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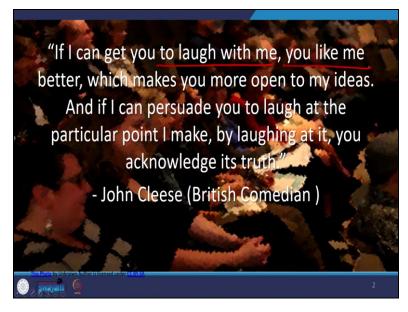
# Lecture: 36 Use of Humour in Speeches

Good morning friends and welcome back to NPTEL online certification course on Public Speaking. My dear friends, in the previous lecture we have discussed speeches for special occasions and even prior to that we talked about the types of speeches where more stress was laid on informative speeches. Now by now, you already might have an idea as to how during public speaking situations, you come across different circumstances.

At times, many of you may feel while delivering the talk that you are losing out your crowd. The audience members are not in sync with you and if the nature of your speech is academic or informative or where you are trying to make a lot of efforts and you find the audience members not becoming interested, what actually is the way out? And that is why today we are going to talk about the use of humour in speech.

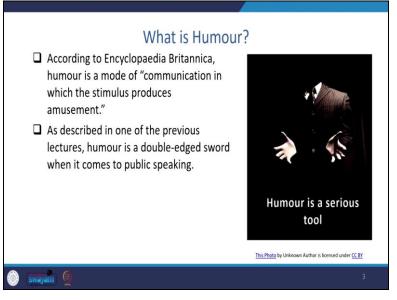
You might at times think that while giving a speech is it also important to make use of humour and if so, why is humour so important? What if we do not include humour in our speeches. Now before we go into the depth of the discussion of humour, let us try to understand what is humour and how does humour help.

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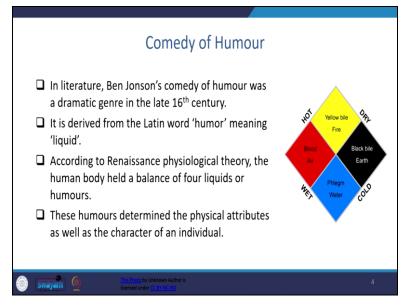
Let us take a quote by a British comedian named John Cleese who says---" If I can get you to laugh with me you like me better which makes you more open to my ideas. And if I can persuade you to laugh at particular point I make by laughing at it you acknowledge its truth." Now what is the essence, the essence is that when you include something in your speech that can make somebody laugh perhaps people will acknowledge people will like. Life is full of harsh moments and in order to face the hardships of life, you need a little bit of laugh, little bit of humour. Because humour not only lessons the boredom and the envy in life, but it also prepares you to take the impending dangers and the challenges very seriously.

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Now let us have a look at how we can understand humour. Encyclopaedia Britannica defines humour as 'a mode of communication in which this stimulus produces amusement.' Fine, if there are only complicated things in life, life will become a very boring exercise. An exercise in futility. We have already discussed in some of the previous lectures that while humour can bring a sort of liveliness in humans' life and in subjects, it is at the same time a double-edged sword. Because in our general, conversations also we say it is very easy to make a person weep but it is very difficult to make a person laugh that is why it actually requires a lot of effort. You will find literature is replete with such examples of humour and specially if you're familiar with English literature, the term comedy of humours has gained a momentum, my dear friends.

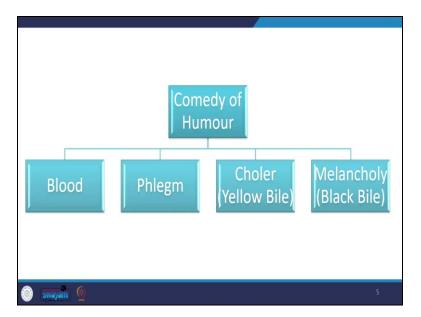
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One must have heard the name of Ben Johnson who actually propounded this comedy of humour as a dramatic genre in the late 16th century. And while doing so one must also remember that this term humour actually means liquid. Renaissance physiological Theory says the human body held a balance of four liquids or humours, four liquids or humours what are those four liquids in literature we call them blood, phlegm, fine, blood, phlegm, then choler and then melancholy.

These actually create our moods like the weather. Human psyche, human mind also at times is hot, at times is dry at times is cold, at times is wet. So, these humours actually determine the physical attributes as well as the character of an individual. Now, you might have understood how difficult it is to create laughter. So, creating laughter is a very difficult exercise.

