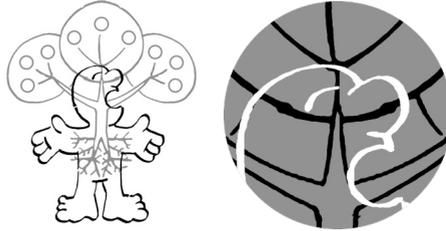


GROW YOUR VOICE TO SPEAK WITH CONFIDENCE

Petro Janse van Vuuren





Week 3

Branch: Articulation

Demosthenes overcame and rendered more distinct his inarticulate and stammering pronunciation by speaking with pebbles in his mouth.

Plutarch

Shaping vowels and consonants

Prince Serge M. Volkonski (1860–1937) was an aristocrat, a thinker and a history and literature professor who was a founding lecturer at the department for Slavic dialects at Harvard University in early 1896. (I guess this must have been where all the American spies learned their Russian!) Here is what he used to say about vowels

and consonants: "If vowels are a river, and consonants are the banks, it is necessary to reinforce the banks lest there be floods!"

Floods happen when muscles are too lazy to work and the words run one into the other so that clarity and definition are lost. But what happens when the river itself is just a trickle? Strong banks are only needed when there is a significant amount of water.

To form different vowels you change the shape of the space inside your mouth where the sound resonates as it emerges from your chest. To form consonants you create complete or partial barriers in the flow of the voice stream, thus imposing separations between vowels.

I like to think of vowel sounds as the branches that grow out of the tree trunk and the consonants as the junctions that divert the growing tree into smaller branches and twigs. The junctions are also the places where you prune a tree to maximise its growth and shape it the way you want it. You can therefore purposefully prune your tree using your articulation muscles. If you control the shape of your voice tree, your message is clear and defined so that your audience does not miss a word or get frustrated because they cannot hear you clearly.

A pleasant voice, which has to include clear enunciation, is not only attractive to those who hear it... its appeal is permanent.

Loretta Young

Objectives

- to realise the importance of precision and definition in specific muscular movements
- to shape the sound into vowels and consonants and to put syllables together
- to use the feel and ‘taste’ of a word to express its meaning

Questions to stir your thinking

- What are the functions of vowels when speaking?
- What are the functions of consonants when speaking?
- Think about how vowels and consonants fit into the tree metaphor.
- How do you use the details of a sound (vowel or consonant) in making meaning and expressing attitude?

Exercises

Stand in perfect posture before you start.

Vowels

Exercise 1: Lips

1. Focussing on the movement of the lips, intone the following. Always remember to support the sound with the diaphragm through an open throat. Repeat each twice:

'ah – ooh, ah – ooh' (x2)

(ah as in far, ooh as in blue)

'ah – aw – ooh – aw' (x2)

(aw as in straw or floor)

'ah – aw – ooh – ow' (x2)

(ow as in cow)

2. Repeat the exercise, this time placing a consonant in front of each – use m, p or b

'mah – mooh, mah – mooh' (x2)

'bah – baw – booh – baw' (x2)

'pah – paw – pooh – pow' (x2)

Exercise 2: Arching of the tongue

1. Focussing on the arching of the tongue, intone the following. Always remember to

support the sound with the diaphragm through an open throat. Repeat each twice:

'ah – ee, ah – ee' (x2)

(ee as in meat)

'ah – ay – ee – ay' (x2)

(ay as in grey)

'ah – ay – ee – ai' (x2)

(ai as in fly)

2. Repeat the exercise, this time placing a consonant in front of each – use n, d or t.

'nah – nee, nah – nee' (x2)

'dah – day – dee – day' (x2)

'tah – tay – tee – tie' (x2)

Exercise 3: The Queen's vowels

1. Intone the following concentrating on the downward movement of the tongue. Always remember to support the sound with the diaphragm through an open throat. Repeat each four times:

'ear – air'

'fear – fair'

'lear – lair'

'dear – dare'

Consonants

Exercise 4: Supporting with your diaphragm

1. Tighten your diaphragm.
2. Make quick, strong squeezes as when panting, with one long controlled squeeze for the last sound in each sequence.

