he or she delivers the speech at a slower than average tempo. This gives the audience more time to consider the impact of each word. But keeping the delivery plodding for too long is less challenging for the audience and it increases the likelihood that the listeners will become distracted.

Increasing the tempo suggests excitement or informality. But although a fast delivery will initially stimulate an audience, a speaker should not maintain that excitement indefinitely. Keeping the audience on its toes can be reached by once again modulating the delivery speed.

Generally, an effective speaker will most often speak in a clear, concise manner at a slightly slower pace using short, simple sentences (subject-verb-object) and high-frequency words. The listeners will not understand him if he speaks too fast or runs his words together.[[28]](#footnote-28)

An effective speaker does not rush, or talk deliberately slowly. Being natural – although not conversational – is the main key of success.

##### Pause

Being an important component of intonation, the tempo of speech, alongside with the rate of the utterance, also implies pausation discussed further.

Obviously, it is impossible to not communicate with people. We all decode meanings from silences and absences as much as we do from talking and other non-verbal actions.

Often, if a speaker feels tense before going into a meeting, he or she takes a deep breath to relax. Furthermore, "lots of folks believe that any gaps in the flow of a conversation are negative, contributing to overwhelming feelings of awkwardness and uncertainty. To avoid this discomfort, many keep up a constant stream of chatter, whether or not they have something relevant to contribute," suggests Nancy Gerber.[[29]](#footnote-29)

On the other hand, we can think about pauses in a speech like about rests in music. They can add dramatic effect and variety as well as giving the presenter a chance to breathe.[[30]](#footnote-30) Some scholars believe that conversation breaks can help to facilitate reflection on the topic.[[31]](#footnote-31) The pause phase of communication represents a short "time out" that allows both the speaker and listener to improve communication. A speaker pauses when he or she wants to gather the thoughts, or to find out how the listeners feel about what has been said, or before answering a question.[[32]](#footnote-32) Psychoacoustic investigations prove that the pause gives the listener more time for better comprehension.[[33]](#footnote-33)

Fran Briggs asserts that "silence can provide a gateway for both the listener and speaker to foresee and adapt with appropriate forethought." She states that silence can make more than just a point; it can make "an exclamation point... and without a single word preceding it. <…> Why is that? Because it can be used to shed light or convey darkness. Utilizing the sound of silence is truly the "master's" art of communication".[[34]](#footnote-34)

For the analysis expediency it is efficient to distinguish the following three kinds of pauses:

1. Short pauses which may be used to separate intonation groups within a phrase.

2. Longer pauses which normally manifest the end of the phrase.

3. Very long pauses, which are approximately twice as long as the first type, are used to separate semantic groups.

Carefully calculated pauses, even a fraction of a second of meaningful silence, can lend emphasis to the group of words that precede it, give time for their meaning to sink in, and rouse suspense about what is to come. Some common occasions for an intentional pause follow:

* before announcing the name of the speaker you are introducing, a slight pause before pronouncing the speaker's name gives it the prominence it deserves;
* in mid-sentence — to introduce an important point;
* after asking the audience a question;
* just before the last few words of a speech.[[35]](#footnote-35)

Functionally there may be distinguished syntactic, emphatic and hesitation pauses.[[36]](#footnote-36)

1. Syntactic pauses separate phonopassages, phrases, intonation groups.

2. The pauses are usually made after phrases or short sentences, not after each word. However, it is not uncommon in speech to find filled or silent pauses prior to a focal accent as an additional signal of emphasis.[[37]](#footnote-37) Thus, a pause can appear before an emphatically focused, semantically important content word[[38]](#footnote-38) to make especially prominent certain parts of the utterance:

She is the most | charming girl I've ever seen.||

So, an intentional pause can be a powerful way of communicating. Deliberate pauses at key points have the effect of emphasising the importance of a particular point.[[39]](#footnote-39)

3. However, a pause can also be a hesitation pause[[40]](#footnote-40) which can be part of dysfluency. Hesitation pauses are mainly used in spontaneous speech to gain some time to think over what to say next. They may be silent or filled. Experiments show that the filled pause is perceived as hesitation conveying uncertainty and non-assertiveness.[[41]](#footnote-41);[[42]](#footnote-42) On the other hand, silent pause may be used to emphasize an idea, generate certain emotions, and enhance attention to and retention of information presented in a speech. Functioning in the latter capacity, silence is similar to white space in print advertising, increasing the contrast between the information presented and its surroundings.

