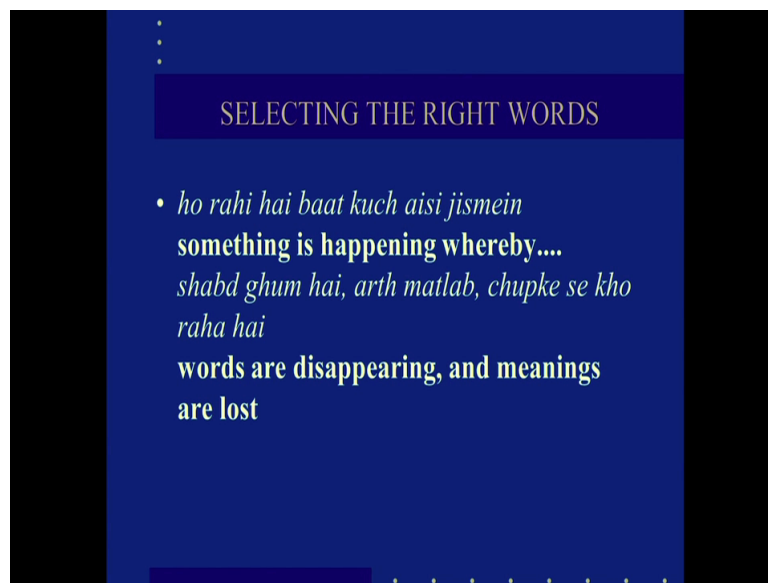


Speaking Effectively
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Lecture 4
The Power of Words

Welcome again to the course on effective speaking. In the last unit of module one, we looked at how language works like a symbol and it is like, a variety of symbols that we use to communicate. In this unit will look at how words work, the power of words and how to select the right word.

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I begin with a small quotation in Urdu to drive home the importance of words and the elusiveness of meaning which words are not able to capture. Ho rahi hai baat kuch aisi jismein shabd ghum hai, arth matlab, chupke se kho raha hai. Ho rahi hai baat kuch aisi something is happening whereby shabd ghum hai we are lost for words are disappearing arth matlab, chupke se kho raha hai and meanings are lost.

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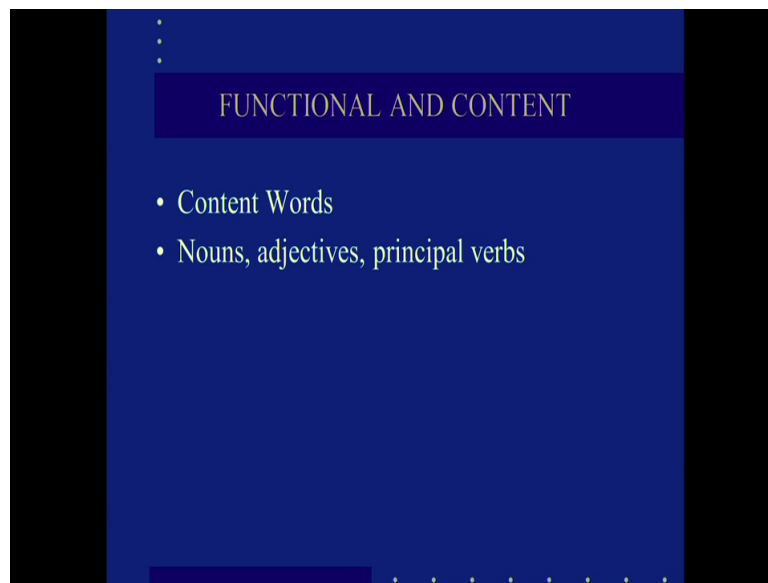
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- *arthashrayatvam shabdasya*
 - *drashtur lingatvam eva ca*
 - *tan-matratvam ca nabhaso*
 - *lakshanam kavayo viduh*
- "Persons who are learned and who have true knowledge define sound as that which conveys the idea of an object, indicates the presence of a speaker and constitutes the subtle form of ether."

So what I said yesterday, how difficult it is to catch meaning because meaning is so elusive and how inadequate words are to capture meaning. Let us look at another Sanskrit quotation which says more or less the same thing. Arthahrayatvam shabdasya drashtur lingatvam eva ca tan matravam ca nabhaso lakshanam kavayo viduh.

Persons who are learned and who have true knowledge define sound as that which conveys the idea of an object, indicates the presence of a speaker and constitutes the subtle form of ether. So from the elusiveness of words and the elusiveness of meaning which is impossible to catch in words, we come to the Sanskrit theory of sound in which a sound is very important in capturing meaning as important as the word itself.

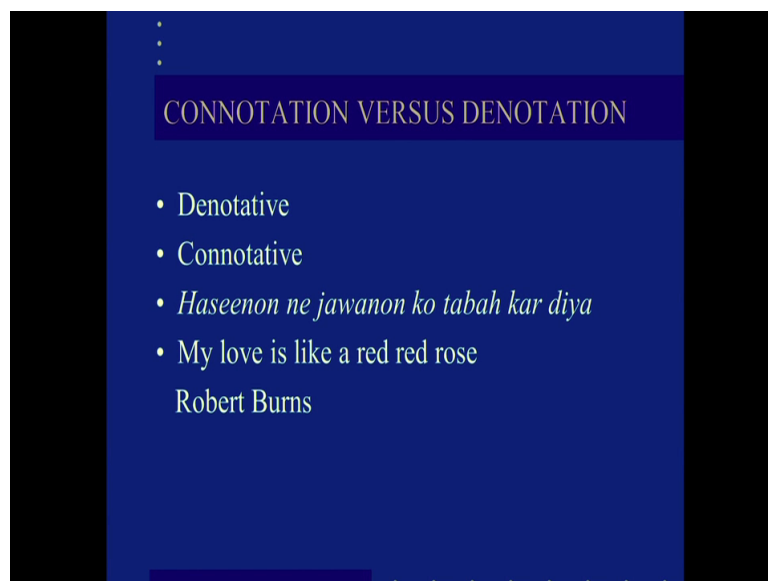
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With this opening, let us look at, let us come down to business and look at how words work. First of all we need to see that words belong to different categories. Some words are functional words and others are content words. What content words? Words which carry meaning, nouns, adjectives, principal verbs, they are the content words. And what are functional words?

