

Introduction

COMMUNICATION AND LANGUAGE SKILLS

Importance of Communication

Students need to understand the various types of communications involved in the globalised context, and the students of Engineering and Technology need a specific set of language skills for their success in education and career.

Industries are also voicing their concerns about the need for better communication skills among students of Engineering. Scientists and engineers in all positions should be able to communicate the purpose and relevance of their work, both orally and in writing. Good communication skills are often required to get a good job. If one is clear in expressing one's thoughts and articulating one's accomplishments and attributes, an interviewer is more likely to form a favourable impression and gain an understanding of that person's skills. The professional profile of a modern qualified engineer should include well-developed communication skills and high English language proficiency to help him achieve success in the modern, highly competitive global work arena.

Communication

Communication is the transmission of information, ideas, emotions, skills, etc., by the use of symbols, words, pictures, figures, graphs, and other means.

These are a few definitions giving different approaches to communication:

It is the act or process of transmission that is usually called communication (Berelson and Steiner, 1964).

Communication is the process by which we understand others and in turn endeavor to be understood by them. It is dynamic, constantly changing and shifting in response to the total situation (Anderson, 1959).

Communication is commonly defined as “the imparting or interchange of thoughts, opinions, or information by speech, writing, or signs”. Communication can be perceived as a two-way process in which there is an exchange and progression of thoughts, feelings, or ideas towards a mutually accepted goal or direction.

There are three major parts in human face-to-face communication. They are body language, voice tonality, and words. According to a research (Fig. 1),

- 55% of impact is determined by body language—postures, gestures, and eye contact,
- 38% by the tone of voice,
- 7% by the content or the words used in the communication process.

