



*Merry Christmas & Happy New Year*

*from everybody at*

*Grant Pearson Brown Consulting Ltd*



Carl Schreiter

## The Queen speaks

On Christmas Day in 1957, those lucky enough to own a television gathered to watch Queen Elizabeth II give her first televised Christmas message. This was as sensational as it was exciting, the Queen invited her subjects to join her in the Long Library at Sandringham. A regal invitation from the sovereign herself. Dressed with restrained yet festive elegance, she greeted the country and the Commonwealth with a congenial and refreshingly informal "Happy Christmas".

This speech marks the beginning of a tradition. Even today family festivities around the country (and possibly the whole Commonwealth) are still carefully planned and monitored to accommodate the Queen. People gather in front of their flat screens, their wits sharpened by a glass of port and their stomachs placated by turkey, to watch HMQ.



I'm going to cast our collective minds back to the 25<sup>th</sup> December 1957. A journey into Christmas past...as the Queen's self-appointed speech coach, I am going to analyse her 1957 performance and offer her some honest and robust feedback. I

will of course use our uniquely combined artistic and scientific approach: Words, Music and Dance. We will look at what the Queen says, in what order she says it, and her voice and visual communication.

*"Ma'am, with your permission, I shall now proceed with my analysis..."*

### Words - Content

The strength of this speech rests with the Queen's ability to build context. Apart from "Happy Christmas" there is no explicit reason stated as to why we should listen, no attempt to establish credibility.

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## The Queen speaks...continued

No wonder, this is the Queen.

Instead she heads straight into the background. She describes the current state of affairs and explains the nature of the issues, problems and challenges facing the nation and the Commonwealth. She points to the rapid changes in society and her televised address as a testament to unparalleled advances in new technology: *"That this is possible for some of you to see me today is just another example of the speed at which things are changing all around us."*

But she captures the moral dilemma associated with change: *"I am not surprised that many people feel lost and unable to decide what to hold on to and what to discard."* She doesn't hold the new inventions accountable for this confusion but the *"unthinking people who carelessly throw away ageless ideals as if they were old and outworn machinery"*.

This is her way of creating an unnamed common enemy. This enemy has cast aside religion, morality, honesty and self-restraint, all of which are morally reprehensible. Here the Queen applies elements of classical judicial rhetoric as she divides people into two groups: the just and the unjust.

HMQ invites the audience to empathise with the virtuous while condemning the questionable deeds of those who act in pure self-interest. The Queen moves confidently on to the next stage: her overriding proposition: *"Today we need a special kind of courage"* she argues, *"Which makes us stand up for everything we know is right, everything that is true and honest"*.

Ethos or an appeal to good character is the driving force behind the proposition which is further substantiated through her first key message: *"It has always been easy to hate and destroy. To build and to cherish is much more difficult. That's why we can take pride in the new Commonwealth we are building"*.

What follows is a combined PR/positioning exercise of anecdotal accounts from the royal couple's trips around the world. This section is celebratory in nature and distinctly different from the accusatory stance adopted in the background: a tribute to the goodness of the nations that

welcomed the royals with *"loyalty"* and *"enthusiasm"*.

Next she manages expectations of a modern monarch through a counter argument: *"In the old days the monarch led his soldiers on the battlefield...I cannot lead you into battle...but I can give you my heart..."*

The power of counter argument should never be underestimated as a means of showing honesty and diffusing any doubt. In her close the Queen brings the concept of morality to a heightened level by quoting an absent advocate of virtue: Mr Valiant in 'Pilgrim's Progress'. Not unexpectedly, the speech ends on a lighter note with words like *"fun and enjoyment"* and *"peace"*.

### Music - Voice

The Queen's vocal delivery bears the hallmark of an era long gone. This is 1950s television, a monochrome world inhabited by quaintly formal presenters with clipped accents. The Queen is no exception; her



tone is formal. But remove some of that antiquated veneer and what you'll hear are some real vocal qualities. For instance, the Queen has consistently good pitch modulation. She goes up to emphasise operative words either at the beginning or in the middle of sentences and towards the end of statements her pitch drops for impact and finality.

