



consulting®

speaking up

'Figures of speech are often used to express things simply and concisely as well as colourfully and so are useful. Accuracy is vital as mixed metaphors can be mocked. Another problem is when figures of speech are not understood either because they are obscure or because the audience does not speak colloquial English.'

Rob Coke, Wellcome Trust

'I confess that I like figures of speech, sometimes they clearly express an idea which is otherwise difficult or complicated. They can also add colour and depth of meaning to otherwise dry subjects. However, I completely understand the point about needing to be sure about your audience and their ability to understand, particularly when dealing with a people who perhaps don't speak English as their first language. I would add though that not only do you have to be careful that the audience understands what you are saying, it is also important that the person using them understands them!

This was illustrated beautifully by a Partner I used to work for. He is Swiss/Swedish and speaks English brilliantly, to the point that you wouldn't know it was his third or fourth (!) language. One of the ways he seems so fluent is his use of idioms and slang, which usually work.

However on a couple of memorable occasions he got things slightly mixed up as he announced to a client that he was "about to pull one out of the rabbit's hat" and another time decided that we would "keep that one up our back pocket", I guess he had a different mental picture than the rest of us! On the other hand, one of his favourite descriptions of something run down and tatty was that it's "higgerey piggery", which I think better conjures up the sentiment of something being "higgledy, piggledy."

Naomi Biggs, BBC

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FIGURES OF SPEECH - THE FINAL WORD

All good things must come to an end and the debate on figures of speech was indeed a good thing. A big thank you goes to all of you that contributed to this debate, which can be seen in full on our website. However, it is time for James McBrien to have the final word.

ARE YOU PROPERLY STRESSED?

No we are not deviating onto the topic of pressure in the workplace but want you to consider how and when your words should be stressed to get the right emphasis and intonation in your message. By this we mean – get your expression right! Michael Ashby of University College London and Alastair Grant explain this complex area and advise you on how to get these somewhat subtle changes right.



Figures of Speech

THE FINAL WORD

As you can see from the responses on the front page the debate rages on and opinion is divided as to whether they help or hinder communication.

We are living in an increasingly multi-cultural and international world.

You are just as likely to be talking to a group containing Scandinavians, Germans or Spaniards as you are to one made up of solely native English speakers.

Whilst many people use English as a second language, sometimes their grasp of the finer points of expression is not as well developed as you might expect. Will the expression “It’s like taking coals to Newcastle” mean anything to an American? What would someone from Brazil understand by the expression “It’s as easy as falling off a log”? However, sometimes figures of speech can be so embedded in the way we speak that we don’t realise it. So just when you have completed what you thought was the last edit of your presentation, read through it just one more time. Think of your “end user”- the audience and check it for Figures of Speech!

James McBrien



Are You **Pr**

Michael Ashby lectures in phonetics at University College London. Many of his students go on to qualify as Speech and Language Therapists and help those who are linguistically challenged. You may have read our previous article about voice analysis – We can record your voice and measure how well you come over when presenting in terms of persuasion and credibility. What then? One answer is to get the phonetics right. Michael has kindly agreed to contribute to this topic along with Alastair Grant via our newsletter. Here are their contributions:

Everyone recognises that a change in voice pitch can turn a statement into a question. “Coffee?” with a rising tone means “Would you like coffee?” But this is just the tip of an iceberg. Spoken English has an elaborate and complex *intonation* system which has intrigued generations of linguistics specialists, and is still the subject of ongoing research. We all use *pitch variation* constantly in speech, subtly marking the relative importance of each word and idea, and guiding the listener to the precise meaning and interpretation that we intend. At least, we all do this in informal speech. Once we stand up to make a *formal presentation*, intonation is often mangled or ignored. The most persuasive and convincing speakers are always those with the most appropriate intonation patterns. And nothing is more certain to ruin the impact of an otherwise good presentation than monotonous and unsuitable intonation.

As we speak, we package information into digestible chunks (word-groups or information units), which are generally much smaller than whole sentences: Year



Properly Stressed?

on year (pause) prices have risen. Pauses between word-groups don't disturb the listener, and actually assist in processing information. Within each word group, the pitch of our voice marks the important words (the accents), and it need not go up or down very much to accomplish this. But the large pitch change which occurs at the **end** of each word-group is crucial, because the listener is always waiting for it. Technical descriptions of intonation generally recognise seven or more

different pitch terminations heard in English, but two of these are especially important. A final fall in pitch indicates that we have finished a particular thought, and adds a note of authority or confidence. By contrast, a final rise in pitch raises the listener's expectations that something else more important will shortly follow. You will seem weak or hesitant if you finish with a rising pitch, but then tail off without adding the conclusion or punchline that you seemed to promise.

Intonation patterns can be measured, analysed and notated in great detail. For practical purposes, however, a few simple tips will go a long way:

- Break information down logically into short phrases. Speak each of these fluently, but don't be afraid to pause briefly between them.
- Make sure that all the important words in a phrase receive proper emphasis, especially when they are first introduced.
- Finish each word-group with a definite change in pitch. A fall in pitch adds authority and decisiveness. You **can** use a rise - but only as a build-up to a following phrase that finishes with a fall.
- If in doubt, or if struggling, stick to short phrases and finish each one with a fall in pitch. It's surprisingly effective!

Stress Test

Have a go at this extract from a Clinton speech on terrorism. Try to mark out words that should be stressed and words that need a pitch drop. Have a look at page four for the answers.

First. No terrorist campaign apart from a conventional military strategy has ever succeeded. Indeed the purpose of terrorism is not military victory, it is to terrorise, to change your behaviour if you're the victim by making you afraid of today, afraid of tomorrow and in diverse societies like ours, afraid of each other.

Therefore, by definition, a terror campaign cannot succeed unless we become its accomplices and out of fear, give in.

Alastair Grant and Michael Ashby



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Stress Test - OUR VIEW

(Italics = greater stress/emphasis Underline = go down in pitch)

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Therefore, by definition, a terror campaign *cannot* succeed unless we become its accomplices and out of fear, give in.

GPB Consulting: Our Services

GPB Consulting is a respected adviser. We enhance the performance of businesses, helping clients to excel in the use of the spoken word, improving the performance of individuals and teams. Over the longer 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 and Telephone calls.

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. Through our own innovative culture we selectively pursue new ideas and approaches, continually hone our advice and create tools such as Voice Analysis, Prospect Relationship Management (PRM) and the GPB Virtual Classroom.



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