

Better Spoken English
Prof. Shreesh Chaudhary
Department of Humanities and Social Sciences
Indian Institute of Technology, Madras

Lecture No. #06
Some Reasons for Mishearing

Good morning.

Good morning sir

Are you All right?

Yes sir.

Have you had a good breakfast.

Yes sir.

Lovely, I hope you stay as cheerful through the day, all around you must so far on this course, I have I have been trying to tell you about things, you already know well enough; there is nothing new that I have told you, is that right?, Is that right ?

Yes sir

Ist that right?.

Yes sir.

We know these things, we have always known that, we should speak politely, we should smile or be relaxed, we should speak slowly, we should have good manners, we should appear at our best to even friends, and certainly to strangers. All of these things are you know, what we called an accepted civilized norm part of the civilized norms civilized code. But unless you try deliberately, unless you make a firm effort; you will not become the part of your habit.

They must become a part of your habit, you must speak that will, at least for the next few weeks even to your friends on the phone even to your family in that manner. Once it

becomes a part of your habit, you know it is like learning another language, imagine you are learning Chinese or Spanish at this institute, you could learn these languages. How many of you are learning a foreign language here? Wonderful please do it. You know IIT madras is about the only institute in this country of the under graduate level, which gives you this opportunity you can do engineering and lot of foreign languages and all these foreign languages will be extremely useful to you, not only for jobs, but also for the development of you personality.

So, learning to speak in a standard manner is like learning another language. Once you learn once you have learned it you can then switch on informal locations you speak the old way as you like it, but all formal locations you can once you know once it becomes a part of your habit you can switch to the new way, you can speak slowly with a smile you know with confidence you will find that your presentations in the department in the hostel at inter I I T or inter collegiate more importantly when you get into jobs and lead groups of people like yourself, when you present papers at international conferences.

You will find that you are much better than much better understood and there is no joy greater than that please believe me. So, please try do not keep these things can find only to hearing, it is like being in gymnastics. I am trying to teach you some skill which you already know all I am trying to tell you is please practice them outside the gymnasium as well. How many people are going or try to speak slowly beginning today.

I want to see your hands up. Please keep your hands up until I ask you to do which would be difficult for you, you will after a minute or two it turn to your old habit, your friends will laugh at you they might discourage you, some friends may encourage you, but please persist and you will find a great joy in learning after learning that accent, hands down please, thank you All right.

Let us let us take it forward, do all these things speaking with slow tempo, speaking with a smile is speaking with confidence is speaking when you are turned out well you know good grooming you will these things guaranteed that you will not be misunderstood or misheard, what do you say they do not, because the communication or listening requires two people you control only yourself, you do not control the other end of the communication channel that is beyond your control, but this is the best you can do.

Speaking with confidence, speaking with the smile, a speaking at a slow tempo all these things is the best you can do, you cannot take a hammer and open the head of your listeners and put everything there, can you is that possible that is not possible, but let us look at some reasons from the other end why is all that we speak not heard, exactly the way we want them to speak heard and that is what I am going to talk about, in other words mishearing if I every use a difficult word please interrupt me, please ask me to explain myself, do not take it for granted. So, what all I am trying to tell you is, that you mishearing can have many reasons both linguistic, language related and a non linguistic individual related, society related, situation related.

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Let us look at some reasons relax; sit with your back to your desk and try and see if you agree with this, you may not agree with this. Sometimes your listeners may not hear you, if you do not have their attention in attention or distraction I am talking to you, but your mind may be tuned to the next class, today examination that is going to come to the Sarang event you know how many of you are coordinators here for Sarang. You poor guys you know you have a lot of thankless job to do only for a shirt, you know, you do not mind being preoccupied. go home for Sarang next week you know they make their train tickets may be wait listed there can be lot of factors which can be distractive as a speaker, all I can do is to frequently get you back to the classroom that is why you might have noticed television channels take commercial breaks.

Commercial breaks come at regular intervals in the best of channels, they cover at about seven or eight minutes and in the rank commercial channels such as those which show you only cricket or only what is called ten sports you know one fat man hitting another fat man where nothing in my opinion is more vulgar. The break comes every two and half minutes if whether any so boring otherwise.