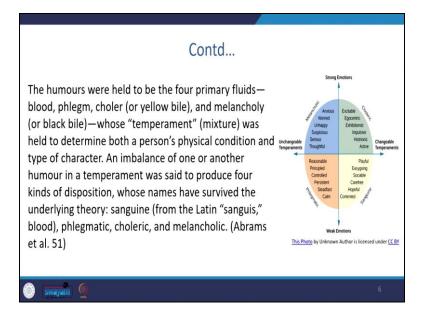
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Now in Ben Johnson's usage of the term comedy of humour these four elements play a vital role the very first is blood. So, the more blood a person has, happy a person can be. Then comes phlegm from the Greek word flama which actually means something that comes out of inflammation no when a man becomes angry, fine when a man is infuriated. So, flama is the guiding principle behind that flame.

And then comes collar that is yellow bile and then there is the last one that is melancholy which actually results out of black bile. Now at times you might have heard people saying he is melancholic by nature meaning thereby he always prefers sadness. He always likes suffering but when we talk about the creation of laughter or humour, all these four are very important. These humours were held to be the primary fluids. Blood, as I said blood, phlegm choler and melancholy or black bile--- whose temperament was held to determine both a person's physical condition and type of character.

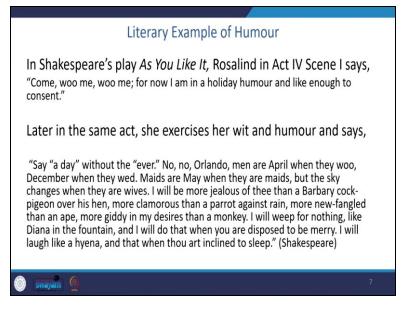
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Now here you can find on the right hand side when a person is sanguine means happy. So, there are certain characteristics he is playful, easy going sociable, sociable Carefree hopeful and contented. On the other hand ,when one is phlegmatic one becomes reasonable principled controlled persistent and calm. And then when we talk about colonic and melancholic choleric is excitable egocentric we have already talked about ego in some of the lectures and then comes melancholic.

So, weak emotions are sanguine and phlegmatic, whereas strong emotions are melancholic and choleric. Now an imbalance of one or another humour in a temperament was said to produce four kinds of disposition or mood sanguine then phlegmatic choleric and melancholic.

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Now let us go back to the pages of literature and take an example from Shakespeare's one of the famous plays entitled *As You Like It* most of you might have come across this play either in the form of a story or in the form of a full play where it is actually a love affair between two girls and two boys Rosalind and Celia and Orlando and Oliver. Now here we can take an example how once Rosalind tells Orlando---- "Come, woo me, woo me, for now I am in a holiday humour and like enough to consent."

So, now I am in a very playful mood and I may consent; consent to marry or consent to approve of your advances and later in the same act Rosalind says. Because there is a talk going on between Rosalind and Orlando. And Orlando does not know that the person he is talking to who is actually disguised as Ganymede, Rosalind is disguised as Ganymede and Orlando is in love with but Orlando does not know that it is Rosalind only.

So, Rosalind tells him that if he could see his real Rosalind who he is in love with what Orlando could have done. And then Orlando actually tells a lot of promises and at one place he says---- 'a day and a year' and in response to that Rosalind says---- "Say a day without the ever. No, no. Orlando men are April when they woo, December when they wed. Maids are May when they are Maids, but the sky changes when they are wives. I will be more jealous of thee than a Barbary-cock pigeon over his hen, more clamorous than a parrot against rain, more new-fangled than an ape, more giddy in my desires than a monkey. I will weep for nothing like Diana in the fountain, and I will do that when you are disposed to be merry. I laugh like a hyena and that when thou art inclined to sleep." So, here Rosalind actually talks about the changing nature not only of men but also of women that how when they are in love they are just like April, I mean spring season. And when they are wed, they are just like December meaning thereby, cold, winter and then she also talks about women that when they are maids they are like May but the sky changes when they are wives. So, an example of humour. Now you might be thinking why is humour important in public speaking, my dear friends.

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# Use of Humour in Public Speaking

- "Humor is a broad, multifaceted term that represents anything that people say or do that others perceive as funny and tends to make them laugh, as well as the mental processes that go into both creating and perceiving such an amusing stimulus, and also the emotional response of mirth involved in the enjoyment of it." (Martin et al. 16)
- It is a fundamentally social phenomenon and forms an integral part of all types of Public Speaking including speeches, and presentations.

