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WHAT IS GOOD SPEECH?

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Ключевые слова: внятность, ясность и точность, логичность речи, умение слушать себя, благозвучность, риторические эффекты.

The article deals with some advice which can help us to improve our speech and make it audible and distinct.

В статье даются рекомендации, как улучшить свою речь на иностранном языке, сделать ее более доступной для восприятия и понимания.

There are several ways in which speech may be considered 'good' or 'bad' by different people and this is usually because it may be used for many different purposes.

First, why do we speak at all? In fact, is speaking really necessary? I am sure we all agree that it is. We realize this very forcibly when we go to a country where we do not speak the language. Of course, if one is good at mime one can get along to a certain extent with gesture. This is fun on holiday and when there is plenty of time but we all know that it does not get one very far in the end. We may say then that *the first and most important use of speech is to convey our ideas to other people*. It is when our speech does not do this, immediately and clearly, that it may truly be said to be 'bad'.

Audibility of Voice. Different people speak in different situations and speech which may be perfectly adequate in some circumstances may be inadequate in others. For instance, a soft voice is usually quite satisfactory in the home but the same voice might not be heard at the back of a classroom, while a competent teacher, who is clearly audible in a classroom, may not be able to make himself heard in a large lecture room, a court of law, a theatre or a church. So the first requirement of good speech is that in any given circumstances *the voice should be audible*. Here a warning note should be sounded: one should fill, but not overfill, the space occupied by one's hearers. It is unpleasant to be shouted at, so unpleasant indeed that anyone with sensitive ears will stop listening to an overloud voice and then, of course, whatever the speaker had to say will not have been taken in and, for all the effect he has had on his hearers, he might just as well not have spoken. At first this presents for the speaker a very real difficulty: how to speak loudly enough but not too loudly. There is also another difficulty which comes into this category: how to avoid letting an audible voice fade into inaudibility at the ends of phrases.

Audibility of words. The voices of most speakers are, in fact, usually well audible but quite often their *words* are not and, in cases of this kind, though the speaker is heard, his meaning is not conveyed to us and so, again, his speaking is without effect. As with the voice, the amount of clarity required in the articulation of words depends on where one is speaking; it is obviously much easier to make words carry in a small room than in a large one and it is especially difficult if there is a slow 'reverberation time' (usually called, erroneously, an 'echo') as in most of our lovely stone churches.

Accents. Another thing which may prevent our meaning from being clear is *accent*. If a person speaks in an accent which is unfamiliar to his hearers they may be worrying about the meaning of a word which he has used while he is saying the next phrase and so they do not even listen to the second phrase. Or they may be wondering where he comes from and so, again, may not listen to what he is saying, or they may even be hostile to, or amused by, the strangeness of his way of speech so that thoughts are aroused quite other than those to which the speaker wishes to direct their attention.

The word 'accent' covers two quite separate meanings: it is used in some contexts to mean extra breath-force on a word or syllable (stress); it is used here to mean the huge range of differences in the rhythm, intonation and speech sounds made by a foreigner in speaking our language, and it is also used to indicate the differences of pronunciation heard in different parts of our own country. Charming as these differences often are, if an accent makes people listen to *how* we are speaking instead of to *what* we are saying then that accent reduces our efficiency as speakers.

The part fashion plays in speech. Whether we find a certain accent pleasant or unpleasant may depend on mere prejudice but it often depends on *fashion*. What is called 'Southern Standard English' is really just the most fashionable way of speaking at this particular period in time. It is, I think, one of the many pleasant ways of speaking our language but what gives it a very real value is the fact that it is accepted, without comment, in any type of society all over the English speaking world. The moment a speaker of Southern Standard English opens his mouth he is comprehensible to other speakers of English. Also, he sounds educated. In fact, a person with a very different accent may be, and often is, much more highly educated than the speaker with a Standard accent but some people feel that they must make sure of his attainments before they accept him. This sounds foolish, but it is a fact. Do not let us underrate the importance of fashion; we all subscribe to it in different ways, in our clothes, of course, but also in the way we spend our holidays, in the books we read, in the food we eat and in a thousand other ways. In the choice we make in these matters we express a good deal about ourselves; how much more we tell people when we begin to speak!

