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## **Style, Tone, and Voice in English Language Teaching: A Philosophical Exploration of the Relationship Between Teacher Communication Style and Student Comprehension**

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### **Abstract**

The study explored the intricate relationships between style, tone, and voice in English language teaching, examining how these concepts shape the pedagogical landscape through the lens of philosophy. The study reveals how style, tone and voice are not merely aesthetic beliefs, but rather, they embody the values, beliefs, and ideologies of teachers and learners. The study argued that a deeper understanding of style, tone and voice can foster more authentic, empathetic, and transformative language learning experiences. By probing the philosophical underpinnings of these concepts, the study aimed to inspire English teachers to cultivate a more divergent and reflective approach to their pedagogical practice.

**Key Words:** Language learning, style, tone, voice, philosophical perspective, English language teaching, pedagogical and teacher.

### **Introduction**

Effective communication is a crucial aspect of teaching and learning, particularly in English language teaching. Communication is the mutual exchange of meaning between the sender and the receiver (Akpan, 2025). Therefore, the English language teacher must aim at achieving this mutuality. Thus, the teachers' communication styles, including their style, tone, and voice play a major role in shaping student understanding and comprehension, engagement, and motivation. Effective communication skills are essential for teachers to convey information, ideas, and instructions to students. The teachers therefore need to develop their verbal and nonverbal communication skills for clarity of thoughts, ideas, instructions, and reinforce teaching. To effectively achieve this, language must be the centre-piece of communication.

Language according to Akpan (2025) is primarily and principally an interactive system in which meaning is arbitrarily related to its symbol and used by people of the same or related communities. This therefore suggests that language serves to differentiate registers and people often study different styles through language use. The teachers then need to select from the 'linguistic bank' available at their disposals the forms, and structures that effectively relay the

communication needs of the students. Commenting on Style, Fish (1986) asserts that style is the peculiarity and uniqueness of doing things. This position brings to the fact, English language teachers need to develop their personal traits, uniqueness, approaches and methods for them to communicate effectively with their students for the latter's understanding and creation of meaning. Meaning according to Akpan (2019) is an opinion and its meaning interpretation is contingent on circumstances. What this means is that, what we say and how we say it, is influenced by who we are talking to and where and when the interaction is taking place. This supports an earlier position by Hybels and Weaver (1989) when they posited that communication, meaning and their efficacy lie on three levels: these are the actual intention of the speaker (teacher), the information (message) of the speaker (teacher), and what the audience (students) thinks the speaker (teacher) is saying.

On the other hand, the teachers tone refers to the emotional tone conveyed by the teachers' voice, facial expressions, and body language. This may be positive, negative or unconcerned attitude. While the teachers voice refers to the way a teacher uses their vocal qualities to communicate with students which may include, volume, pitch, inflection and pace. However, the relationships between teacher style and student comprehension is complex and influenced by various philosophical perspectives such as existentialism, phenomenology, poststructuralism, and pragmatism. This aim at exploring the relationships between teaching style and student comprehension in English language teaching, examining the role of philosophical perspectives in shaping teacher communication.

### **The Concepts of Style, Tone and Voice in English Language Teaching**

According to Kamalu (2018) nobody has ever really known what the term style means, and in any case, hardly anyone seems to care. This is where the burden of the concept of style lie. Oftentimes, people refer to style as a way of doing things, for instance, style of dressing, style of talking, style of teaching, style of walking, style of dancing and so on (Kamalu, 2018). However, for our present paper, we will adopt the earlier definition of style as that which exhibits a history that is anything but uniform (Eco, 2004). Thus, style in English language teaching refers to the unique way in which a teacher communicates with students. This may include the way the teacher use non-verbal cues, example, body language, facial expressions, and tone of voice. It can also be the teacher's language use, such as, the vocabulary, grammar, and syntax or sometime it can be the way in which the teachers organize their speech or writing.

A teacher's style can influence student engagement, motivation, and learning outcomes, for example, a teacher who uses a formal and structural style may be perceived as authoritative and knowledgeable, while a teacher who uses an informal and conversational style may be seen as approachable and supportive. On the other hand, tone, in the context of language, refers to the pitch or sound quality used to convey meaning and distinguish between words. Expanding this definition Udondata (2002) opines that tone include vocal quality, an accent or inflection expression of a mood or emotion, style or manner of expression in speaking or writing and pitch constituting an element in the intonation of a phrase or sentence. A teacher's tone can significantly impact student motivation and engagement. For example, a teacher who uses a supportive and encouraging tone may help students feel more confident and motivated, while a teacher who uses a critical or dismissive tone may lead to student demotivation and

disengagement.