Functional words are words which necessarily do not carry meaning but which are necessary to indicate relationships. So indefinite pronouns, conjunctions, prepositions, auxiliary verbs, are all functional words.

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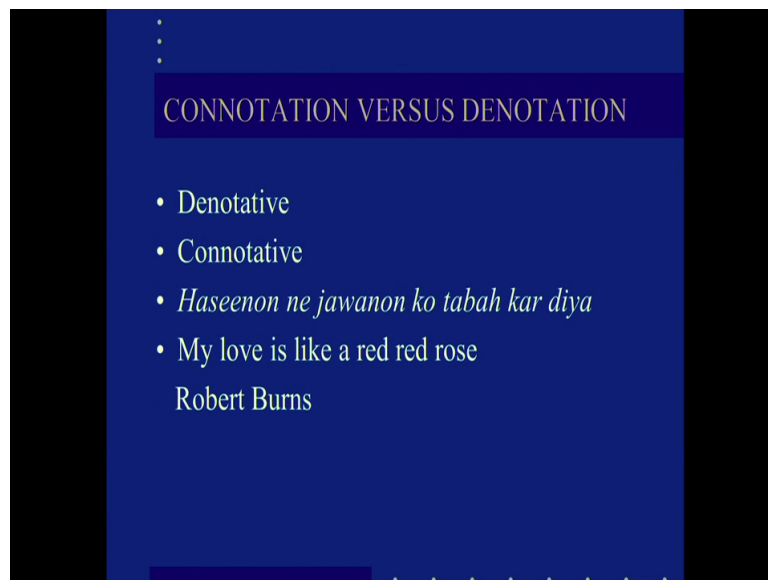


Then we look at the difference between words which are connotative and words which are relative, so the meaning of connotation and denotation in words. What is connotation and what is denotation? Some words are denotative and in science and engineering, whenever we want to express things clearly, we try to use denotative words because in denotative words, the words mean has only one meaning or it has a very small range of meaning.

So take a word like, if you look at an object in front of me, there is a table which has four legs and it has got it is made of wood it has got a it is a it has got a rectangular plank and it has four legs and we understand this object to be a table, so this is a denotative word. But if you say table the minutes, then we are not using it in a denotative sense. So what I am saying is, even denotative words can be used in a connotative manner.

When you say, okay take a seat and we are looking at a chair but when you see someone is on the hot seat then it is a connotative usage of the same word seat. Denotative words are largely used in science and engineering or in business, wherever clarity is a goal, we tend to use denotative words. But in other faces, we tend to use, we can use connotative words because connotative words have many nuances.

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They have several shades of meaning and they do not have only one meaning. They can have metaphorical meanings, they can have a range of meanings. So generally poets, creative persons, writers tend to use connotative language. When we are expressing our emotions then connotative language is more appropriate than using denotative language.

Let us look at Robert Burns's famous line, my love is like red rose, that is a brilliant use of connotative language because for centuries people have been trying to guess what did Robert Burns mean by this line? Those of you interested in poetry, who write poetry or who like to read poetry can see what the pleasure that you get by cracking the meaning of a poem because the poem has no one meaning, it has several meanings.

So as in this line what does Burns mean? Does he mean, my love is like red rose? So love is an abstraction which is compared to a rose which is otherwise a denotative word, we all know what a rose is. But in this usage, rose stands for something, it is a connotative word which does not mean literally a rose, it means a rose but it goes beyond a rose. So rose in general usage, in the west, rose is associated with beauty. So what does Burns mean?

Does he mean, his love is very beautiful? Or is he talking about, when it talks about love, is he talking about emotion of love? Or is he talking about his beloved it? So is he saying that my beloved is like a red rose? Is he saying that his beloved is very beautiful? So this is to illustrate how connotative words may be used to create a range of meaning.

Now there are situations in which connotative usage may be used for denotative purposes and the interest, it may be used to create by using connotative words to create denotative meaning. Now I am going to narrate an incident, an anecdote about listening to a newspaper vendor screaming headline from back days newspaper.

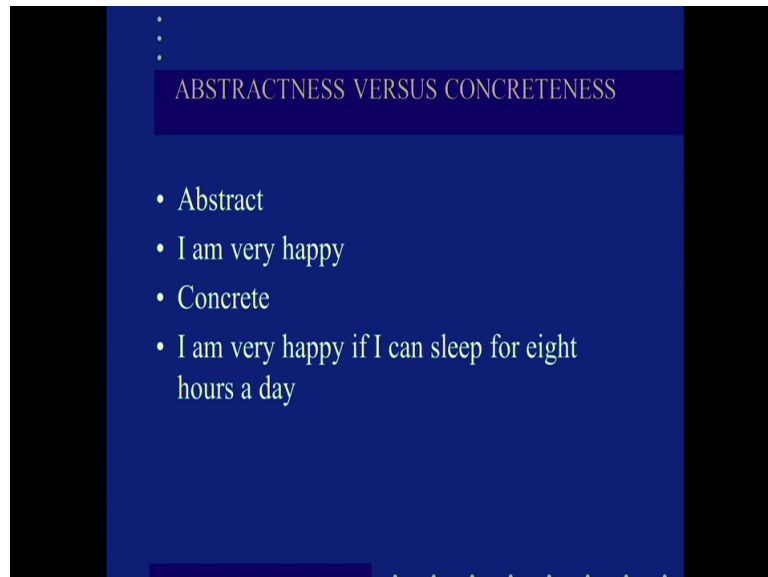
So I am talking about a several decades ago and am talking about my childhood Srinagar, yes Srinagar before it became the most dreaded place in India and it was paradise on earth. But I was in school and from my school bus I heard a newspaper vendor scream haseeno ne jawano ko tabah kar diya. Haseeno ne jawano ko tabah kar diya which is Urdu, in Urdu newspaper. And it really, it means beauties have devastated young men.

