

# **INTRODUCTION TO EXCELLENT WRITTEN AND ORAL SPEECH AND PRESENTATION SKILLS**

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# MANAGEMENT OF STUDENTS' RESULTS, COMPILATION, VETTING AND COMPUTATION

BY

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## INTRODUCTION

I would prefer to begin this lecture by commending the Centre for Human Resource Development highly for deeming it necessary to organise this workshop at no other time than now. The workshop is timely not only for the participants but for the University as a whole because it would go a long way in complementing the efforts of the present University Management in "Driving the Culture of Excellence", as a university, ideally, is meant to be a centre of excellence in all aspects, including communication.

For you, the participants, as senior administrative staff occupying sensitive positions where you are saddled with onerous task of writing minutes, reports, speeches and so on, this workshop is a sort of refresher course, which offers you an ample opportunity to update and upgrade your knowledge. It is obvious that some of you might not have come from a background of having studied English or related courses.

Therefore, this workshop becomes an on-the-job training, which has the potentialities of helping you to excel in carrying out your statutory responsibilities, which will in turn attract commendation and reward.

The topic of my lecture is made up of three components, namely:

- (i) Excellent Written Speech
- (ii) Excellent Oral Speech, and
- (iii) Excellent Presentation Skills.

We shall go further to explicate these components one after another.

## THE CONCEPT OF SPEECH

Although speech could mean a different thing in different contexts or to different people, in the context of this lecture, speech is used to mean an oral or written address someone presents to an audience. In our context, it could be a speech or address presented by the Vice Chancellor, Deputy Vice Chancellors, Deans, Heads of Departments, Directors and so on. Speech, whether oral or written, is usually realised through the medium of language. In Nigerian context, the language for official communication is the English language, which incidentally, is a foreign language but has the status of:

- (i) a second language
- (ii) an official language
- (iii) a lingua franca?, and
- (iv) a target language.

As a second language and by extension a target language, Nigerians have no choice but to learn it notwithstanding the fact that our mother tongues are already flowing in our veins. Consequently, the learners and users of English in Nigeria are faced with the challenge of what is technically described as mother-tongue interference. Simply put, mother tongue interference is the influence of the mother tongue (language one – L<sup>1</sup>) on the acquisition or learning of a second language. This phenomenon (mother tongue interference) has been considered by linguists as the worst bane of learners of English as a second language. This is so because the



learners think in their mother tongue and either speak or write in English. For such learners, they end up speaking or writing what could be regarded as Igbo English, Yoruba English or Hausa English, which can collectively be referred to as Nigerian English and this variety of English is never suitable for

official communication. The fact remains that most errors usually committed by learners or users of English as a second language are induced by mother-tongue interference. Consider the following expressions:

The errors above are induced by

## NIGERIAN ENGLISH

### 1. Syntax

i. It is expected that I and you will be present present at the meeting.

ii. That your sister is very beautiful.

iii. My Head of Department is not on seat

iv. I can hear the smell of the food.

v. Have you gone to beg your Head of Department to forgive you?

vi. I am coming.

## STANDARD BRITISH ENGLISH

It is expected that you and I will be at the meeting.

That sister of yours is beautiful. Or  
Your sister is beautiful.

My Head of Department is not around.

I can perceive the aroma of the food.

Have you gone to plead with your Head of Department to forgive you?

I will see you in a moment. Or

I will be right back. Or

Just a minute. Or

Excuse me a minute.

### 2. Phonology (Pronunciation)

i. thank = / / / /

ii. comb = / / / /

iii. come = / / / /

iv. money = / / / /

v. champagne / / / /



mother tongue interference. By the way, there is the need to stress the fact that there is a difference between an error and a mistake. Technically, an error has to do with a consistent deviation from the norm while a mistake is a slip or an oversight. If one commits an error, they would hardly know, not to talk of correcting it, but if one commits a mistake, if their attention is drawn to it, they would be able to effect the necessary corrections.

### STEPS TOWARDS ATTAINING APPRECIABLE LEVEL OF PROFICIENCY IN ENGLISH

It is very possible to attain appreciable level of proficiency in the use of English, the challenges of the mother tongue interference notwithstanding. Although the English language is basically learnt in school, whether formal or informal, there are some basic steps individuals as senior administrative staff like you, who have the need to attain an appreciable level of proficiency in English, can take to realise their heart desire. Such steps include the following:

**i. Extensive Reading:** Extensive Reading (ER) is a kind of reading that bothers on consciously reading large quantity of materials written in good English, and such materials should not necessarily be within one's area of educational or professional inclination.

ER is also referred to as reading for pleasure or leisure reading. It is usually done in a relaxed mood without any tension or anxiety because the reader is not reading to pass an examination, carry out a research, deliver a lecture or the like. It is also a life-long exercise because there is no end to it until one is no more.

Materials that could be read extensively include novels, newspapers, magazines, journals and any other materials written in good English that are outside one's area of specialisation.