It should be pointed out that our ear can also perceive a pause when there is no stop of phonation at all. It may happen because a stop of phonation is not the only factor indicating an intonation unit boundary. The main factor is a perceivable pitch change, stepping down or stepping up depending on the direction of nuclear tone movement. The other criterion is the presence of junctural features at the end of each intonation group. This usually takes the form of a pause but there are frequently accompanying segmental phonetic modifications (variations in tempo, aspiration etc.) which reinforce this. So the intonation unit boundary is not necessarily indicated by a complete stop of phonation.

To summarize, pauses are meaningful for both the audience and for the speaker:

* They give the audience a chance to think about what the speaker said. Therefore, a good place to pause is right after the speaker makes a key point. Such a pause also adds emphasis and dramatic impact to a statement.
* They add variety. An interrupted stretch of words can get tiresome to an audience. A pause is a convenient break for the listeners, and it keeps them attentive.
* They slow down the pace so that the audience can understand the speaker more. Nervous speakers tend to speak quickly in order to get the speech out of the way. Pausing gives them a chance to breathe, to calm down, and speak at a more controlled pace.
* They help a speaker to eliminate "ahs" and "ums". People use such distracting fillers to give them time to think. The speaker can use the pauses as time to think, and it sounds more polished and professional to the audience.

On a higher cognitive level, pausing is perceived as cognitive loading.

##### Phrasing words for meaning

Meaning comes not from words alone, but from the relationship of words to one another in an utterance. One of the elementary rules for communicating meaning is that words that are related in meaning should be kept together. In speaking, a slight pause distinguishes one group of related words from another.

In the following sentences, the pause comes between subject and predicate, allowing an audience to digest what is being spoken about (the subject) before a statement is made about it (the predicate):

The skull of a blue whale | is the size of an automobile. A limitless amount of radiant energy | falls on the earth from the sun. The celebration of the town's centennial | continued for a whole weekend. Twenty-five million gallons of water | tumble over Victoria Falls each day.[[43]](#footnote-43)

In more lengthy sentences, where extended phrases or subordinate clauses supplement either subject or predicate or both, additional pauses may be necessary:

Atmospheric pollution | profoundly harmful to our physical well-being | is threatening our very existence.

The Athabaska glacier in Alberta | as it crawls between Mount Athabaska and Mount Kitchener | grinds a channel seven miles long and three miles wide. The variety show | scheduled to begin this evening at 8 p.m. in the civic auditorium | has been postponed until next week | same day | same time | same place.[[44]](#footnote-44)

Besides, it is also important how vowels and consonants are joined in the stream of speech. A foreign language sounds like a continuous flow of syllables if listeners have not learned to recognize the signs of where one word stops and another begins. Lack of attention to juncture can make a speech indistinct or hard to understand, so even experienced translators may find it difficult to accurately render a message into another language. For example, if you tell a carpenter to build a greenhouse, make sure that you don't end up with a green house. Or if you ask your secretary to get you the night rate and have it on your desk the next morning, be sure it doesn't sound like "nitrate."

##### Rhythm

Prosodic components (pitch, loudness, tempo) and speech rhythm work interdependently. Rhythm is understood as periodicity in time and space. Subjective perception of rhythm is correlated with biological processes in the human body: heart beating, breath and so on. Rhythm can also refer to images, sounds and movements, and in a speech both can be used. Speech production is naturally closely connected with the process of breathing. So speech activity as well as any other human activity is conditioned by physiological factors among others and is characterized by rhythm.

