

The Sylvans

Detailed summary powered by AI

20 May 2026

Motion: this house believes people talk too much.

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Analysis of the outcome powered by AI:

The debate over whether society is plagued by excessive conversation hinged on a fundamental clash between the desire for peace in a noisy world and the vital human need for emotional connection. Ultimately, the motion did not carry. The result was driven by the opposition's highly effective semantic reframing of the motion, which successfully shifted the battleground from the sheer volume of modern chatter to the severe psychological consequences of emotional repression.

The proposition opened the debate with a humorous and highly relatable assault on the banality of modern communication. By weaponising statistics—citing the 15,000 words an average person utters daily—the opening speaker painted a picture of a society drowning in low-quality "jibber-jabber". The proposition successfully capitalised on collective frustrations with endless corporate meetings, the vapidness of reality television, inescapable automated train announcements and the mindless scrolling of TikTok. By contrasting this modern cacophony with the nostalgic charm of 1970s British reserve, the proposition established a strong early lead based on observational comedy and shared daily annoyances.

However, the opposition immediately disrupted this momentum by introducing a incisive dichotomy that would ultimately define the entire debate: the difference between "speaking" and "talking". The opposing speaker argued that while modern society involves endless speaking—broadcasting on social media, prattling about trivialities and shouting at protests—it is utterly starved of genuine talking. By reframing "talking" as the difficult, emotionally resonant exchange of ideas, the opposition elevated the stakes of the debate. They argued that the old Victorian adage of children being seen and not heard was not a virtue but a source of generational psychological scarring. Furthermore, the opposition effectively used Shakespeare's Hamlet to illustrate the necessity of deep articulation to navigate human suffering.

The ebb and flow of the floor debate reflected an audience deeply torn between the comedic appeal of the proposition and the emotional gravity of the opposition. Supporters of the motion leaned into levity. Floor speakers lamented the agony of morning chatter over a quiet cup of tea, the uniquely British absurdity of spending 56 hours a year discussing the weather and the modern scourge of lengthy voice notes. In a particularly memorable and theatrical moment, the proposition speaker's own daughter humorously roasted her father for talking too much. Another guest advocated for the profound power of silence by recounting a tale of a Zen monk and a quiet intervention that saved a building from fire.

Conversely, the tide began to turn firmly towards the opposition as floor speakers grounded the abstract need for communication in stark societal realities. An international guest praised the British capacity for open, decent dialogue in the wake of the infected blood inquiry. Another speaker highlighted that having "two ears and one mouth" does not negate the fact that modern citizens are increasingly isolated and unable to even greet their neighbours.

The decisive turning point of the debate was a powerful contribution from the floor that wholly anchored the opposition's premise in lived experience. A speaker passionately linked the lack of open conversation to male suicide rates, the plight of homeless veterans and the struggle of navigating neurodivergence. By explaining how genuine dialogue breaks down racial barriers and allows for necessary "code-switching" to be unlearned, this speaker effectively demonstrated that talking is not merely a social lubricant but a matter of survival and societal cohesion.

In the final summations, the proposition attempted a tactical retreat. Acknowledging the validity of the mental health arguments, the proposition tried to concede that profound conversation is necessary while maintaining that mindless "jibber-jabber" remains excessive. They pleaded for quality over quantity, ending on a cautionary quote about remaining silent rather than removing all doubt of one's foolishness.

The opposition, however, drove home their ideological victory by doubling down on their redefined terms. They reminded the room that superficial noise is merely speaking, whereas talking requires vulnerability, listening and the courage to confront the depths of human experience. The motion did not carry because the opposition successfully convinced the room that while modern life is undeniably loud, curing the world of its superficial noise is not worth the risk of silencing the essential, life-saving conversations that society desperately lacks.