Researches have revealed that if one can read about two hundred novels written in Standard English, for instance, one can think in English (instead of mother tongue) and write Standard English. This is so because ER enhances:

- (a) enrichment of vocabulary, including idioms, collocations and figurative expressions.
- (b) construction of correct sentences.
- (c) correct spelling of words.
- (d) effective punctuation.
- (e) use of correct tenses.
- (f) imitation of good writing style and more.

Unfortunately, in contemporary times, people, including senior administrative staff, hardly have reading for pleasure in their agenda. For many of them, the much they read are the memos they write and carry about in the offices or the text books they read in preparation for examinations, especially those who are undergoing educational programmes for additional qualifications. To say the least, reading for pleasure is at its lowest ebb in Nigeria; people are busy chasing material things and fame and hardly consider reading for pleasure necessary. It is against this background that it is usually said that if you wish to hide something from Nigerians, put it in a book and place it on their centre table and they would hardly see it because the last thing they would do is to open the book.

You should, therefore, cultivate the habit of reading extensively as it has been proven to be one of the surest ways of attaining proficiency in the use of English.

**ii. Effective Use of Dictionary:** Applied English Linguistic scholars are in agreement that a good English dictionary is the best English teacher. Their argument is based on the fact that a good English dictionary provides relevant information that can enhance the user's knowledge of the English grammar. For



instance, a good English dictionary provides information leading to:

- (a) correct spelling of words.
- (b) correct pronunciation of words.
- (c) correct meaning(s) of words and usages.
- (d) grammatical properties of words, e.g., parts of speech, tenses, inflections, etc.
- (e) idioms, meanings and usages.
- (f) synonyms and antonyms of words.

You should, therefore, learn to make effective use of dictionary and make it your handbook. In fact, every senior administrative staff should have a good English dictionary on their table.

**iii. Make Conscious Efforts to Listen to Radio and Television:** I do not know how many people that make conscious efforts to spend quality time to listen to radio and television. Experience has shown that women are worst offenders in this direction. Recall how many times you as a woman or your wife has on her own put on radio or television with the purpose of listening to news only. Listening to radio and television news and other programmes can enhance proficiency in the use of English. Therefore, make conscious efforts and cultivate the habit of listening to radio and television. For those who are addicted to watching video films, they should in addition to enjoying the actions and romances that are displayed, pay attention to good actors who speak good English and imitate them because imitation is a veritable ingredient in language acquisition and learning.

**iv. Practice to Use English:** If you must be proficient in English, in addition to the above, you should practise to speak and write English because practice makes perfect. You cannot be a good speaker or writer of English if you do not practise to speak and write it.

## HOW TO REALISE EXCELLENT ORAL/WRITTEN SPEECH

In writing generally, two issues are usually addressed. The issues are content and form. The content of a writing is the topic, the message or the subject of discussion while the form has to do with how the message is conveyed to the audience, that is, the language and style. For a writing to be successful, the content and the form must be relevant and appropriate. The two must also agree.

Therefore, to realise an excellent oral/written speech, the following should be taken into consideration:

- i. Ensure that the subject matter is not only suitable for the occasion but also relevant to the audience. In doing so, the age, the occupation and the educational level of the audience should be taken into consideration.
- ii. Articulate your ideas and arrange them sequentially in order of importance, placing much emphasis on more important points.
- iii. Use appropriate and excellent language style:
  - (a) Choose a formal language for a formal situation and informal language for informal situation.
  - (b) Vary your sentence types, e.g., simple, compound, complex and compound complex.
  - (c) Use appropriate register, idioms, collocations and figurative expressions.
  - (d) Pay attention to mechanics: spelling, punctuation, tenses, agreement, etc.
- iv. Organisation of Oral/Written Speech:
  - (a) Ensure that your ideas are developed in paragraphs, one idea leading to another.
  - (b) Ensure that your paragraphs are effectively linked, using cohesive devices.
  - © There should be an introductory paragraph, which states the



thesis statement.

- (d) The introduction should lead to the body where the details of the subject matter are expounded.
- (e) The body should lead to the conclusion, which sums up the discussion either by making recommendations where necessary or reiterating the salient points earlier stated.

#### v. The Structure of a Speech:

- (a) Title: A good speech should have a title, which should be an embodiment of:

- the sender- the presenter
- the receiver- the person to whom the speech is addressed
- the occasion- the ceremony or activity
- the date- the date of the ceremony or activity

- (b) Protocols: Recognise the dignitaries present according to their status, beginning with the chairman of the occasion while the least in status is placed last.

- (c) Introduction: Introduce your speech by formally welcoming the guests and establishing the background of the occasion.

- (a) The Body: Go further to develop the relevant ideas sequentially according to their order of relevance.

- (a) Conclusion: Sum up your presentation by reiterating the salient points made if necessary and thank the guests for their time and pray for their safe journey back home.

- vi. Endorsement: Endorse your speech by signing your signature and writing your full name.

### PRESENTATION SKILLS

It is one thing to write an excellent speech and another thing to present an excellent speech. A well-written speech

may be marred by poor presentation. Therefore, it is expedient that a speech writer and presenter should acquire the necessary presentation skills that would give rise to a successful presentation. The following presentation skills should be noted:

#### i. Physical Appearance

- (a) Dress corporately to suit the occasion.
- (b) Your dressing should not be too gorgeous or seductive to distract the attention of the audience.
- (c) Put on a cheerful face and/or disarming smiles and endeavour to create jokes and introduce humour in the course of the presentation.

