

Public Speaking
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Lecture – 23
Proxemics

Good morning, friends and welcome back to NPTEL online certificate course on Public Speaking. All of you might remember that you are now in the fifth week and we are dealing with the role of nonverbal in public speaking. In the previous lecture we made a brief mention of what non-verbal communication is. I think here I must add that non-verbal communication can be classified into certain areas.


And the very first was that of kinesics which we have already discussed. So, the various forms of nonverbal communication can be kinesics, proxemics, haptics, chronemics, paralanguage and meta-communication. I must here tell you that now with all these lectures being tuned to you, your speech anxiety might be a little bit on the receding side. I mean till now you might have developed a sort of confidence.

But the confidence will be more when you also come to know about certain truths, certain facts of how non-verbal plays a very important role in making a public speaker effective? In the previous lecture we talked about how to make use of one's body which we call body language? How one can provide a proper body language when one is communicating? But as a speaker, one also needs to understand how apart from kinetics, proxemics are also important?

Now, you might be thinking about what this proxemics is? Now, before we come to analyze proxemics let us take a beautiful quote by Soren Kierkegaard, the existential philosopher who says.

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“Language has time as its element, all other media have space as their element.”
- Soren Kierkegaard





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“Language has time as it is element, all other media have their space as their element.” Now, he actually underlines the importance not only of time in language but also of a space in language. And this importance of space we are going to understand in this lecture which I have titled as proxemics.

(Refer Slide Time: 03:36)

Introduction

- ❖ A term coined by cultural anthropologist Edward T. Hall in his book *The Hidden Dimension*, written in 1963.
- ❖ It is about how people understand and use space in a cultural context.
- ❖ While talking about human perceptions of social space and personal space, Hall defines proxemics as “the interrelated observations and theories of man’s use of space as a specialized elaboration of culture” (Hall 1).

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Proximity + Phonemics = Proxemics

Now, the word proxemics comes from proximity. By proximity we mean closeness, nearness. So, this term was coined by cultural anthropologist named, Edward T. Hall is a big name and one of his famous books that I came across was *The Silent Language*. You look at the title of the book that there are many forms of language which are silent but they have a lot to contribute in making something very important.

So, in his famous book *The Hidden Dimension* which he wrote in 1963, he actually has made a mention of this term 'proxemics.' Proxemics, as I said earlier, comes from the word proximity or nearness or closeness. It is about how people understand and use space in a cultural context. When as a public speaker one starts speaking should you also not pay attention to how much of space is required?

The space not only between the audience and the speaker, the space also between the microphone and the man, the space also when you are delivering a talk to a big group to a small group. Hall actually defines proxemics as the interrelated observations and theories of man's use of space as a specialized elaboration of culture. Now, when you see two people sitting very close to each other do you not derive a meaning? You derive that they are intimate with each other. But the other day when you found your friend moving away from you and maintaining a distance. Did you not get the language that perhaps something was wrong, fine? We can, at times, also find many people walking hand- in- hand having no space in and between---- that also talks a lot about relationship. The space communication can also be considered as relationship communication.

This word proxemics comes from proximity and then proxemics, I mean, the space that you maintain when you are speaking.

(Refer Slide Time: 06:18)

Proxemics: Space, Culture & Communication

- Spatial Communication
- Close study/ Awareness of physical space
- Behavioral norms
- Cultural variations

• Proxemics, as a field of non-verbal communication, tries to ground the relationship "between man and the cultural dimension and is one in which both *man and his environment* participate in moulding each other" (Hall 4).

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Now, proxemics can also be called as a spatial communication. Meaning thereby this spatial also is related to space communication, where any speaker any communicator needs to understand importance of space in communication. Imagine yourself being in a classroom

and you will find that there is a space between other teacher and the taught. There are rows I mean lines--- they also denote all a lot and there are several physical settings also. They also come under space, they also get a lot of cues and clues about the meaning of space in communication so, it is a closed study or awareness of physical space. You can look at two people talking to each other and the distance, fine. When you talk to a stranger, I think the space between you is a bit far. But when you talk to an intimate person, you actually move close by.

But my dear friends, while discussing culture in communication, we have already discussed how when people of two cultures--- how they also derive meaning out of the space distances? There are certain behavioural norms also there are also cultural variations. And proxemics as a field of non-verbal communication, tries to ground the relationship between man and the cultural dimension, which is actually one in which both man and his environment participate in moulding each other. Imagine you are going to listen to a lecture and you find the hall packed, fine. The moment you go you do not find any space any place to sit and even if you anyway manage to get it, will you stay there for a long time? You will not. You sometimes also find the speaker also struggling for his own space.