Now can you guess what happened? The newspaper vendor, the young newspaper vendor who is trying to sell copies of the Urdu newspaper was surrounded by a huge mob and everybody wanted to get their copy of the newspaper because there was you know it was a very sensational headline and everybody was very curious to see what had happened and how did the beauties devastate the youth.

And then came the anti-climax, because what was the headline about? It was about the class XII results in which girls, female students had scored higher marks than male students. So think of this very creative writer of the headlines, who used a very everyday news about the

class XII results to create interest in his readers by using connotative words, connotation to create interest in his potential readers and his potential buyers.

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The second way we distinguish words is, on the scale of abstractness versus concreteness. What are abstract words and what are concrete words? We tend to use a lot of abstract words in our everyday usage and whenever I asked people to spell it out in concrete terms, I find invariably people substitute one abstraction with another abstraction. So say a word like happy, a word like happy which is an abstract word.

Now when I ask people, what do you mean when you say I am very happy. They would say, I am very content it, I am very satisfied, I am very thrilled, I am very excited, I am ecstatic. So they are merely substituting one abstract word with another abstract word because an abstraction is our very difficult to describe, they are very necessary.

When we do need abstraction and we find that as civilizations advanced, as people tended to use less concrete language and tended to use more abstract words and they say that it is a myth when they say that primitive, the so-called primitive people or the savage people or the people who belong to oral societies which who we met earlier in Ong's definition do not have a capacity to use abstract words because they tend to think.

Even their thinking is in concrete terms so abstract words came with the invention of writing, with the distance with the birth of individualism. So the capacity for, this is a belief, this theory is contested but I am trying to say that, abstract usage which is very common, it came

later in the evolutionary scale. It is believed to have come later in the evolutionary scale and it is very difficult to get somebody's meaning when they use abstract terms.

We tend to use abstract terms but when someone says, I am very happy, what do you what does that person mean? So a person has got a very high-paying job and that person says, I am very happy. The other person says, I am very happy, you look very happy or says, I am very happy, so what does that person mean? He means that, he is he been he has gone on a holiday and he is feeling relaxed. So unless a person tells you what they mean by happy, you have it is a guessing game.

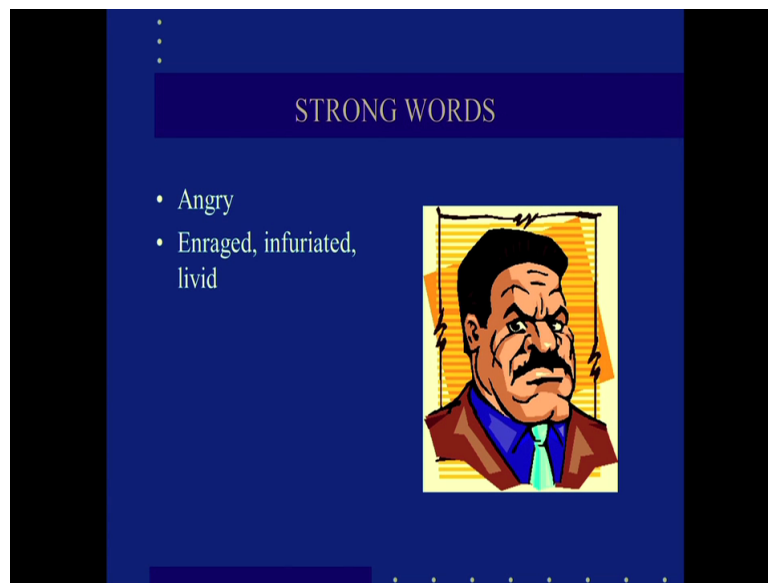
You do not know what he means, when he or she means when he says I am happy or I am sad. We do not know what the emotion is there but what is the state of being happy? Philosophers have been trying to guess, to interpret abstract terms for centuries and they have not succeeded.

Words like compassion, like the Buddhist term dukh, karana, these words people have been debating for centuries but they are such high-level abstractions, that it is impossible to guess what these words mean. Therefore when you desire clarity, it is better to avoid abstract words and to use concrete words.

So if I were to, if you were to say, I am very happy if I can sleep for eight hours a day or if I am very happy if I score 99 out of 100 in my class test or I am very happy when I am with my friends.

So then that abstract word becomes very concrete otherwise it can create misunderstandings between the sender and the receiver because the sender can mean one thing by happy whereas the receiver will understand happy to be something else unless the sender states clearly what they mean by being happy.

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The slide has a dark blue background. At the top, the title 'STRONG WORDS' is written in white capital letters. Below the title, there is a bulleted list of words: 'Angry', 'Enraged, infuriated, livid'. To the right of the list is a cartoon illustration of a man with a large, dark mustache, a furrowed brow, and a stern expression. He is wearing a brown suit jacket, a blue shirt, and a light green tie. The illustration is set against a yellow background with some black lines suggesting a window or a frame.

We talked about strong words, I will give you another example, so you say, I am very angry. Now angry is a very flat word. When you were a child and you did something naughty or even as a young adult you did something which was not approved by your parents, so suppose you have a curfew on going out at late nights.

You are a young man or young woman but you still have to follow curfew at home that you cannot, you cannot return home after a certain hour at night or a certain wee hours of the morning. So you imagine, your mom your mother or your family has been waiting for you for dinner and you have dinner at 9 o'clock and you land up at 10 o'clock because you have been you have been hanging around with your friends, you get back at 10 and what happens?

Your mother serves the food or whoever is there serving the food, serves the food but is very enraged, not just angry, they are enraged. Now suppose, instead of 10 o'clock, everyone waited out for you till 10 and then they went to bed and you turned up at midnight, what would happen? Everyone has come out to open the door for you but your dad is infuriated, absolutely infuriated.