So, there is why you know when you speak you should also try you will do lot of lot of speakers, lot of professional speakers bring in jokes, bring in a stories make variety is their talk, where I ask you about you know speak slowly I remember one or two semesters ago. So, one or two years ago at least somebody ask me, sir how can I speak slowly if I have to catch a train and I am late for the train what is your answer what is your answer what is your answer.

All that you know I am in all that telling you divorce your common sense, you do not to speak thrust your hand to the window give the booking clerk required amount of money and just tell him Guntur, Vijayawada you do not have to tell him, can you please kindly give me a ticket to Guntur and the train goes common sense is the best guide do you agree yes or no.

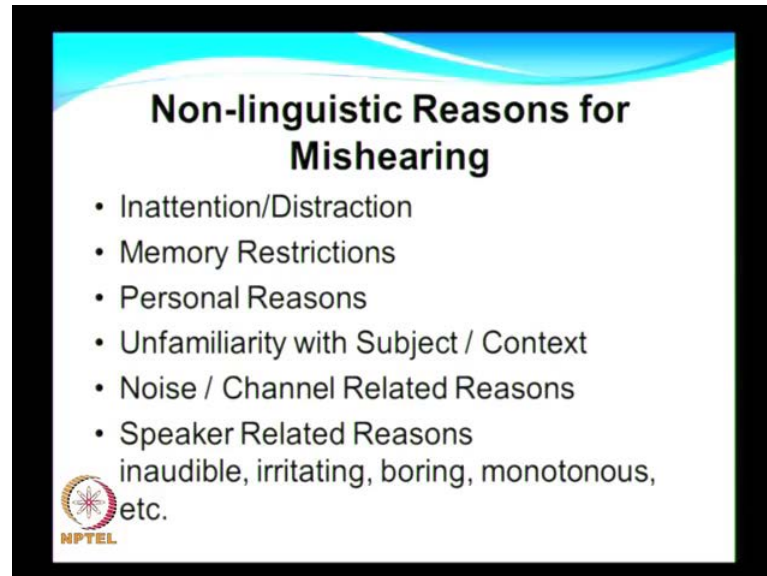
Yes sir

Common sense is the best guide in all aspects of human behavior the only problem is common sense is not very common you have to acquire it you have to use it. So, in a tension all distraction can we similar things can be huge reason for mishearing. Similar similarly, memory restrictions you have been talk you are talking about something which happened yesterday and your listeners does not remember fails to recall that is why you know when you write letters you give reference in continuation with our conversation on this topic or in continuation with my earlier letter what can you do on such situations in such situations when you talk would you say please refer to that will somebody artificial that would not be a natural, but do whatever you can try and make sure in a very pleasant not unpleasant manner you know nothing is more disastrous to the act of communication than an irritative listeners.

A listener, who does not want to hear you, will not hear you no matter what language you speak how slowly and a listener who wants to hear you, will hear you in spite of barriers of language otherwise Tamil speaking boys would not fall in love with Hindi

speaking girls right. It happens you know human willpower is the greatest asset of human beings which is also the greatest liability of human beings.

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So, turned on that you know motivate your listener to listen to you, there can be memory restrictions you your memory can be related to topic ,can be related to relationship, can be related to experience, can be related to a variety of things, but mishearing can also occur because of that, there may be personal reasons.

I do not like b Tech students. I do not like B Tech students wearing T-shirts without collar. I do not like B Tech students from Bihar, what can you do about that you know and if I have I am I am listening, and somebody from Bihar speaks for no fault of him, I will not be focused you know human beings are not always rational creatures do you agree? Hostel election Holi you boys from a particular part of India always win general elections when it comes to voting we behave like the great Indian public. We vote for reasons other than rational the candidate is from my part of the country, the candidate is not from my part of my country, the candidate is my gender, the candidate is not my gender.

You know it is only extremely rarely that a girl at this institute has won an election I may right say yes or no.