't, t, t, d, d, d, nnnnn' (x2)

'p, p, p, b, b, b, mmmmm' (x2)

'k, k, k, g, g, g, ngngng' (x2)

'ch, ch, ch, j, j, j, shshsh' (x2)

(ch as in change, j as in job)

'f, v, f, v, th, TH, th, TH, s, z, s, z' (x1)

(th as in thief, TH as in that)

Exercise 5: Loosening your jaw

1. Move your jaw from side to side and up and down helping with the thumb and forefinger.
2. Open your mouth as widely as possible, then purse your lips forward into a kissing face. Relax and repeat: Open wide and kiss.
3. Chew like a cow, circling the jaw:
round and round one way

change direction

backwards and forwards (from back to front),
round and round one way

change direction

circle on the horizontal plane one way

change direction

Exercise 6: Placing consonants

1. Focussing on the tip of the tongue, say the following. Always remember to support the sound with the diaphragm. Repeat each line three times:

'tattle tettle tittle tottle tuttle'

'daddle deddle diddle doddle duddle'

'nannel nannel ninnel nonnel nunnel'

2. Focussing on the lips, say the following. Always remember to support the sound with the diaphragm. Repeat each line three times:

'papple pepple pipple popple pupple'

'babble bebble bibble bobble bubble'

'mammel memmel mimmel mommel mummel'

3. Focussing on the back of the tongue, say the following. Always remember to support the

sound with the diaphragm. Repeat each line three times:

'kakkle kekkle kikkle kokkle kukkle'

'gaggle geggle giggle goggle guggle'

'ngangel ngengel ngingel ngongel ngungel'

Exercise 7: Gourmet sounds

1. Read the following (from *Macbeth* by William Shakespeare) as though you were enjoying a gourmet meal. Forget for a moment the meaning of the words and simply feel or taste the textures of the sounds.

Use the textures of the sounds to express the meaning of the words more deliberately.

**"Double double toil and trouble
Fire burn and cauldron bubble."**

Why spend time on getting vowels and consonants precise?

Definition and clarity

The many little muscles in and around your mouth shape the resonating voice stream that grows out from your trunk and throat. This stream passes through your mouth where the shape of the mouth cavity determines the vowel and the blocking or hindering of the stream creates the consonants. This is called articulation.

Expressing the meaning of the words

If vowels carry the voice stream, while consonants chop it up into sense-making syllables, the meanings of the words are locked in the sounds. Every syllable of every word is made up of a combination of a vowels and consonants that can be used to convey the meaning of the word. You can say the word sharp sharply and the word round in a rounded manner. Combining vowels and consonants into syllables is called enunciation.

Enunciation is therefore the mechanism directly involved with the communication of meaning, because it has to do with the shaping of sounds into syllables and words.

If you can prune the branches of your tree

precisely the way you want to, you can create interest in your speaking by playing with the sounds in a word for effect (onomatopoeia), or bring in funny accents to add humour.

Overcoming strong accents

Accents are beautiful and characteristic. You can hear my own Afrikaans accent on the CD coming through every now and then. This is to be cherished and celebrated.

However, if your accent is so strong that it causes people to struggle with understanding you, it becomes a problem. Then they get frustrated or feel sorry for you instead of enjoying your unique melody as they listen to your message.

You can overcome this problem by training your muscles to make the sounds more precisely and carefully. The more you practice, the easier it will become and the more natural you will sound. Then people can enjoy your accent without missing anything or getting frustrated.

Breaking weak habits

If you want to sound relaxed and laid back like a radio DJ on the late night shift, you may come across as lazy and like you don't care. Also, your words may run into one another and people could miss what you are saying.

Training will help you make your articulation muscles agile and responsive like the muscles of a racehorse. Then you can talk relaxed and sound natural without causing your audience to strain when listening. The better trained your muscles are, the easier it will look and the more natural you will sound.

*Make sure you have finished speaking
before your audience has finished listening*

Dorothy Sarnoff

**Precision brings clarity and
clarity communicates confidence**

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