

# MIND YOUR LANGUAGE

"I want to  
visit the loo"

"I  
am  
not Loo ...  
I  
am  
Saw !"

# MIND YOUR LANGUAGE

The Place of Speech  
in Personal Relationships

By  
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# Mind Your Language

## The Place of Speech in Personal Relationships

Whether we like it or not, for most of us, speech affects our relationships with those we live and work with everyday. The author hopes that this book will give some people a handle to the door of understanding what may influence our speech content and patterns. We will explore areas such as:

*“How do we listen so that others will talk to us and talk so that they will listen?”*

*“Why do my words hurt those I care for most of all?”*

*“Why can’t I get out of the vicious cycles of words with my husband or wife? It is so tiring!”*

Due to the IT age in the last two decades, where exchange of words takes place at high speed and across long distances, the effect of the spoken word seems to have been devalued. This is because face-to-face communication is no longer necessary for business or impatient lovers’ verbal exchange any more. Younger people (who grew up knowing no other type of world other than the one where computers and the

internet exist) seem to have become impatient with slower patterns of speech and communication of ideas. Older people are finding themselves rather lost in the world of microchips unless they catch up too, that is, if they want to identify with their juniors in years. However, in their heart of hearts, they know that nothing is better than personal conversations for the nurturing of meaningful human relationships.

God, through Paul the apostle, urges us thus in Ephesians 4:15 (See 4:14 & 16 regarding unity in the body of Christ):

*"Instead, speaking the truth in love, we will in all things grow up into Him who is the Head, that is, Christ."*

Therefore, we need to build up one another through the words we say and the words we hear from each other.

Paul also reminded in Colossians 4:5-6 (before final greetings):

*"Be wise in the way you act toward outsiders; make the most of every opportunity. Let your conversation be always full of grace, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how to answer everyone."*

Therefore, we need to learn how to converse so that we will not stumble those yet to be born again into God's family.

## **Why Consider What Influences Our Speech?**

### **Three reasons**

#### **1**

Speech, as a means of communication between persons, originated with God the Creator. In Genesis 1:26, we discover that God was the One who informed us that the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit communicated with each other through words. Further more, when He has made man and woman, He communicated with them by means of speech as well. The Bible has many examples of such fellowship. For example, He spoke to Adam and Eve after the fall (Genesis 3:8-9); He spoke to Abraham about His command to move on (Genesis 12); He spoke to Moses after 40 years of seeming silence (Exodus 3:6).

God created language so that He could talk with us, we with Him and we with one another ... in love.

*God Spoke - and It Was Done!*

*“In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.”*

John 1:1

The whole Bible supports the idea that it is the nature of God to speak and to communicate His thoughts to others.

A.W.Tozer wrote:

*“‘In the beginning was the Word’- a word is a medium by which thoughts are expressed, and the application of the term to the eternal Son leads us to believe that self-expression is inherent in the Godhead, and that God is forever seeking to speak Himself out to His creation.*

*It is not just that God spoke: but God is speaking! He is, by His nature, continuously articulate. He fills the world with His speaking voice.*

*One of the great realities with which we have to deal with is the Voice of God in His world...’He spoke, and it was done!’ The ‘why’ of natural law is the living voice of God in His creation...*

*This word of God, which brought all worlds into being, cannot only be understood to mean the Bible only, for it is the expression of the will of God spoken into the structure of all things. This word of God is the breath of God filling the world with living potentiality. The Voice of God is the most powerful force in nature, for all energy is here only because the power-filled Word is spoken!”<sup>1</sup>*

## 2

Many of us get into trouble with others because of the words we speak, intentionally or otherwise. The writers of Proverbs, James and Colossians often remind us of the need to control our tongues as well as the difficulties in controlling them.



However, probably, because we have been born with the ability to make sounds and then words, we do not even ask the question "How come we inform others of our thoughts and hearts' desires through speech all the time? Why don't we just use sign language and not just reserve it for those who cannot use spoken words to communicate e.g. those who are deaf and/or dumb" Most of us have taken our speech so much for granted. We only stop to ponder over our words when we have offended someone with our speech or, during courtship days. Therefore, when we want to love someone deliberately, one of the first factor in ourselves that we have to check on is our speech.