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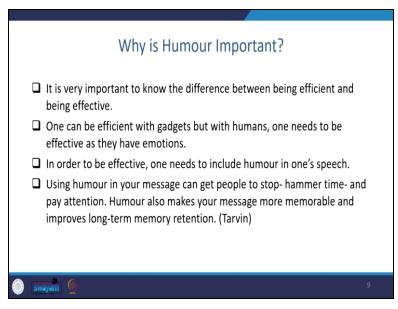


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In this regard let us let us take a quote by Martin and others who say--- "Humor is a broad, multifaceted term that represents anything that people say or do that others perceive as funny and tends to make them laugh' and also the emotional response of mirth involved in the enjoyment of it. So, with a little amount of mirth, the importance of your speech as a speaker actually increases.

So, it is a socially fundamental phenomena and it forms an integral part of all types of public speaking even of speeches, presentations and even in conversations.

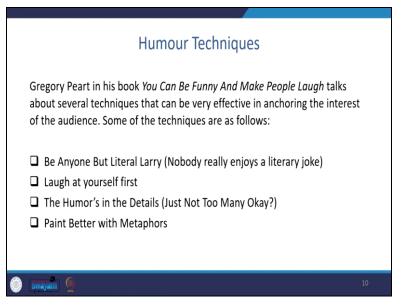
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Now when we try to find out the importance of humour we can find that as a public speaker one has to be efficient, no doubt, but you do not have to be only efficient rather you also have to be effective. And in order to be effective it is not only that your gadgets will work rather it is your emotions and it is only through humour that we can bring back the crowd which is distracted. The crowd which is deviant, can be brought back to the main part of your discussion.

Using humour in one's message, people can get to stop hammer time and pay attention. So, in order to bring back the attention of the audience members, some amount of humour can be used because humour can make your message memorable and it can also improve a long-term memory retention. You might have found that even in tragedies also in order to understand or make people understand the worth of tragedy, some comic relief is introduced even by veterans like Shakespeare.

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Now, what could be the techniques of creating humour? In this regard, let us take one very important book by Gregory Peart who in his book *You Can Be Funny And Make People Laugh*. He actually talks about several techniques where he says that these techniques can be very effective in anchoring the interest of the audience and these techniques are: First is-- Be anyone but literal Larry. What is the meaning the meaning is you can be anyone but see to it that you do not become a Literal Larry.

Because if you provide them a literary humour or a joke, not everyone can understand. One must also have the power to laugh at himself. Sometimes in order to make audience members entertain, you need to create a sort of humour on yourself. You might have, at times, found people creating a sort of laughter out of own experiences. The humour lies in the details, fine and one has to paint humour with the help of metaphors.

Sometimes some of your own experiences, some of these situations where you find that contrasts can also make humour possible. Sometimes you might have heard many people creating or wrapping some amount of sarcasm through humour in order to make people understand because humour is such a sort of device through which we want to say what we want to say but in a very light manner.

Sometimes you can ask the fun questions. By asking fun questions you can bring back the deviating crowd members or the audience members to the discussion table. Now, there can be several styles of humour we can discuss---- one is affiliative. I mean, something a humour that can affiliate, fine.

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Then again, there is self-enhancing, aggressive, and self-defeating.

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# Styles of Humour

Psychologist Rod A. Martin identified four broad styles of humour:

- Affiliative humour is employed to enhance one's relationships with others.
- Self-enhancing humour allows to find mirth in difficult situations.
- Aggressive humour comprises sarcasm, teasing, ridicule, etc.

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• Self-defeating humour consists of sabotaging oneself for the mere approval of others. (Abadi)

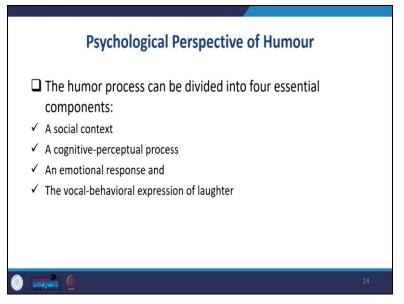
We can also take the examples of how we can have these styles. Psychologist Rod A Martin has given these four types of humour where Affiliated humoure is meant to enhance one's relationship with others. You cannot make use of humour with especially with strangers whom you do not know. Because at times, the humour can also backfire then comes self-enhancing humour which allows to find mirth even in difficult situations. You might have come across in several movies and in several books also that out of difficult situations in order to lessen, in order to lessen the complication, people also create self-enhancing humour. Then comes aggressive humour which can comprise sarcasm, there can be a note of sarcasm, fine. Sometimes it can be ridiculous also, sometimes it could be teasing, also even in even in some poetry also, you can find there are several satires where you know these poets while criticizing others, they actually take the help of satires.