Voice in English language refers to the unique personality, perspective, and values that a teacher conveys through their communication. It includes authenticity, authority and empathy. A teacher's voice can play a crucial role in building student trust, engagement, and motivation. For example, a teacher who uses an authentic and empathetic voice may be able to establish a positive and supportive learning environment, while a teacher who uses an authoritative but distant voice may struggle to connect with their students.

The concepts of style, tone, and voice have significant implications for English language teaching. Teachers should be aware of their own communication style, tone and voice, and make conscious efforts to adapt them to meet the needs of their students, by being mindful of their style, tone, and voice, English language teachers can create a more engaging, motivating, and effective learning environment for their students. But how does style, tone, and voice intersect with teacher's communication and student learning? The simple answer to this question is discussed in the paragraphs that follow.

A teacher must develop clear and concise teaching style which helps students understand complex concepts and retain information. This is in line with the positions of Malinowski (1923), Bloomfield (1933) and Wittgenstein (1953) on meaning and clarity when they defined meaning in terms of the extra linguistic world. Also, a well-developed and structured teaching style such as the use of visual aids and transitions, will facilitate student learning, engagement and understanding. Commenting on the importance of visual aids in communication Akpan (2025) asserts that visual aids such as graphs, charts, video, maps, photographs, diagrams, leave behinds, demonstration and pictorials can help the audience (student) in better comprehension and easy recall of the information.

It should be stated that the aim of every teacher is to engage the student, inspire their interest, persuade them and create in them the mental picture where they (students) leave the classroom environment more satisfied and with a lasting impression. According to Akpan (2025, p. 135) "speaking appeals more to the ear (oral), the visual aids appeal to the eyes (sight). This is so because people learn and recall things by both hearing information and seeing information". Simply put, visual aids are a supplement to words.

Furthermore, a teaching style that encourages student participation, feedback, and questioning promotes active learning and critical thinking. The fact of feedback as a necessary ingredient in communication cannot be overemphasized. This feedback is what Akpan (2003) called "what effect" does the teaching has on the students. In terms of tone, a teacher's tone should have emotional connection with the students, influence their motivation and make them create a "buy in"; in what Akpan (2025) calls "attention catcher". The teacher should as well create a conducive classroom atmosphere and give it all the necessary ambiance for teaching and learning to thrive. Importantly also, a teacher's tone when providing feedback and assessment can impact student self-esteem, confidence, and future learning.

Voice is also important as it conveys the teacher's authority, authenticity and credibility and gives the student sense of fulfilment and confidence. To promote deeper learning, the teacher should have passion, interest and patience with student. This will sure inspire the students and promote better learning and understanding. Let the teacher develop and demonstrate empathy, create a safe and supportive learning environment.

### **Teacher-Student Intersection in Communication and Learning**

This is observed in the following ways which help the teacher to function optimally and the student to understand and comprehend effectively. First, the teacher's style, tone and voice intersect through verbal and non-verbal cues; second, the teacher's style, tone, and voice influence their choice of instructional strategies such as group work, technology integration and lectures. And thirdly, the teacher's style, tone, and voice impact the way they provide feedback and assessment.

On the other hand, the teacher's style, tone and voice intersect with the student engagement and motivation, influencing their willingness to learn and participate. Again, the teacher's style, tone, and voice affect student understanding and retention of subject matter, impacting academic achievement and future learning. And finally, the teacher's style, tone, and voice influence students' emotional and social learning, including their self-esteem, confidence, and relationships with peers and teachers. Therefore, by considering the intersection of style, tone, and voice with teacher communication and student learning, educators can create more effective and supportive learning environment.

### **Philosophical Perspectives to Teacher Communication**

Teacher communication is a complex and multifaceted phenomenon that has been studied from various philosophical perspectives. These perspectives provide insights into the nature of teacher communication, its relationships with student learning, and the role of teachers in shaping the learning environment. In this study, we will discuss briefly four perspectives: existentialist, phenomenological, poststructuralist and pragmatist.

#### **(a) Existentialist Perspectives**

The father of existentialism is Soren Kierkegaard, a Danish philosopher and theologian. However, the philosopher who popularized existentialism and made it a mainstream philosophical movement is Jean-Paul Satre, a French philosopher. This theory emphasizes individual freedom and choice. From this perspective, teacher communication is seen as a personal and subjective experience. Teachers are viewed as autonomous individuals who bring their unique experiences, values, and beliefs to the classroom.

What this means is that the teachers is seen as an autonomous entity capable of shaping their communication style. Teachers are encouraged to take ownership of their teaching practices and to be authentic in their interactions with students. While the students on the other hand, are encouraged to understand that they are free and free to make whatever choices and decisions. What this means is that teachers are encouraged to create a learning environment that allows students to make choices about their education path.