Rhythm as a linguistic notion is realized in lexical, syntactical and prosodic means and mostly in their combinations. Speech rhythm is traditionally defined as recurrence of stressed syllables at more or less equal intervals of time in a speech continuum. We also find a more detailed definition of speech rhythm as the regular alternation of acceleration and slowing down, of relaxation and intensification, of length and brevity, of similar and dissimilar elements within a speech event. Such figures of speech as sound or word repetition, syntactical parallelism, intensification and others are perceived as rhythmical on the lexical, syntactical and prosodic levels. Often the syntactical parallelism of the homogeneous clauses is correlated with the identical prosodic contour of the intonation groups in the phrase and is strengthened by the repetition of a certain word.

In the stress-timed English language, the amount of time given on each syllable varies considerably, the total time of uttering each rhythmic unit is practically unchanged. The stressed syllables of a rhythmic unit form peaks of prominence. They tend to be pronounced at regular intervals no matter how many unstressed syllables are located between every two stressed ones. Thus the distribution of time within the rhythmic unit is unequal. The regularity is provided by the strong "beats".[[45]](#footnote-45)

The markedly regular stress-timed pulses of speech seem to create the strict, abrupt and spiky effect of English rhythm. To bring the meaning of the utterance to the listener the stressed syllables of the notional words are given more prominence by the speaker and the unstressed monosyllabic form words are left very weak.

The speech tempo and style often regulate the division into rhythmic groups. The enclitic tendency is more typical for informal speech whereas the semantic tendency prevails in accurate, more explicit speech.

The more organized the speech is the more rhythmical it appears. A lecture read aloud is more rhythmic than colloquial speech. On the other hand, rhythm is also individual – a fluent speaker may sound more rhythmical than a person searching for the right word and refining the structure of a phrase while actually pronouncing it.

However, regularity in a speech chain is not realized in its exact isochronous form. Absolutely regular speech produces the effect of monotony. It means that the intervals between the stressed syllables are not physically equal. Whenever short rhythmic groups are mixed with longer ones the speaker minimizes the differences by means of changes in the rate of delivery.

Most rhythmic groups are simultaneously sense units. K. Pike finds the term "waves" for rhythm periodicity to be very expressive.[[46]](#footnote-46)

In speech an intonation group, a phrase and a phonopassage seem to have similar prosodic organization:

1) the beginning of a rhythmic unit is characterized by the tone and intensity maximum, the slowing of the tempo;

2) the end of a rhythmic unit is marked by a pause of different length, the tone and intensity minimum, slowing of the tempo, generally sloping descending terminal tones;

3) the most common pre-nuclear pattern of a rhythmic unit is usually the High (Medium) Level Head.

Many of those who use language well have a natural ear for rhythmic patterns: they know how to use rhythmic devices to reinforce meaning and control the emotions of the audience. Rhythm of the delivered speech can describe the features of the speaker’s voice, the structural elements of the speech that can be characterized on the textual level, and visuals – everything that contains repeated elements.

Tension can cause the vocal cords to be too tight to follow the natural rhythms of language. As a result, the performance can be monotonous and uninspiring.[[47]](#footnote-47) Professional speakers do not distort the rhythm of their speech.[[48]](#footnote-48)

Loudness

Loudness is a strong factor that affects perceived meaning. Human beings have a built-in mechanism that adjusts the volume of the voice to what is needed. More precisely, loudness is the attribute of auditory sensation in terms of which a sound may be ordered on a scale from soft to loud[[49]](#footnote-49), corresponding to some degree with the acoustic features of intensity (measured in decibels (dB)), which in the study of speech is based on the size of the vibrations of the vocal cords, as a result of variations in air-pressure. There is, however, no direct or parallel correlation between loudness (or 'volume') and intensity: other factors than intensity may affect our sensation of loudness; e.g. increasing the frequency of vocal-cord vibrations may make one sound seem louder than another.

