

Topic:

Dimensions of Speech-

Syllable; Accent, Pitch, Rhythm, Intonation

Syllable:

A syllable may be defined as a unit of sound with one vowel sound and with or without consonant sounds.

A syllable is the sound of a vowel (a, e, i, o, u) that is created when pronouncing a word.

A syllable is a part of a word that is pronounced with one uninterrupted sound.

A syllable is a unit of sound which can be pronounced with a single effort of the voice.

For example, the word water is composed of two syllables: wa and ter as we have to make two efforts to pronounce this word.

Syllables are ways to split words into speech sounds. We naturally say words using syllables, but we don't usually think about it until we need to separate the syllables for reading or spelling purposes.

Why do we need syllables?

When we learn to read, and as we encounter more difficult words, we may need to decode a word. You'll often hear someone telling a reader to "sound it out" or "break the word into parts." When we do this, breaking the word into syllables can help us read the word. Here are a few examples:

i) word- one syllable, word

ii) spelling- two syllables, spe + lling

iii) computer- three syllables, com + pu + ter

Breaking a word into syllables can also help when we learn to spell new words. There are many spelling rules that apply to how a word is broken apart. For example, if a syllable ends with a vowel, the vowel sound is usually long.

tiger- two syllables, ti + ger

The i in tiger is a long i, making the sound "i." If the word had been broken up like this, tig/er, we would pronounce the i as a short i, as in the word igloo and the beginning of the word would be "tig."

The construction of a syllable may be described in terms of the following formula:

[C]+V=Syllable

Where C indicates indefinite number of consonants and V stands for a vowel sound, the bracket indicate that the consonants are not obligatory.

e.g.

street = CCCVC (1 Syllable)

ago = VCV (2 Syllables)

There can be one or more syllables in a word depending upon the number of vowel sounds it has.

Words are divided into three types as per number of syllables:

1. Monosyllabic: Words with one syllable e.g. on- on (VC)
2. Disyllabic: Words with two syllables e.g. upon- up+ on (VCVC)
3. Polysyllabic: Words with more than two syllables e.g. syllable – sy+lla+ble (CVCVCVC)

Accent: (way of pronunciation)

Accent is the way of pronouncing the words of a language that shows the person belongs to which country, area or social class.

Accent is a manner of pronunciation peculiar to a particular individual, location, or nation. The region to which you belong affects your accent. Not only the locality but the economic status, ethnicity, caste etc. all make an impact on the accent. Accent mainly includes pronunciation, which also has correlation with stress.

It is an important factor whether English is your first language or second language. To learn the right pronunciation, like that of the native speaker, you must watch the native speakers in action. It should not look like affected accent. Many times you do not give importance to pronunciation and that makes your speech seem below par.

Children are able to take on accents relatively quickly. Children of immigrant families, for example, generally have a more native-like pronunciation than their parents, though both children and parents may have a noticeable non-native accent – however these generally differ: the parents' accent tends to be influenced by the sound system of their native language whilst the

child is more inclined to apply hyper-pronunciation resulting from their need to correct their parents' shortcomings in fluency. Accents seem to remain relatively flexible until a person's early twenties, after which a person's accent seems to become more fixed.

Pitch: (Loudness)

Pitch is a property that allows the ordering of sounds on a frequency-related scale. Pitches are compared as "higher" and "lower".

The rise and fall of the voice conveys various emotions. 'Thank you' is such a phrase.

You can find out the difference when you utter it indifferently and when you say it with sincerity. Lowness of pitch can indicate sadness, shock, dullness, guilt etc. if you are excited, joyous, ecstatic, triumphant and even angry then your pitch automatically becomes high. A well balanced pitch results in a clear and effective tone. It helps you avoid being monotonous.

A variety of pitches should be used to hold listener's attention. Avoid raising the pitch of the voice at the end of a sentence.

Rhythm: (Sound pattern achieved by using stress in words)

Rhythm refers to a pattern of sounds. Maintaining a rhythm in a speech makes the speech sound natural and fluent. Rhythm is produced by stressed and unstressed words in a sentence. Using only the stressed words in a sentence may make a speech sound dull and artificial. The listener may also not understand the intended emphasis or meaning in the speech.

Just as stress, speed is another very important factor in the fluency of English. When we speak, we do not speak words in isolation but group them and speak without any pauses between them. To achieve good rhythm in speaking we should know which words to be stressed and which are not to be stressed in a sentence.

This leads to one or more of the following conclusions:

Rhythm is not primarily expressed by patterns of duration.

- The person-to-person and paragraph-to-paragraph variation within a language may be much larger than expected. Perhaps linguists may have idealized the form of each language, neglecting the variation.

Intonation: (variation of pitch or loudness of the words in a sentence)

The intonation in a language refers to the patterns of pitch variation or the tones it uses in its utterances. In normal speech, the pitch of our voice goes on changing constantly – going up, going down, and sometimes remaining steady. Different pitches of the voice combine to form patterns of pitch variation or tones, which together constitute intonation.

Intonation is closely linked to stress because important changes in pitch occur with stressed syllables. The following are the main functions of intonation.

- 1) Distinguishing different types of utterances such as statements, commands, requests, and questions.
- 2) Differentiating the speaker's emotional attitude such as curiosity, apprehension, friendliness, and politeness.
- 3) Drawing the listeners attention to those segments of an utterance that one considers important.

i) Paralinguistic features of voice / Nuances of Voice Dynamics:

Paralinguistic features are non-verbal vocal cues that help you to give urgency to your voice. Your voice is your trademark; it is that part of yourself that adds human touch to your words. Nuances of voice dynamics help the speaker to make his oral presentation impressive.

In order to control the audience, the speaker has to adopt certain strategies; primary among them is the use of language. The speaker should speak a language which is close to the participants. Clarity is the key word in oral presentation. Writing does not have that immediacy because the words are static on a page. Voice gives extra life to your delivery.

Therefore, you

may find it useful to understand the nuances of voice dynamics, namely-

- 1) Pronunciation
- 2) Modulation of the voice

3) Pace / Rate

4) Use of connectives

1) Pronunciation:

Words should be pronounced clearly, with proper stress and intonation. Mispronunciation sometimes leads to confusion and spoils all presentation howsoever well planned it is.

2) Modulation of the Voice:

A. Voice should be vibrant and well modulated.

B. Nasalization of the voice should be avoided.

C. Pauses should be at the right place.

3) Pace / Rate: (words spoken per minute)

Rate is the number of words which you speak per minute. It varies from person to person and from 80 to 250 words per minute. The normal rate is 120 to 150 words. Cultivate your pace so as to fit in this reasonable limit. If a person speaks too slowly and monotonously, he is most likely to be considered a dull speaker even though the contents of his speech may be highly interesting. Similarly, a fast speaker also causes discomfort because the listeners do not get time to grasp the thoughts and switch from one thought to another. Under these circumstances, listeners may just stop listening and their attention may get lost.

It is best, therefore, to vary your speaking pace. Use pauses to create emphasis. A well-placed, varied message suggests enthusiasm, self-assurance and awareness of audience. So, the rate of delivery should be normal. Since too slow or too fast delivery spoils the entire presentation.

4) Use of connectives:

There are various kinds of connectives which may be used in oral presentation. There are some words or phrases which indicate the end of one thought and shift to another. Even rise and fall in

tone can serve this purpose. The speaker can use such phrases as:

After having said that, It is time now to, In addition to etc.

Likewise his falling pitch will indicate the end of his speech.