The speaker finds it very difficult because the speaker also expects some space where he can make movements. We have already talked about it in the previous lecture. While we are talking about the use of body, is not it? So and man by nature actually wants space, every person, every individual wants space. Nowadays, there are talks about personal space, social space, is not it?

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Communication across Spaces

1. Edward Hall divided human perception of spatiality into two broad categories namely:
 - a. Personal Space
 - b. Territory
2. Personal space is understood as the distance at which the individual could be touched physically.

"the man's boundary begins and ends with his skin." (Hall 115)

 - Meanwhile, the concept of "territory" is associated with animals and birds.
 - Territory suggests the critical distance around which "flight-or-flight reaction" takes place.

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graph LR
    A[Interpersonal spaces] --- B[Personal Space]
    A --- C[Territory]
  
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5

So, when we talk about space Edward Hall divides human perception of speciality or space into two broad categories. What are these two broad categories? One is personal space, no? At times you want that there should not be anyone around you. You want to have more space where you can allow yourself to relax. And if there is an interference you are actually hurt you actually are feel quite different.

And then another type of space is territory. Every human being even when we talk about territory actually suggests the critical distance around which flight or fight reaction takes place. In a crowded place, think of it in a crowded place, you do not get the space that you require and you actually want to get away from that place. It is actually a question of flight or fight reaction, is not it? So, every human being wants a sort of territory around.

The other day why you felt anxious when somebody else sat on the chair you always used to sit in, my dear friend? Because you felt threatened, your space was being occupied. In the corporate world you will find that there are space allocations for everyone. Because that denotes that actually gives you a meaning a significance of the person as to how much importance does he or she have in the organization?

So, this personal space is understood as the distance at which the individual could be touched physically. I mean we have already perhaps talked about the cultural zones. When you are in a cultural zone which is intimate, so people of your intimate relations they only can enter that space. But space keeps on varying with this sort of relationship. We may have a personal journey we may have an intimate zone.

So, the man's boundaries begin and an end with his skin says Hall. Hall, also at one place had said that time talks and space speaks. I mean when a person does not come in time, do you not derive some meaning out of it? And when a person does not allow others to have this space around, once again you try to extract meaning out of it. So, the concept of territory which is associated with animals and birds.

But at the same time this meaning of territory actually allows an individual for a flight or fight reaction. So, interpersonal spaces because when we are communicating between two groups, you as a speaker and the other members as audience, you perhaps are trying to find out what sort of space? Here, the space that we are going to talk about, we actually want a larger space.

Now, here as I was mentioning the role of space zones. So, intimate zone you can find how a person who actually has a sort of relationship with you?

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And this intimate space is 1.5 feet to 0.45 metre is not it? So, it actually a sort of confinement then personal space between 1.5 feet to 4 feet. Now, friends, family members, friends, near relatives they only are allowed to enter into such a space. Then we have social space where the distance, finally the distance widens and the distance is from 4 feet to 12 feet. Earlier in personal space we had 1.5 feet to 4 feet.

But now depending upon our relationship, the distance also widens and the space also widens in order to give us more meaning. And then public space, most of the talks actually take place in public space where the distance is more. My dear friends, have you not realized that there have been times when these spaces have been violated and the violation of space has resulted in giving rise to very unpleasant situations.

So, history is a witness to it and even today when these space zones are violated there are chances, apprehensions of some untoward accidents. Now, when we talk about intimate distance--- during this intimate distance you will find there is an overload of sensory inputs. That is why the distance between the audience and the speaker is a little bit because you know one has to be aware of, one can find in intimate space, one can find the overwhelming reaction from the receiver.


But if the space is more are you in a position to understand? Are you in a position to observe the sensory inputs of the person sitting at the last bench? Fine.

(Refer Slide Time: 15:00)


Intimate distance

- Close phase:
 - Overload of sensory inputs.
 - Overwhelming reaction from the receiver.
 - Output type: Highly positive or negative

- Far phase: (6-18 inches)
 - Phase of cultural differences, esp. while greeting gestures.
 - High risk of offending/ getting offended.



