A Linguistic Approach
To The Teaching Of Speechreading:
Theoretical and Practical Concepts

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Since the time of the formal introduction of speechreading into this
country, those concerned with aural rehabilitation have been strug-
gling with the question of the validity of our position as teachers of
speechreading. Have we been teaching what we have intended? More
importantly, have we taught anything through the strict traditional
method of speechreading instruction?

The age-old discussions of analytic vs. synthetic approaches have
given us little with which to work in our attempts to improve our
teaching methods. Our traditional instructional approaches of pho-
neems and word analysis have more than often proven fruitless Con-
comitantly, those enrolled in speechreading classes often complete the
course as poor or as good a speechreader as when they began. Profes-
sionals in the area of aural rehabilitation have admitted that they are
frustrated because they have reached a stalemate in their attempts to
 teach this thing called speechreading. There has, therefore, been a
need for development of a fresh approach to the teaching of the visual
aspects of communication to the hearing impaired. Such authors as
Vernon (1968), and Woodward and Barber (1966) have stressed the
importance of language factors in speechreading. For example, O’Neill
(1968), has stated that,

"Language training must be aimed at communicative mean-
ingsfulness. In other words let us not be working at the sound or
word level, but at units of meaning...we should proceed on
the assumption that we are dealing with a learned form of
linguistic behavior."

For some time, then, we have realized that something different is need-
ed, something more effective than teaching only the visual analysis of
phonemes, words, and sentences. The purpose of this report is to
present and discuss a different approach to the teaching of the visual
aspects of communication that has been utilized for the past five years
by this author and found to be effective for a broad range of clients.

THE CONCEPT

The "Linguistic Approach", is an attempt at discovering a more effective technique for acquainting speechreading clients with the essence of visual speech and language understanding, not only visually, but also utilizing auditory cues through the use of what residual hearing they possess. The concept of "speech understanding" does not include the visual recognition of individual phonemes except for brief instructions relative to homophoneous sounds or sounds that might be otherwise confusing visually. Furthermore, the visual recognition of individual words and phrases or sentences out of context is not included, e.g. out of the speech or environmental context. The present "Linguistic Approach" deals with the concept that if we expect to aid the hearing impaired person in becoming more proficient communicatively through the utilization of residual hearing and supplemental visual cues, we need to be trained to "fill in the gaps" between what he perceives in oral-aural communication and what he is missing. It is emphasized that in most communication situations, the normally hearing individual does not hear every individual phoneme when he perceives auditory-verbal information, nor does he often comprehend every word in every conversation. We "listen" for the thought of what is being said, as we listen for clues that give us information about the verbal message. Why could this not be the case in the comprehension of visual-auditory-verbal information? To achieve this, emphasis is placed on instruction dealing with the concept and patterns of language. The syntactic aspects of oral speech and language are emphasized. Stress relative to the total structural properties of oral communication has been found an effective tool in speechreading instruction. The predictability of the patterns of our oral speech and language in terms of intelligibility is also stressed. This approach has as its purpose instruction regarding the predictable properties of speech, and hopefully the development of an ability on the part of the speechreading client to "piece together" the thought of the speaker without receiving every word. The residual hearing of each client is used during all speechreading sessions.

PRACTICAL APPLICATION

The following are examples of materials utilized in the "Linguistic Approach".

* An example of environmental context is a greeting such as "How are you this morning?" that is given at the appropriate time of the day and in the appropriate place.
A. Right and Wrong Information

This activity is used to first of all make the clients aware that there are words within sentences that look like others (homophones) and can change the meaning of sentences. Example 1 illustrates samples of the type of sentences utilized. Clients are given a typed list of sentences. They are then asked to determine if the sentence they “saw” the instructor say was the same or different than what was written. If the sentence is different, it is their task to attempt to determine how it is different.