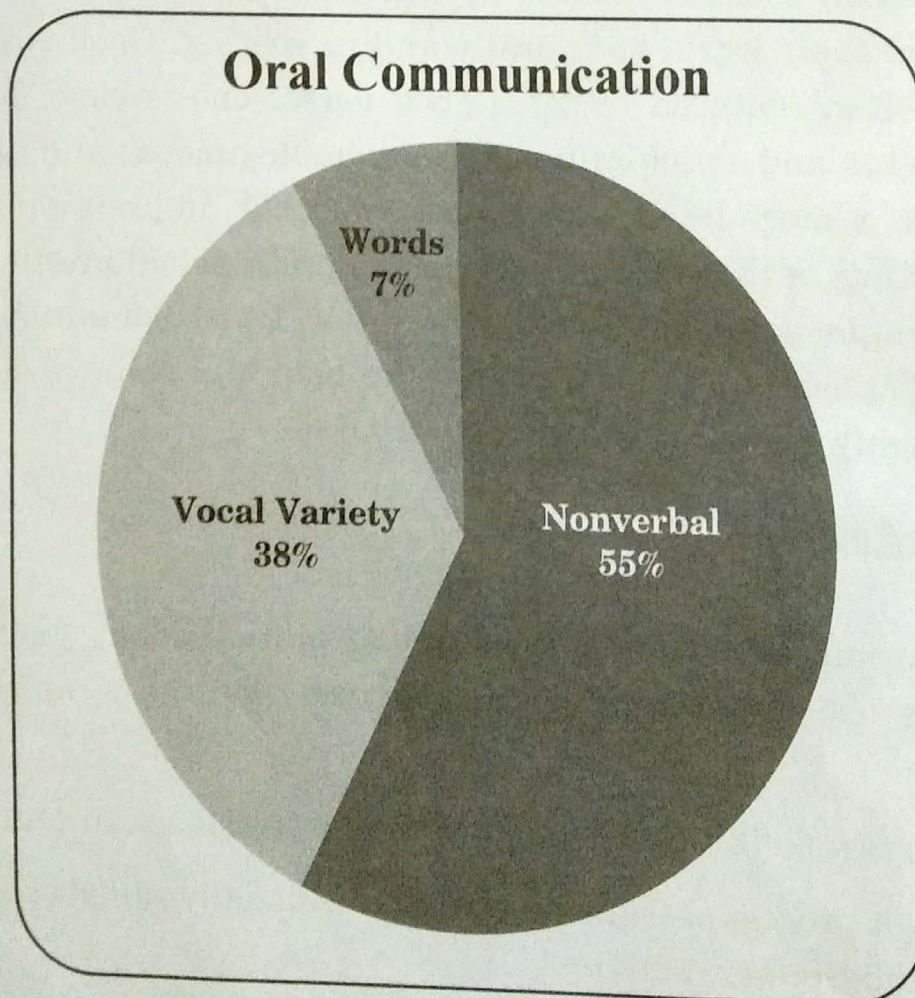


Fig. 1 Varieties involved in oral communication.

Process of Communication

The process of communication involves ideation, encoding, channelising, decoding and feedback (Fig. 2).

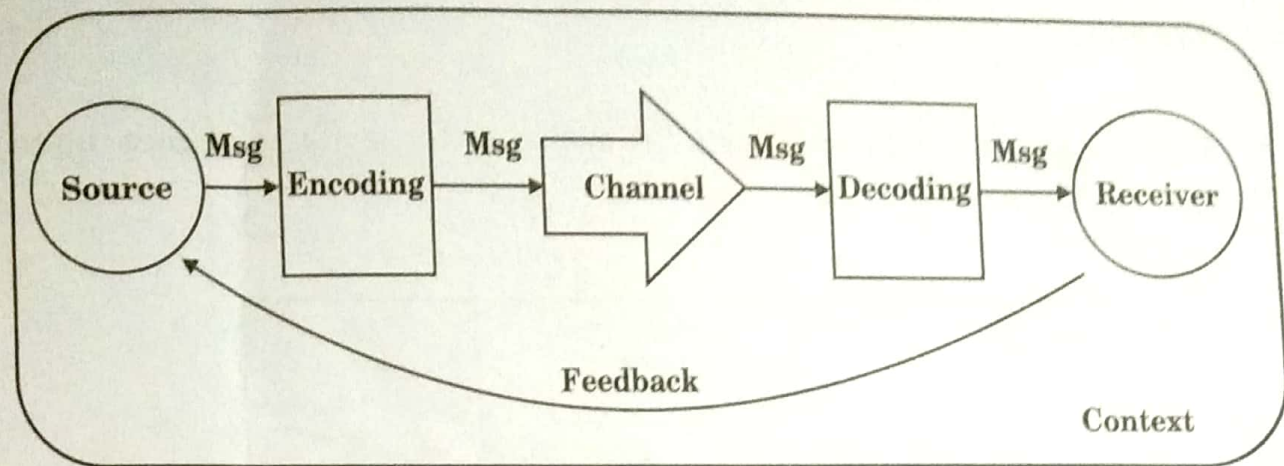


Fig. 2 Process of communication.

Types of Communication

Verbal communication

A dialogue is a reciprocal conversation between two or more entities under which the oral and written communication take place.

Nonverbal communication

Nonverbal communication is the process of communicating through sending and receiving wordless messages. Such messages can be communicated through gesture, body language or posture, facial expression and eye contact. Nonverbal communication plays a key role in every person's day-to-day life, from employment to romantic engagements. It includes pictures, drawings, charts, signs, symbols, body language, sounds and visuals.

Channels of Communication

In any work place all forms of communication are routed through different types of channels according to the nature and purpose of communication. The following are the channels / directions of communication used in workplaces.

1. Upward
2. Downward
3. Horizontal
4. Diagonal

- Upward communication starts from the lower levels and goes up to the higher level (Fig. 3).