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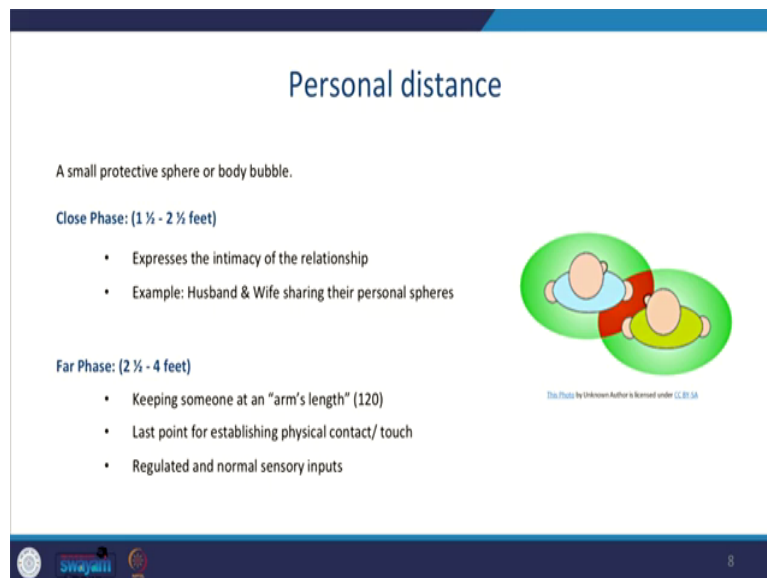
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The output type in closed phase is highly either positive or negative. Either the person sitting just in front can give you a positive or a negative, and in both the case if it is negative. It actually is going to destroy the entire show and it can create a sort of inconvenience for the speaker. Then, there is far phase, I mean distance 6 to 18 in inches, phase of cultural difference especially, while greeting gestures.

You might have found that when people of two cultures meet, they maintain a sort of cultural space. Sometimes, it is less, sometimes it is more, depending upon the cultures from which these people come. There are, at times, chances of offenses. There are chances of or risks of offending or getting offended. We might have talked about how when two Arabs meet each other? They are either very close or they appear to be very distant.

Depending upon what the people of other culture carries a sort of cultural meaning, which is based on space. Now, we come to personal distance. It is actually as the word person--- so it is, actually a very small protective sphere where you cannot restrict yourself from a sort of touch, from body bubble, fine.

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Personal distance

A small protective sphere or body bubble.

Close Phase: (1 ½ - 2 ½ feet)

- Expresses the intimacy of the relationship
- Example: Husband & Wife sharing their personal spheres

Far Phase: (2 ½ - 4 feet)

- Keeping someone at an "arm's length" (120)
- Last point for establishing physical contact/ touch
- Regulated and normal sensory inputs

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8

The phase is very close 1.5 to 2.5 feet and it expresses the intimacy of the relationship. That is why when we talk about proxemics, we also call it relationship communication. Say for example, a couple maintaining the sort of distance with each other that can come under personal. But then when it is close, you find the other person is kept at an arm's length, fine. And the last point for establishing physical contact you do not want or there is no possibility, fine. And there are certain regulations also about sensory inputs.

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Social Zones

Touch is reduced or entirely removed at this zone.


Voice plays a primary role in communication.

Close phase: (4 – 7 feet)

- Impersonal business zone
- Work relationships
- Social gathering

Far Phase: (7 – 12 feet)

- Formal business zone
- Interviews, Meetings, Conferences etc.



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9

But since you are a public speaker, you will at times come across social zones. In social zones, mostly touch is reduced there is less chance of touch, not only according to the regulations. But as per the demands also and touch is reduced or entirely removed at this zone. In this regard the speaker has a difficult time, why? The speaker is expected to respond to everyone or the speakers why should reach everyone?

Of course, there are facilities nowadays of technical gadgets, say for example, the microphones and all which can help us. And in this regard your voice plays a primary role in communication. You might have come across certain situations where the audience members can tell you that will you could you please raise your voice a little so that we may hear. Why? This results because of the distance that is there between the two parties.

So, in this regard the closed phase when there is interpersonal business zone. I mean when you sit for a sort of negotiation, you will find at the distance is not that much. Especially in most of the work relationships and social gatherings you can find. But then there is always a chance and one should always try to remain very sensitive that you are not going to interfere or violate other's spaces.

Because we should be aware of the far phase where the distance will be between 7 to 12 feet. And it is considered to be a formal business zone, which also as public speaker we ought to maintain. Mostly during interviews during meetings and during conferences, these things get a sort of primacy. And the last is public zone.