Yes sir

Many reasons girls you know they they have little time to waste they are more focused in to the studies they do not contest elections that can be all kinds of this, but personal prejudices personal prejudices I have always difficult to understanding my wife's mother, but I never only difficulty understanding my own mother, these are personal speaking. I hope you understand both your mother and your wife's mother equally well or unwell. Similarly, you may be unfamiliar with the subject if somebody imagines takes me to a lecture on the second law of thermodynamics after to few minutes I will start playing crossword puzzle you know or some such thing because this subject is totally moving, but if the speaker is determined the speaker wants to include people like me in his talk then he would starts simplifying the basics.

He would involve him in conversation, if I have to define syllable you are not a student of and I cannot going complex geometry of syllable. I can only tell you what can I have one part or two parts. Example, cat it has only one part, but monkey how many parts two parts. I have simplified it for you; I have included you in my subject you know these are common sense tricks.

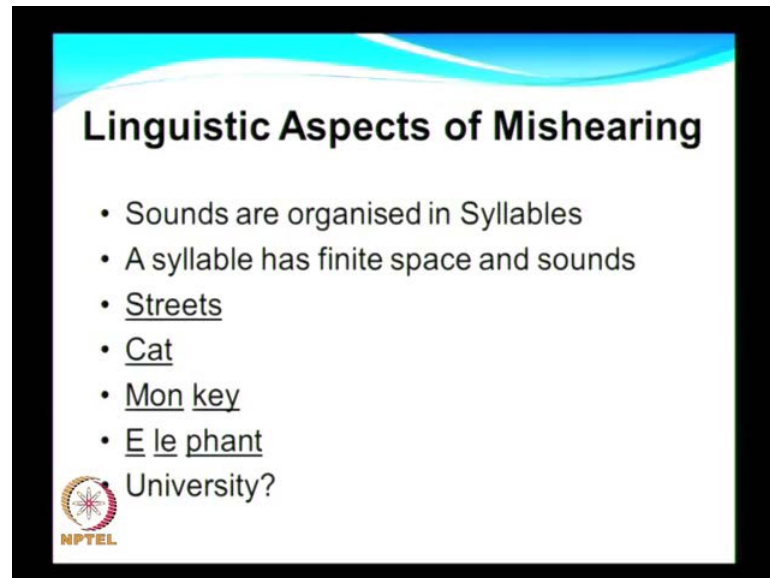
This is how you can proceed with audience is where you have mixed groups people from mechanical engineering, people from chemical engineering you know I was once upon a time, a member of the board of academic courses and we were reviewing B tech courses may be in the mid nineties and I found that quantum mechanics was being taught by four department of this institute and in four different ways chemical engineering, mechanical engineering, chemistry and physics.

All the four departments actually, this came to the extent that the taught one particular element you know compound one department physics people, say it was solid and chemistry people say it was liquid do you understand are you with me. So, when you speak to mixed groups subject familiarity with subject can be a particular point there may be a noise you are trying to say imagine yourself at the central station, lots of background noise distracted. This is studio we are lucky working in a studio that is sanitized except the noise of the air conditioner which is again very subdued.

We have no other noise, but you know h s b, m s b, v s b when we have classes you know then people passing through the corridor, the birds, the monkeys another lecture in another room. Some people speak so loud, that when they speak in e s b my students in h


s b will take notes they are heard from miles apart. So, there may be speaker related problems. Some speaker may be irritating and boring etcetera etcetera there are these these are generally known as non linguistic reasons.

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Linguistic Aspects of Mishearing

- Sounds are organised in Syllables
- A syllable has finite space and sounds
- Streets
- Cat
- Mon key
- E le phant

 University?

They may also be linguistic reasons. I am going to be a little technical are you with me now, everybody please, I am going to be a little technical. Mishearing can also occur because of the number language related reasons, linguistic reasons. Say for example, a syllable which is the basic organizing unit of a speech. Sounds are gathered in syllables. Sounds do not travel by themselves, they are put together in a bag called syllable then there are passed. So, there can be one word can have one syllable or more syllable and within each syllable, the number of sounds can differed. Look at a syllable like a streets.

