

Oral History and Oral Communication in Today's Culture

L. R. P. Stiegelbauer, N. Tirban and P. A. Onofrei

Abstract—The aim of this paper is to present how Oral Communication is an integral part of creating Oral History. The conveyance and the presence of Oral History cannot exist without the “ingredients” of communication. The paper presents how both the transmitter and the receiver have responsibilities without which a communication cannot be successful. In order to succeed this, these responsibilities need to be known and paid attention to.

Index Terms—Oral communication, oral history, transmitter, receiver, channel, responsibility.

I. INTRODUCTION

“The seeds of knowledge may be planted in solitude but must be cultivated in public.” Edgar Johnson”

As Oral Communication is an integral part of Oral History, it is important to indicate its basic rules and the significance it has by making two points that highlight the importance of communication as an integral part of every person's past, present and future. It should be mentioned that the following analysis is the ideal situation as to have an accurate Oral Communication as a part of the Oral History, however, research will prove in the forthcoming chapters that reality goes beyond theory.

First, our communication behaviour has an influence on other people. In other words, communication is an activity that produces a result. Although this activity may originate in the mind, communication is first and foremost something people do with and to each other. When you show a little smile and someone sees that smile, it means that your action was seen by someone and might trigger a reaction. If your father is eating chaotically and you suggest that he terminate this habit, you have done something to him - whether or not he discontinues eating like that. As it can be seen from these two simple examples, communication has a consequence - sometimes subtle, sometimes powerful, but definitely a consequence. Hence, as Oral History implies Oral Communication, it has a consequence on the transmitter and on the receiver.

The second reason why communication is an important process in Oral History is because communication is something we do and it is an activity which we can alter the way we engage in it or we can improve it.

Thomas Jefferson sensitively told us of the link between Oral History, its transmitters and Oral Communication when he wrote, “Democracy is

cumbersome, slow and inefficient, but in due time, the voice of the people will be heard and their latent wisdom will prevail.” The key words in Jefferson's saying are “the voice of the people.” People must be heard if we want to transmit something, if we want to communicate something. And to be heard they must speak, they must communicate orally, thus creating Oral History.

II. THE “INGREDIENTS” OF COMMUNICATION

Although each communication situation differs somehow from every other one, there are certain elements that all communication events have in common. Every time we try to communicate, be it with the interviewee or with the interviewer, in order to result Oral History, certain ingredients of communication are present. Before giving these ingredients, I need to mention that due to my research limitation I hereby write about the main communication ingredients.

First, generally speaking, the enumeration of communication ingredients is not subject to simple analysis because communication is highly complex and multidimensional. There are multiple factors that play a role in this process such as communication skills, perception, gender, culture, motivation, knowledge level, and social background. I will enumerate the factors that are ordinary and dominant in the response made by the receiver of the message.

Second, although it may seem that the ingredients describe a linear process by placing one item ahead of another, communication is not linear but language is. Hence, only one element can be discussed at a time, even though this distorts the way communication actually appears. In “real life,” regardless the time range we talk about, things happen all at once, not one after another. In most communication encounters, both parties are using feedback simultaneously, are encoding and decoding, and are aware of the context and the relationship.

A. Transmitter

The communication act has to originate from a transmitter. The transmitter wants to express him/herself in order to pass on feelings, to convey a message, to transmit knowledge, to educate, to give directions, to obtain agreement, to get something done, or to relate an idea. The transmitter has something that he/she wants to share with the others, namely with the receiver.

B. Encoding

The transmitter of the message must translate his or her ideas and feelings into a verbal (words) or nonverbal (actions) form. This translation process is called encoding. It is simply the process of putting feelings and ideas into a set of symbols that can be sent to another person. While

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L. R. P. Stiegelbauer and N. Tirban are with “Vasile Goldis” West University, Arad, Romania.

P. A. Onofrei is with “Alexandru Ioan Cuza” University of Iași, “George Enescu” University of Fine, Ornamental Arts and Design of Iași, Romania (cyp4d@yahoo.com).

symbols can take the form of art, dance, and even architecture, in most human interaction we think of symbols as being either words or actions.

C. Message

The original idea, now represented by a set of symbols, is the message. This is the indispensable part of the communication process, what we want to be communicated. The message, in written or spoken language or in nonverbal actions, is the symbolic representation of the original idea. Regardless of the language system employed or the meaning given to various nonverbal actions, all of us use symbols as the primary means of sharing our internal states. Because our messages can be intentional or unintentional, it is very important to be conscious of the words selected and actions generated.

D. Channel

The message is being sent through a carrier, or medium, called a channel. Channels take various forms, such as wires, graphic signs, light vibrations, and my research study case - air vibrations. Channels can be called as the vehicles that carry the message. For the public speaker the primary channel is the voice, in combination with the visual channel that carries your gestures, facial expressions, movements, and visual aids.