Detailed transcript:

Good evening. For those of you who don't know me, who are new to the Sylvans, I'm a relic of Sylvans past, brought out of retirement like a sort of museum piece. Now, all of you, I think, are familiar with the old Victorian adage that children should be seen and not heard, nothing personal on table three, but I'm actually here tonight to argue that the time has come when we

need to extend that measure to adults as well, because I think that as a society we have forgotten how to wind our collective neck in. We heard, "Wind your neck in, Wes," the other week. It's not just Mr Streeting, I think it's the rest of us as well, because we just can't stop talking. Would anybody like to guess how many words an average person utters on an average day? 44,000? Because this guy, probably a million! Yeah, no, 10 million, I'm saying. But it's actually a bit more modest than that, it's actually between 15 and 16,000. But I have to say, fellow Sylvans, that is excessive. Do we really need 15 to 16,000 words in our day? Just to give you a bit of context, an average sermon is two and a half thousand words. So the average person, during the course of a day, utters enough words to fill six sermons. If you could imagine that, I mean, do we really need that much?

I think also there are some nuances within that. There's an old myth that women talk more than men. Don't believe it if you've ever heard that, because actually science shows that women only talk fractionally more than men, but it's a big difference in what that's made up of. Women use filler expressions a lot more like, "and yes," which I imagine is when they're listening to men, probably. Whereas men are apparently more likely to dominate meetings, sounds familiar, more likely to interrupt and apparently the people who are particularly loquacious are disproportionately male as well. So, gentlemen, you are getting the side-eye on that. But apparently also, according to research, the amount of words that we utter in a day is actually falling, which may seem counterintuitive of me as I'm the speaker in favour of the motion, by 28% on some estimates. But don't be reassured by that. The reason is that technology has just given us other ways to jibber-jabber. So whereas spoken words our mouths may have produced have fallen, they have simply been replaced by Twitter and WhatsApp and various other forms of twittering away electronically rather than in person. And although my opponent might argue that we're talking about words and speaking, I don't think that writing is really a little bit too random to attribute to the sort of grammar-free stuff that you see on social media, so I'm going to include that as well.

And the other bit, I think part of the issue is the fact that whatever happened to the British reserve when it came to speaking? I have a friend who still has cassettes that he recorded from Capital Radio in the 1970s, a very interesting range of social history. They're a bit scrambled up, but they're quite good. But what really fascinates me is the phenomenon that people were so shy. This is 50 years ago, so it would be something like this. It would be like, "Who do we have on line one?" Silence. "Hello, line one." Silence. "What's your name?" "My name's the caller." Terrified. "Okay. And where are you from, caller?" Silence. "Caller, where are you from?" "I'm from Peterborough." So shy, hardly getting a word out. Fast forward to now: "Who do we have on line one?" "Hi, I'm the caller, and I'm from Peterborough!" There's just no filter anywhere. I think it's this sort of culture that we have, and we must all express ourselves to the maximum. We see this in work a lot. Have you ever heard this adage that people say now about bringing your whole self to work? Yes, you ever heard that one? Please don't. It started off as a well-meaning thing, you know, people shouldn't hide parts of who they were, but instead it's been over-interpreted. We've now got this tsunami of oversharing. Now I know far more about my colleagues than I'd ever wish to, to be honest with you. And it's hardly any surprise that British productivity is stagnant, because everybody is talking about their parrots. And don't talk about meetings. I mean, really, these meetings are the modern plague. I mean, we could cut

that 15 to 16,000 words by a third, couldn't we, if we could just get on top of meetings? I mean, we have meetings about meetings about meetings!

And you've got these certain characters who appear in meetings, don't you? You've got the person who says something just to justify them being there. It's like, "Oh, I'm the person from finance, therefore I must justify my presence by saying something." You know, it doesn't actually mean anything, it's not particularly relevant, but I'm going to say it anyway, just so that you know that I said something. It's always a recap of what the last four people have said. "I think the project's a really good idea." Six people further down the line, "Well, yeah, I think the project's a really good idea." Just brilliant. And what about that person who always starts talking at the end of the meeting? You know, "I'm going to give you 15 minutes back now," says the person who's chairing the meeting, some hope for that. Then it'll be like, "Has anybody got anything they'd like to say?" Oh, somebody comes in, they start twittering on about something completely irrelevant. Do they not realise, do they not want lunch? I mean, really. So there's just this sort of thing where people just can't stop, you just have to keep talking all the time.