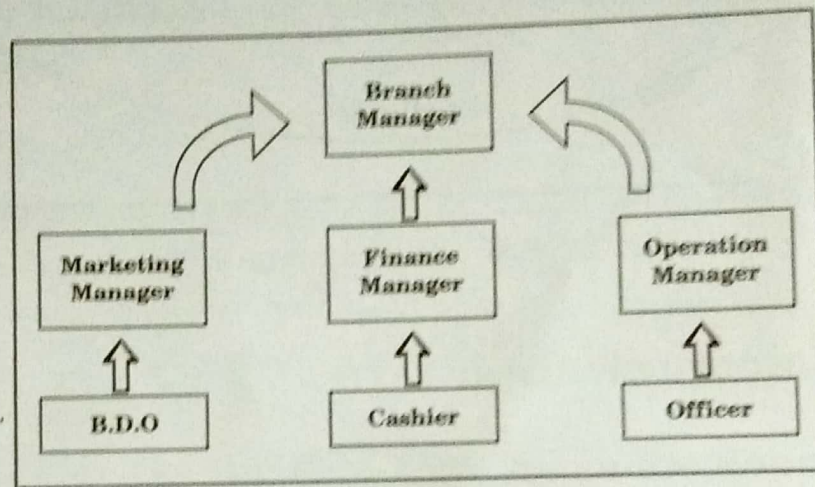


Fig. 3 Upward communication process.

- Downward communication follows the hierarchical order from the higher to the lower level (Fig. 4).

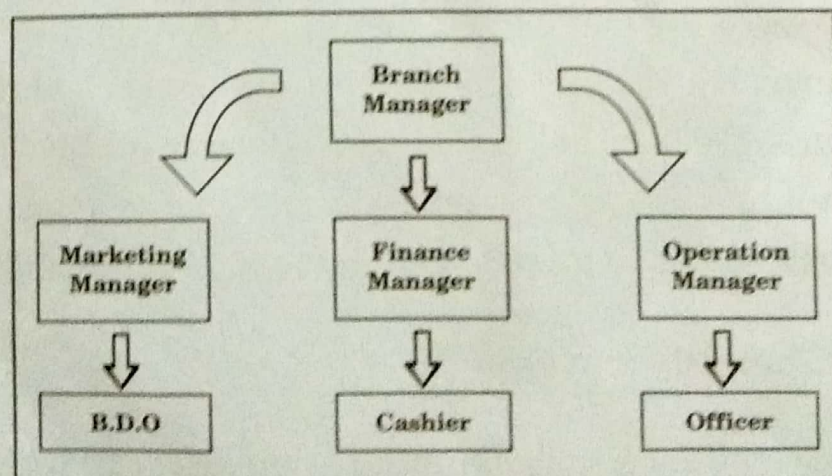


Fig. 4 Downward communication process.

- Horizontal communication takes place between employees of equal ranks and sometimes among the peer groups (Fig. 5).

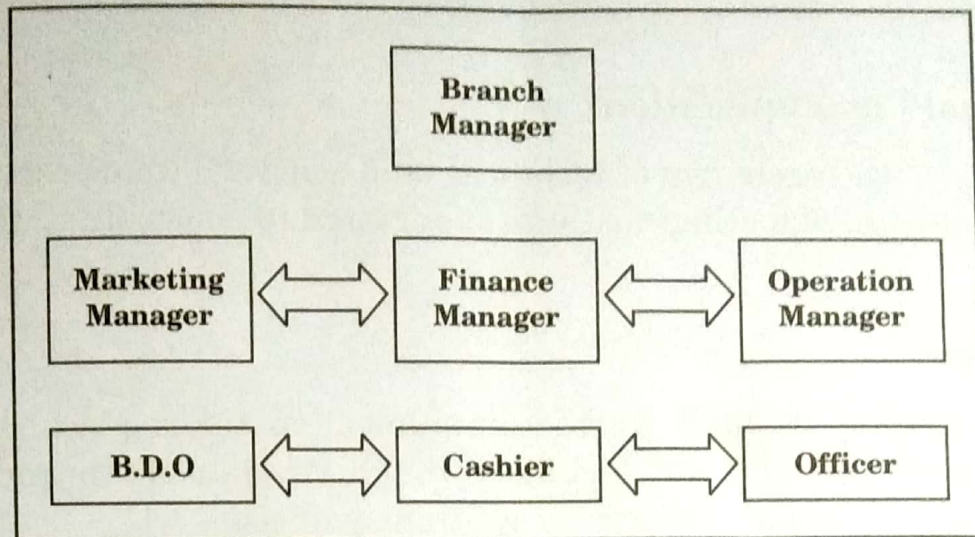


Fig. 5 Horizontal communication process.