Knowing how to use volume to control meaning is a useful skill. Some speakers have naturally loud voices. However, the volume of one's voice should correlate with the size of the room and audience. If one speaks too loudly or too softly, the audience will react nonverbally. For example, when a speaker starts to speak too loudly, the listeners move back in their chairs. Or they move up to the edge of their seats, turning their ears in the speaker's direction when he speaks too softly.

Volume frequently reflects emotional intensity. Loud persons are often perceived as aggressive or overbearing. Soft-spoken persons are often perceived as timid or polite.

Volume, or loudness, is often a problem with inexperienced speakers. Some people cannot produce enough energy to be heard by others. Others blast their voices through interpersonal encounters. An overly loud voice can be irritating to listen to and sound brash or autocratic. A speaker with an overly soft voice is equally distracting. Not only is it difficult to hear and understand, but the audience might conclude that they are listening to a reluctant speaker, and will soon lose patience and interest. So, speaking too loudly or too softly may lead to a breakdown in speaker-listener communication.[[50]](#footnote-50)

Besides speaking too loudly or too softly, a speaker must be aware of a third aspect of volume, which is variety. Volume must be varied if it is to be effective. When the loudness or softness does not vary, then the voice will become boring. Also, a constant volume throughout the presentation leads to failure of distinguishing the main points in a speech. The volume should be varied to avoid monotony and periodically recapture his audience's attention. Modulating the volume appropriately can serve as a voice clue, helping the audience identify the key points.[[51]](#footnote-51) One particularly effective technique for attracting attention to an important idea is to pause almost imperceptibly before the last two or three words and then to speak them softly. Listeners lean forward to catch the words. The speaker has their undivided attention.[[52]](#footnote-52)

However, some speakers begin at a normal volume but end up in almost a whisper. This problem of vocal drop-off is usually a product of nervousness, when the speaker either runs out of air while delivering a particularly long sentence, or prematurely focuses on the next sentence.

Consequently, shouting or whispering is a deviation from normal and it can be misinterpreted. Particularly, raising one's voice does not facilitate comprehension. Hence the voice should not be too loud.[[53]](#footnote-53) To be better understood, a speaker should speak clearly, in a calm, reassuring manner.

##### Voice Quality

The voice that people hear when one talks is far different from the simple tone produced by the vibrations of one's vocal folds. Resonation increases the complexity of the voice tone. The resonators of the upper body and head are the primary sources of the distinctive sound of each human voice described as voice quality.[[54]](#footnote-54) By affecting these resonators, people change the quality of their voice.

Voice quality is the result of a combination of factors, most notably linked to physiology and breathing patterns. It can range from nasal to breathy and from hoarse to flat and convey an infinite variety of impressions — harsh, excited, bored, angry, amused, apologetic, sexy, conceited.[[55]](#footnote-55) D.Crystal indicates the labels for the many qualities which can be produced as those that tend to be impressionistic and ambiguous, e.g. a 'cheery', 'haughty', 'sullen' voice.[[56]](#footnote-56) Different vocal qualities can also be described as 'strident', 'thin', 'resonant', 'breathy', 'husky', 'harsh', 'nasal', or 'denasal'.[[57]](#footnote-57) Many of these terms have negative connotations.

Good voice quality may be the biggest factor in the effectiveness of some speeches. The voices we hear regularly on television news are chosen, at least in part, because people respond positively to their quality.