And I think part of that is the fact that we now have all these different technologies over the years giving us so many different ways to twitter on, doesn't it? Even old-fashioned ones like radio. We hear LBC, for example. Do you listen to LBC? Why I can't stand it! More than five minutes just drives me insane. If I want to understand the Iran war, I'll listen to something serious. I don't want to know what brain-dead local council people do. You'd be hard-pressed to find it, you wouldn't have had LBC like that 40 years ago, but now they can't stop, they have to sort of cut them off in midstream. Then, of course, you've got television as well. You've got the scourge of reality TV. People will watch hours and hours and hours of vacuous people living in a house together, squabbling and grumbling and talking about absolute nonsense. Below Deck? You're in the Big Brother room, don't swear. I swear at the television about half the time watching it. "I'm a nonentity... get me out of here!" Yes, it's just incredible, these Love Islands as well. It's best not to listen to the conversation on Love Island, just switch the sound off, just enjoy the view, I think, and just don't listen to the dialogue. It's like all these wonderful inventions all just serve the purpose of just more jibber-jabber.

And then, of course, we have the more modern technologies. We have the inaptly named social media. Look at the comments, you know, it's like there was a time when people held their counsel about things, now they share it with the entire planet every time there's a newspaper article, we've got 600 comments underneath of people blurting out their half-baked opinions on absolutely everything. Then, of course, there's some of the more modern social media inventions. Well, modern to me, anyway, because I'm old and prehistoric. People often criticise China, they say that it's a big exporter of low-quality tat, really. But the biggest exporters of low-quality tat from China are not Temu or Shein, it's TikTok. Yes, anyone got TikTok? Honestly, you just scroll, it's not for nothing that it has been dubbed the "Idiocracy" by people. I mean, honestly, now absolutely any half-wit in the world can just be broadcast to the entire planet. Have you seen these videos? It's endless people doing vox pops and vapid people interviewing people that are even more vapid than they are about absolutely nothing at all, or people running around saying that, "Oh, this is a really nice, exciting new town I've discovered, it's called Bognor Regis," or people talking about the fact that they've been cooking Mars bars in their air fryer, or unboxing... "I've got an Amazon parcel, you know, it's a new packet of dusters." Literally

people talk for two hours about the same product. In the days of restrained speech, it was quality rather than quantity, really.

But not only has the technology led to even more jibber-jabber, the technology itself jabbars. Anyone use ChatGPT? If you ask it a simple question, you get a 15-page essay. I asked a question, it can't shut up. Which part of that interested you most? Give me the answer in one line or something like that. Even the machines themselves just can't be quiet. Self-service checkout: "Would you like to continue? Would you like to continue? Help is on its way." Or try travelling by train. Yes, I meant to again, so as I don't exceed my time, it'd be embarrassing if I exceeded my time, wouldn't it, to say that people talk too much, I'll leave you with a scenario that often happens to me. A train journey used to be something very peaceful. You sat there and watched the countryside roll by as your thoughts drifted off. Not anymore. Now it's, "If you see something that's not right, tell one of our staff or text 61016, we'll sort it. See it, say it, sorted. This is carriage four of six." Even if the train won't shut up, you've got someone sitting opposite you who hasn't got headphones on, on loudspeaker listening to TikTok, some idiot talking about the charms of Clapham or something like that or what they've just made in their air fryer. So even there we can't escape it. Even the machines talk too much, so we all just need to rein this in.