(Refer Slide Time: 19:29)

Public Zones


Sensorial shifts occur with respect to loss of familiarity.

Close phase: (12 – 25 feet)

- "Careful choice of words and phrasing...occurs" (Hall 123)
- Formal style

Far phase: (25 feet or more)

- A distance set around public speakers.
- Voice loses its subtlety.
- Exaggeration of non-verbal communication is required.
- High usage of kinesics.



10

In public zone, your sensory shifts switch over occurs with loss of familiarity. You do not know who the audience members are? It is actually a crowd of 200 people fine. You do not know them and actually they are full I mean the capacity is full. So, the close phase which should be 12 to 25 feet that is also considered to be close. In this sort of setting as a speaker what wants to do? Careful choice of words and phrasing as per the advice of Edward T. Hall.

Edward T. Hall says that when you are in a public zone and even if it appears to be a closed face you need to not only be careful of the selection of your words but also of your phrasing. Because everything that you say may be heard. Of course, the style has to be formal. And then when it becomes a far phase the distance will once again increase and distance set around public speakers.

Now, there is a loss and the loss is the loss of the subtlety of the voice, no? The excellence of your voice here is lost because as a public speaker you every now and then want that your voice should reach everyone, is not it? And here, every possibility that your nonverbal communication actually requires a lot of expectations. We have already talked about the deficiency in verbal can be compensated by the efficiency of non-verbal.

I mean your body action has to work here because there is not such facility where your voice can reach each and every one. The way the people sitting in the front can receive. In this regard, high uses of kindness because what cannot be understood through words can be understood through non- words and in this non-words your body language. Now, the way a

person does a sort of locative gesture or an empathic gesture or descriptive gesture while he or she is trying to define trying to analyze the size of an object or whatsoever.

So, it is very important that one makes are the movements of one's hands in such a situation.

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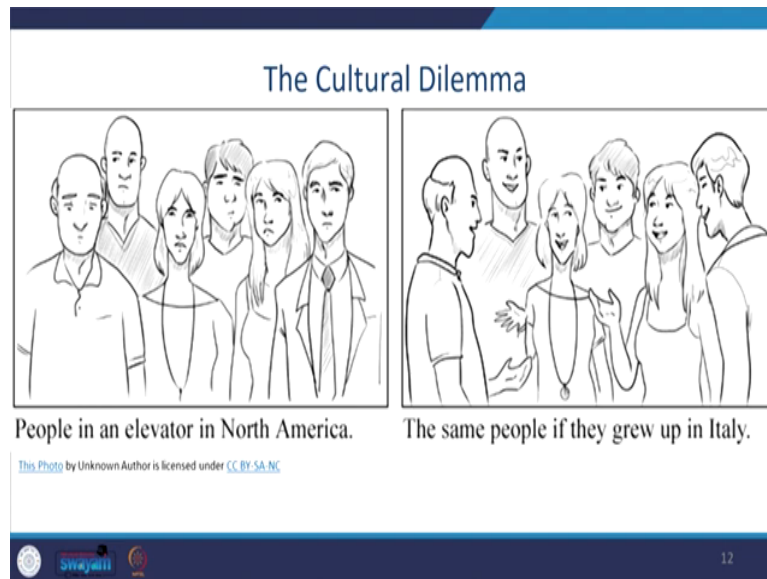


Now, when a person communicates either he communicates horizontally or he communicates vertically. When you communicate horizontally you are aware of space zones but when you communicate vertically you must be aware of power zones. You appear, I mean, here in this case the speaker becomes more important. And that is why? I sometimes think the speaker is given the elevated position is not it?

There is a rostrum fine, and the speaker gets more importance because the need of hour is that the speaker should be seen. Now, what is the philosophy behind it? Many scholars who have done a lot of research in the area of proxemics, they say that audience, members expect the speakers to be seen and that is why from the toe to the top, if they can see the speaker they are not only going to make easy the task of the speaker.

But they are also going to make it easier for themselves because it is a question of credibility and rapport. The moment you create a rapport simply by passing a smile or by making yourself visible the task becomes easier, my dear friends. But when the culture things come in and between then there at times can be a dilemma depending upon the way.