### **3**

We want to create an awareness when conflicts arise due to our speech. We also want to prevent such conflicts, so that we may communicate fruitfully at home, among God's family and in the wider society for His glory. Why for His glory? Because God speaks and He created speech for people to relate with Him and one another.

Let us now go on to discuss a few issues about speech in our attempt to understand the usage of speech and the effects of verbal communication.

# What Influences our Manner of Speech?

## Three Common Factors

### 1

## Temperament

### View from Biblical Psychology:

Temperament + Character = Personality <sup>2</sup>

Temperament = Unique Basic Creation Gift-Mix of Functions, the expressions of which depend on opportunities for expression. It may be affected by sin, upbringing and environment. These functions may become our strengths or infirmities, depending on how we manage the gift-mix of functions.

Character = How we manage our  
Temperament:

If in God's ways -> Bear His fruit (holy)

If in others' ways -> Bear the enemy's  
fruit (unholy)

Personality = The unique individual that result, as we relate with another person. This may be changed because of the Holy Spirit's transformation of our character as we renew our minds with His truth -> maturity. Personality is what we see in each other when we relate with one another.

### **View from a Dictionary <sup>3</sup>:**

Temperament = One's customary frame of mind or natural disposition, basic natural giftedness and weaknesses.

Character = Moral strength or moral constitution.

Personality = Habitual patterns and qualities of behaviour of any individual as expressed by physical and mental activities and attitudes; it comprises distinctive individual qualities.

### **Some Description of Four Functions as Related to Speech**

#### **Note:**

- A person may adapt & learn the other extreme of function. The influence of training is in what function to use and when, even when one is more prone to one function than the other naturally.
- Generalisations are not to be taken as gospel truths for every individual
- For a more thorough discussion, refer <sup>4</sup>

Using Myers-Briggs words to describe four human functions:

**Introversion/Extroversion refers to:**

*The Orientation of One's Inner Self (how he recharges his emotional energy)*

An introverted person speaks more effectively if given time to reflect and speaks well in public if he has enough time for preparation of heart and mind. He reveals his true self more only among trusted friends when they meet privately.

An extroverted person speaks easily off the cuff and can't stand slow conversations. He is able to talk like good old friends even with strangers.

**Sensing/Intuitive refers to:**

*The Reception of Information from the Outside World*

The sensing person gets his information more through the natural five senses i.e. seeing, hearing, smelling, tasting and touching. He likes proof before telling something as a fact and is more detailed in practical living.

The intuitive person gets his information more through his intuitive function i.e. 6th sense. He often speaks from hunches and tends to get into trouble with the sensing type. The latter may feel their intuitive friend is being inaccurate in his recording of information.

**Thinking/Feeling (only function with gender difference) refers to:**

*The Expression of Decisions  
(not a measure of intelligence)*

The thinking person speaks logically and systematically in arguments. He makes decisions backed up with clear reasoning and is more concerned for facts and objects.

The feeling person speaks in a more round about way. She makes decisions with the heart more than the head due to her being more concerned for relationships than cold facts.

## **Judging/Perceptive refers to:**

### *The Lifestyle of a Person*

The judging (implies being rigid in daily schedule, does not imply being judgemental) person needs to make a detailed plan in daily routines and stick to them. He gets frustrated if his plans are suddenly changed. He tends to choose his words carefully in speech.

The perceptive person also plans but he accepts sudden changes better. He may not sound as accurate in verbal vocabulary because he is more flexible with choice of words for daily conversations.

## **Handle with Care**

**Need to guard our words when we are:**

- generally tired
- emotionally stressed out
- ill

OR ELSE

**Our weaknesses may lead to sin ...**

### **Example:**

- Thinking people have a strong tendency to look down on feeling people. They treat them as of lesser intelligence, of lesser importance in discussions or "feminine" [common male prejudice] though there is nothing wrong with being femininely relational .
- Feeling people often feel hurt easily because they think that other people are criticising them when they are just stating things objectively.

### **Reflection**

1. Reflect on the above discussion about your God given temperament.
2. Give thanks for who you are in Christ.
3. Ponder on some of your weaknesses. What will you do about them?