So I was not booked as the opposing speaker. It's a very last-minute thing. So, here's going to be one of life's supreme ironies. The one saying people talk too much has been a brilliant speaker, and the one who's going to oppose that motion says we're not talking enough, and I don't think I'm going to be that good of a speaker. Let's find out. Oh, I'm tired today, because I just had a very exhausting work day. I worked in the West End. My job was to usher them in, and those school kids weren't being very quiet during the performance. School kids, they weren't keeping quiet, and it's great because it shows they're engaged in the performance. I really wish grown-ups would speak up more during some of the plays I see. Boo the actors, throw rotten tomatoes and tell them they need to do their job properly. People don't speak enough. What about this ideal that children should be seen and not heard? That my honourable opposing friend says is something that's been around with us since the dawn of time? No, it comes off as a very high Victorian ideal. I don't know if anyone here is a historian about that era, but the idea that children should be seen and not heard, yeah, that's an ideal if you're an up-and-coming middle-class country and you've got to focus on your work and kids will be noisy, so you might nod to them, blow them a kiss, but the nanny can take care of the noise. I don't think it works, honestly. I think we're still living with a lot of psychological scarring down through generations from families that really needed to talk to each other about certain things to be emotionally honest. People weren't speaking enough, people weren't talking enough. What is it? Is it talking? Is the motion talk or speak? I want to use the correct phrasing. "People talk too much." People were not talking too much. They weren't talking enough. The British reserve on the phone that got mentioned, yes, but have we traded one form of emotional dishonesty for another? I wonder to myself. People had much to say. They had maybe medical problems that they didn't feel they could share with their doctor back in the 70s. "Oh, Doctor, lovely weather." "How long have you been suffering with that?" "Doctor, I'm going to tell you my things in graphic detail. I know we've never met, you're not my local doctor, you are now an NHS employee, but this is gratuitous stuff, really." And is the doctor going to say, "Did you bring that

on yourself with your terrible lifestyle?" No, people don't talk enough. Please, doctors, tell your patients the true facts of life.

My honourable friend brought up the decline in vocabulary. There's another play I worked on years ago. Did anyone hear of a play called Lemons Lemons Lemons Lemons Lemons, which is some sort of sci-fi play about a dystopia where the government makes a rule that you can only use 140 words in a day, like the equivalent of a tweet, and it leaves the two heroes on the stage unable to communicate the deep passions which they feel for each other. The very fact they have any kind of liberties, even being able to talk about the fact that it can be challenged in the courts. They need to be able to talk to each other. People need to be able to speak. At one point in the play, all the two can do is say the word "love." They only use one word. It was a fascinating play. The ability to articulate is one of our great gifts, and it needs to be developed from a very early age, because in this world today, if you are going out into the world and you are unable to articulate the vast experiences that we are undergoing now and in the future, you are going to be wholly at sea. Can you imagine a generation of English school children who can only articulate as Shakespeare's Hamlet might do? Maybe, maybe not. "To be or not to be, that is the question, whether 'tis nobler in the mind to suffer the slings and arrows of outrageous fortune, or to take arms against a sea of troubles, and by opposing end them." Very poetic metaphor, but does it not articulate something deep about human experience? There are people today who don't even know who Mr Shakespeare is. "Is he still writing plays? Is he still working at that big wooden O?" I'm serious. I volunteer at the Globe. People will ask if he's still writing for them.

Let me tell you some history. The history is people need to talk more. Talk to your kids about this fascinating Mr Shakespeare. Talk about the fact that Shakespeare was just one man amongst many playwrights in his day. He was a Steven Spielberg type of guy, he was a successful commercial producer, but he didn't see himself as a great artist. George Orwell pointed out that in his sonnets, he never even mentions the plays he's worked on. That was a bit of a lark, but because people preserved his words, we can articulate our experience. We need to be able to talk about things.

And right now I walk out onto the streets of modern Britain, and as my friend says, people will talk about the simplest of stuff, the stupidest of stuff. Make a TikTok video on how to best wipe your bottom. Go on social media to talk about how you should vote for trees. What is the stuff we should be talking about? It's stuff that is often difficult, complex, not comfortable but often emotionally rewarding. Shakespeare's Hamlet is talking about so many things in that one monologue: whether to live, whether to die, the fact that if you live, you basically are choosing to accept that life is suffering, and you could kill yourself and escape it all, but then what lies beyond it? Very profound in his own poetic way. Or maybe take a family member of mine, who I will not name, who is in great pain and finds it really difficult to communicate, and I'm there to inform them, and they're like, "Go away, go away." That's not helping. We need to be able to support a suffering relative. "I know when you were growing up in the 1950s you didn't complain. We just lived through the war. Don't complain." No, we need to be able to complain civilly. Because that's how we get things done. We need to be able to debate. We need to be able to talk to each other. We need to be able to go up to somebody with whom we've had an argument and say, "Look, you know that I don't agree with your perspective, but we're on the same planet and we have to work things out. Let's talk, let's try and sit down, let's not shout at each other."