And let us think of the next situation where it is past midnight and you are partying hard, you land up at the wee hours of the morning after having told your parents that you will be back by midnight. And for o'clock you find your mother is pacing up and down the room, or your dad is pacing up and down the room and is livid. So see the difference between enraged, infuriated and livid, it is very flat to say angry, you have to use the precise strong word.

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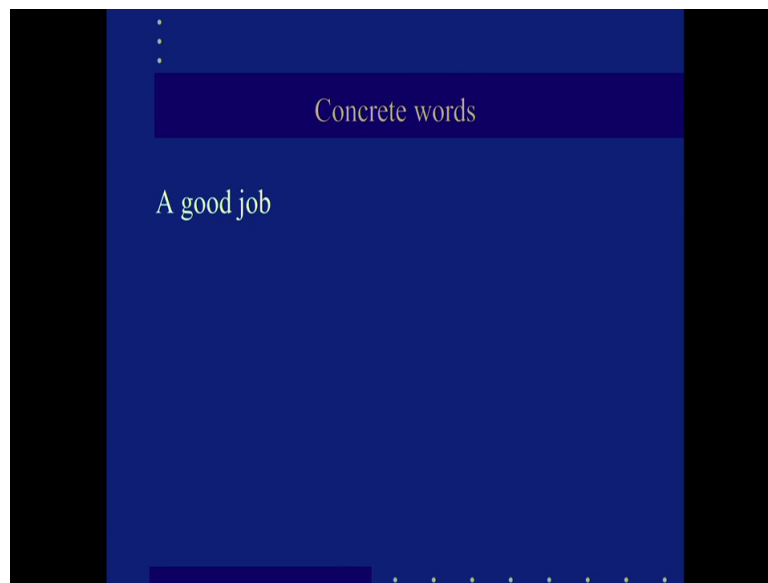
Yesterday I talked about familiar words that always use familiar words which are normally short words but I also told you that some familiar words, some short words are not familiar words like the word suave which we use in relation to certain kind of people who are very well-dressed, who are very well who speak very well, who are very refined, we use the word suave but it is not a word familiar to most people.

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Short words, we instead of saying lot of people try to use very complicated words long words. So instead of saying I am very happy to see you, I am elated to have encountered you which is just complicating very simple words into very complex words.

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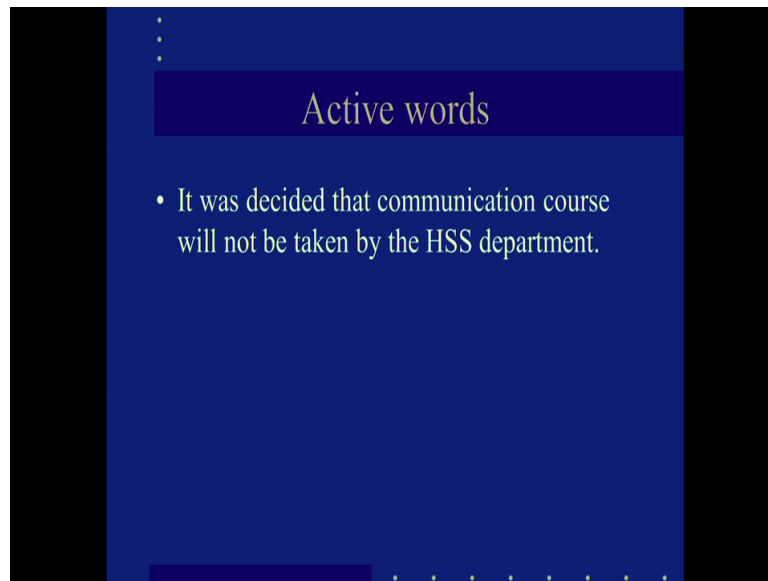


Concrete words, yesterday we talked in the last unit we talked about concrete words and how when you use abstract lower-level abstractions, it creates confusion. So if you tell your worker, that he has done a he or she has done a good job, the worker is very confused. What do I, what do you mean, oh you did a very great job you did a very good job.

Did he mean that I did the work in less number of hours that it was expected, did he mean that the work I did was ex I mean the quality of work I was expected to do seeded the expectations of my boss. So instead of saying a good job, you say you say you know the report that he prepared, it was written very succinctly and very briefly and was, it was just the right length.

If you say very clearly what was good about the job, that helps bring more clarity in your speech.

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Active words, we also distinguish between active and passive words. So the normal English sentence is an active sentence, we tend to use active words more often than passive voice and words in standard English.

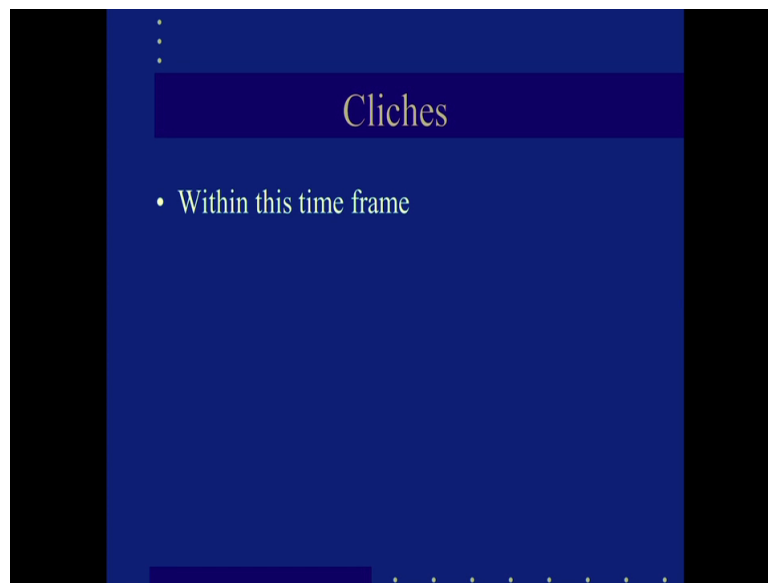
So the normal sentence is, John likes Jane. Whereas in Indian languages we tend to use the passive more often, we would say the equivalent of Jane is liked by John, instead of saying John likes Jane, we will say Jane is liked by John, we use the passive voice. So passive voice brings less clarity because we translate from our languages, we tend to use passive voice more often.