#### ii. Place prominence on correct articulation of words (correct pronunciation, stress, intonation and rhythm).

**GRAMMAR TIPS:** Although we are not exclusively in a grammar class, it is obvious that the use of correct grammar is indispensable for an excellent oral/written speech. Therefore, I have deemed it expedient to sparingly touch on some critical grammar issues, the knowledge of which would go a long way in enhancing effective oral/written speech. Note the following:

#### Subject-Verb Agreement (Concord):

Basically, every sentence usually has a subject and a verb. The rule of grammar requires that the subject of a sentence must agree with its verb in number. That is, if the subject is singular, the verb should also be singular and if the subject is plural the verb should also be plural. Examples:

1. The Principal Officers of the University **are doing** their best.
2. The University **is developing** too.
3. The secretary **comes** to work early.
4. The clerks **come** to work late.



However, there are some exceptions to the subject-verb agreement rule. Consider the following:

1. When two singular subjects joined by and are considered individually, a singular form of the verb is required. Examples:

- (a) **Every man and woman is** present.
- (b) **Each boy and girl makes** a separate report.

2. When two singular subjects joined by and refer to the same person or thing, singular form of the verb is required. Examples:

- (a) **The Vice Chancellor and Chairman of the Senate has implemented** the Senate decision.
- (b) **Bread and butter is** good for me.

3. When one of the two subjects connected by or, nor or but is singular and the other is plural, the verb agrees in number with the nearer one. Examples:

- (a) **Neither the man nor his children are** here.
- (b) **Neither his children nor the man is** here.
- (c) **Not only the girls but also their mother loves** the man.
- (d) **Not only their mother but also the girls love** the man.

4. When two subjects connected by or or nor differ in person, the verb agrees with the nearer one. Examples:

- (a) **You or the man has** stolen the money.
- (b) **Neither the Secretary nor I am** to blame.

5. A singular subject immediately followed by as well as, in addition to, including, with, together with, no less than or a similar construction requires a singular verb. Examples:

- (a) **The lecturer as well as the students is** in the class.
- (b) **The Vice Chancellor with the Principal Officers has** arrived.

6. A singular subject followed by a plural

modifier requires a singular verb. Examples:

- (a) **The attitude of the members of staff is** bad.
- (b) **The leader of the students speaks** very well.

7. When the subject is a relative pronoun, the verb agrees with the antecedent of the relative pronouns. Examples:

- (a) He is one of the **boys who play** around my house.
- (b) She is one of the **ladies who refuse** to marry.

8. A collective noun takes a singular verb when the class it names is considered as a unit and a plural verb when the members of the class are considered individually. Examples:

- (a) **The Committee meets** today. (singular)
- (b) **The Committee have disagreed** on the issue. (plural)

9. Plural numbers take a singular verb when they are used in a phrase to indicate a sum or a unit. Examples:

- (a) **Twenty years is** too long to wait.
- (b) **Ten per cent is** attractive.

10. Certain nouns which are plural in form but singular in meaning take singular verb. Examples:

- (a) **The whereabouts of the clerk is** not known.
- (b) **The news is** good.

### COMMON ERRORS IN ENGLISH

Errors are common phenomenon in second language learning and acquisition. As stated earlier, this situation is as a result of many factors, one of which is mother tongue interference. Time may not permit us to enumerate the common errors that abound in English in a second language situation. However, we shall highlight some of them for your benefit.



## WRONG

## CORRECT

1. One of my **friend** hates coming to work late.    One of my **friends** hates coming to work late.
2. I came to work late because of the **go slow**.    I came to work late because of the traffic jam.
3. I have warned you **severally**.    I have warned you **several times**.
4. When will you **round up** your discussion?    When will you **round off** your discussion.
5. This office is out of **bound** for non-staff    This office is out of **bounds** for non-staff.
6. I don't know his **whereabout**.    I don't know his **whereabouts**.
7. It is an **age-long** dispute.    It is an **age-old** dispute.
8. He is a **full fledged** student of FUTO.    He is a **fully-fledged** student of FUTO.
9. I came early **and** I did not sign my name.    I came early **but** I did not sign my name.
10. Time is against us.    We haven't got much time. Or  
Time is running out.

## CONCLUSION

A lot can still be said but for time constraint. However, we have strived to put in a nutshell all it takes to produce excellent oral and written speeches and the necessary skills that would enhance an excellent presentation. It is expected that you would take the steps highlighted here very seriously and endeavour to apply them whenever you have the need to write and present speeches.

Remember that the issue of language (this time English language) is very critical in communication. You should always make conscious efforts to ensure

that you continually improve on your use of English, and this you can achieve by cultivating the habit of reading extensively, listening to radio and television, imitating good speakers and writers of English and making effective use of a good English dictionary.

In addition you should practise to speak and write English. If you appreciate what we have done today, let us repeat it some other time as I wish you a resounding success as you strive to put into practice all you have learnt today. Thank you and God bless.

