

## Personality Development Through Speech

\*Alok Chansoria

Your looks are the gift of God. A beautician can make marginal changes in it but its basic structure and features remain the same. But then there is nothing to worry about. Looks form only one of the parts of your personality. Your overall personality is assessed by what you are- which includes how much knowledge you have, how you present yourself, how you speak, how you walk, how you sit, how you listen to others, what are your etiquette and manners, what is your conduct etc. - and not by your looks alone. Realizing the limitations of an article it is impossible for me to deal in detail with all the aspects of a man's personality as stated above. I shall therefore confine myself to elaborating upon just one aspect of a man's personality, i.e. speech, which, I understand, is of primary use and importance in the life of man. Needless to mention that despite its indispensable importance one hardly devotes any time to improve upon it or even to think about it. Let me tell you here that by simple practice and some exercise you can improve the quality of your voice and speech and can make it more presentable and attractive.

Figure 1 displays the mechanism of your voice. It is closely knitted to your respiratory system. In order to produce a good voice it is necessary for you to understand this mechanism. When you breathe you inhale air inside the lungs and exhale it. But your lungs, though they extract oxygen from the air to not suck it or push it out. This function is performed by your diaphragm, which is a muscle that extends across the base of your chest. When you inhale your diaphragm contracts and pushes your intestines down and out. This is the reason why your abdomen expands when you breathe in. When you exhale while speaking, your diaphragm relaxes and is pushed upward by your abdominal muscles. The air in your chest cavity is compressed and forced out through your trachea. The trachea consists of a number of airway tubes and takes the air to your larynx. Larynx is also called as the voice box and contains the vocal cords which are membranes tied across the

---

\* Head, Department of English, Hawabagh Women's College, Jabalpur.

cavity of the larynx. When you breathe your vocal cords are held wide apart. But when you speak the vocal cords meet, i.e., they are held loosely together so that when the air passes between them they vibrate. This vibration brings disturbance in the air, which results in the production of voice. When you speak, your oral cavity, nasal cavity and even the sinuses and the bones of your skull act as resonators. Resonance is one of the most important factors, which enhance the quality of your voice. Do not forget the difference between your voice and speech. Voice is the vibration that comes out from the vocal cords and the resonance along the vocal and the nasal tracts. Speech is how this sound is given different shapes by the speech organs within the mouth. A pleasing voice enhances your personality whereas an offensive voice makes you unpleasant and impolite to others.

Let us first examine the mechanism of speech i.e., how does one speak. At the very outset there is the formulation of a concept in the speaker's brain. The brain transmits this concept to the speech organs which are set in motion. These movements of the speech organs produce disturbance in the air resulting in sound waves. The listener receives these sound waves and through his nerves the message is carried to his brain. In order to decipher the message in clear terms the speaker and the listener must necessarily share the same linguistic code. Figure 2 describes before you the organs of speech in English.

The air stream coming out of the lungs is the primary source of energy in the production of speech. It produces two kinds of speech sounds- voiced and voiceless. The vocal cords contained in the larynx when vibrate produce voiced sound and when they do not vibrate produce voiceless sound. Further, the air stream coming out of the lungs is modified by the resonating cavities namely:- the pharynx, the mouth and the nasal cavity.

English words contain one or more than one syllable. In words of more than one syllable, one syllable or at times two syllables are more prominent than the rest. These prominent syllables are said to receive the accent. It means that the speaker has to use greater breath force or greater muscular energy to articulate these prominent syllables than they do to articulate the other syllables of that word. These prominently pronounced syllables are also said to have the stress. Unless one acquires workable knowledge of English word accent or accentual pattern one shall not be able to pronounce the word correctly. There are general rules of word accent in English, which because of the paucity of space, are difficult to be

reproduced here. At the same time it shall always be appreciable if one checks from the dictionary the word accent of a word before using it.