So we would use words like I mean this is an actual usage, it was decided that the communication course will not be taken by HSS Department. This is an actual statement from a resolution which was sent by a certain department to another department.

Instead of saying the HSS or so and so in the HSS Department will not take the communication course, instead of that, no blame was assigned, names were avoided, no responsibility was taken and passive voice was used which is often used by bureaucrats to avoid blame and responsibility to say that it was decided.

Who decided it was not mentioned, it was decided that the communication course will not be taken by the HSS Department.

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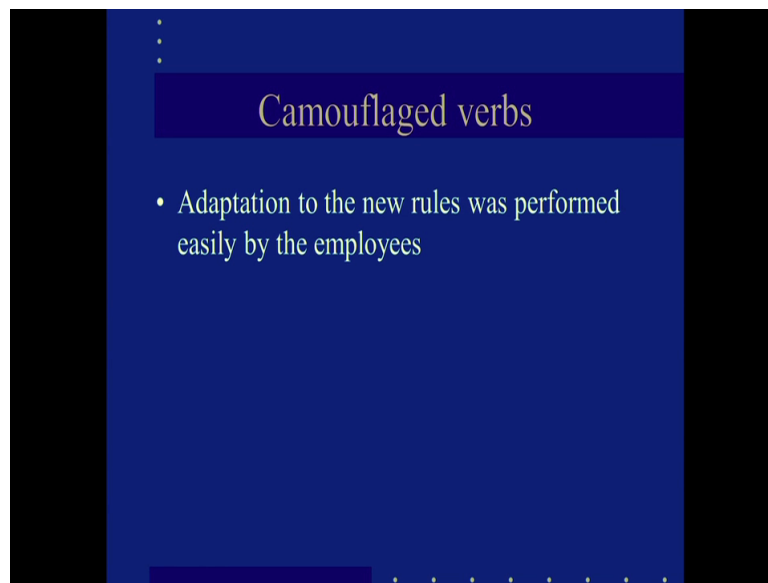


Cliches, in the last lecture, I talked about cliches as phrases of words which are used when they were used for the first time, they seem very appropriate, they seem very unusual, very original and they attracted interest. Since they captured everyone's imagination, everyone began to use the same clichés, so that they lost their bigger and there originality. And when you come across these cliches, you find journalists using a lot of clichés.

Now remember journalists have deadlines, they have to deliver their copy, they have to deliver their article before the newspaper goes into print or now there is even before, the news is uploaded online. They are working under a lot of pressure and they tend to use cliches because it helps them to compose a report very quickly.

But for other people, when you pepper your speech with cliches like within this timeframe, the bottom line is, or above and beyond, things like that, battle lines are drawn, it gets very irritating because you are using words which have lost their vigor.

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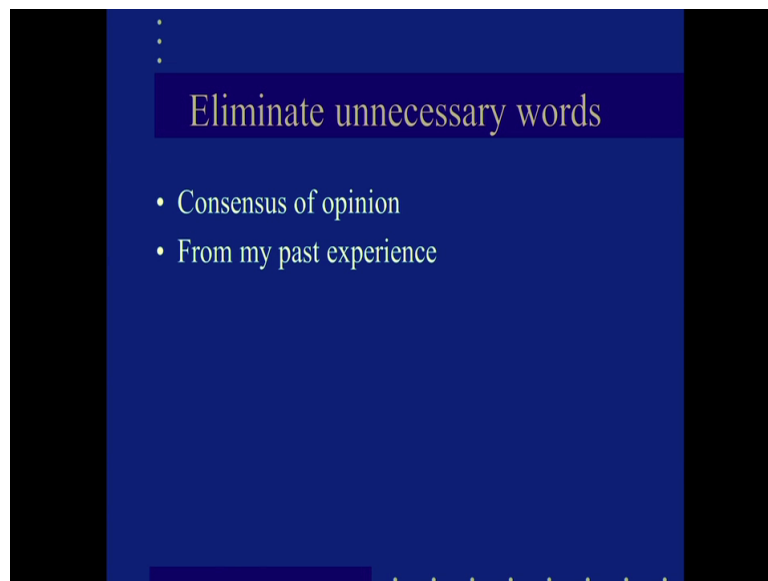


Now camouflaged verbs is another example I had given that instead of using nouns, instead of using verbs many of you use us use the passive voice and whenever we use the passive voice, we tend to include verbs turned into nouns. So instead of using verbs as verbs, we turn verbs into nouns. These are camouflaged verbs, they are actually verbs but they are used as nouns and they tend to make a speech very confusing.

So a sentence like this, adaptation to the new rules was performed easily by the employees. We have two problems here, one is that it is a passive voice, it was performed easily by the employees. The second is, we have a camouflaged verb, that is adaptation to the rules, adapt has turned into a noun.

So instead of saying, the employees easily adapted to the rules, it has made more complex more confusing to say adaptation to the rules was performed easily by the employees through the use of camouflaged verbs.