Those protesters last Saturday, they weren't talking. Their actions spoke loudly with the Union Jacks on one side, Palestine flags on the other, but there's no talking. The action spoke for them. The action spoke very loudly when I mentioned that these good British patriots with their Union Jacks went into a local Portuguese-run cafe that I like, and got their food there. Very nationalist, very British. I could have turned around to one of them, this man draped in his Union Jack, his beefy face showing that he had never been to Sylvan. I could have stopped and said, "Mate, look, I understand what you're doing. I understand, you have not been able to set up an ISA in your life, maybe been to prison, maybe you feel Hamlet is this obscure text that your teacher tried to shove down your throat, but we can talk about this." We can talk about the differences, and the fact that you know clearly, with my very fine shirt, posh voice, maybe I've had opportunities in my life this man in the Union Jack hasn't had. We can talk about it. We don't need to march in the street, we don't need to argue, we don't need to hate each other. We just need to be able to talk. If you have a suffering relative who doesn't want to express their feelings, okay, but that's not helping. We need to be able to talk. If you have any poetic feeling, you need to be able to talk. And sure, words come out of our mouths, they go all over social media, they come out of the chatbots, but are we talking? We're not talking enough. We need to talk more. We need to expand our vocabulary. We need to go to debates. We need to hear the opinions that we don't agree with. We need to go out into this wide world and talk more, articulate people. The world is here. Grab it with both hands and your eyes, your ears and your tongue. I thank you.

Thank you very much to our opposing speaker. Thank you for stepping in at last-minute notice. We will go to the floor speakers now. Anyone who wants to get up can go, and you can ask questions as well of the floor speakers if they will take a point. So I'm sure people have things they want to say. Who would like to come up? Well, the next speaker is next. Also, I'm just going to pass the book back around. If you want to say you're here, you can pop your name in.

I'm sorry, I've got to go back to Australia. I just want to say, I go around the world a lot. There's a basic decency in England that you need to hold on to, you know. One of the reasons I was here was yesterday in St Paul's Cathedral, there was a memorial service for all those who died when they got infected blood through blood transfusions. And the British government owned up to that, and not only owned up to it, but paid compensation to the families, and that's a really decent thing to do. I don't know any other government that's done that anywhere, or any other people, and I don't know anywhere where you find meetings like this, and it's something to hold on to. I just wanted to say that. Thank you very much. And thank you for welcoming me.

Thank you so much, Sylvan's guests, I'm delighted to come here to speak. I've always been shy and nervous, and waited till the end before I spoke. I thought today I'm going to be first. It wasn't to be. Never mind. I would like to point out this is a very difficult, complex question that we really need to go into in great detail. So, I'd like to pick out a few things where I feel there's points for the motion and a few things that are against the motion to let you realise how totally confused I am. I'd like to start with social media. Someone mentioned social media as being too much talk. Well, I don't know what he's looking at, but when I'm looking at it, you sit there absolutely silent for hours and hours. Maybe there's a bit of sound, maybe there's some other noises, but there's certainly not intelligent conversation going on, and certainly you are not part of anything remotely intelligent. So I think that shows not enough talking, but that's a good thing, because scrolling does keep you quiet.

Then I thought about sex. People often talk about talking dirty, and how important that is in sex. I would like to say, as a serial monogamist, I think it's very important not to talk in sex, because it's so easy to forget names and get muddled up. So, there's another example of no talking. The final one is sacred occasions like birth and death. Do we want people talking on those occasions? Do you want someone yelling at you, "Push, push, breathe, breathe, push!"? No, you tell them shut up, let them get on with it. And when it comes to death, you don't want to hear religious talk, we want silence, beautiful music and then nobody saying, "I just don't know what to say." Of course you don't know what to say, so shut up.