E. Receiver

Even though there is a message sent, communication has not yet taken place, as there must be another ingredient, someone to whom the message is directed - a receiver. In order for the receiver to understand and react to the sent message, he or she must start decoding the message, meaning translating it into a code that he or she can use and understand. This operation is specific for each person and the way a receiver, meaning a listener, responds to the message depends on a number of factors. Variables such as the receiver's past experiences, culture, attitudes, beliefs, age, gender, values, and fund of knowledge will play an important role as he or she looks for the meaning of the message.

F. Context

A particular context or setting is also an important ingredient in the communication process. The same words spoken may take on different meanings if uttered in a noisy environment than if they are said in the cosiness of our home. The effective communicator is well aware of the specific setting he or she is in and adapts accordingly. The adaptation might include all behaviours, from volume level, length of the message, and purpose of the message (to persuade, inform or entertain) to the selection of clothing and most important of the receiver.

III. TRANSMITTER'S RESPONSIBILITIES

It is well-known that words mean power. If anything bad occurs as a consequence of the spoken words, it is brought forth by humans, not by the processes of communication. The devices and means used by transmitters are indeed their own responsibility. They should realize that they have an obligation to their receivers as well as to themselves. Suffice

it to say, all of us need to be aware of the potential power of our Oral Communication behaviour. It is mandatory that we think about this power before we speak, before we influence another person. As noted in a Chinese proverb, "A harsh word once dropped from the tongue cannot be brought back again by a coach and six horses." Accordingly, the transmitter should consider the following aspects each time he/she initiates an act of communication.

A. Examine Reasons for Communicating

Why does the transmitter want to deliver a message? In theory, an ethical speaker begins by examining the motives behind her or his communication act. The audience's perception of the transmitter being a good or a bad person greatly influences the success of the communication act. Research indicates that what the audience, the receiver, thinks of the person who conveys the message can either hinder or aid the cause transmitted. Aristotle, Quintilian, and Cicero, the great speech theorists of classical Greece and Rome, agree that a speaker whose prestige is high in the eyes of the audience has a better chance of gaining acceptance for ideas presented than does a speaker whose credibility is low.

B. Investigate and Analyse the Topic Thoroughly

While speaking about Oral Communication as an integral part of Oral History, thorough analysis and investigation of prospective conveyed message should be considered as parts of successful, effective, and ethical speaking. It depends on what the transmitter wants to convey. It is easy to embroider facts and figures, but common sense, good judgment and good research feeling might influence the transmitter before getting involved in the communication act.

C. Be Correct in the Presentation

Has the transmitter presented the message in an accurate and ethical manner, in order to be perceived as precise as possible? This means avoiding half-truths, outdated information, lies, and unsupported statements. Not being accurate can also include withholding important information from the receiver.

D. Show Respect

In order to have an exact message transmitted there should be no amplification, oversimplification, or adjustment of the truth because the listeners' knowledgeable is underestimated or overestimated. Judging and analysing the message individually by each receiver proves respect and ethics.

E. Be Succinct

In order to have a well perceived message, the transmitter needs not only to be accurate, but also to make sure that the message is understandable to the receiver. It is an unethical practice to intentionally use words that not everybody understands or to state ideas not fully explained.

F. Avoid Engaging in Personal Attacks

A Native American proverb reminds us of the power of communication: "Talk is but wind, but wind can break a tree." The word is an irrefutable instrument and should be used with great care taking into consideration what exactly the transmitter wants to get across. As a support for this, the

American author Ernest Hemingway said almost the same thing when he wrote, "I know only what is moral is what you feel good after and what is immoral is what you feel bad after."

IV. THE RECEIVER'S RESPONSIBILITIES

According to my research the receiver has two main responsibilities. The first one is that he/she should pay full attention to the speaker. As proved before, Oral Communication is a two way process, thus, the receiver also has a share of just issues related to the communication act. Much ethical responsibility lies in the act of listening. If the receiver is to evaluate, accept, and respond to the message, he/she must first hear and understand those it. In order to have the right to analyse, criticise or attribute something as personal knowledge, the receiver should give his/her full attention to the message. Each communication act is characterized by countless distractions, but the receiver must prevail over them in order to analyse justly what it is being said.

The second responsibility refers to the idea that the

receiver needs to be open minded yet sceptical. Ethical receivers should be somehow discriminating. I have stated before that listeners are changed, in one way or another, by the speaker; however, they must not accept everything that is said without questioning the key points in the communication act. Some degree of measured scepticism is normal, as we are humans and we were created to think for ourselves, to analyse and after that to draw our own conclusion. Nevertheless, the foremost obligation is to have an open mind, and at the same time to question what was heard and hold off jumping to conclusions until all the evidence had been presented and until our own analysis had been made.

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