After key statements she successfully combines this with a pause. This is the "got it?" pause in our book, allowing the audience to digest and briefly reflect over the importance of what they have just heard. The pace is fairly consistent, verging on the slow and with only a slight increase in speed in certain sentences; the

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# The Queen speaks...continued



performance would have gained in dynamism and energy without undermining her poise or regal charisma.

As expected the Queen is perfectly fluent. Her success in this department can be attributed to two things: a well scripted speech and her learning by heart thereof. Here every effort of proper preparation is duly awarded. Nota bene!

## Dance - Visual

The aim for any speaker is to achieve congruence, which can best be described as the perfect alignment between the Words, the Music and the Dance. If properly synchronised these three channels transmit in perfect harmony and empower the speaker to achieve his or her ultimate goal which is to create belief. As already mentioned the Queen changes from an accusatory position in the background to a celebratory stance in her key messages.

So how does this affect her Dance? Well it would appear as if she is more at ease with positive content than with negative content. When speaking of the goodness and generosity of her subjects around the world she does so with a smile and affirmative body language. This makes her

congruent; the Words reflect the Dance and visa versa. However, the Queen appears less congruent when touching on the negative; there are no discernable facial expressions at all, with the exception of one and that's deadpan. An expression of concern would have made her more congruent and therefore more credible. Contrary to common belief, "poker face" does little to win over an audience, rather it is a cause for confusion.

As previously mentioned, the Queen pauses for impact. But not only that, she adds gravitas by holding sustained eye contact. This is a fundamental principle and the Queen masters the technique. Overall her level of eye contact is good and the occasional look down at the script isn't the least distracting. She is well prepared and it shows. As expected, body movement is kept to a strict minimum with the exception of a few prosodic gestures and head nods; the rhythm of the words is communicated through the rhythm of the body.

I hope these tools will help you judge the quality of the Queen's upcoming Christmas message with increased sharpness and appreciation. I will be watching, will you?

## A tale of two speeches

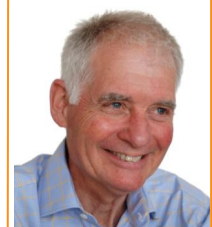
Recently I coached a client who gave a high profile presentation amongst the press and politicians. On the following day I made my own presentation to a conference in Birmingham in the International Conference Centre (ICC). The situations were different and so the advice I applied to my client was different to that I applied to myself. It confirmed to me that there are a number of options when talking to large audiences. Broadly these divide into formal and informal styles.

My client was at the formal end. Every word was to be measured. By contrast I would be judged by the usefulness and interest of my talk after a series of presentations on actuarial subjects, then a heavy dinner followed by the chance to drink into the small hours.

## Preparation

In both cases we prepared with diligence. My client quickly agreed that a script was the best way to go; he would read every word on pages of A4. No autocue or

teleprompter being available or desired. He is a natural speaker with good modulation and an excellent grasp of conversational English. I, by contrast, although happy with script reading felt that interaction with the audience and a loose agenda would work better. But my subject 'Your voice as a weapon of persuasion' would be greatly improved by visuals, sound files and videos. It became apparent that my ability to control software packages would be key!



Alastair Grant

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## A tale of two speeches... continued

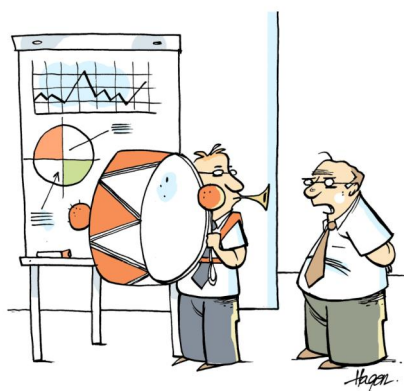
### Training

I introduced my client to the art of script reading or as I describe it as the 'Clinton technique'. The process is not easy as it requires the speaker to pause at what appear to be illogical moments. But my speaker was immediately struck by the impact of this approach and the fact that it would not be obvious to the audience that he was slaved to his script.

As with any technique, practice is needed to allow what is counter intuitive to become good sub-conscious behaviour. Good progress was made on pausing, eye contact and expression. We then started to tackle body language.

His cheerful almost ebullient style needed little change but as so often happens to those not used to large audiences there is a need to be more expressive with hand gestures.