For example, in Dryden's *Mac Flecknoe*, the way a poet has been criticized satirically and while doing so, Dryden makes use of some such devices where he says----" Besides his goodly fabric fills the eye", while he was talking about the physical deformities of the other person but look at the use of words. While he says besides his goodly fabric fills the eye. while he is again going to hit upon the other person he says----- "Shadwell alone of all my sons is he who stands confirmed in stupidity."

Look at the use of words conformed in stupidity I mean they are actually he tries to deride the stature of the other poet and then there is self-defeating humour. So, self-defeating humour is a device where you decrease your own importance just simply for the approval of others.

Now what could be the psychological perspective of humour? Why we often say that humour is very important and we need to make use of humour.

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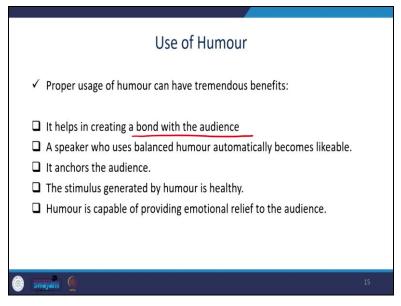


So, it can be practised in a social context, it can also be practised in a cognitive perceptual process where you make use of knowledge and in order to make use of knowledge while you are trying to deride others or make a sarcastic remark. Sometimes, it also can have a context of emotional response and sometimes she can also find it not only in terms of your voice but also in terms of your behavioural.

In order just to create a sort of laughter, sometimes you can also find people making use of humour and not only by using words but also by making use of non-words. Is humour advantageous? Yes, of course. Actually, humour helps in creating a bond with the audience. Not every now and then the audience members are attentive. So, in order to drive home your own points you actually take recourse to humour.

But not everyone can create humour, my dear friends. A speaker who uses balanced humour automatically is appreciated by everyone.

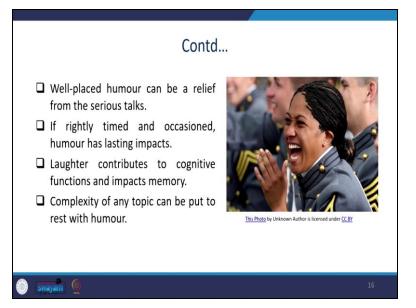
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So, you need to understand before you are going to make use of humour, you actually need to rehearse it you need to practice it sometimes you can practice it on your own also. If actually tried humour can help you bind the audience and these stumulus generated by humour has to be very healthy. Humour is capable of providing emotional relief to the audience. In most of this Shakespearian tragedies you will find that Shakespeare uses comic relief.

And in comic relief it provides some amount of humourous dialogues so that the audience members be prepared for the coming seriousness of tragedy.

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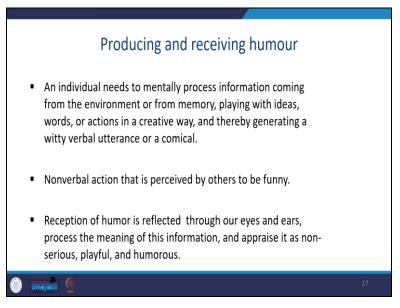


And then well-placed humour can be a relief from the serious talks. Most of the talks as we have been saying, are persuasive in nature and in order to persuade your audience, you have to well place your humour because if it is rightly timed and rightly occasioned, it has got an

everlasting impression. Laughter contributes to cognitive function and it actually impacts and affects memory even a complicated topic can be put or can be made easier with the help of humour.

Now while producing and receiving humour on both the occasions one has to be very careful and what are the things that one should keep into consideration.

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Any individual needs to mentally process information coming from--- sometimes from environment, from memory, sometimes from ideas and these are actually given in such a creative way that even when you are going to make use of it, it generates with verbal utterance a sort of comical atmosphere which results in a sort of warmth. Sometimes nonverbal also.

As I said, and then when you are receiving humour as a receiver, one can find I mean, even as a speaker also you can find whether your humour has been rightly hinted, rightly directed how can you find that by looking at the non-verbal behaviour of your crowd. Through our eyes and ears we can process the meaning and approach it as a non-serious, playful and humourous manner. Now as a public speaker what sort of humour can one use? You will find that there are certain devices namely anecdotes.

