MESSAGE PRESENTATION

STEPS TO FOLLOW, STYLE OF AND GUIDELINES .
FOR SPEECH DELIVERY, WITH SUGGESTIONS FOR CLASS ACTIVITIES

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It goes without saying that – sooner or later – our students will become specialists in different fields, business persons, managers or supervisors, obliged – as part of their activity – to speak in front of a group of listeners in order to convey a certain message.

Being involved in communication oriented careers, their success will depend on their ability to present the ideas of their messages in an orderly, persuasive and compelling way; this will make the audience react in the way they wish.

Moreover, in some cases the audience include besides co-nationals people belonging to other cultures, with different ways of accepting and responding to certain attitudes showed or expressed by the speaker; in such cases the possibility of misunderstandings or involuntary errors is great. A good knowledge of some standard ways of approaching a subject is absolutely necessary in order to make a person a good communicator and to avoid undesired situations.

The question is: "can a person be taught to get such an ability, to become a "good communicator"?

One first objective to be considered is that the future "good communicator" should be taught to have a clear idea of how to behave in front of an audience. This will make him/her feel more confident about himself / herself as a speaker. In other words he/she should be made aware of some basic steps to follow when some information must be given to a person or a group of persons. In the following, we are going to comment on these steps:

I Confidence by overcoming anxiety. Even before coming to this stage of learning, a beginning speaker should be taught how to overcome the possible "stage fright" which is so common among those who – because of their profession – are in the situation to speak in public.

Communication scholars call this feeling "communication apprehension" or "speech anxiety"; it is interesting to mention here, that they consider that "a certain amount of nervousness is not only natural but

facilitative" being a factor which helps improve performance; it is admitted that "a speaker thinks more rapidly and expresses himself more energetically when the level of tension is moderate"[1, p.310]. However an intense level of anxiety is dangerous causing trouble either by inhibiting clear thinking or effective self-expression, or by urging the person to make the problem/speech go away by speeding up its delivery.

During his training classes the student should be helped to overcome speech anxiety by being taught to be: 1) rational about the beliefs that might cause the fright; 2) receiver–oriented; 3) positive and 4) well prepared.

First, the student should be made aware that the speaker must listen to his internal voice trying to figure out if his anxiety is rational and discovering on what mistaken thinking his/her anxiety is based; in this way, such thinking can be dispersed.

Second, the student should be trained to concentrate on his audience to see if they are interested and understand what he/she is saying, maintaining permanent contact with them.

Third, the student should be taught to have a positive attitude towards the listeners, but also towards his own speech.

Fourth, the student should be advised to come in front of the audience well prepared; in this way he/she could feel secure and the speech will cause less apprehension.

One first activity suggested for training the students to overcome "stage fright" is to ask them to identify a speech someone delivered and to recognize the symptoms of anxiety shown by the speaker (the speech might rank from a classroom response of a classmate to a presidential debate watched on TV).

A second activity suggested is to ask the students to try to remember their latest public speech; after having thought back to it the students are asked to objectively analyse and rate the extent to which it was rational, receiver–oriented, positive and well prepared. Doing it they have to admit if the presence/absence of these aspects affected their anxiety level.

A third activity suggested is to organize a group debate on stage fright. Ask the students to share a personal

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experience that illustrates an example of such emotions. Afterwards the group will generate some ideas of how to deal with the symptoms discussed.

II. Steps to follow. The delivery of a speech is a unique experience; each time it is different even if the topic is the same, because something is changed: either the receivers are different, or their knowledge of the topic is different, or their environmental factors are different. We cannot say the same thing to everybody in the same way at different moments and in different places. In other words, if we want to be successful, the content of the message would depend on the particular situation and be adapted to the audience. Each time planning, preparation, organization and presentation of the message should take into consideration the aspects mentioned above.

Therefore the students should be trained that, before coming in front of an audience for a presentation, some steps must be carefully followed, as shown below.