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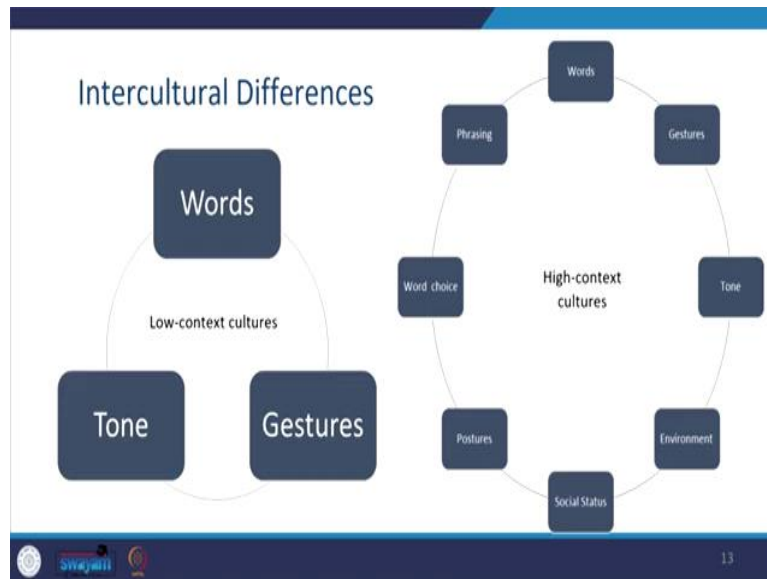


people of one culture actually have got meanings for the other cultures. People in an elevator in North America they can be very close. But at the same time if they have grown in Italy it will completely be different. In this regard, I can give you an example which I read in one of the books, where one person who was invited for a talk and the people who went to greet him or to escort him there were two in number and they sat in the front seat.

Whereas the rear seat was empty and the invited guest was put in the rear seat. Now what happened? The speaker, I mean, the invited guest kept on thinking throughout, why when there was a lot of space why these two people could sit in the front seat, by the side of the driver? I mean, he got the clue in the next meeting when once again he was called. And there again the same thing happened this time three people came to escort him and all the three sat in the front seat. The speaker or the invited guest felt it quite awkward and then when he tried to understand it with the help of some of the communication coaches. So, he would say that these people believe that--- You and I are close friends. The meaning is that we always allow more room to the guests, fine. Now, we also come across such sort of experiences in many cultures, fine. And it is here that culture plays a very dominant role in communication.

Now, here you can find the people of our two context cultures, people of high context cultures. They actually find the meaning in totality.

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Whereas people of low context cultures they only believe in words tones and gestures. That is why? As I might have discussed in the lecture on culture that people of high context culture they believe while they make a meaning, they make a meaning out of the word choice, phrasing, words, gestures, tone, environment, social status and posture. People of Japan especially, you will find that they are people of high context culture.

And they give too much primacy to the meaning which is based on all these factors. So, it is very difficult when you are communicating across cultures.

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Contd...

- Mehrabian says: "Status manifests itself by relaxed posture and way of interacting."
- Most non verbal communication at work in U.S. reinforces power.
- You and I are close friends.

As I have said earlier and let me once again make a mention of what Albert Mehrabian says that a status manifests itself by relaxed posture and way of interacting. That is why you can find some people when they are having a relaxed posture. Especially, the CEOs and others

actually have more space in the office. Most non-verbal communication at work in U.S. reinforces power. I have already made a mention of one episode where it is said-- you and I are close friends.

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Perceptions of Space

1. Visual space
2. Auditory space
3. Olfactory Space
4. Thermal Space
5. Tactile space

Proper spatial awareness through a different sensorial medium is essential for a speaker to recognize the situational context and changes.

Enhanced perception of spaces leads to increased output in communication.

15

Now, my dear friends, there are other perceptions of space also visual space, auditory space, fine. Visual space is something that you can see auditory space then olfactory space. I mean, smell thermal space, fine. Then tactile space-- touch. So, proper spatial awareness through a different sensorial medium is essential for a speaker to recognize the situational context and changes.

Enhanced perception of spaces leads to increased output in communication. Now, you might also find a difference that if the physical property of a room if the rows are properly arranged, if there are proper windows fine. So, as a speaker if you have been able to understand everything that it is quite comfortable for the audience because as a speaker you want that your content or your matter has to be heard by them.

So now, how is space in public speaking? All of us as speakers be conscious of others near us, especially if they are behind us.




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Space in Public Speaking

- ❖ We are conscious of others near us, especially if they are behind us.
- ❖ A Speaker is prepared to be unaware of physical surroundings.
- ❖ A speaker should become conscious of how close he should stand to the audience.
- ❖ It is easier to understand the speech of a person one can see.

