

# Conversation Piece

September 02, 2015

## *The Chronicle of Higher Education:*

These quotations, in their various ways, get to a deceptively simple truth about good writing. That is, it should be similar to speech, *but* ... The “but” is expressed by Sterne in “properly managed,” by Steffens in “would,” by Wilder in “the impression,” by Maugham in “should” and “well-bred.” Everyone knows that pure speech doesn’t work on the page. Transcribe any conversation (except maybe one between John Updike and Clive James) and you will see rampant halts and starts, “um”s and “uh”s, redundancies, ellipses, grammatical solecisms, and all manner of infelicities.

...

All this has long been widely recognized, but a new psychological study suggests we only knew the half of it. “The Sound of Intellect,” an article in the June issue of *Psychological Science*, reports the results of an experiment in which a group of M.B.A. candidates at the University of Chicago’s business school were asked to prepare two brief pitches for prospective employers, one a written text and one an audio recording. A random group of people were asked to judge the pitches on three criteria: intellect, hiring likelihood, and general impressions. On all three measures, the audio pitches were judged significantly better.

The most important reason for this result, the authors propose, is a feature of speech: “variance in in pitch,” which “may reveal the presence of an active and lively mind” and “can convey enthusiasm, interest, and active deliberation.” And all the while I thought I was getting that stuff into my scribbling!

Read the whole story: [The Chronicle of Higher Education](#)