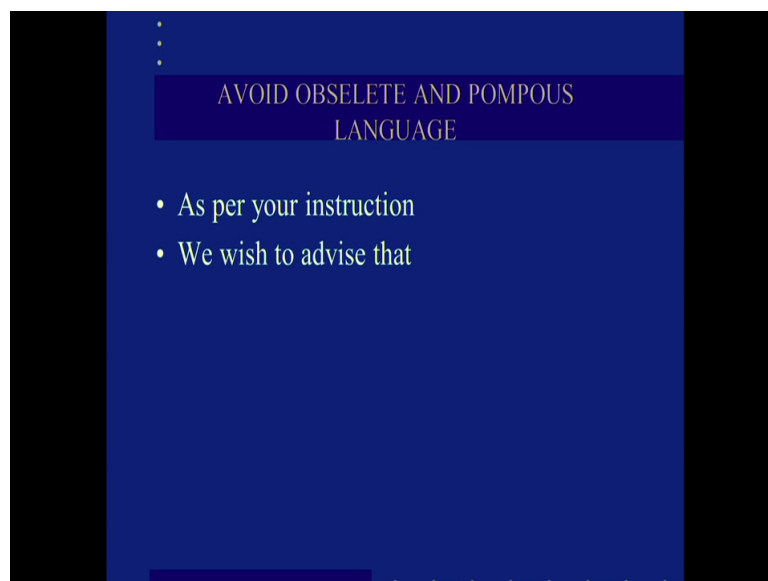
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Eliminate unnecessary words, when you are speaking or writing, try not to use try to use one word when one word can do the job, do not use three words. eliminate unnecessary words, so many of us have come across people using there was a consensus of opinion on this matter. Now a consensus itself means opinion, I mean it is based on opinion, so you do not have to say consensus of opinion, you can just say consensus.

Or you would say from my past experience, experience is always in the past, it cannot be in the present or the future, it is always on what you went through in the past, so you do not have to say from my past experience, you can just say from my experience.

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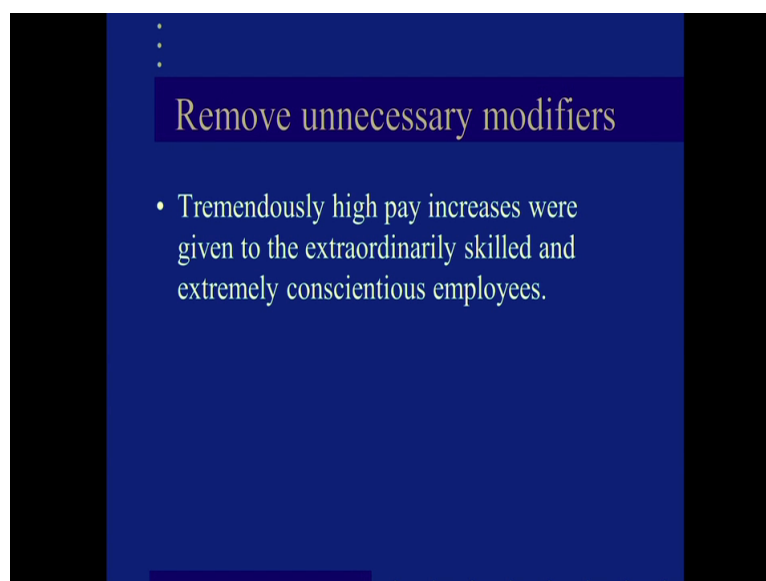
Avoid obsolete and pompous language, now we tend to think that words like Latin words or structures are very formal structures are sound very impressive but these are words which we have been using since the British Raj and these words were in usage at that time. But over a period of time, over the centuries since the Raj ended, English language itself has evolved, it is a very dynamic language.

So in England, no one use this kind of language which was used by the British when they were in India, whereas we are holding onto the language that the British left us with, particularly the officialese or the bureaucratic language. In our bureaucracy we are holding onto these phrases and sentences which are obsolete, which are no longer used in the native by native speakers.

Words like, as per your instruction, we wish to advise that and I am amused and surprised that even when I have to deal with bureaucrats, if I frame a letter in a very simple English, stating very clearly what I want, I am instructed by someone in my office someone in the administration who advises me or who corrects or edits my letter by using words of this kind, obsolete.

Because it is still used, is still standard language in the Indian bureaucracy and it is considered appropriate language. So I would be told, please write as per your instruction because or as mentioned above or for necessary action usages which are no longer which are out of date elsewhere in the world because they sound very pompous.

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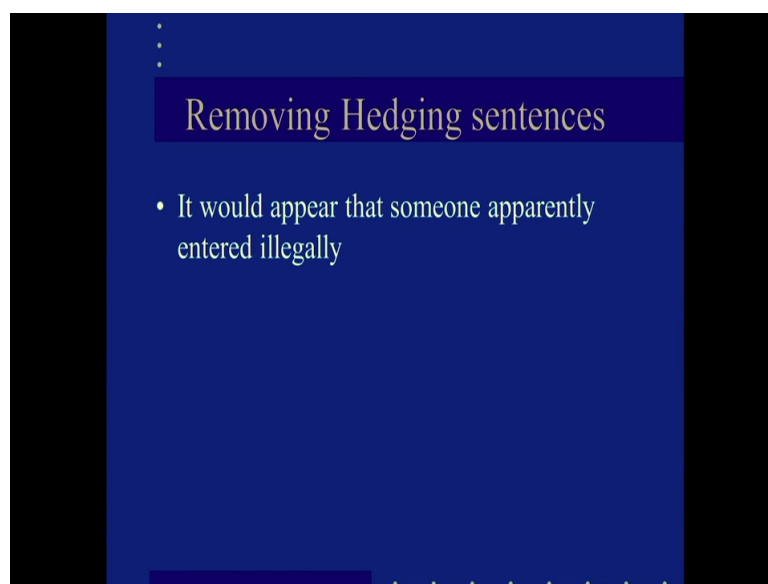
Remove unnecessary modifiers

- Tremendously high pay increases were given to the extraordinarily skilled and extremely conscientious employees.

Remove unnecessary modifiers, so example is, tremendously high pay increases were given to the extraordinarily skilled and extremely conscientious employees. What are the modifiers? Tremendously, extraordinarily, extremely, these are modifiers. Now instead of saying tremendously high pay increases, you can just say high pay increases or astronomical pay. You can use just one word instead of using unnecessary modifiers.

Were given to the extraordinarily skilled, extraordinarily skilled is redundant extraordinarily is redundant, extremely conscientious, extremely is redundant. You can just say high pay increases were given to the skilled and conscientious employees, that is all.