#### **(b) Phenomenological Perspectives**

The phenomenological perspective is primarily associated with Edmund Husserl. The key focus of this perspectives focuses on the subjective experience of individuals. From this perspective, teacher communication is seen as a lived experience that is shaped by the teacher's intentions, values, and beliefs. Phenomenology highlights the importance of intentionality in teacher communication. Teachers are encouraged to be mindful of their intentions and to

communicate in a way that is authentic and transparent. Also, teachers are encouraged to use their bodies and voices to convey meaning and to create a sense of presence in the classroom.

#### **(c) Poststructuralist Perspectives**

Poststructuralism had its roots in France during the 1960s and 1970s, with several key figures contributing to its development. Some of the thinkers include Roland Barthes, a French literary critic and philosopher, Jacques Derrida, a French philosopher and Michel Foucault, a French philosopher and social theorist. (Heidegger, 1959).

Poststructuralism challenges traditional notions of power, authority, and knowledge from this perspective, teacher communication is seen as a site of power struggle and negotiation. It highlights the importance of power dynamics as teacher communication. Teachers are encouraged to be aware of their position of power and to communicate in a way that is inclusive and empowering.

Furthermore, poststructuralism emphasizes the importance of knowledge construction in teacher communication. Teachers are encouraged to view knowledge as a social construct and to communicate in a way that acknowledges the complexity and multiplicity of knowledge.

#### **(d) Pragmatist Perspectives**

Pragmatism is a philosophical movement that originated in the United States in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. Notable philosophers like Charles Sander Peirce, William James, John Dewey, George Herbert Mead and Richard Roty are behind this movement.

This movement emphasizes the importance of practicality and effectiveness in communication. From this perspective, teacher communication is seen as a means to achieve specific learning objectives. It emphasizes and encourages teachers to communicate in a way that achieves the desired learning outcomes and to be flexible and adaptable in their communication approach. Also, teachers are encouraged to communicate in a way that is clear, concise, and relevant to the learning objectives.

#### **Students Perspective to Teacher Communication**

Research has shown that students' perceptions and responses to different teacher communication styles can vary significantly. The perception can be positive communication. Students tend to respond positively to teachers who are warm, supportive, and empathetic. They feel more comfortable, motivated, and engaged in the learning process. Also, students appreciate teachers who communicate clearly and concisely. They are more likely to understand the material, follow instructions, and stay focused. Students equally respond well to teachers who offer genuine praise and encouragement. They feel more confident, motivated and willing to take risks.

However, students tend to be discouraged, deflated and demotivated when teachers are critical and dismissive. Therefore, teachers are encouraged to be willing to adapt their communication style to meet the diverse needs of their students.

Student may feel uncomfortable intimidated by teachers who are distant, unapproachable, or unresponsive. They may be less likely to ask questions, seek help, or participate in class discussions.

When teacher communication is ambiguous and unclear, students may feel confused, uncertain, and less likely to engage with the materials. Therefore, teachers are encouraged to strive to be aware of their communication style-and how it may impact their students. Equally, teachers should engage in professional development to improve their communication skills and build positive relationships with their students.

## Conclusion

The way teachers communicate with their students is a crucial aspect of the learning process. The style, tone, and voice used by teachers can significantly impact students' understanding, engagement, and motivation. From a philosophical perspective, the relationships between teacher communication styles and students' understanding is complex and multifaceted. This article explores the significance of style, tone, and voice in English language teaching examining the philosophical perspectives that inform teaching practices.

Firstly, the concept of style in teaching is essential. Teachers' style encompasses their personality, teaching methods, and communication strategies. From a philosophical perspective, the pragmatist approach emphasizes the importance of practicality and experimentation in teaching. Teachers should be adaptable and willing to try different approaches to meet the diverse needs of their students.

Tone is another critical aspect of teacher communication. Tone refers to the emotional tone conveyed by the teacher's voice, facial expressions, and body language. A positive tone can create a supportive and inclusive learning environment while a negative tone can lead to student disengagement and demotivation. The existentialist perspective highlights the significance of teacher authenticity and genuineness.

Voice is also a vital component of teacher communication. Teacher voice can influence students' perceptions of the subject matter and their motivation to learn. The poststructuralist perspective emphasizes the importance of challenging dominant narratives and promoting diversity and inclusivity.

Finally, the significance of style, tone and voice in English language teaching cannot be overstated. Teachers' communication styles have a profound impact on students' understanding, engagement, and motivation. Philosophical perspectives such as pragmatism, existentialism, poststructuralism and phenomenological offer valuable insights into the nature of teacher communication and student understanding. By embracing a deeper understanding of style, tone, and voice, educators can foster more effective communication, promote student-centered learning, and cultivate a more inclusive and supportive learning environment.

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