



Verbal Utilization

"Magic is hidden in the language we speak. The webs that you can tie and untie are at your command if only you pay attention to what you already have (language) and the structure of the incantations for growth."

Bandler and Grinder *The Structure of Magic*, 1975

Introduction

It may not come as a surprise that everyone with whom you communicate will behave in accordance with their own mental and linguistic map. Since language is a representation of personal experience, it makes sense that what someone says — and how they say it — is probably very important to them, and unknowingly a large part of their life.

My question is: *then why not put this valuable information to good use?*

After all, the words and phrasing someone uses in their communications are like magic to their ears. This is probably because these are *their* words, which came out of *their* mouth; a part of them probably feels some ownership over these things.

The skill of verbal utilization — when properly employed — can improve your communication ability drastically. Your communication partners may find themselves unknowingly appreciating it or feeling inexplicably at ease around you.

And so you know, this strategy is supplementary to your other communication strategies and simply requires attending to the way people express themselves.

Important Distinction

Nonverbal Utilization would have you focus on a person's outward attributes (i.e. health, age, attractiveness), their demeanor and body position (outgoingness, mood and energy, how they move (sluggish and slow, fast and abrupt)) in order to gain potentially valuable (but untested) information.

Verbal utilization, on the other hand, is that which follows once have engaged the person in an ongoing dialogue. To reiterate, this part of the process requires you to focus on *what they say* and *how they say it*.

You might, for example, ask yourself: is there a specific word they use repeatedly or emphasize tonally? How can I utilize this word when speaking with them?

Try-on Statements

One way to begin utilizing is by leveraging "Try-on" statements. These are designed to redeliver the information that you have gleaned from the person and their environment in a way that seems as almost intuitive on your part. Done repeatedly, the unconscious conclusion they may reach is that you *just understand* them. This is good place to be for any communicator.

For example: A person consistently talks about how *terrible* things are in the economy. They cite the *terrible* economy, a *terrible* lack of money and *terrible* leaders as the cause.

You could utilize this and say something to the effect of:

"You know, I notice that... the economy seems kind of *terrible* these days and I want to say that it gives me a *terrible* feeling about how the future is going to turn out."

"I get the feeling that the *terrible* economy might make you feel *terrible* also?"

Or, a contrasting statement: I would doubt that we really understand how *terrible* things are, in financial terms. This economy is something that will potentially make the lives of our children *terrible*.

Either way, the idea is that you are utilizing the emphasized words or phrase of this person in your conversation with them. Adding any of the following try-on phrases to your sentences will make the verbal delivery process all the smoother:

Key Utilization Phrases

1. *You know, you've always been...*
2. *It would seem that you are searching for...*
3. *Based on your past, I would say...*
4. *My first impression is...*
5. *I notice that...*
6. *I see you as...*
7. *I would doubt that..*
8. *You are always (doing/saying)...*
9. *Well, in my mind...*
10. *It would appear that...*
11. *People around you would (say/think/do)...*
12. *Within you there is...*

A Case of Utilization

On a Monday morning in the middle of winter, you walk past the kitchen at your workplace only to notice a few coworkers chatting by the coffee machine. One of them is *Jed*, who has a glowing tan and relaxed smile stretched from ear to ear. He is laughing and telling the others a story.

You continue onwards to your desk, but something about *Jed's* tan and relaxed presence reminds you that he went on vacation to the tropics a few weeks ago. It could, of course, also be that he chose to wear a Hawaiian yellow-flowered shirt to work. *How unusual*, you think to yourself.

Curious to find out more, you approach *Jed* and ask how his trip went. With great enthusiasm, he replies:

"OMG, that trip was just awesome! Our flight was super short and we stayed at this awesome hotel that had a good location and an awesome view of the city. Our neighbors turned out to be really fun too, so we had an awesome time with them when going out!"

At this point, you recognize that perhaps the word *awesome* might be an important word for *Jed* at this moment in time. So you utilize it in your response and watch his face for any positive confirmation (smile, nod, etc.) that he might give you.

"Wow, sounds like an awesome time, Jed." you respond, casually.

"Yeah, totally! (Beaming smile) But somehow it's good to be back to work too!"

From then on – for fun and out of curiosity – you try and remember to utilize the word *awesome* when you interact with *Jed*. Though you have no statistical evidence to prove it, you notice that he seems to appreciate your usage and over time – as you learn and utilize more of his favorite vocabulary – you enter deeply into rapport with one another. He becomes friendlier toward you and quickly becomes your go-to-for-help guy at work.

Putting it Together

Generally, verbal utilization is a powerful way to influence someone by using *their own words* to get you one step closer to *your desired outcome*.

However, when you combine both verbal and nonverbal utilization techniques, your communication abilities have the potential to improve even further. So let's consider the power of *spacing and leading* in the context of utilization.

Pacing, by the way, means doing what the other person is doing (verbal or non-verbal) while *leading* means taking them where you want to go (towards a solution, outcome, a change in behavior, etc.) *Pacing* usually has to come before *leading*.

The standard formula for this of communication is as follows:

Pace, pace, pace, lead.
Pace, pace, lead.
Pace, lead.
Lead, lead.
Lead, lead, lead.

This strategy shares a similar logic to the yes-set used often in sales and marketing.

(For example, studies show that getting someone to say yes three or more times in a row to something simple and true about their world makes them more likely to say yes a fourth time, namely your unrelated request.)

Integrative Case Example

It's the first of the month and you are attending your monthly Board Meeting. In front of you is a long mahogany table surrounded by the influencing members of your company — all of whom are waiting quietly for you to give your perspective on the proposed budget cuts that need to be made.

Prior to speaking, you momentarily reflect on all the things you have heard them say thus far; ideas, key phrases, complaints, worries, externalized thoughts. All of this is important information, you decide — but still, their vision does not conform to the one you hold of where the company needs to go.

So, in those moments, you decide to utilize all the information that is present at the meeting in order to increase your convincingness and maybe get your way. Integrating it all (so it applies to everyone present at the meeting), you say something like the following:

"Well everybody, here we are again (pace). You all, like me, are sitting here (pace) and as we're talking about these important budget cuts (pace: notice the utilization of the setting details) there is something curious happening behind the scenes that you may be becoming aware of only now (lead).

That is, time — for the members of this company — is passing (pace). No one of us can change that (pace). And sometimes — maybe because how fast we move as a company — we forget what is really important (lead).

But since we're all here, (pace) we can now focus on what is really important; hiring new employees (lead). You can imagine how important that is to our struggling workforce (lead) and even feel yourself, how relieved our employees will feel with more help (lead).

Each of you, even though there have been other things on your mind today, may recognize how important this really is (lead) and that if we make these changes, the company will prosper (lead) and you know it (lead).

(Albeit briefly and perhaps somewhat vaguely, you have managed to utilize what was present and then influence the members towards your desired outcome.