However, I would like to give the opposite side of things, where you do need to talk. When you get onto a tube that's full of people scrolling, it's beautifully quiet, isn't it? There's no communication, but there's one or two people who've still got old-fashioned books. That's the problem, because you can't look over their shoulder easily to watch what they're looking at. On that occasion, I think it's important to talk. You can ask them about the plot, if you know the book, you can tell them how it's going to finish. You can improve their transport experience. I'll jump to my final point. I am a member of this debating club. I'm also a member of a speakers' club where there's no purpose for the club except for people to come and speak, so I know a lot about speaking. I also do stand-up comedy, and I also agree with the opposer of the motion. It's wonderful when people join in and encourage you, you know, the people shouting out, "You're not funny, when are you going to tell a joke?" They improve the feeling of the occasion. I'm very clear that there are reasons for silence, there are reasons for noise and as I have so much experience of talking, I'm going to say, please support the motion, do.

Anyone else want to speak? Oh, I saw my daughter first. I'm biased, but then we'll go to another speaker after. So, my daughter is next.

I don't think that the house speaks too much. I think he speaks too much, blabbering on about some boring subject, speaking with his hands and he goes like this, no. No one wants to hear him. I just think they sit here for the funny people at the end, not for him. He's blabbering on about something, always whacking his fancy little pen on his cup. He's making such a big noise to hear that some people are trying to sleep, you know. I don't think they speak too much, but I think he should be out of this club because he speaks too much.

Revolutionary! Thank you, my daughter, for that very cheeky outburst, I wonder where she gets it from. Her birthday is coming up. I'm not sure if she's going to get enough presents now. Well, quite know what to say after that. Maybe I don't know whether we speak too much or not, but maybe we don't listen enough, because people want to be heard, but maybe we don't listen. When I get up in the morning, I come down to the kitchen and make myself a cup of tea, and I sit down and look out at the garden, you know, and then start to drink it, and my wife comes and sits next to me, and she starts chattering about all her various concerns. Frankly, it's the last thing I want to listen to. I absolutely don't want to listen, and so really, what I want to do is to drink my cup of tea in peace and quiet, but I don't get that luxury.

Anyway, you know, some people don't speak very much. It reminds me of a monk called Bodhidharma, who is credited with bringing Zen Buddhism to Japan, and Bodhidharma sat in a cave for nine years looking at a blank wall. During that time, he didn't speak a word to anybody. Now I had a scroll depicting Bodhidharma in his cave hanging on my wall when I lived in Japan, and my then-girlfriend used to work in the evenings. We had a Japanese-style room in what I suppose you would call a boarding house, and one evening she was out working. I lit a candle,

and I thought it would be nice if she had some light when she came in later, and I went off to sleep. The candle burnt down to the candle holder; the candle holder was made of soft wood, and it burnt down to the tatami matting. That was about the time she came in and she very quietly picked up the kettle from our little stove and poured water over the burning mass on the floor. Meanwhile, I was sleeping quite peacefully, blissfully unaware. In the morning she said nothing, and it was only when I noticed the scorch marks on the floor, and I asked her how the scorch marks got there, and she said in the most matter-of-fact way, "Oh, when I came in last night, I had to pour water on the floor." Another five minutes, and it was a wooden building, and the tatami matting is all rushes and stuff. Another five minutes, the building would probably have gone up in flames. So I have her to thank. I remember her, I mean, it's 60 years ago, but I remember her with great affection. She was a wonderful girlfriend. But anyway, I'm here to tell you the story, thanks to her calm and cool pouring of water in the late evening, so there we are. I'm here to tell the tale.