- Diagonal communication happens across all official cadres and no hierarchy is followed. This is also known as grapevine communication. This is a mode of informal, unofficial but effective way of communication (Fig. 6).

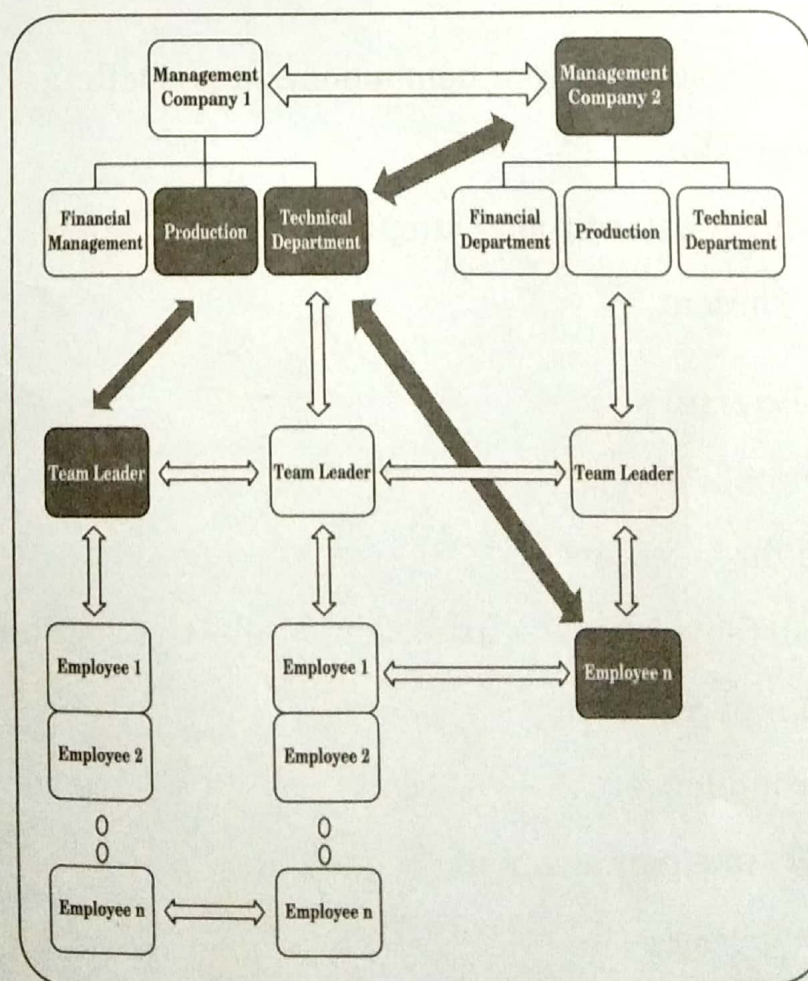


Fig. 6 Diagonal communication process.

- **External communication** takes place with people outside the company. It helps to **achieve organisational goals and customer satisfaction.**

Technical Communication

It refers to the **exchange of technical and scientific knowledge** through writing, speech, and other mediums, **addressed to a specific audience.**

Language

It is the **medium through which communication takes place.** It is used to **convey the thoughts and feelings through a system of arbitrary signals,** such as voice, sounds, gestures, or written symbols.

Communication is not always successful and there are a few factors that barrier communication. Anything which acts as a threat or **hinders communication is a communication barrier.** Some of them are:

♦ **Language Barriers**

- ✓ Improper message
- ✓ Confusion resulting from homophones and spelling
- ✓ Wrong translation
- ✓ Bombastic or ostentatious language
- ✓ Incorrect accent

♦ **Personal Barriers**

- ✓ Assumptions
- ✓ Physical inconvenience
- ✓ Passive listening (lack of attention) / Selective listening
- ✓ Individual perception
- ✓ Lack of confidence
- ✓ Improper time management
- ✓ Fear of superiors

✦ Organisational Barriers

- ✓ Strict seniors / boss
- ✓ Status problem / ego
- ✓ One way communication
- ✓ Rigid rules
- ✓ Job pressure
- ✓ Poor working environment

How to overcome these barriers?