Planning. When planning the speech, a good communicator must take into consideration several aspects: 1) the purpose of the presentation (it is done to inform, or to convince, to entertain or to get some action); 2) the audience (number, age, sex, interests, politics, level of knowledge about the subject, attitudes and values, leaders and followers); 3) the occasion / event / atmosphere; 4) time and place. When planning the presentation of his topic the speaker should also think about the psychological dynamics of the group in front of which he is going to speak (the ways by which the subject presented gets some priority in the minds of the listeners, is brought most clearly into focus, and can involve them in action/reaction).

Preparing. This is the stage which precedes the presentation, meaning a good knowledge of the topic achieved by collecting information. It can be obtained from different sources, such as company documents, library materials, interviews, questionnaires and last but not least personal experience/observation.

Organising. It is the key to effective speaking and it is manifest during the presentation; it might be divided into three parts: gaining attention, adapting to the audience and presenting the information.

Gaining attention includes some of the following: personal greeting, reference to the subject/occasion (event, a statement of fact or opinion, humour, a quotation, a testimony, a question, an illustration etc).

Adapting to the audience cannot be really considered as a separate part, but as a requirement pervading the entire presentation. The audience "are people, and people are individuals with different sets of interests, knowledge and purposes for being present. The speech must relate to specific material; it must be important to and somehow affect the audience" [2, p.135]. In other words, the speaker should act in such a way that the group benefit by listening to his speech. One way of achieving it might be the attempt to hold the listeners' attention by starting from some hypothetical illustrations, while moving on afterwards to the real content of the topic. An example, in this respect, could be the interview strategy, "a topic" studied during the language classes:

In order to arouse the students' interest in the topic, the trainer should start by involving them in a hypothetical situation: "You want to get a job with a company and you are being interviewed; what do you think will happen? what questions do you expect to be asked? what questions are you prepared to ask, etc?" A short period of uncertainty follows and afterwards, the presentation of the interviewing techniques is watched with more interest.

So, to place the persons in the audience in a hypothetical, realistic situation is a method by which they might become more interested to know the information delivered.

Presenting the information could be called "the core" of this activity and it includes an initial preview (purpose of the presentation, outline of the points covered during the report), detailed information or body of the report (illustrations, statistics, other evidence) with the sequence of the main points depending on the nature of the material presented, and finally, a summary with appropriate connections and recommendations.

For the practical training of the students to follow the steps mentioned above, some activities are suggested:

1. The students are required to select and watch a TV programme showing the presentation of a professional issue in front of the public. Such a speech can be recorded by the trainer and presented to the students.

Their task is to outline the content of the message in order to illustrate and comment on (1) the attention devices (2) adaptation to the audience (3) initial preview, (4) development of the topic (5) summary.

2. The students are divided into several groups representing (1) businessmen (2) journalists (3) the general public (4) members of the class, (5) interviewers etc; a topic is suggested, and the same basic information will have to be presented on behalf of each group by the representatives (students) the groups nominate; a panel, selected again from the students, will evaluate the changes made in each case in order that "gaining attention", "preview", "method of developing the topic" etc, are achieved.

3. The students are asked to select from a business magazine an article giving information relating to a specific company; each student will make a five minute presentation designed to persuade the class to buy / not to buy stock in that company; at the end of each speech there will be a secret vote (yes/no). Rate the successful speakers according to votes.

Public speaking, either simulated in the classroom or carried out in real life is both an art and a skill; students can be taught to be efficient in their communication but this atempt must be approached with sincerity, discipline and a lot of practice.

III. Styles of speech delivery. When preparing for an oral presentation the communicator should decide upon one of the four basic styles of speech delivery: *impromptu, extemporaneous, memorized, and manuscript.* These styles vary in terms of their degree of structure and formality going from an unstructured / informal message to a structured / formal one. Each of them creates a certain impression on the audience and is appropriate under specific conditions, the choice of the style being made after a thorough consideration of objectives, situation and public.

By analysing the different styles, we have identified some characteristics, advantages / disadvantages of each of them, which makes them effective for a certain type of audience.

