

# Review of movie : my fair lady

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REVIEW OF MOVIE: MY FAIR LADY It has been theorized that the ability to communicate through language made the human species possible and in the same way, each individual becomes humanized as he/she enters into verbal communication with those around (Simmons-McDonald). If this statement is accepted as true, then it follows that the continued development of the human species depends on each individual being able to participate effectively in the process of communication. Was this the message of the movie “ My Fair Lady”? Mr.

Higgins certainly believed that a person’s accent and tone of voice determine his/her prospects in society and that ‘ verbal class distinction could be extinct if the English taught their children how to speak. ’ The process of effective communication has been broadly defined as the successful exchange of information through a series of stages consisting of Sender, Encoding, Channel, Decoding, Receiver, and Feedback in a particular Context. The goal of effective communication is getting the message across without misunderstanding and confusion.

Effort should therefore be directed at reducing the frequency of problems at each stage of this process with clear, accurate, well-planned communications. This paper will focus on the use of communication codes to exclude or include individuals in social contexts in the movie “ My Fair Lady”. Encoding is the process of transferring the information being communicated into a form that can be sent and correctly decoded at the other end. So, in a sense all language and writing systems are codes.

The ability to encode effectively is vital to successful communication. It requires the sender to convey information clearly and simply, as well as  
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having such in-depth knowledge of the audience that he/she can anticipate and eliminate any sources of confusion that may arise. These include cultural issues, mistaken assumptions, missing information. The sender should consider the following:

- Choice of words or language used in encoding the message
- Different interpretations given to the same words by different persons
- Effect of past experiences on current perceptions
- Misreading of body language, tone and other non-verbal forms of communication
- Noisy transmission resulting in distorted or inconsistent messages
- Personal biases
- Interpersonal relationships
- Cultural differences

Successful decoding is also a skill. It involves taking time to read or to listen actively to the message, as well as having sufficient knowledge to understand it. Contexts are determined by questions like Whom, What and Where.

They can be intra-personal, inter-personal, small groups, large organizations as well as mass communication like movies. If, according to Walt Disney, ‘movies can and do have tremendous influence in shaping young lives ... towards the ideals and the objectives of normal adulthood’, then the movie ‘My Fair Lady’ may have been conceptualized to help English youths master the use of their own language. The overall message of the movie was encapsulated by the challenge undertaken by Mr. Higgins to teach young Eliza Doolittle to speak proper English (like a duchess).

The movie highlighted the differences in the way people encode their messages and the positive or negative responses that can be directly attributed to the manner in which the message was initially encoded. An expert in effective encoding was Mr. Alfie Doolittle, Eliza’s father, who was a direct contrast to Mr. Higgins, whose crude and impersonal manner was

almost guaranteed a negative response. Mr. Doolittle's philosophy was to enjoy life doing as little as possible and finding ways to benefit from the hard work of others, 'with a little bit of luck'.

The customary response of 'not a brass farthing' did not deter him from trying again and again to find someone to support his drinking habit. When all else failed, he had his daughter on whom he could fall back. His rationale was that he had given her life and the opportunity to roam the whole city selling flowers, so he was entitled to some of her earnings occasionally. His expertise was demonstrated in the inter-personal exchange when he visited Mr. Higgins to inquire about the welfare of his daughter. His real intention, though, was to get some money from Mr. Higgins.

He was such an expert in effective encoding that he succeeded, not just in stopping Mr. Higgins from calling the Police, but in getting Mr. Higgins to offer ten pounds instead of the five that he wanted. . Mr. Doolittle had no bias against the rich. He accepted the difference in status between himself, a poor dustman and Mr. Higgins, a professor. He was not intimidated by Mr. Higgins' obviously superior status. Accustomed to living by his wits, he saw before him a man, of a different status, yes, but still a man. He acknowledged that he was one of the 'undeserving poor' and was content with his lot.

He rationalized why he could not afford to live by middle class morals; his needs were too much. Nevertheless, he was not going to allow Mr. Higgins 'to take advantage of his nature.' He appealed to what they had in common – their masculinity and their ability to reason. His tone of voice, gestures, body language and facial expression helped to ensure proper decoding of his

message. In the end, he was able to impress Mr. Higgins with his natural gift of rhetoric e. g. ‘ I’m willing to tell you, I’m wanting to tell you, I’m waiting to tell you. ’ After explaining why he wanted money for his daughter, Mr. Higgins opinion of him changed from being a blackmailer to a philosophical genius. He later recommended him to lecture on morals as ‘ an original moralist’. On the other hand, Mr. Higgins’ manner of speaking or way of encoding his message was so crude that he couldn’t help but get a negative response. For example, when Eliza visited his home to request lessons, he was most insulting. He referred to her as piece of baggage, deliciously low-class, horribly dirty and a draggle-tail gutter snipe. Mr. Higgins’s harsh: ‘ Sit down! ’ was a great contrast to Mr. Pickering’s: ‘ what’s your name, dear; would you sit down, Ms. Doolittle? ’ Mr.

Pickering succeeded in doing what Mr. Higgins could not do. He got Eliza to sit. Mr. Higgins’ speech reflected his feelings of superiority and personal bias against people who could not speak ‘ proper’ English. He obviously believed that Standard English i. e. the English of Shakespeare, Milton and the Bible was the only proper form of the language. Mr. Higgins also expressed some bias against women for whom he apparently had littlerespect(at least as a wife). He saw Eliza as ‘ Something’, not as ‘ Someone’ with feelings. The intervention of Mr. Pickering’s ‘ what do you want, my dear? ’, again got a positive response from Eliza.

She wanted to learn to speak more genteel, in order to work as a lady in a flower shop. Eliza’s ignorance and immaturity were also barriers to proper decoding. Mr. Higgins’ extrapolation of her offer of a shilling a lesson to 60 or 70 pounds from a millionaire, was interpreted as a request for 60 or 70

pounds. Since she knew that she could not afford to pay this huge sum, she became very upset. The use of figurative language was lost on Eliza when Mr. Higgins said that the streets would be full of dead bodies of men fighting to marry her. She thought that he was a mad man and wanted nothing to do with him. These barriers, created both by Mr.

Higgins and Eliza, blocked the communication process between them so much, that by the time he was willing to accept the ‘irresistible’ challenge, Eliza had made up her mind to leave. His blatant attempt at manipulation forced the intervention of Mrs. Pearce and Mr. Pickering. The terms of their association were clarified to the satisfaction of Mrs. Pearce and later perhaps to Eliza, who still screamed that if she did not like it, she would leave. It has been noted that the most efficient communication takes into account the social and intellectual features of both the speaker and the hearer (Simmons-Mc Donald).

Mr. Doolittle certainly did that. He clearly understood himself, his audience (Mr. Higgins) and the social context (the class structure) in which he communicated his message. This made his method of communicating very effective. He also gave recognition to the premise that all communication involves a relationship, conscious or unconscious, between the speaker and the listener. He recognized the differences between Mr. Higgins and himself but appealed to the qualities they had in common.

A relationship was established, helping to ensure the successful decoding of his message. In contrast, Mr. Higgins made no attempt to build any relationship with his audience (Eliza). He was arrogant and downright rude. He believed that people could change their class by learning to speak ‘

'proper' English. His message was good, but his coding was atrocious. This was principally, because he was very impersonal and totally ignored the feelings of his audience. In my opinion, these two examples demonstrate the positive and negative use of communication codes. Word Count: 1500