## 2. Gender

### **Genderlect: "Same Words, Different Worlds"**

When we look at a man or woman, we are not just seeing that person but what makes that person what he or she is now. *One of these influences* is the gender of that particular person. Probably, if we can see others from this wider point of view, we may be more patient and more appreciative; we may find it easier to forgive them when they wrong us and love them for the Lord, be they young or old.

### **Development of Sexual Identity and Gender Identity**

*(For further discussion, refer: Human Sexuality, Reconre Publications 2004)*

### **Differences in Gender Conversational Styles**

Gender differences is commonly shown in the area of language where the same words spoken may be interpreted differently by a man and by a woman. Sometimes they appear to have two different languages! This phenomenon led a psychologist, Deborah Tannens, to coin the word '*genderlect*'.



Generally, a man is more object orientated, a woman is more relationship orientated.

1. *In public (on stage environment)*

Man talks more and uses talk to report events, facts e.g. share market, the weather (*report talk*)

while

Woman talks less because she uses talk to build relationships (*rapport talk*)

*In private (off stage environment)*

Man remains *silent* because there is nothing left to report e.g. at home.

while

Woman *talks more* because she wants to connect for intimacy in privacy.

Therefore, the following scenario may echo through households universally...

Woman: "*You don't listen! You don't care!*"

Man: "*I'm relaxing because there is nothing to report ... but I do care ... so, don't accuse me!*"

2. Man is focused on what he wants to do (*action*).

while

Woman is focused on her need for sympathy or the need to give it (*emotion*).

Example:

Wife: *"I'm not feeling well ..."*

Husband: *"Dress up, honey, I'll take you to the doctor."* (action)

Question: But what does she really mean?

*"Darling, I need you / your hug / your sympathy because I have been with the kids whole day and have not had my bath!"*  
(sympathy)

3. Some men can be like women and some women can be like men in the above situations, depending on their uniqueness.
4. When a man is asked about his feelings, neurological findings seem to point to the possibility that he has to search for and find the feeling centre in his brain, identify the feeling, then track back to the word centre to describe the feeling and speak it out. However, by that time, he has forgotten what the feeling is and so has to track back to look for it. Therefore, for a man, **thinking** and **speaking about feelings** simultaneously is difficult, if not a torture. This means

that man is often unaware of how he feels and he needs to sit quietly to work it out and then put it into words!

However, more neural pathways may be opened up (through e.g. painful experiences) when he is forced to think about his feelings more specifically. Professor C.S.Lewis and Dr. Paul Tounier learned it the hard way when their wives died. (5 & 6 respectively).

A woman *communicates more, and more effectively*. She is **able to link the feeling recognition centre and the speaking centre instantly** and say what and how she feels. Actually she uses talking as a way to find out how she feels. She keeps talking and talking AND TALKING until she uncovers all the things that could be bothering her. Eventually, she discovers what it is that is making her feel bad. Then she is able to state what her point is all about. **However, her uniqueness gives her man the migraines!** Why? This is because, as she is speaking, the more fact orientated man is busy trying to solve the problems she seems to be stacking in front of him. This also explains why women multitask well e.g. watch a toddler while on the

telephone with a friend plus cooking something on the stove at the same time ... enjoy all her tasks!

They find it difficult to multitask e.g. when they are watching the TV, they become deaf to the surrounding voices.

Common sense tells us that, generally, a woman speaks more words than a man in a day.

### **Reflection**

Have you accepted the sexual and gender identities that God has wisely given to you and to those around you?

OR

Is the grass greener on the other side?

### **3. Conversational Intent**

There are four basic conversational styles which affect our conversations, namely:

- Small Talk
- Control Talk
- Search Talk
- Straight Talk

#### **i. Small Talk**

This pattern of talk is used:

- To fill in time e.g. waiting for a meeting to start.
- To reduce tension e.g. among strangers under a shade on rainy days.
- To socialize e.g. at high teas.
- Out of obligation e.g. ordered to entertain visitors unwillingly.
- When the content is not important to the speaker e.g. about the weather.