The impromptu style
Characteristics: unstructured, informal, often given in an emergency, spontaneous, delivered after minimal preparation, with no planning in advance,.
Type of audience (effective for): informal talk; group discussions; comments on others' speeches.
Advantages: spontaneity; originality; positive attitude of the public; use of personal experience; good response to what is going around; briefness of comment, high audience appeal.
Disadvantages: short time to think about the topic; possible mental blocks, low audience expectations (the public is aware of the speaker's off–hand speech), short time for expressing conclusions.

The extemporaneous style
Characteristics: more formal, showing a balance between highly structured / highly unstructured; planned and organized in advance but delivered in a spontaneous, direct, natural manner, the speaker making use of only notes / key ideas; effective, not memorized or read.
Type of audience (effective for): business situations; small audience (5-50 people) with different backgrounds (as the college classroom, or the „outside" world); round table talks; a diversity of interests.

Advantages: benefits from good focusing; good organization of the delivery (due to its careful planning in advance), spontaneity; maintains eye-contact, offers liberty to move (due to the non-predetermined character of the speech).
Disadvantages: difficulty in keeping exact time-limits; difficulty in being exact in wording or grammatically perfect; requires time for being prepared.

The memorized style
Characteristics: formal; the most difficult, the least effective; rarely recommended, sometimes necessary; carefully planned and memorized word for word.
Type of audience(effective for): political situations requiring prepared speeches when notes are not allowed; jury in oratory contests; people involved in very formal situations (eulogy speeches, church rituals).
Advantages: offers the illusion „of the first time" if well practised; a good traning device for memory.
Disadvantages: lack of spontaneity; tendency to concentrate on words rather than ideas; unatural, artificial image created; danger of panic when one small word is forgotten.

The manuscript style
Characteristics: most formal, most structured; carefully planned and written in advance; essentially read to the audience; more personal than written messages.
Type of audience (effective for): scientific conferences for presenting scientific findings; legal proceedings; „for the record"; large groups of people addressed by high level executives / officials who could be quoted.
Advantages: good organization of the message; concentration on ideas rather than words; good control of words; maintaines partial eye-contact; good time-limits; variation of speed.
Disadvantage: lack of spontaneity and naturalness; might not promote audience involvement and interest; difficult, cumbersome to be followed.

In order to practise the styles of delivery we suggest some activities which might help:

1. The students are asked to watch a recorded TV speech delivered by a public official; they have to recognize the delivery style, to analyse its characteristics and to show the obvious advantages / disadvantages of the speech. In conclusion they have to decide if the individual was effective by the style chosen in accomplishing the main objectives of the speech.

2. The students are asked to name one good and one bad speaker whom they have watched during a TV programme, identifying the good / bad features of the style used and suggesting an alternative style, if appropriate.

104

3. Divide the class into 4 groups; suggest topics like "women's rights", "women in business", "reactions to globalization", "an economic issue" etc; ask each group, after preparation and planning, to delegate their representatives to deliver a speech on the topic suggested, each of them using a different style; ask the students to comment on the results and decide which style was the most appropriate for the topic.

IV. Guidelines for delivery. Up to this moment we have taken into consideration the speaker's attitude towards the speech and audience as well as the way in which the speech must be built. Another important aspect of this action is represented by the way in which the speech should be delivered, meaning the control over the non-verbal messages included in a speech presentation. The speaker must have in view that these non-verbal messages can determine a change in the meaning assigned to the spoken words, and even worse, sometimes, can entirely contradict that meaning. The fact is that "an *audience is inclined to trust the non-verbal communication more than the spoken word*, and to react negatively to the speech if the two types of communication (verbal / non-verbal) contradict each other"[3, p. 125].

Therefore the students should be made aware of this important aspect and taught to behave / act / react non-verbally according to their words. The audience can receive the non-verbal messages either by the visual and / or by the auditory aspects included in the speech delivery.