In English sentences the accented syllable tends to occur at approximately regular intervals of time irrespective of the varying number of unaccented syllables between two accented syllables. Due to the ignorance of this general rule an Indian speaker fails to speak in English in the right way and sounds even unintelligible at times specially to the native speakers. The concept of voiced and voiceless sound is no less important than word accent as it is directly related to the pronunciation of some weak form words which form almost an integral part of pronunciation of every statement one makes in English. For example the word 'is' is pronounced as /ɪz/ after the sounds /s, z, tʃ, dʒ, ʃ, ʒ/. It is pronounced as /z/ after voiced sounds other than /z, dʒ, ʒ/ and pronounced as /s/ after voiceless sounds other than /s, tʃ, ʃ/. Similarly 'has' is pronounced as /həz/ when it occurs initially in a sentence. It is pronounced as /əz/ after /s, z, tʃ, dʒ, ʃ, ʒ/ and /z/ after voiced sounds other than /z, dʒ, ʒ/ and is pronounced as /s/ after voiceless sounds other than /s, tʃ, ʃ/. The knowledge of weak form words is essential for the correct delivery of a sentence in English. For example, 'have' is pronounced as /həv/ when it occurs at the beginning of a sentence. It is pronounced as /v/ after personal pronouns and /əv/ in all other positions. 'Would' is pronounced as /wəd/ when it occurs at the beginning of a sentence. It is pronounced as /d/ after I, he, she, we, you, they and pronounced as /əd/ in all other positions. 'He' is pronounced as /hi/ at the beginning of a sentence and /ɪ/ elsewhere. 'Her' is pronounced as /hə/ at the beginning of a sentence and /ə/ elsewhere. 'The' is pronounced as /ðə/ before a constant and /ði/ before a vowel. /t/ is pronounced only when it is followed by a vowel sound otherwise it shall always remain silent. The list of such weak form words extends to approximately forty-five words in English. In order to maintain the rhythm of an English sentence one must necessarily learn and keep in mind the pronunciation of weak form words. Absence of knowledge of the weak form words has been and is the primary reason why we Indians are not able to speak English according to the required intonation pattern and end up in becoming unintelligible before a native speaker of English.

An Indian speaker of English whose mother tongue is Hindi fails to pronounce certain sounds correctly in English as he has not been taught these sounds or come across them as they are non-existent in Hindi. For example /ð, v, w, ʒ/ and diphthongs like /eɪ, ɪə, uə, eə/. The Indian speaker tends to draw a Hindi equivalent of these

sounds and eventually land up in incorrect pronunciation. What one needs here is to contact a linguist who would introduce you to the correct pronunciation of these English sounds. One should be rest assured that it doesn't take more than seven days sitting of one hour each to learn them.

So far I have ytried to deliberate upon, in the shortest possible manner, the aspects of voice and speech of man. A little interest and effort in this direction can enormously enhance one's personality. One can become more impressive, attractive and pleasant.

The general characteristics of an unplasing voice are harsh voice, a thin and a weak voice, a gravelly voice i.e. a deep and a rough voice, a poor pitched voice, a singsong voice, a whiny voice, a breathy voice, etc. Hoarseness often results from over-use and improper use of the voice. Shouing, screaming or cheering for a longer dutation can be the cause of it and if it persists for long should be shown to a physician. A thin voice is the result of lack of resonance. Good posture and a proper air support may increase the resonance. A gravelly voice is commonly low pitched and is devoid of melody. A higher pitch and a better breahst support can reduce this problem. Some people try to talk too high or too low. Discovering a comfortable and natural pitch can subside the problem of poor pitch. Singsong voice is marked by a rhythm that rises and falls. A normal speech melody can clear up this problem. Whiny voice is caused by speaking at a hgih pitch and by elongating vowels. It can be cured by assuming a better ptich and shortening the vowels. In a breathy voice the speaker has insufficient air reserves and often runs out of breath. Better breath support, better posture, proper vocal tension and a professional therapy can clear up this problem.

Although breathing is a natural function still there is some technique involved in breathing properly for voice production. The old concept of breathing by throwing the chest out is not correct. One must expand his abdomen rather than the chest during inhalation for proper speech. But remember, the first step in producing a pleasant speaking voice even before correct breathing is to learn the correct posture. Both correct posture and breathing depends upon your formation of good habits and the breaking of bad habits. David Blair McClosky, an author and a voice therapist states: "Posture is the most important element is voice"<sup>1</sup>. He recommends a posture in which your feet are spread comfortably apart and your weight is slightly toward the balls of your feet. Do not stand by giving exaggerated

curve to your back. Keep our back straight and tuck your hips in as shown in the figure 3.

Now be sure that it should be your abdomen that should expand and not your chest when you inhale. A natural exhalation from this position, involving a contracting of the abdominal muscles, will produce the proper speech effect. This breathing posture shall work equally well when you are in a seated position.

Lastly, I would like to suggest some exercise necessary for proper speech production :

- (a) Neck and shoulder exercise.
- (b) Gently massage the area under your chin.
- (c) Gently massage the larynx from side to side.
- (d) Push out your tongue several times than hang it loosely over your lower lip and try to relax it.
- (e) Massage the muscles of your face.
- (f) Avoid speaking when you suffer from cold or have a bad throat.

I have very briefly tried to provide some necessary tips useful for the production of correct speech in English. Let me conclude here by saying that a little learning, some practice and some exercise can make you much improve the quality of your voice and speech thus making your personality more attractive and charming.

### Reference

1. David Blair McClosky, *Announcing*, by Hausman Carl, Lewis B.O' Donnel, and Philip Benoit (Australia; Wadsworth, 2000) 47.