1. Be clear and precise.
2. Let the sentences be short and simple with easy words.
3. Speak at a normal pace.
4. Improve concentration and active listening skills.
5. Plan your schedule and act accordingly.
6. Avoid being egoistic and give way for suggestions.
7. Know your audience / listener.
8. Appreciate feedback.

LSRW

Language is never learnt. It is acquired. If one wants to acquire a language, he / she should follow a natural way of learning things. As a child, we 'listen to' the language spoken around us for 3 years. At the second stage, we 'speak' in broken words and sentences for a couple of years. At the third stage, we 'read' some picture books. Even alphabets are remembered as pictures. It is only in the last and fourth stage that we learn to 'write'. Thus, to say, L-S-R-W (L – Listening, S – Speaking, R – Reading, W – Writing) is the natural way of acquiring language.

We shall now have a detailed look at each of the communication skills.

Listening: Though 45% of our communication is listening, it is the most difficult one to practice. One should know the difference between Listening

and Hearing. Listening is an active process wherein we concentrate and retain the information listened to, while hearing is a passive process wherein the listener does not want to retain any information.

Some of the barriers to listening are external noise, personal distraction, inappropriate place and time, information overload and selective listening. To avoid listening barriers one can practice active listening. Active listening involves uninterrupted listening, concentration, asking questions and observing the non verbal cues and the ability to restate the message.

Speaking: To be an effective speaker one should follow the following rules:

- Use appropriate vocabulary.
- Use words in the correct order.
- Check the stress, rhythm and intonation accordingly.
- Use simple language and avoid ostentation.
- Avoid hanging thoughts, relate whatever you say.
- Know your listener / audience.
- Avoid slang and unparliamentary words.
- Synchronise the body language and words.
- Be slow, if you doubt your pronunciation.

Reading: Reading is the process of decoding the symbols on the page (print or electronic) for a meaningful comprehension. It is the interaction between the text and the reader. Reading is typically an individual activity, although on occasion a person will read out loud for the benefit of other listeners. It is not always necessary that we understand every word that we read. Reading is effective only when

- the reader can distinguish sounds of the language.
- the reader is fluent so as to remember what he has already read.
- the reader deduces the meaning of the vocabulary used in the text.

Reading is of four types:

1. **Skimming** – It is to gather the most important information by running the eye over the text. One tends to read the title, sub titles and topic sentences. Skimmers will not look for minute details. Pictures, graphs and charts help in additional understanding of the text.
2. **Scanning** – It is to find a particular piece of information. The scanner scans the text until he finds what he was looking for. For example, Sachin Tendulkar's fans would scan the sports column to know how many runs he scored in how many overs. It is also like finding the phone number of Mr. Ramarao who belongs to Ranipet from the directory. We also scan for the expiry date when we buy a product.
3. **Reading for thorough comprehension** – It is done when the reader wants to gain the full knowledge or information in the text. The reader tries to understand the relationship between the ideas of the text including the author's purpose. Vocabulary enhancement takes place unknowingly.
4. **Critical reading** – Critical reading takes place when the reader tends to make judgment on the piece of work. The reader here comes up with various questions and arguments. It is done to understand the author's purpose of writing the text and the language used.

Writing:

Writing is when we put our thoughts in words on a paper or computer screen. It is considered to be the most difficult skill and therefore is less preferred. Writing is usually more formal and therefore the writers have to be more careful about the grammatical rules, syntax and lexical items. If the writing is comprehensible and creative then the writer has achieved the purpose. Since nonverbal expressions are generally avoided in formal writing one should use proper punctuation so that the reader can arrive at what the author is trying to convey.

This book focuses on Listening, Speaking, Reading, and Writing skills of the learner. On learning the phonetic symbols the learners can refer to the dictionary to know the correct pronunciation of the words whenever they are in doubt.