1. *Visual aspects of delivery* include appearance, movement, posture, facial expressions and eye-contact.

Appearance should be attractive, up-dated (including modern clothes, modern hairstyle, etc) but not in an exaggerated way; research suggests the audience prefer modern looking speakers, or those speakers who are similar to them, but this similarity should be shown in a standard way. This is important for achieving the speaker's credibility.

Movement / gestures, represent a very important visual aspect of delivery. Movement and gestures should express the speaker's confindence and enthusiasm, *being made voluntarily*; in other words the speaker should be trained to control his gestures and movement but without having to plan each of them.

This is succesfully achieved if the speaker is involved in the message, this involvement creating the motivation for movement and gestures; in this way the speaker would look natural and convincing; besides, gestures are useful for emphasising some important ideas.

Movement can help the speaker maintain contact with *all* members of the audience extending "the action zone" from those sitting in front and centre towards those sitting in other areas and who would otherwise stay uninvolved.

Posture recommended by research is the "good one"; it means standing relatively straight, relaxed enough to be at ease with the audience". There are situations when the speakers prefer "excessively informal postures, but this is the case with only highly reputed persons who need it in order to encourage the audience to relax and so they are more or less justified to it" [4, p.25]. Beginning speakers should be advised to avoid their example. The "good posture" helps the speaker to get a positive audience reaction, increasing the contact with its members.

Facial expresions should reflect the speakers' involvement with the message, the students being taught that the face can be more meaningful to the audience than the words themselves.

Eye-contact is considered as the most important aspect of the speech delivery. It increases the interest in the message as well as in its communicator, making the latter more attractive.

The research considers that direct eye-contact is a form of reality testing, allowing the speaker to watch -while speaking- the audience's perception of his/her message as well as their reaction to it. Eye-contact should be obtained *at least once*, during any presentation, with each member of the audience; after having made a definite contact, the beginning speaker should be taugh to move on to another, a.s.o.; "this should be done quickly so as a visual latch to every person of a good-sized audience could be done in a relatively short period of time" [5, p. 112].

2. *Auditory aspects of delivery* refer to the correct use of the voice (paralanguage communication) including volume, rate, pitch and articulation.

Volume (the loudness of the speaker's voice) should be the right one, adapted to the room; it means that the delivery has to be loud enough that the audience can hear any word said, but not so loud that they might be disturbed by it.

Rate (speed in speaking) should be the normal one, meaning around 150 words / minute; a slower rate is boring and a fast rate, - although associated in people's mind with competence – if too rapid, might make the speech unintelligible.

Pitch (highness / lowness of the speaker's voice) should be normal and kept under control in such a way that the audience could believe that the speaker is talking to them and not in front of them. Thus, the volume, rate and pitch are very important for maintaining the

audience's interest but more than that, they will result in *emphasis* which can be laid on some ideas.

Articulation (pronunciation of all the parts of the necessary words) is considered as the most important non-verbal aspect, meaning a careful, not necessarily standardized pronunciation; the four most common articulation problems (mistakes) are deletion (leaving off one part of a word), substitution (replacing parts of a word with an incorrect sound), addition (adding extra parts to words) and slurring (saying two / more words at once); they have to be avoided, the general rule for articulation is that of being both natural and clear.

In conclusion, the students should be taught that they must be concerned with both visual and auditory aspects of their presentation.

In this respect some activities can be suggested:

1. The students may be asked to practise an analysis of the visual and auditory aspects noticed while watching a certain well-known person (actor, newscater, talk-show host, politician) whose delivery they consider effective. A list can be made with those aspects which help the delivery be really good.

2. The students may be asked to identify good/ bad speakers from the point of view of either visual or auditory aspects, taken separately; in the end they could appreciate the delivery positively / negatively according to these aspects.

3. Each student should get an idea of how he/she sounds in normal conversation/ while delivering a speech; he/she is asked to leave a tape recorder running in each of these two situations. The results will be analysed with a group of colleagues; they might suggest some improvements.

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