How many sounds are there, can you count and tell me please, what are those five sounds or six sounds. How many how many to be yeah six sounds in one syllable. On the other hand, there is a syllable like cat, how many sounds here only three, but they are both syllable. You see the difference, there is a family with six members nobody working. The poor mother is expected to feed four boys one husband and herself. Naturally, that mother cannot give money to her sons to have pizza in the morning and burger in the evening. She will have to be more careful with money. On the other hand, imagine another family only one son, both mother and father working the Americans call them this double income single kid. The kid can you know kid will not eat anything, he

will not be spoiled by them. You know you will not know what he likes does not , what he does not like the joke is can you tell a joke.

The joke is, once spoiled boy like this insisted for that evening for the dessert you would have something which is hot like summer and cold like winter, what did the hotel waiter give him water would be hot cold like winter, but not hot like summer any guess, there is where you require imagination and intelligence and the waiter in that hotel was intelligent he put some chilly in ice cream and that this boy single kid had his dessert which was cold like winter and hot like summer. So, you know when you are more more sounds and only one syllable you naturally will have to be, will have to be give it longer. So, streets should take a few nano seconds, longer compared with cat, but it in cat long. So, there are these factors. Look at the next word, how many syllables what is that.

Cat

No matter what I told you yesterday, you will have to pronounce it two pronounce it with two syllables the next word.

Monkey

How many syllables

Three

Everybody please how many syllables

Three

What is the word

Elephant

Elephant what is the next word

University

How many syllables

What are those

U ni ver si ty once again, everybody together. How many syllables

Let us count them U ni ver si ty, but if you give each syllable sometime may be a few nano second some syllable may take a little longer, some syllable may take a little less, but comparable time, then you will find though in English you know stressed syllables, I will tell you later take longer and unstressed or under stressed syllables take a little less, but allow decent time for otherwise you will be misheard.

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I will give you some examples, if you are more sounds and you do not give them enough time then the words get distorted, they do not retain their shades. It is like you know Indian buses, you get into an Indian bus with clean shirt a starched pant, shirts, tie etcetera, but there are 250 passengers in a bus meant for 60 people especially in my part of the country when you come out of the bus is your shirt is still a starched, it is crumpled, disheveled you are irritated, tired you know when you when you packed more in less distortion is inevitable it does happen. Look at these words, it should be available, but because people is spoke rapidly what did it become it become available here one part went.

The proper word is government what is the proper word.

Government

Government what is it

Government

Stressed on the first syllable what is the proper word

Government

Government, but if you spoke in a hurry like in many language in many Indian languages you know we say gorment, we eat away two or three syllables the breakfast or lunch. Lots of people particularly in south India do not pronounce the last sound of the number five is it say twenty five, thirty five. How many do you want five what is five it is five what is it.

Five

Your lower lip should come to your upper teeth watch my lips five.

Say.

Five

Please keep saying.

just say everybody keep doing it until I ask you to, please kindly record them everybody please Aparna you also may God bless you keep doing it, keep doing please keep doing it, do it again. So, what is the number after four

Five

What is the number before six

Five

Five what is the number after eleven.

Twelve

What is the number after ten

Eleven

Eleven what is it.

Eleven

Eleven Eleven. You know articulate each sound articulate each sound the way it ought to be, but when you speak rapidly some sounds get lost, dropped. Similarly, what do you think that the word is stands for, the next word architecture what is it.

Goes very comfortable

What is the word

Architecture

Architecture what is it.

Architecture

Right, but if you speak in hurry it becomes architecture. What is the next word yeah you know last year last year or year before last year we from this institute conducted a big training program at the airport, we had about more than four hundred air traffic controllers you know it is those air traffic controllers could tell the pilot, how high or low at which altitude at which speed they should fly pilot do nothing other than control the air craft because in the air you do not have landmarks.