At first we could not see his hands as they were hidden behind the lectern so I asked him to exaggerate gestures and widen his repertoire from a simple prosodic spreading of both hands. Points of precision can be reinforced by an iconic gesture such as holding one hand forward with index finger pressed against the thumb.



JUST DO THE PRESENTATION WILLIAMS AND LET THE NUMBERS SPEAK FOR THEMSELVES.

And so on. I encouraged him to turn his head to welcome distinguished visitors and use an outstretched hand, a didactic gesture. We tinkered with the words to ensure they flowed well.

On my part, training was a refresher on presenting from notes and I spent time to organising sound and video files into PowerPoint and ensuring that that the

conference centre had the facilities I needed, including technical support.

### Rehearsal on site

My client and I met at the venue with the in-house sound man and ran through the presentation twice. We found that the microphones were highly directional and so my speaker needed to keep his lips close to them even when turning his head to address specific people.

We also confirmed that the sound man would be at his control box with a colleague amongst the audience who would be able to provide accurate feedback on volume: A room full of people has quite different sound qualities to that of an empty one.

I went on to Birmingham to be there the night before my speech and had a good look around. The technician was only available for me 45 minutes before my presentation. We needed every minute of that time. My laptop was attached to the system but we had to change the screen resolution to achieve a good projected picture. That was fine but rendered my laptop's screen almost unusable with one of the software programmes. After much fiddling we got it to work.

### The Speeches

The presentation went ahead and I was delighted that my audience kept awake, asked questions and came up afterwards to ask some more. But what they didn't know was that one of my icons had slipped off the screen and so I was unable to demonstrate one aspect - nobody noticed!

My client reported back that his speech had gone down well and more importantly I had independent feedback that confirmed this.

### So what?

With formal presentations do consider using a written script but you must devote time and effort to learn the technique of how to do it. I suggest anything up to ten hours' time to be invested beforehand if you have not used it before. Once learnt it takes only minutes to refresh. On my part I was too ambitious with programmes and should have radically simplified the screen on my laptop so that only a few key icons would stay visible. The old adage 'less is more' applies every time. Although I doubt I'll apply that principle on Christmas Day!

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# Plane speaking



Plane crashes rarely happen the same way they happen in movies. Despite the recent emergency with the Qantas A380, it is rare for some engine part to explode mid-air and it is rare for the captain to cry out 'Dear God!' as he is thrown back into his seat as the aircraft plunges into the side of a mountain. In fact, the commercial jetliner - in its current stage of development - is as dependable as a fine Swiss Watch.

Plane crashes are much more likely to be the result of an accumulation of minor difficulties and trivial errors.

In a typical crash, for example, the weather is poor but not terrible, but bad enough to cause more anxiety than normal and the plane is typically behind schedule, so the pilots are hurrying. In 52% of crashes the pilot has been awake for more than 12 hours, and in 44% of cases the two pilots have never flown together so they are uncomfortable with each other.

These are the pre-conditions when the catalogue of errors start. In fact, the typical accident involves seven consecutive errors. One pilot does something wrong that by itself is not a problem. Then one of them makes another error on top of that which compounds the situation further and increasing the probability of another error. And then the next error comes, and then another and another, and it is the combination of all these errors which leads to disaster.

These 7 errors are

rarely problems of knowledge or flying skill. They are

overwhelmingly errors of poor teamwork and bad communication. One pilot knows something important and somehow doesn't tell the other pilot. One pilot does something wrong, and the other pilot doesn't catch the error. A tricky situation needs to be resolved yet somehow the pilots fail to co-ordinate and miss one of them. In short, it's how the pilots talk to each other that creates most problems.

Research into this area has identified two key issues which have major relevance to

how we communicate outside of the cockpit in the real world.

The first issue is what linguists refer to as 'mitigated speech': Here is a transcript of a pilot and first officer talking to Air Traffic Control (ATC) whilst flying a plane that is dangerously low on fuel:

**Captain to First Officer:** Let them know this is an emergency...

**First officer to ATC:** Avianca one-five-two, we need a visual. Low on fuel....

**ATC:** Roger that...

35 seconds pass and then Captain starts to panic....

**Captain:** Have you told them? I don't see the runway....

**First Officer:** I don't see it either. Yes, they know our situation...

A further minute passes.....