## ii. Control Talk

This pattern of talk is used:

- To influence others to a certain thinking, feeling or action

It has two categories

### a. Heavy control talk

- Is forceful, expecting obedience from listeners
- Used when the listeners' views and feelings are ignored e.g. parents to children at times, dominating person to spouse, unreasonable boss to staff, in situations where immediate obedience is essential for safety e.g. when a ship is sinking.

### b. Light control talk

- Uses gentle persuasion, leaving room for listeners to take it or leave it
- Respects the listener's views and feelings e.g. used by counsellors and pastors, teachers who use stories and parables, patient and wise parents.

### **iii. Search Talk**

This pattern of talk is used:

- To explore the mind of the other person for various reasons e.g. when unsure of intention of the other, to clarify content of the other's speech, in order to genuinely understand the other, to disturb the other, to help the other understand himself e.g. at a certain stage of psychotherapy, used by a jealous spouse.

### **iv. Straight Talk**

This pattern of talk is used:

- To directly express the speaker's thoughts and intentions.
- Gently or crudely, whether what is said is true or not by e.g. an angry frustrated speaker or one who speaks the truth in love at the right timing.

## How is verbal communication affected by conversational intent?

### Example

Mr. Y is a jovial extrovert who likes to banter. Miss X is an introvert who takes words more seriously. Both are single. They are colleagues in an office and worship in the same church.

Mr. Y: *Hi, Jill, you look so beautiful today! I wish you are my girlfriend!*

Miss X: *Are you sure? You may not like me if you know me better ...*

Mr. Y: Why not, love is blind. To me, commitment in marriage is a virtue, even though marriage is an eye opener.

Miss X: (Keeps quiet but thinks to herself ... *"Wahhh ... such a good man to be my husband ... got chance lah ... "*)

If the above conversation takes place once, Mr. Y's words may be taken lightly. However, if it is repeated in various ways over the weeks or months, Miss X may begin to feel that he really wants her as his special girlfriend. One day, Mr. Y announces his wedding plans to marry



someone else. He has dropped a bombshell into Miss X's heart! In the following weeks, she shows signs of depression, being angry at Mr. Y for lying to her and betraying her trust in his courtship of her.

Miss X: *How can a mature man lie? He told me that he liked me. Why is God so unfair? I don't trust men any more! They do not mean what they say!*

Question: What is the underlying problem which may be prevented?

Answer: Mr. Y takes his words as small talk while Miss X takes them as straight talk.

If each understands where the other person is coming from, more of such relational pains could be avoided, friendships and even marriages and families saved.

### **Reflection**

How will recognising conversational styles in others and in myself help me to develop more gracious relationships with God and others at home, in church and in society?

## **Treatment/Prevention of Conflicts due to Verbal Communications**

### **1.**

#### **Look at Jesus, Listen to Him**

Jesus alone, of all men and women, has the complete/wholesome temperament, character and personality. He is both extroverted & introverted, sensing & intuitive, thinking & feeling and rigid and flexible. He was in control of His temperament and used it accordingly to His Father's rules. Thus, His character is perfect as a Son of man. Hence, to become like Him is to be as balanced as He is. He will bring us to His character one day...to bear the fruit of the Holy Spirit, which is His personality. That is His promise to us, His Bride.

Read Psalm 141:3 ...

*“Set a guard over my mouth, O Lord; Keep watch over the door of my lips.”*

Remember, God ...

- Takes our differences as Man and Woman seriously.
- Encourages us to make use of our Natural Path.
- Wants us to watch out for our One sidedness in Views.

- Calls us to be Sensitive To The Spirit's Nudge Toward The Less Familiar because our least used functions render us vulnerable/susceptable to temptation to certain sins e.g. extroverts have a tendency to talk a lot +++ without patient consideration for the listeners' responses or reactions.

## 2.

### **We need to understand the temperament, genderlect and conversational intent of other people.**

This is necessary so that hurtful and unjustified misinterpretation of words and blame are avoided.

*"But seeing a pattern against which to evaluate individual differences provides a starting point to develop not only self-understanding but also flexibility, which is the freedom to try doing things differently if automatic ways of doing them aren't having entirely successful results."*

*D.Tannens <sup>7</sup>*

She adds ...