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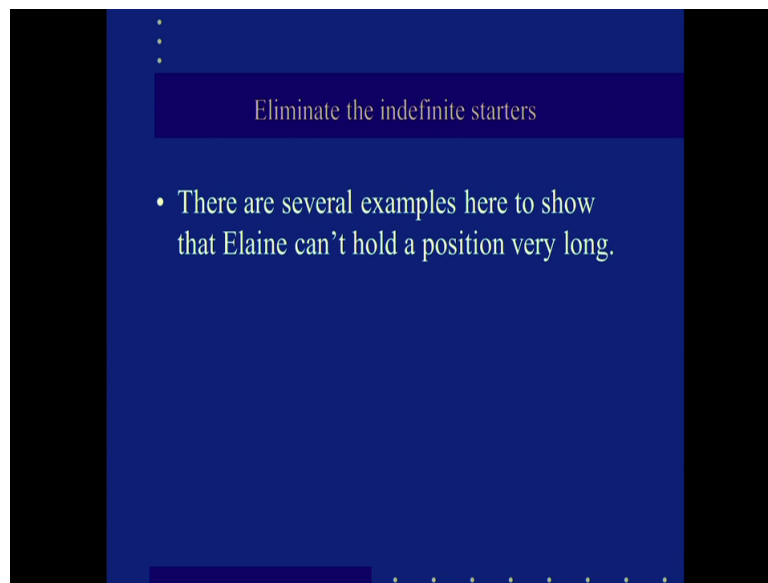


Removing hedging sentences, now hedging is a trick we use whenever in the last unit I said whenever you state fact whenever you make a statement, you make it sound like a fact even though it is an inference. So hedging is a very good strategy when you are not sure about something and to use hedging or to use hedging sentences or words, it helps to bring some tentativeness.

It helps to bring a less it makes it less generalized or less of a fact and more of an inference but when you are very sure that something is fact and you use a hedging sentence, it is very irritating. So suppose someone has entered an office illegally and there is evidence of that, you try to hedge by saying, it would appear there is obvious evidence that somebody has entered illegally but you would say it would appear that someone apparently entered illegally.

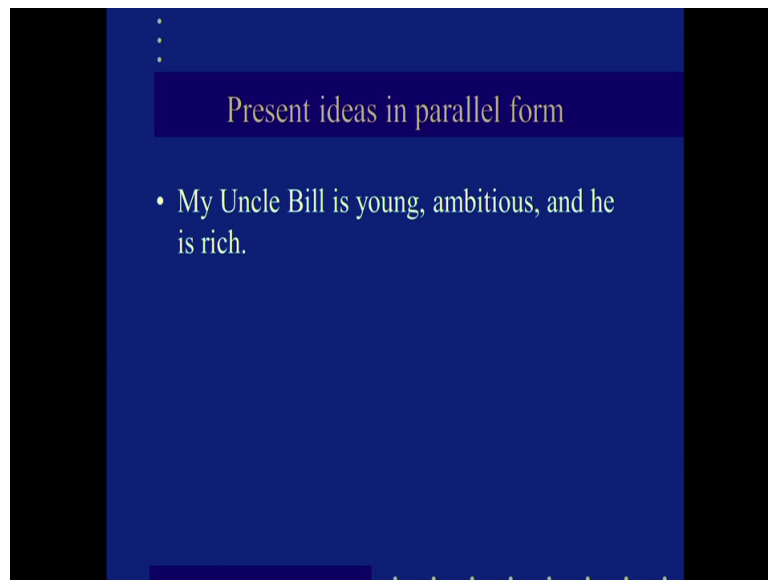
There are unmistakable signs that someone has broken into the room, so if you hedge and say, it would appear apparently, it is very irritating.

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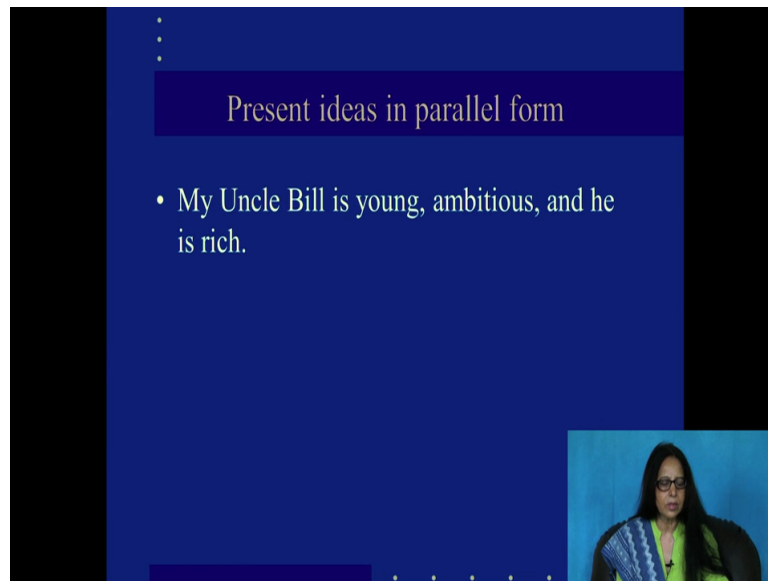
Eliminate the indefinite starters, this is there are this is a new learners of English tend to use in definite starters, there are four boys in the room, there are several examples here to show that Elaine cannot hold a position very long. You do not really have to say there are, several examples here show that Elaine cannot hold a position very long.

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Present ideas in parallel form, my young My Uncle Bill is young, ambitious and he is rich. Now this is not correct because due to say my uncle Bill is young, ambitious and rich, you do not have to say he is rich.