Let us then become aware of how we sound to others and, if this is not how we would choose to sound, then let us alter our way of speech.

Hearing ourselves. Now we all hear our own voice and speech from inside ourselves while other people hear us only from the outside, so it is difficult to know, without some mechanical aid, how we actually do sound to others. Now that so many people own tape recorders it is a good idea to listen to ourselves on one of these useful instruments. The recording may not be perfect but it is usually very much more like what other people hear when we speak than what we ourselves hear from inside our own heads. The first time we listen to ourselves on a record we usually get rather a shock since it is so different from what we expect. This is salutary but *too much listening may be dangerous* unless we continue to be self-critical or unless we have our recorded voice and speech analysed by a competent expert. Listening to a record does not, in itself, make speech better, it only makes us aware of good and bad points in our own voice and speech and in our use of speech – mumbling, hesitations, dullness, repetitions and such faults are very noticeable on a record, especially in an unprepared conversation. When we have become aware of our faults, hard and concentrated work is usually required in order to alter these habits.

Bringing out the meaning. Even when voice and words are easily and suitably audible the *meaning* of what we say may still not be conveyed. For instance, if, after a lecture or a sermon, someone who was not there asks what it was all about, a person who was present and heard the talk may find that he does not really know. He heard it all clearly at the time but was not made to understand it. This happens much more often than people realize. After hearing a talk it is a good test to ask your friends, or better still, yourself, to recapitulate the points and arguments that were put forward. If this cannot be done it is best for everyone to blame himself, that is the speaker should blame himself for not speaking well and the hearers should blame themselves for not concentrating properly.

Being an interesting speaker. In fact, if we have not listened to what was being said this may well have been the fault of the speaker since he may have failed to *interest* us. Apart from subject matter and the choice of words, illustrations and so on, what makes a speaker interesting? It is not only the quality of his voice and the clear way in which he expresses his ideas, it is also the variety in his voice and speech and gestures. We all get very bored if we have to keep on doing the same thing day after day, if we have to *variety* is the essence of interest. We must remember that an interesting subject may be made boring by a dull speaker and a dull subject interesting by a good speaker.

Beauty of voice. A point about speech, which is beyond the very practical points raised above, is the actual quality of the voice itself. Some people are

more sensitive to this than others are, or perhaps it would be truer to say that they are more consciously so. A *beautiful voice* is, in itself, interesting and pleasant to listen to, but here again a warning must be given: the owner of a lovely voice often takes great pleasure in listening to it himself and anyone who does this is not concentrating fully on what he is saying and so his meaning suffers. Another point is that he may be speaking of something ugly or unpleasant and then the unsuitability of lovely tone makes him sound insincere.

Style in speaking. In fact, *suitability* of voice and speech to the subject, even more than to the acoustics of the room, is very important. In addition, the style should be suited to the audience and to the situation: a good speaker uses a different style when stay always in the same place, however beautiful, or if we never meet new people, however much we like our old friends. It is the same with speech: he is speaking, for instance, to small children, to adult students interested in his subject, or to the guests at a wedding reception.

Sincerity. All speech, if it is to sound *sincere*, must be stimulated by thought, feeling and imagination. Sometimes one or another of these may predominate: for instance, when one is hurt the ejaculation 'Ow!' expresses the feeling of pain while the sighing 'Oh!' at the sight of something beautiful expresses the feeling of pleasure. On many occasions thought is predominant and often, in poetry for example, imagination is more important than feeling or thought. All three elements, however, should be present and we must always think, feel and imagine before we speak if we are to bring out the full meaning.

Effective speech. To sum up: if we are to be *effective* speakers we must speak clearly and in such a manner that our meaning is understood; we must vary our voice and speech so that we hold the attention of our hearers; and, finally, we must think, feel and imagine before we speak so that not only do we sound sincere but we also bring out the full meaning of what we are saying. If we speak in such a way we shall command attention since we shall indeed be well worth listening to.

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