So, air traffic controllers can have the huge role in air traffic and we conducted a training program for them telling them only about these things, but before we conducted the program we recorded their speech we went into the air traffic controller tower, we recorded hundred hours of their speech with variety of pilots from different country and what we heard was appalling, what we heard was surprising and made us seriously believing in God there definitely is somebody called God. The biggest pilot in the greatest air traffic controller who controls all air traffic because you know they spoke in a hurry international civil aviation organization says, speak at the rate of hundred words per minute you ask me that question right.

These guys are the gentleman and ladies, he spoke at the rate of thousand words per minute I have their recordings you are welcome to hear them any day you like and we found when you they spoke rapidly they did not sound like saying kingfisher though they

intended kingfisher, but in hurry they kingsher by you and I know because we are from India, but a pilot are from Rumania or another pilot from Brazil, Spanish, Italian and Rumanian speaking pilots would have great difficulty. Similarly you know the air traffic controller wanted to tell the pilot hold on the holding point, what did you want to say.

Hold on the holding point

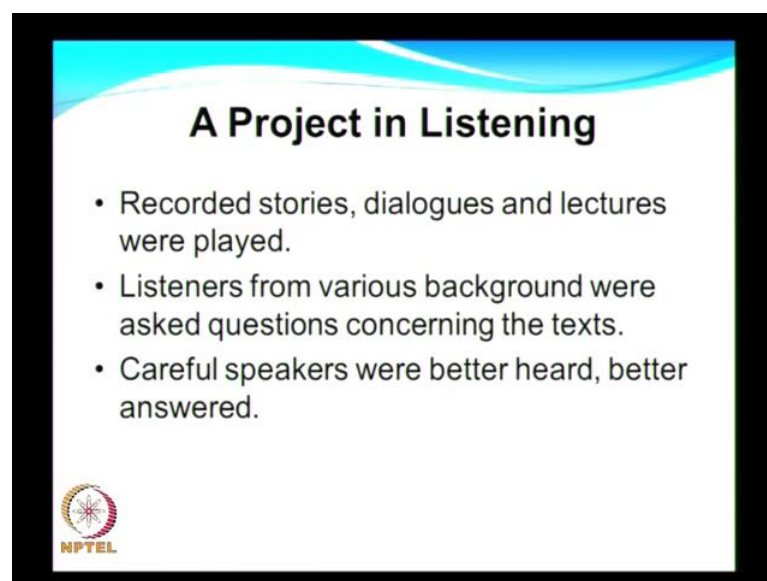
Once again what did you want to say.

Hold on the holding point

But because he spoke rapidly he said hold on hold on point, when we heard me and my thirteen colleagues fourteen English teachers were involved we racked our brain and finally, a smart guy after two or two and half hours, but God they are trying to say hold on the holding point. You know distraction, distortions can happen if you speak rapidly and if you speak that way the listener and speaker are not linked together this listener is thinking of something. So, you you may be thinking of that and the speaker may be talking of syllables and templates and chronology.


So, this speaker and listeners may not be together. I am now going to play you some examples from a project listeners you know in sciences, in arts and researches sometimes we have curious questions. So, once we had a project which had a curious questions, how do and why do people mishear what could be the reason.

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A Project in Listening

- Recorded stories, dialogues and lectures were played.
- Listeners from various background were asked questions concerning the texts.
- Careful speakers were better heard, better answered.

 NPTEL

So, what we do you did was we played recorded stories, conversation, plays, lectures from a variety of people, a lecture from an American professor to Indian students, a lecture from the Indian professor to Indian students, a story told by an Indian mother to Indian students, students from the college, students from the school we took a variety of listener nearly, one thousand one hundred listeners from various backgrounds and we played these recordings to them and then we ask them questions about the recordings and we got a variety of answer. We found that you know this was our main conclusion that carefully speakers can you read it to me.

