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Manners of Speech

By Sam Vaknin

Manners of Speech By Sam Vaknin Author of "Malignant Self Love – Narcissism Revisited"

Scholars like J. L. Austin and H. P. Grice have suggested novel taxonomies of speech acts and linguistic constructs. The prevailing trend is to classify speech according to its functions – indicative, interrogative, imperative, expressive, performative, etc.

A better approach may be to classify sentences according to their relations and subject matter.

We suggest three classes of sentences:

Objective

Sentences pertaining or relating to OBJECTS. By "objects" we mean – tangible objects, abstract objects, and linguistic (or language) objects (for a discussion of this expanded meaning of "object" – see "Bestowed Existence").

The most intuitive objective speech is the descriptive, or informative, sentence. In this we also include ascriptions, examples, classifications, etc.

The expressive sentence is also objective since it pertains to (the inner state of) an object (usually, person or living thing) – "I feel sad".

Argumentative performatives (or expositives) are objective because they pertain to a change in the state of the object (person) making them. The very act of making the argumentative performative (a type of speech act) alters the state of the speaker. Examples of argumentative performatives: "I deny", "I claim that", "I conclude that".

Some exclamations are objective (when they describe the inner state of the exclaiming person) – "how wonderful (to me) this is!"

Manners of Speech

"Objective" sentences are not necessarily true or valid or sound sentences. If a sentence pertains to an object or relates to it, whether true or false, valid or invalid, sound or unsound – it is objective.

Relational

Sentences pertaining or relating to relations between objects (a meta level which incorporates the objective).

Certain performatives are relational (scroll below for more).

Software is relational – and so are mathematics, physics, and logics. They all encode relations between objects.

The imperative sentence is relational because it deals with a desired relation between at least two objects (one of them usually a person) – "(you) go (to) home!"

Exclamations are, at times, relational, especially when they are in the imperative or want to draw attention to something – "look at this flower!"

Extractive

Interrogative sentences (such as the ones which characterize science, courts of law, or the press). Not every sentence which ends with a question mark is interrogative, of course.

Performative (or Speech Acts)

Sentences that effect a change in the state of an object, or alter his relations to other objects. Examples: "I surrender", "I bid", "I agree", and "I apologize". Uttering the performative sentence amounts to doing something, to irreversibly changing the state of the speaker and his relations with other objects.

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After the Speech

By Stephen D. Boyd

Usually the emphasis on making an effective speech is what you do in preparation before the presentation begins. But if you speak very much, what you do after the speech can help you become a more effective speaker.

As soon as possible after the speech, write down impressions of how you felt the speech went. Answer at least two questions about the speech: What was the best part of the speech? What part of the speech can be improved the next time?

Some of your best ideas will come to you as you are speaking. Write them down as soon as the speech is over so you can be prepared to use those lines or ideas the next time you speak.

Think about the peaks and valleys in the speech. Consider when the audience seemed to listen best and when the audience seemed restless and disinterested. Write down your reactions while they are fresh on your mind.

Talk to someone about the speech within the first day after your presentation. You'll remember best what you talked about and you might discover a better way of telling a story or making a point as you summarize your speech to a friend or colleague.

Keep track of stories you tell and case studies you include so you'll not repeat yourself if you speak to that audience again. In addition, keep records of how long you spoke, what you wore, key people you met, and anything unusual about the speaking context. Occasionally look back over your records of individual speeches and look for trends in your speaking that you are unaware of. When you speak to this group again, this information will be the basis for your audience analysis. This is especially important if you speak frequently within your company and your audience will be made up of listeners who have heard you before. You don't want to develop a reputation for telling the same stories over and over.

If the group has speaker evaluations, ask that a copy of the summary be sent to you. Look for any pattern in the comments as you analyze the summary. If one person said you talked too slowly, it may be a personal preference and you don't need to give much consideration to the critique. If four or five people make that comment, however, then you might want to consider changing the pace of your speaking for the next speech.

Certainly your main concern should be with your preparation before the speech. However, don't underestimate the effort of what you do in analyzing the speech after the audience has left the room.

Manners of Speech

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