Well, this has been fun. People chatting, having conversations, sharing stuff, you know, that's what we like to talk about, whether it's silliness and teasing other people, which I think is also incredibly important and hugely entertaining for all of us. That's how we do social connection, that's how we have fun. The Brits are excellent at this, because you've actually turned talking about the weather into an icebreaker. How exceptional is that? You're so socially inept, and that's my favourite British quirk. The other way of talking that's really fun, extremely necessary, is complaining, commenting, actually, specifically. So I am going to have a very slight rant, which I would request that you laugh at, just so I tick the dictator's box of being funny. It's one form of communication, talking that we should eliminate, banish for the sake of humanity, and I'll tell you why, because it's hugely annoying. Who sends voice notes? Can you please stop, because you're sending about five million sermons to me, which I'm never going to listen to, because if someone does research on this, they will probably find that you can put your three-minute monologue of actual verbal diarrhoea into one sentence text. So in protest to all voice notes, to anyone who sends them to me, I just don't listen to them, which means they either think I ghost them, excellent, or they finally get the message and text me, brilliant. So, please, for the sake of humanity, stop talking in voice notes.

Thank you. This has been really great. I only have two short things to suggest, and one is that it's been very interesting for me growing up that people who say little are often saying something very valuable, and that many of us don't get the opportunity to see that. I knew an old man, a friend of my father's, who was very good at this, and we all really respected him. It wasn't that he was necessarily going to say anything profound, but the fact that he didn't say much meant that we all were waiting for something profound, and that I think was the art of his conversation, and we loved him to bits. The other thing I've read recently is that there are two strata of conversation and society. In the 1970s they worked this out. You might have heard of it, the high-context society or group, which relies very much on just reading the vibes and little nuances, and maybe old styles of behaving that one only knows about if they're in that group. And the other one is the low-context, where people are much more individual and outspoken, and for some reason they said Australia and America are more like that. I'm from New Zealand, but down in those countries you are quite verbose sometimes and garrulous. I should probably stop, actually, because that's reminding me what I'm like.

I am going to speak in favour of the motion that we talk too much, but in doing so I also recognise some excellent points made by the opposer about things that we ought to talk about that we perhaps don't. So I think that what I'm saying is in favour of quality speech and less of the rubbish. Even though it's correct that the number of words we actually speak on a daily basis has been gradually coming down for the last 20 years, we still talk far too much. One example, which is a very British example, of the kind of stuff that gets said millions of times a day. We've all heard this: "Oh, hi, my colleague, how are you doing? Hey, what about the weather at the moment? I mean, God, you don't know where you are, do you? One minute it feels like it's February or winter and it's raining, and the next minute the sun comes out, and it feels like summer. Yesterday I had to drive my car to Waitrose to buy something for my mother, because she can't get out of the house at the moment, and I got in the car, the sun was shining, when I got out at the other end, it was pouring with rain, and I got soaked because I hadn't taken an umbrella." The Met Office has calculated that we British, in particular, but it also applies in Australia and America, talk about the weather for 56 hours in any year. So 56 hours of talking about the weather, if you calculate it in waking hours, it's about three days talking nonstop about the weather. That is something we could cut out, because if I'm telling my colleague my experience in the weather, he already knows what the weather's like, he's living in the same place. So a lot of the weather talk is a waste of time, and I agree with what's been said about meetings where people love the sound of their own voices and go on and on.

A lot of this does need to be cut out. I have lobbied my local MP about this since I saw the motion, and he has agreed to introduce a private member's bill into the House of Commons, which will be called the Talking Reduction Act of Parliament. As long as the King rubber-stamps it, and he'll obviously be told to, the way this works is that every British citizen, instead of having an identity card, will all have four cards, and you have to have them about your person all of the time. It will be the law. These cards are called silences. One of them says five minutes, two minutes, one of them says one minute and the other says finish. So I suppose what I'm saying is there is too much talking, we still talk too much, we should talk less, but what we say should be more meaningful. I was just reminded, while sitting there, last week I went to see Paul Simon at the Royal Albert Hall, and his final song was The Sound of Silence, which includes the lament about people talking without speaking, people hearing without listening. So that's what we need to do. Thank you very much.