Careful speakers were better heard, better answered

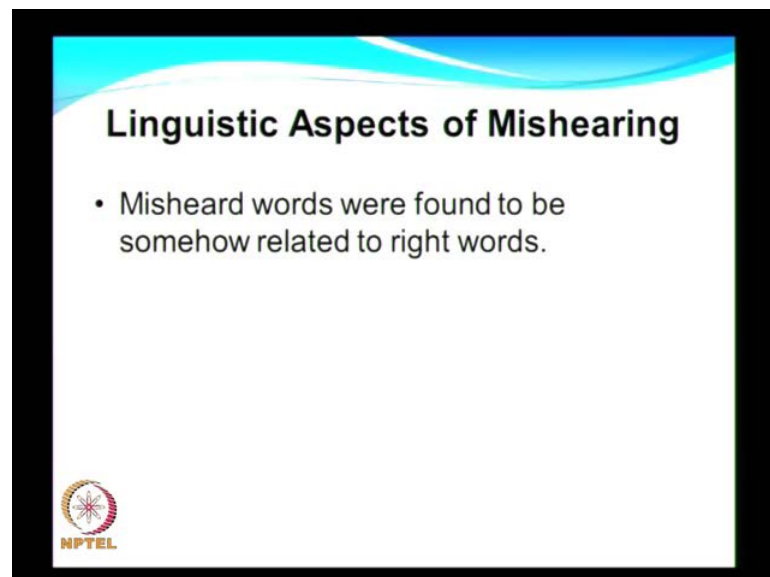
Once again with pauses tell me once again.

Careful speakers were better heard, better answered

You are not taking good pauses you know good pause to be heard careful speakers were better heard and better answered better answered come again tell me.

Careful speakers were better heard, better answered


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Right those that were not careful were misheard, but but misheard words were also related to the right word in some manners, a noun was only a noun was supplied for a noun. Only a two syllable word was supplied for a two syllable word. The only problem

was, it was not heard in place of Irfan they heard Rahman or pathan, in place of ram they heard Shyam. So, both Ram and Shyam are nouns they are both one syllable, but if you want to cut the head of ram, the ended the cutting of head of Shyam, but a gross you know miscommunication

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Correct Responses	Erroneous Responses
1. Novice	1. (a) Enormous (b) Obvious (c) Nervous (d) Novelist
2. Wood work	2. (a) good work (b) book work
3. Ladies size	3. (a) Ladies' eyes (b) Ladies' side (c) Latest size

Look at some example, we played the tape yesterday and you might have seen there was a word there called... and we thought I was erroneous. Do you remember? Yes or no please, do you remember or I played the tape yesterday played recording yesterday and the recording said the man of the schedule this is what memory restriction. I have heard it three hundred times. So, I remember it by heart you have heard it only once. It is unfair on my part to expect you to remember that word, but I am now trying to tell you that the speaker said something like the following. The salesman thought I was a novice not because it was not said carefully the first time, we ask the listeners to fill in the blank, the salesman thought I was a and these were the answer we got and some listeners said enormous ,some listeners said can you give the other words.

Obvious, nervous, novelist

Next

Good work, book work

Next

Ladies eyes, ladies side, latest size

Now, I am asking your question, this is the question is there anything common among these four words, last syllable yes anything else everybody please try using varies such a powerful engine, that the more you make it work better it works and if you do not present if you allow it to sleep, if you allow it to become lazy, then you know you does not do anything, tell me why novice was misunderstood. Enormous, Obvious, Nervous, and Novelist that was possible, but why did not in place of them they misunderstood novice why did they not say America, number one, syllable match is there, anything else anything else are you also in the class. Can you try and give me the answer, but after a stress e is hardly heard, but that is a very good point you have made enormous has three syllable e nor mous, but because stress is on norm.

So, e is hardly heard, the listeners hardly heard e. The listeners distracted tired, bored listeners only heard enormous and you thought it is enormous. You see the point do you agree, I do not know I may be wrong, I did not go and ask the listeners to explain myself pardon me. I did not ask the listeners to explain themselves, but this appears to be, this seems to be the reasons. In other words, look at the similarities of novice, the first syllable is stressed obvious, nervous, novelist in all of these cases except enormous you enormous and obvious are both adjectives, but nervous is also an adjective only novelist is a noun, but in that slot both noun and adjective can be thought I was a novice was hardly heard, it is unstressed in a rapidly speech it may even be dropped.