Anglo-Saxons stand at a reserved distance when conversing, while the Spanish and Italian peoples stand much closer. At international conferences you can often see Americans and British people edging backwards, pursued by Italians and Spaniards trying to get to their usual degrees of closeness.

(Christopher Turk in *Effective Speaking*)

16

A speaker is prepared to be unaware of, most of the speakers are quite unaware of the physical surroundings. That is why let me tell you here that before the day of the speech or before the time of the speech as a speaker, it is better if you can go and check the acoustics if you can check the physical setting. Also find that will you be able to face the audience in such a manner and the host organization always welcomes your suggestion.

And even any change at the end can also be brought into. A speaker should become conscious of how close he should stand to the audience? So that he can give full concentration to the audience. It is also easier to understand the speech of a person, one can see. I was talking about the visibility as a speaker let yourself be seen because when you are seen you are heard, my dear friend.

In this regard a very famous statement made by Christopher Turk in *Effective Speaking* says, “Anglo-Saxons stand at a reserved distance, reserved distance when conversing during conversation they actually make a reserved distance Anglo-Saxons. While the Spanish and Italian peoples stand much closer at international conferences you can often see Americans and British people edging backwards.”

They will always try to keep themselves backwards, pursued by Italians and Spaniards trying to get to their usual degrees of closeness. They will always try to come near and both the British people and the American people they will always try to withdraw because they have a different meaning associated with the space.

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Some Tips

- ✓ Check the room and physical arrangement in advance.
- ✓ Request for change if required. Ensure proper ventilation.
- ✓ Be aware of audience's cultural background.
- ✓ Push the rostrum to one side and stand in front of the table.

17

Now, before we come to wind up this talk, but let me here tell you that when you have already made a sort of physical setting of the entire room, please also ensure that if there is any interference in and between that may actually mark the entire show. It is better to check the room and physical arrangement in advance. Request for change if it is required, ensure your proper ventilation.

Sometimes or the other, you will find they are gasping for breath. So, if you can find it earlier that whether there is a proper ventilation or not? This will make your task easier and this will also make the time of the audience members also amenable. Be aware of audience, members cultural background. Push the rostrum because most of us are habituated to be on the rostrum, fine.

So, push the rostrum to one side and stand in front of the table so that you may be seen properly, so that you may be judged properly, so that you may be heard properly. Because one thing that is very important in terms or with reference to public speakers that they have worked hard to drive home their points. And only because of a certain lapse in terms of physical setting either of chair or either of the arrangement that may actually destroy the entire show. So, as a speaker we need to be aware of all these things.


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Digital Proxemics

- Proxemics is a marker of intercultural communication.
- With increasing trends toward digital culture, one can observe changes in human perceptions of space too.

“As culture changes, so changes the rule of proxemics”
(McArthur 25)

- i. Smart cities
- ii. Digital classrooms
- iii. Sentient objects
- iv. Wearable e-gadgets



The above additions to our communication space have redefined proxemics on multiple levels.

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18

Nowadays, we also come across digital proxemics where inter cultural communication is a marker. And with the modern day trends moving towards digital culture, we also have to ensure how to make utilization of a space when we are communicating digitally as culture changes. So also changes the rule of proxemics says Macarthur. Have you not been aware of the talk of smart cities, digital classrooms, sentient objects, wearable e-gadgets?

All these are actually going to make or mar the entire content of a speaker's speech if he or she is not conscious of it. These conditions can apply to our communication spaces because they have actually been redefined, fine. In terms of proxemics on several levels, my dear friend. So, you will, at times, find that if you are not conscious of all these space meanings perhaps you are not going to be successful as a speaker.

(Refer Slide Time: 34:00)

“Proximity breeds familiarity, and familiarity
breeds comfort.”

- Nicholas Sparks in *The Lucky One*

Thank You

19

But before I bring this talk to an end, let me make a mention of one of the lines from one of the famous films by Nicholas Sparks who in “The Lucky One”, says---“Proximity breeds familiarity and familiarity breeds comfort.” Meaning thereby, as a speaker you should try to create a sort of familiarity and while creating familiarity one also has to be conscious of space meanings.

One has to be conscious of the proximity behaviour not only of a speaker but also of the receivers. I think, you will take these things into consideration before you go to make your speech, presentation, interview or debate. And these will help you a lot in making you successful as a public speaker, with this may I take your leave and leave the space for you. Thank you very much.