**Captain:** We're out. Where is the runway?

**First Officer to ATC:** Avianca one-five-two, needing visual....

Fifteen more seconds pass.....

**Captain:** We're going down....

**First Officer:** Yes, we are....

Plane goes down.

**ATC:** Avianca one-five-two. Do you have enough fuel to get it to the airport?

**Transcript ends**

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**Tim Farish**

**Advice squeezed straight from the experts**



## Plane speaking...continued

In this example, the first officer did not convey a sense of urgency or context for the seriousness of the situation which resulted in Avianca 052 crashing outside New York in January, 1990.

Due to poor weather and wind sheer, there were serious delays that evening on in-bound craft and Avianca 052 had been put into a holding pattern for nearly 60 mins which had resulted in it running out of fuel. There was no cry of 'We have to land now!' which would have resulted in ATC creating the necessary space in the queue.

Mitigated speech refers to any attempt to downplay or sugarcoat the meaning of what is being said. for example: *'Right sizing'* and *'damage limitation exercise'*.

We mitigate when we're being polite, or when we're ashamed or embarrassed, or when we're being deferential to authority. If you want your boss to do you a favour, you don't say, *'I'll need this by Monday.'* You mitigate and say *'Don't bother, if it's too much trouble but if you have a chance to look at this over the weekend that would be great.'*

The NASA linguists Uke Fischer and Judith Orasanu discovered that there were an unusually high rate of accidents which included first officers using mitigated speech. They also found that in the majority of cases there were cultural components too. For example, the Asian and South American pilots mitigated more than other cultures while, unsurprisingly the US, South African and Dutch were seen as least mitigated.

This has profound implications for how we communicate, especially in the corporate setting where hierarchy and culture mix.

The fact is that we need to be very clear in stating our needs, views and opinions. This is obvious to western minds. What is less obvious to western thinking is that we need to remember to listen and clarify to check our understanding of what's being said. Linguists refer to western communication as having 'transmitter orientation' – that is, it is considered the responsibility of the speaker to communicate ideas clearly and unambiguously and that in a western cultural context, if there is confusion, it is

the fault of the speaker. But many parts of Asia, China (and some countries in South America) are *'receiver oriented'*, where it is the duty of the listener to make sense of what's being said. In the case of Avianca 052, the First Officer (Colombian) was dealing with New York air traffic control, who are famous in aviation circles as being the most direct and abrasive in the world.

Since this incident, there has been a transformation in commercial aviation communication that has instilled the values of recognising the difference of both when it comes to being understood. It has meant that pilots and first officers now appreciate the dangers of mitigated speech and orientation in cultural contexts and it has led to safer skies and fewer accidents.



Maybe now, it is time for the corporate world to heed those lessons. ....

**Note:** For further reading, please go to *'The Ethnic Theory of Plane Crashes'*, a chapter in the book: *'The Story of Success'* (p177-223), Gladwell M (2008) by Penguin). Or we can email you a copy of Fisher and Orasanu, 1993. Just ask!

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# Do it matter wot I says?



A debate has recently raged among the British language intelligentsia about the issue of pronunciation. Some of you may have seen it. Does it really matter if someone says “elp” instead of “help” and then puts “haitch” into the alphabet between G and I? Does it matter if we say ‘I was sat’ rather than ‘I sat’? Is a child’s street pronunciation ‘bruvver’ as valid as their teacher’s ‘brother’? Should I stop telling my children that ‘yeah’ is the first syllable of ‘yellow’, not a complete word on its own, and that I keenly await the completion of this word and its context? Does anyone care?

Professor Henry Higgins himself, of Pygmalion and My Fair Lady fame, has been enrolled in support of good, standard, or traditional pronunciation, suggesting we stick to the way most of us have pronounced things in recent times. And sociologists and futurists, plus several from media leadership have come out on the opposite side of the argument, saying that language does evolve, and that we should ‘go with the flow’.

Even the Queen’s English has gotten (an American word originally from old English) dragged into the debate, with the changers

What’s clear after the dust has settled is that as a nation we can’t agree on this, and that there is, unlike the Institut Francais in Paris for the French, little formal structure in the English language hierarchy to give us the ‘official view’. Not that we would do what it said, even if there was.

