

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 struggling 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 methods 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 phoneme and word analysis have more than often proven fruitless. Concomitantly, those enrolled in speechreading classes often complete the course as poor or as good a speechreader as when they began. Professionals 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 Hull (1969), Jerger (1968), Lloyd (1964), Lowell (1969), O'Neill (1968), Vernon (1968), and Woodward and Barber (1960) have stressed the importance of language factors in speechreading. For example, O'Neill (1968), has stated that,

“Lipreading training must be aimed at communicative meaningfulness, 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 needed, 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 instruction relative to homophonous 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, he needs 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 *structure* 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 (homophenous) 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?
Lipread: When did you get your new coat?
2. The girls were playing in the park while the boys fished.
Lipread: The girls were applying in the bank while the boys visited.
3. I got two of those yesterday.
Lipread: I caught two of those yesterday.
4. That was Stanley moving our gowns.
Lipread: That was a dandy movie, "Our Town."

Example 1. Right and Wrong Information.

B. 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 _____ .
2. _____ would be much easier if _____ would help.
3. How do _____ feel about changing the _____ when we _____ begin to work?
4. Do _____ think that _____ should stay out so late?
5. _____ is called the father of our _____ .

Part B: Verbs and Direct Objects

1. The boy was _____ down the _____ .

Example 2. Filling in the Gaps.

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?

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 _____.

Example 4. The Predictability of Speech and Language.

E. *How would you say it? How would your listener say it?*

These activities are centered around situations which involve:

1. The restaurant
2. At the dinner table
3. Speaking to your friends about their family
4. The casual conversation on the street corner
5. At dances
6. At special gatherings (Thanksgiving, Christmas, New Years, etc.)

These 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 usually 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 ones' 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.

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