So, if the slot is blank he thought I was then you can about adjective and noun. I will not explain other example in such detail, but the point I am trying to make is you know that listeners can misunderstanding in a variety of ways and for a variety of reasons. You have to anticipate, if you want to be a successfully speaker and an effectively speaking not to your mother or to your wife or to your best friend, but all to your best friend, but all the world if you want to be heard a good like Budhha was heard Gandhi was heard.

Imagine, Gandhi at a time when there were no mobile phone, when Gandhi did not have access to radio, but radio had come, but do you think British had invited him to tell the entire India on radio the British quit India did they do that did they do that Americans occasionally recorded him and broadcast from their radio and not the British except when it shooted him how did Gandhi manage to wake up the entire country within


twenty years what do you think the answers read read about Gandhi you know, the lots of books available on around you.

Someday, I will play you some tape of Gandhi here, Gandhi also spoke slowly [FL] where there is truth, there is god, he did not say where there is truth, there is god, because that is the best bet. Look at the next example, Wood work why was it misunderstood that way, can you tell me, can you make a guess, context yes so context that context good work will fit book work will fit. I read a book called Wood work, one was wood and the work was understood All right. Work was understood, why was wood misunderstood for good or for book. Can you tell me sorry lots of similarity you know wood and book.

One syllable, it comes at the heard of two word compound, two word phrase. Moreover, wood has only three sounds, book has only three sounds, good has only three sounds sounds are very similar who is common them to both this is how you may misunderstood. Let me let us go to something interesting you know the I ask for the Ladies size. The salesman ask that boy what kind of saw would you like and the suggested the salesman insisted Ladies size, why did he suggest ladies size you remember, it is easy for beginners. You know Ladies ladies size was misunderstood, the listeners must have been a poet, ladies eyes or ladies side or latest size what is commonly between ladies or latest. Stress on the first syllable, then they are both two syllable word by syllabic, they are both only two syllables.

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Correct Responses	Erroneous Responses
4. Experts	4. (a) Exports (b) Expose
5. Jobs	5. (a) Jaws (b) Jokes
6. Want it for	6. (a) want sir (b) wanting for (c) want to firm



Next words, let us go to longer occurrence, what do you want it for the sales man ask me and want it for was misunderstood as answer wanting for, want to for. What is similar between want it for and these responses. Once again, stress, number of syllable etcetera etcetera. Let us go to something more interesting.

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Correct Responses	Erroneous Responses
experts	exports
but	bet
tackle	tag
Screws	schools; shoes
Handicraft	handicapped
Bookshelves	bookshops
Jobs	jaws
Ladies	ready
Woodwork	goodwork



Look at these can you tell me, can you make a guess why Bookshelf were misunderstood as bookshops

They are both, they are both same number of syllables how many syllables two, what else are they both adjective or nouns, noun are they both adjective or nouns are they both adjective or nouns they are both nouns, they are both complex phrases you know to make a two words, anything else. Once again you know what is what is uppermost in the mind of the listeners may be listeners may more aware of bookshop than of book shelf.

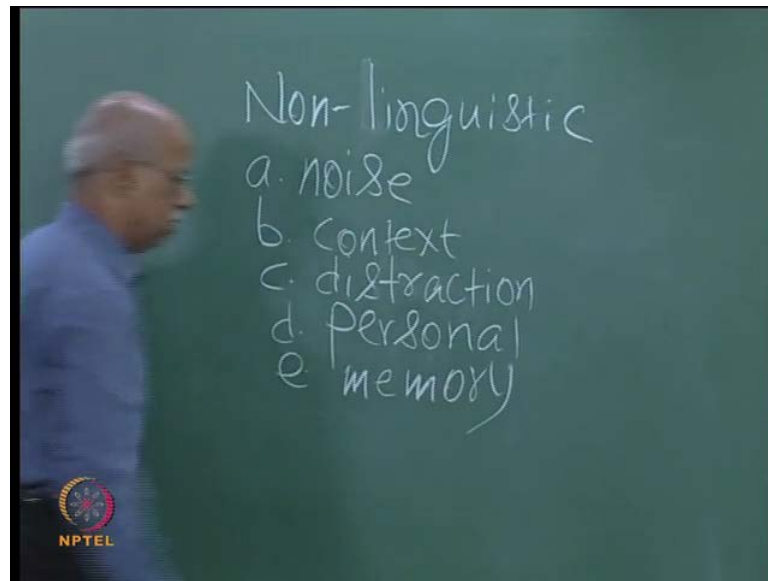
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Correct Responses	Erroneous Responses
fallacious _____	palatial
has passed _____	is fast
looms _____	rooms
roads _____	loads
fate _____	faith
dangerous tangle _____	dangerous tanker
cloves _____	gloves
chunk _____	junk
formerly _____	formally
migrant _____	vagrant