1. Where did you get your new coat?
   Lippert: When did you get your new coat?
2. The girls were playing in the park while the boys fished.
   Lippert: The girls were applying in the bank while the boys visited.
3. I got two of those yesterday.
   Lippert: I caught two of those yesterday.
4. That was Stanley giving our gown.
   Lippert: That was a badly movie, “Our Town.”

Example 1. Right and Wrong Information

E. Filling in the Gaps

Example 2 presents an example of this exercise. Its purpose is to make clients aware that with a little information, it is possible to develop the capacity to determine the content of messages with supplemental visual clues.

Part A: Nouns and Pronouns

1. Good ____________ would be much easier if ____________ would help.
2. ____________ feel about changing the ____________ when we ____________ begin to work?
3. ____________ think that ____________ should stay out so late?
4. ____________ is called the father of our ____________.

Part B: Verbs and Direct Object

1. The boy ____________ down the ____________.
C. The Structure of Our Language

This activity illustrated in Example 3 is utilized both as a method of assessment and as lesson content. Its purpose is to instruct clients regarding important syntactic clues in language that facilitate speech perception when not all of the auditory signal can be heard. This aspect includes specific instruction concerning the syntactic consistencies of our language in relation to its predictability and redundancy. During these lessons, the speechreading instructor utilizes the blackboard for presentation of the given word clues along with presentation of speechreading materials.

1. _____ money _____ _____ _____ _____ _____ _____ ?
2. _____ money _____ _____ life _____ _____ ?
3. _____ money _____ _____ life _____ happiness?
4. _____ money _____ mean _____ life _____ happiness?
5. Does money _____ mean _____ life _____ happiness?
6. Does money _____ mean a life _____ happiness?
7. Does money _____ mean a life of happiness?
8. Does money always mean a life of happiness?

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Example 3. The Structure of Our Language.

D. The Predictability of Our Speech and Language

This exercise is utilized to make clients aware that information in conversations can be predicted. The items in Example 4 present practice items for this aspect of the Linguistic Approach.

1. It was a beautiful __________________.
2. She wore such a beautiful gown to ____________________.
3. The girl was ____________________.
4. The little baby ____________________.
5. The snow ____________________.
6. Skiing is ____________________.
7. The sun shone ____________________.
8. That building was so ____________________.

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Example 4. The Predictability of Speech and Language.
E. How would you say it? How would your listener say it?

Those activities are devised to demonstrate that the client's own language sets can be utilized to predict what others might say. The client is urged to "think through" the situation he has difficulty in and attempt to construct, in his own mind, the conversations that might take place, at least in terms of what he would say. Another client in the same speechreading class is to do the same. Then, the stage is set for a demonstration that involves their reconstruction of the scene (at a Thanksgiving dinner, on a street corner, etc.) and their constructed conversations. This activity is utilized to demonstrate to the clients that there are language sets which, when knowledgeable of them, can aid them in everyday situations. They are equally surprised that they can reconstruct conversations that allow them to more accurately predict and follow those types of conversations. This activity is not only an enjoyable one, but it appears to instill confidence in the client that he/she can function more efficiently communicatively and with less anxiety. Confidence in one's ability to communicate provides the foundation for efficient use of learned skills.

All activities above are eventually utilized in noise backgrounds. All noise is recorded, except when clients are taken to the real situation (restaurants, filling stations, etc.). The noise is environmental noise (cafeteria noise, classroom noise, or babble noise—two or more speakers). Artificial noise such as white noise is not utilized.

CONCLUSION

The "Linguistic Approach" appears to be an effective approach to the teaching of speechreading. Its effectiveness in helping the hearing handicapped individual to improve or retain his ability to receive and interpret verbal communication when he cannot hear all auditory information has been clinically demonstrated with ages ranging from late childhood to the geriatric population. It would be unreasonable to say that this approach has been effective with all hearing impaired clients, but in utilizing it, more appear to have made progress in their ability to communicate in an oral/aural environment. Its clinical effectiveness, however, is generally limited to clients who demonstrate developmentally functional language.