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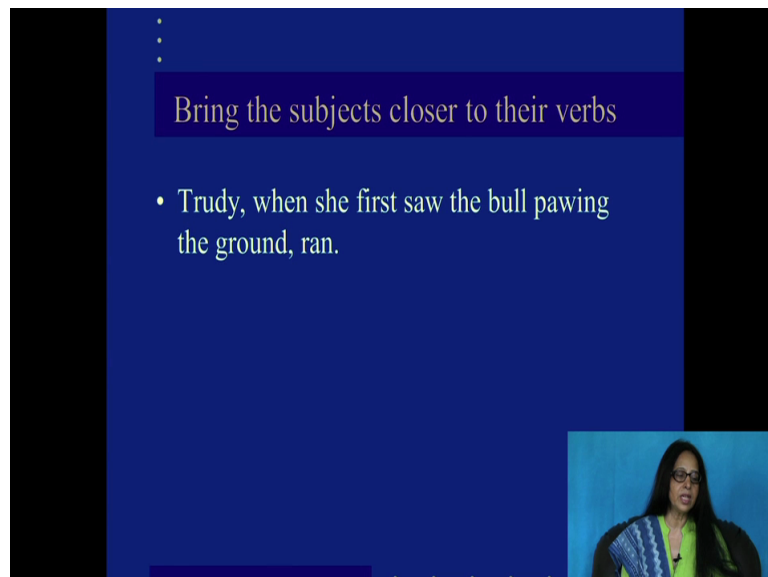


Present ideas in parallel form

- My Uncle Bill is young, ambitious, and he is rich.

Awkward pointers, words like as mentioned above, the aforementioned, the former, the latter, again my admin staff loves to use these of awkward pointers and edit my letters by saying you have to write this as mentioned above, the aforementioned and I meekly obey them because I want to get my job done.

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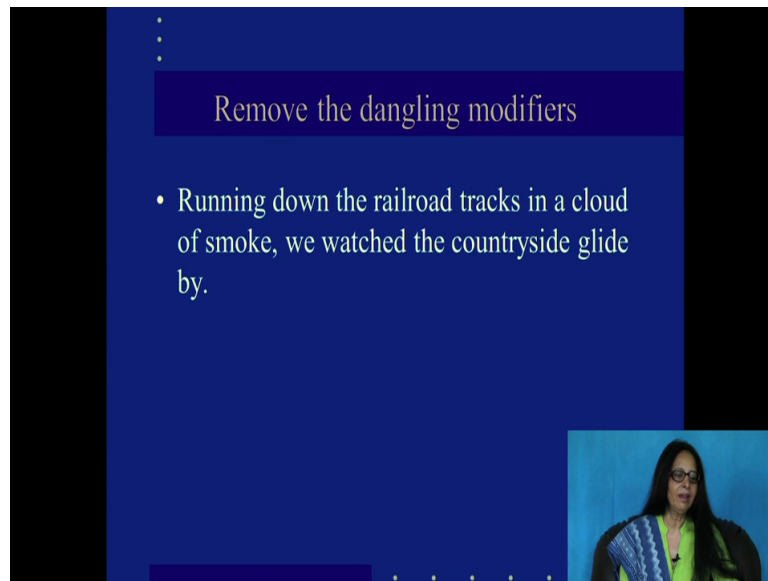


Bring the subjects closer to their verbs

- Trudy, when she first saw the bull pawing the ground, ran.

Bring the subjects closer to their verbs, Trudy, when she first saw the bull pawing the ground, ran. It is very confusing because we do not know who ran, Trudy or the bull. So if you say Rudy ran when she first saw the bull pawing the ground, we know who has ran, whether the bull or Trudy.

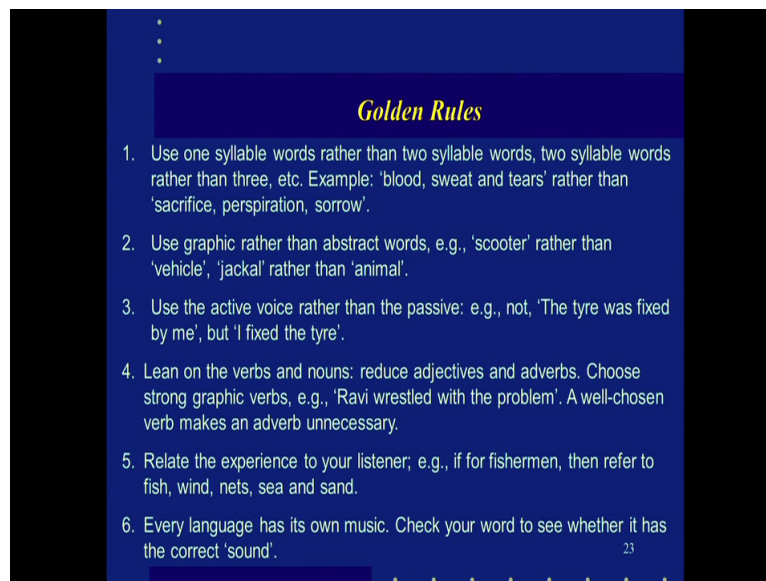
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But when you want to create ambiguity, like in this poem, it is better to keep the modifiers and to use sorry to let the subjects be not be close to the verbs. Like in this line, running down the railroad tracks in a cloud of smoke, we watched the countryside glide by. Now this is a very beautiful poem and it captures that idea that when you are in the train, you do not know whether you are running or the train is running or the countryside is running.

That feeling of the countryside passing you by as you are in a train. So that gives you the impression and this use of the dangling modifier, running down, is it the train running, is it you running, the countryside running, we do not know but it creates that beautiful impact which the poet wants to create.

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So I will conclude with the golden rules, use one syllable words rather than two syllable words. So in other words, use short words two syllable words rather than three, example - blood, sweat and tears rather than sacrifice, perspiration and sorrow. Use graphic rather than abstract words, scooter rather than vehicle, jackal rather than animal. Use the active voice rather than the passive, not, the tire was fixed by me, but I fixed this tyre.

Lean on the verbs and nouns, reduce adjectives and adverbs. Use strong graphic verbs, example - Ravi wrestled with the problem, a well chosen verb makes an adverb unnecessary. Relate the experience to your listener, example - if for fisherman, then refer to fish, wind, nets, sea and sand. Every language has its own music. Check your word to see whether it has the correct sound. Thank you.