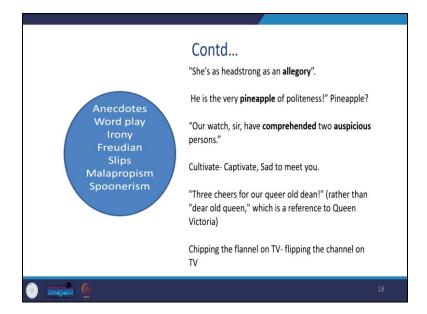
You might be thinking what are these anecdotes and how can we because not everyone is equally trained to make use of humour in his or her speech. Anecdotes actually come from the Greek word Anecdota that actually means unpublished. So, as a speaker when you are making use of anecdotes, maybe it is from your personal experience, maybe it is from hard experiences but then you have to see that they are going to be relevant.

Then comes word-play, my dear friends. We have already said that one word can have different meanings depending upon the capability of the speaker. So, sometimes the same word but played in such a manner can have different meanings. Sometimes one can make use of irony and you are well aware of irony. Irony is a situation where what the speaker says and what the audience understand, the audience might know what is intended whereas the people on whom that is done are unaware of it. So, we can have several dramatic ironies situational irony, fine.

And then there are Freudian slips. You want to say something but because of your unconscious, fine? All of us we have an unconscious. So, when we try to some say something and something that is already repressed in our psyche, it actually comes out that may be a form of a Freudian slip sometimes you are trying to address somebody but instead of using his name, you use somebody else's name. How is that possible? It is only because somebody else's name is in your unconscious.

And then comes Malapropism which is actually coined after a one character named Mrs Malaprop in Sheridan's drama *The Rivals*, where this lady makes use of such words when she tries to make use of her word, she actually uses something else. But what she intends is totally different. Then comes the spoonerism. Now this spoonerism was also coined after Archibald Spooner who while making use of words transposed the words and that actually resulted in a sort of spoonerism.

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Now here are certain examples, say: She's as head is strong as an allegory. She's as headstrong as an allegory. Now the intended word is alligator and what is used is allegory. Now at one occasion one of the characters says--- He is the very pineapple of politeness! Pineapple? Actually, the speaker wanted to say Pinnacle and uses pineapple. So, this is actually an example of malapropism. Then, "Our watch, sir have comprehended two auspicious persons."

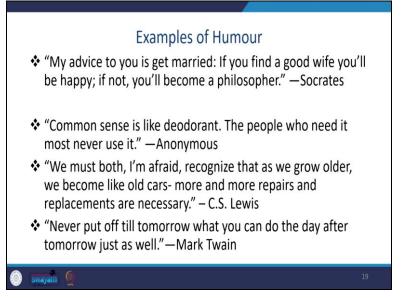
So, while the speaker wanted to make use of apprehended, the term comprehended was used and instead of auspicious the term suspicious was to be used. Now, again an example of Freudian slips. While somebody wanted to say Captivate and the speaker said cultivate. Sometimes, when you want to say 'glad to meet you' and because you are in a different sort of mental condition 'you say sad to meet you.'

So, these are all sorts of slips. Again, let us take an example of spoonerism from Spooner, a 19th century famous writer who says--- Three cheers for our queer old Dean. Now actually the speaker wanted to say-- dear old queen and the words have been transposed fine. And after Spooner this term spoonerism got a lot of momentum. Again, while somebody says chipping the flannel on TV fine, chipping the flannel on TV. So, flipping the channel on TV. So, you can find how the words have been transposed.

In place of flipping, chipping is used because it is case of paraplexia according to Sigmund Freud. Now, you might be thinking how one can create humour, as I have been saying, that it is very difficult to create humour. There you can you can find quite a good number of books

available where there are so, many funny quotes which can be used, but remember while making use of it, first you have to understand whether it is relevant or not. Let us take some of the examples of some celebrated authors how they have made use of humour.

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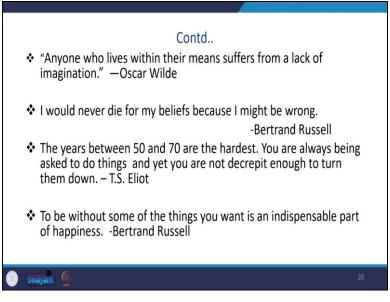


Socrates: "My advice to you is get married; if you find a good wife you will be happy; if not you will become a philosopher." Now, look at the essence of the words again. There is an anonymous quote—"Common sense is like deodorant. The people who need it most never use it." I know, I think you know how what is the intended message but while making use of words the speaker very cleverly.