What is behind this stereotypical response? Voice quality refers to the general characteristics of one's physiology and their effects upon an audience. The tonal qualities of the voice significantly affect how the message will be received, often overriding the message itself, because listeners automatically associate these qualities with personality. After years of cultural conditioning, listeners expect a speaker to sound the way he or she looks and to employ a tone of voice that is somehow commensurate with the subject. For instance, a speech on ballet delivered in a gruff, husky voice, or a speech on military strategy delivered in a breathy voice, would immediately sound incongruous. If the voice is not what the listeners expect, then much of the initial message will be lost until they adjust.[[58]](#footnote-58)

Accuracy in sending and judging the nature of emotional messages appears to be related to an individual's sensitivity and familiarity with the vocal characteristics of emotional expression. Besides communicating emotional content, the voice has also been found to be a communicator of personal characteristics. Let us examine the aspect of vocal stereotypes.

Listening to a person's voice can sometimes help to identify that person's key characteristics. We also tend to associate particular voice types with particular personality types. Table 1 summarizes stereotypes related to vocal cues.[[59]](#footnote-59)

Table 1. Vocal cues and perceived personality stereotypes

| Vocal Cues | Speakers | Stereotypes |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Breathiness | Males | Young; artistic |
|  | Females | Feminine; pretty; effervescent; high strung; shallow |
| Thinness | Males | Did not alter listener's image of the speaker |
|  | Females | Social, physical, emotional, and mental immaturity; sense of humor and sensitivity |
| Flatness | Males | Masculine; sluggish; cold; withdrawn |
|  | Females | Masculine; sluggish; cold; withdrawn |
| Nasality | Males | A wide array of socially undesirable characteristics |
|  | Females | A wide array of socially undesirable characteristics |
| Tenseness | Males | Old; unyielding; cantankerous |
|  | Females | Young; emotional; feminine; high strung; less intelligent |
| Throatiness | Males | Old; realistic; mature; sophisticated; well adjusted |
|  | Females | Less intelligent; masculine; lazy; boorish; unemotional; ugly; sickly; careless; inartistic; humble; uninteresting; neurotic; apathetic |
| Orotundity | Males | Energetic; healthy; artistic; sophisticated; proud; |
| (fullness/ |  | interesting; enthusiastic |
| richness) | Females | Lively; gregarious; aesthetic sensitivity; proud |

Speakers should be aware that their vocal quality suggests certain things about them. Whether receivers are interested in identifying the speaker's age, occupation, or status, they are likely to make assumptions based on what his or her voice says to them. Although the picture or stereotype they form may be far from accurate, it could still influence their assessment of the speaker as an individual and affect the way they react to the spoken message.

It follows from the above mentioned that in business communication delivery often plays a much more important role than the message itself. When using the described paralinguistic means of the language, one should be very careful. Such qualities as volume and pace can work in unison to achieve powerful effects, especially when selling and persuading from the public platform. Adaptation of the pace to the message can be shown by telling some points more rapidly, or by slowly drawing out the words, or by long pauses to let the points sink in. The way we emphasize words can also change the meaning of the sentences. Using stress helps the listeners to understand the sense of the words and to show which words are more important.

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Conclusion

On the basis of the above analysis it is possible to draw the following conclusions.

Socio-cultural sensitivity is as important as any other issue of business communication. Hence, when dealing with international partners or customers, business people should consider the communication peculiarities, styles and traditions of the target cultures. Moreover, specific features of both formal and informal interaction should be acknowledged in view of the fact that the main purpose of out-of-office events is to develop mutual trust and sociability among business people. In addition, participants of business interaction should be aware of possible communication mistakes in order to avoid communication blocks, frustration, and misunderstanding. Following accepted and approved communication patterns makes it possible to develop effective business communication.

Analysis of linguistic features of business communication shows that it also requires much attention on the levels of content, structure and delivery. Thus, in business communication it is important to pay attention to both verbal and nonverbal interaction. This means that, in order to be effective, partners of business interaction should pay attention not only to the peculiarities of business setting, but also build their speech according to the general principles of public speaking, as well as use feedback, eye contact, personal space, body action, and voice to give the best impression. A proper balance between confidence and respectfulness will help to achieve the goals.

For the future, business communication should continue to improve while it strives to produce a larger quantity of deep research.

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