Yet it is important to you, the people who read our jottings, stutterings and musings, to get this right. And for two reasons: First you need to talk in a language that your audiences will both understand and relate to. Second, you are trying to communicate with gravitas, authority, and charisma.



suggesting she has evolved her pronunciation over the 50 plus years she has led this nation.

Of all my formal education, the most useful thing I got was an analytical and critical yet open mind, so I did not leap straight off the fence on one side or the other of this debate, but let it rage in the press and even on TV; I listened carefully to the arguments put. And then like all news stories it faded unresolved into the background, eventually to evaporate all together.

Ultimately these come together as most of you are engaged in acts of persuasion, ideologically or commercially. So you will want to know on which side of the fence we sit, and where we would advise you to be too.

Well, the mulling has concluded, the sages have been consulted (even Warren Buffett, the sage of Omaha, I confess), the mugs of tea have been drunk, the flip chart covered several times over. We got quite complicated at times, but eventually we got to a very simple conclusion on this subject:

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**Ewan Pearson**

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## Do it matter wot I says?.....continued

That to persuade you have to be both understood and respected. That's it.

And then I think of the crowd of followers of Brian in Monty Python's Life of Brian when told to get lost, asked "But how should we get lost O Lord?" (I have removed the expletives!) So for us, how can you best be understood and respected?



Well, to be understood you first need clarity of speech. You DO have to pronounce words in a way that the people in your audiences can easily understand you. This is a function of pronunciation, but also of articulation, volume and even pace.

That means you have to pronounce all the syllables in the words you say, and not take short cuts of with long polysyllabic words (of 3 or more syllables).

For example, how many syllables do you actually say in the sentence: "The elucidation of Professor Mehrabian's theorem of monoclonal antibody function by the polypeptides attached to deoxyribonucleic acid molecules was brilliantly covered on Wednesday." Was it 60? Somehow I doubt it. And yes, I did make that sentence up. Many will think 59 syllables, and you'd be right. But that's because in English use now we say 'wensday' not 'wed-nes-day'. That's just syllables.

How about pronunciation proper? We don't think this is so important: potato or

potahito, tomaito or tomahto, vitamin or vitamin, keelometre or killometre, are all areas of unnecessary fussiness. We all know what you mean, whichever way you say these words.

It is important to keep up though. In 1928, the BBC's *Broadcast English* book told us to pronounce pomegranate as 'pomgrannat', suave as 'swayve', ski as 'shee', and flaccid as 'flaksid'. To pronounce these words in such ways would render the listener confused, or to put it another way, as they suggested in 1928 it would be jibberish, not Gibberish (with a hard G)

To be respected, you will need to be unstuffy about your choice of words and the way you pronounce them. But that doesn't mean you can use glottal stops. 'no' a' lo' o' love lost there'. You will need a little bit of 'street' in order to connect both ways with your audience, but this should be kept under very strict control and should never deviate from 'the real you'.

That also means keeping 'ball parks', 'damage limitation' and 'buy in' and their like to a minimum. There should be a modest language gap to the more colloquial patois of the least erudite members of your audience, as this is where the respect is most fully yet subliminally communicated.

It's going to end up being a balance between clarity and connection with your audience. Not stuffy traditional, not pandering to the masses. Most of all to be understood, be memorable and be persuasive.

For sure, English language is a game in play, but a game that needs rules. Break them here and expect to be excoriated (not 'coruscated') by your irritated audiences.

### Our Services

Grant Pearson Brown Consulting Ltd is a respected adviser based in London and Oslo. We enhance the performance of businesses, helping clients to excel in the use of the spoken and written word, improving the performance of individuals and teams. Over the long term our work improves the way a firm does business.

We coach and advise individuals to perform at their best in the toughest situations including: Presentations, New Business Pitches, Business Development, Negotiating, Media Interviews, Telephone Calls and Document Writing.

We also produce scientific voice and visual analysis reports, then provide voice coaching and non-verbal communications advice.

Our clients' needs are the only focus of our work; we listen to them and closely tailor our response to deliver first class coaching and advice. In support of this we selectively pursue new ideas and approaches, continually hone our advice and create tools such as Voice, Visual and Content Analysis, Prospect Relationship Management (PRM) and the Information Iceberg.



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