*"If you understand gender differences in what I call conversational style, you may not be able to prevent disagreements from arising, but you stand a better chance of preventing them from spiraling out of control ..."*

*When sincere attempts to communicate end in stalemate, and a beloved partner seems irrational and obstinate, the different languages men and women speak can shake the foundation of our lives ...*

*Understanding the other's ways of talking is a giant leap across the communication gap between women and men, and a giant step toward opening lines of communication." D.Tannens <sup>8</sup>*


### 3.

**We need to break down destructive circuits by slowing down our speech and listening to the other person's feelings behind the words.**

Men want independence and women want intimacy

But

this cycle often result in ....

*woman approaches man*  *man reads it as her trying to control him and so feels his freedom is hindered.*



*woman more fearful of losing him*



*man pulls away*



#### 4. Form good habits

- Get into a habit of being flexible in non-essentials, firm in essentials, be teachable and humble.
- Get into a small accountability group
- Speak the truth in love - How?

Remember: God reminds us that stinging words may be helpful in certain situations (5:7-8) but they need to be spoken in genuine love for the listener, as in the weeping prophet's case (13:15-17).

Speaking the truth in love is :

- a. a matter of the will  
= intentional
- b. a matter of attitude  
= sometimes needs prayerful preparation especially if in conflict situations
- c. a matter of character  
= fruit of the Holy Spirit, possible and effective. Look at God who knows the truth about us and yet loves us!

Therefore,

*How do we speak the truth in love, especially when there is a strain in relationship??*

Learn from the God who has taken the initiative to speak to sinners and desires that we speak to Him (Genesis 3):

John 3:16-17 ....

we condemn, Jesus doesn't.

He forgives again and again ...

John 2:24-25 ....

even though He knows everything, including the worst in us.

Rev.3:20 ....

Jesus still wants to talk with us e.g. God and Moses in Exo.33:12-23, Jesus spoke the truth in love to the church in Laodicea with the hope of their renewal of friendship with those in the church.

Therefore, the questions are:

- *“Have you heard God speaking to you and have you spoken to Him informally before?”*

(1st step in making sure that you are right with God ... start today, with someone else or on your own.)”

Start talking to Him about your career choice, joblessness, studies, singlehood / marriage, purpose in life, motivation for being one’s best, fear of God’s judgement, etc. etc.

- *“Are you diligently making an effort to listen so that God will speak to you and speak so He can hear you? “Lord, speak, for Your servant is listening ...?”*

Do this by reading and thinking about His word to you.

As you open up your private communication with the God of languages and speech, you will improve your verbal communication with your spouse, children parents, friends and even those with whom you disagree.

## **A Prayer**

*“Father, please forgive us  
for not talking to You enough when you are  
always waiting to listen to us.*

*Grant us the humility, discernment and  
patience ... to change what we can and ...  
to accept what we cannot change.*

*Please fill us with Christ’s love so that we  
can love others as You have loved us ...  
‘truthing’ our speech with love in our  
relationships with others for Your sake.”*

*In Jesus’ Name we pray,  
Amen.*



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Dr. Lee Bee Teik (MBBS, Monash University) practised medicine till she turned fulltime homemaker.

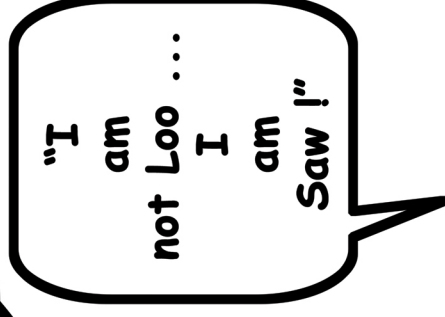
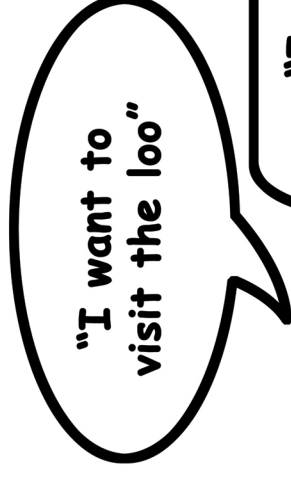
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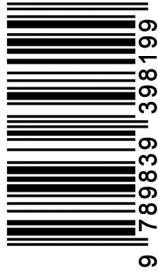
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