Look at the first word, what is the meaning. What is the meaning of first word the left hand column what is the mean anybody please try and guess are you so afraid of going wrong? Are you embarrassed when you go wrong? Make a guess what does it mean, the first word in the left hand column incorrect yeah what how do you pronounce that word no not palace All right why was it misunderstood for palacian. What is what is the similar between them how are they related. Lots of you know, syllable structure is similar they are both adjective they may fit the context again and again you know.

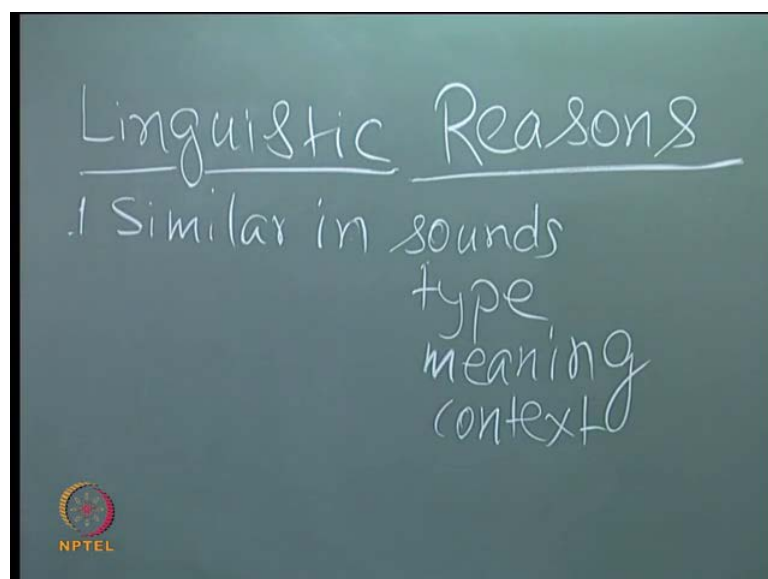
I am trying to tell you that the brain of the listener does not work the exactly the same way, unless your presentation therefore it is clear enough, unless you are interesting ,unless you are well prepared unless you are pleasant and confidently speaker, the chances of you being misunderstood would be limited. I would like to summarize them, if anyone of you interested and I can copy it these, I can copy these slides to you. Comeback to I like to summarize, mishearing can have many reasons.

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There can be non there can be non -linguistic reasons. Can you give me some non linguistic reason a noise, b context may be familiar or unfamiliar any other, distraction ,next personal etcetera personal factors, next memory restriction wait.

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There can be linguistic factors linguistic reason. Can you give me some linguistic reasons, the words may be understood, but not exactly the way you want them to understood right. What can go wrong, may be similar words, similar in what, syllable similar in sounds, lovely similar in type, noun for noun, adjective for adjective, similar in

meaning. Any of these any other any other or similar in context what can we do, there are a number of factors that control the success of communication. Linguistic, non linguistic our best bet as the speakers once again is the same. We can we must prepare as well as we can, we must be pleasant confident speak slowly with a smile right and you can hope that at least seventy five, eighty, ninety sometime if you are lucky giving a hundred percent communication will take place between you and listeners when you speak, any questions, please anything you wish to ask me for today thank you have a good day.