But remember that the audience members should have the capability of understanding these humours. Now C.S Lewis's one of the quotes--- "We must both, I am afraid, recognize that as we grow older we become like old cars more and more repairs and replacements are necessary." You'll find that when you are talking or delivering a talk on 'Aging' you can make use of such expressions where what you say is right.

But then intentionally you are right but the way you have created it or curated it is very challenging. Mark Twain says--- "Never put off till tomorrow what you can do the day after tomorrow just as well."

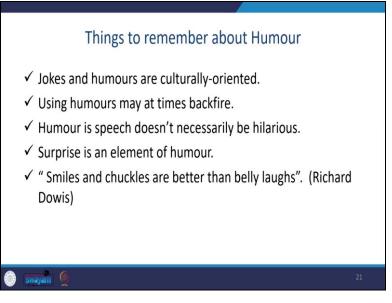
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There is quite a good number of examples which can be used as a form of humour in your speech let us take some more examples. One by Oscar Wilde---" Anyone who lives within their means suffers from a lack of imagination." Now look at it, even Bertrand Russell says---" I would never die for my beliefs because I might be wrong." So, this can come into the category of self-depreciating humour.

And what T. S. Eliot says is even an eye-opener----" The years between 50 and 70 are the hardest. You are always being asked to do things and yet you are not decrepit enough to turn them down." So, when you are between 50 and 70 this is a very hard period, you are always being asked to do things but you are not that decrepit, you are not that old to turn things down. Another by Bertrand Russell---" To be without some of the things you want is an indispensable part of happiness," my dear friends.

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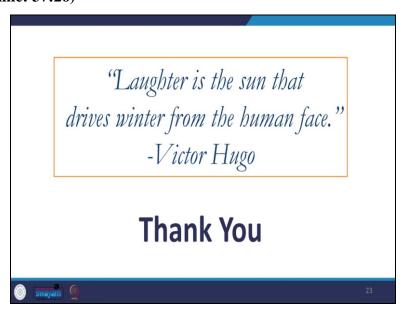
There is quite a good number of humours and jokes but one has always to remember that when you are making use of humour, one has to understand that humours are also culturally conditioned. If you are making use of some humourous remarks or jokes and the audience members come from a different culture, maybe it can backfire. So, jokes and humours are culturally oriented. Using humours may at times backfire, because you do not know or do not understand the cultures of the audience members. Humour is speech, of course, human in speech does not necessarily be hilarious. I mean, if you simply feel that by making use of humour you simply want to make people laugh no you simply want to drive home your thoughts, drive home your points without making them hilarious otherwise the basic purpose of a speech will be lost.

Of course, surprise is an essential element of humour .In this regard what Richard Dowis in his book *The Lost Art of Speech* says is---" Smiles and chuckles are better than belly laughs". You will often find that when you make use of humours, people may chuckle, they may smirk, they may smile but your main intention is not to make them have belly laughs, fine. Now there are some points of caution while you are making use of humour.

What to avoid while using humour? Let us not make use of too complicated jokes. Also, in a speech one should not include too many jokes or humour and while our speaker is going to make use of humour he or she should not announce that a joke is coming. Actually many speakers have said that it automatically comes. Once you become a seasoned speaker, you will find that these humours automatically come.

There is no use and rather one should always try to be beware of making use of controversial topics and also of unacceptable language. One should always see to it that making use of humour that is based on ethnic, based on religious issues, based on gender and other human deformities. So, one should not. That is why Dryden in *Mac Flecknoe* says—'Besides his goodly fabric fills the eye. He is actually talking about the rotund belly but how he says it. He wraps it in the form of a language and says-- besides his goodly fabric fills the eye. My dear friends, while as a public speaker all of us should try to understand that humour is simply a facilitator. Humour should not create unnecessary noises or should not give rise to unnecessary threats or unnecessary controversy. As I have already mentioned in the beginning that humour is a double-edged sword and while making use of it, one needs to practice it, rehearse it on his own.

So, in order to bring the distracted audience members to the main discussion, humour is to be used. But it has always to be used with caution. Before we come to wind up this talk, let me make a mention of a French poet playwright and writer's quote, Victor Hugo's quote, where he says.



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"Laughter is the sun that drives winter from the human face." So, let us laugh but laugh simply to make others laugh, and understand, but not to make the audience members hilarious. With this let me come to wind up this talk wishing you good luck laughter and Chuckles but not belly jokes. Thank you very much. I wish you all a good day.