I'll try to break the habit of a lifetime and be brief and amusing. I think a couple of things. When I was younger, I used to go on management courses when you had face-to-face courses. Everything now is online, blah blah blah, no one's got any money for a training course any more. But I was in a sales course, and I was reminded of someone saying, "You've got two ears and one mouth, and you should use them proportionately." Another point I'd like to make is that, young speaker, I think you've made some tremendous points, particularly about your father. There is a saying about "out of the mouths of babes." Maybe you guys are a bit young, but I think sometimes we could do with listening to the young a little bit more than we sometimes do. I know dads can be really annoying, I'm a dad as well, and my kids are a little bit older than you, but they're still really annoyed with me. I'm a little bit undecided about which side I'm going to sit on this debate. I think the opposing speaker brings up some very good points, because, yes, we could spend a little bit more time talking to people. We live in a world today which is very isolated, we have all of this information at our fingertips, we can talk to imaginary friends with AI,

but we can't walk down the street and say good morning to our neighbour, and maybe that would be a better thing to do, to say hello, ask how they are. Thank you.

I feel the need to come up and defend myself and say a few words. The motion tonight, I selected it, of course, to present to you, but it was a suggestion from the treasurer. Yes, there's been talk of dictatorship, and I won't address that head on, and I want to ignore the cards. Normally, I'm the one to wield the blue cards, of course. But as a debating society, we need to look carefully at the motion. If an earlier speaker were here tonight, he would dissect the motion in a funny way, word by word. "People talk too much." I like that motion. It doesn't say I talk too much. I control the blue cards. I'm in charge here. I can ignore the complaints from my daughter. I run an organisation that is about people talking and about having great conversations, and we've heard so many nice things about listening, speaking things that are actually useful and not the blabber that we hear way too much of. But I'm torn, because usually I'm the one with the cards, so I can stop people from talking if I want them to cut off soon. But, of course, all the timings are impeccable. It's all to the second. There's no judgement that's required at all. No revolution, no one's going to take over the club.

I'm channelling Miranda Priestly, and if you don't know who I'm talking about, it means that you don't talk enough. Is there anyone who doesn't know who Miranda Priestly is in this room? Jesus Christ! I'm going to admit to something. I was president of a sister organisation, and when I told people that I didn't read the news, they'd be like, "What?" I said, because you don't need to read the news, people talk! And then you look it up. Somebody saying something, I'll be quickly looking it up. Anyway, my pet peeve is meetings after meetings after meetings, because I know people who do that. And the earlier speaker, unfortunately, I agree with your family. Children, young speaker, just remember, as a young woman, you've got to stand up for yourself and talk right now. People don't talk enough, right? And maybe the reason I said 44,000 words is because that's what I do in a day. All right? So I'm not the average person. I've been told I'm not normal.

The other thing is, people don't talk enough. I'm going to use men between the ages of 16 and 25. That's the highest rate of suicides in this country, because men don't talk, right? Homeless people, again, it's mostly men, mainly because the wives have chucked them out, or they're army veterans, and we don't look after our army veterans, so we don't talk about the fact that we're not like America in that respect for army veterans. The other thing is, if you've got mental health issues, it's not easy to turn around and say to somebody, "I struggle with my mental health." I do. I suffer stress and anxiety, so when I got bullied by people, it affects me, right? But maybe it's why I am the way I am, okay? And I love it. One day in this meeting, I talked about what I like to do, and somebody came up to me afterwards and said, "Have you got ADHD?" And I went, "Yeah, I think I have. I'm supposed to get tested." Now, I didn't mind that. Actually, it was the earlier speaker. I didn't mind him coming and asking, but he was brave, the fact that he came and asked me, and I didn't feel bothered that he asked me that at all, right? Maybe he's the only person that would. So it does actually show a level of concern, and if you've got something that you're worried about, you learn more.

I was in the area of Trafalgar Square on Saturday. I was going to the Science Museum for 10 o'clock, but I ended up going to the Stop the War march. They called it Free Palestine, but I'm saying Stop the War. I felt I hadn't been to the Science Museum for about three or four years, and I needed to go, but I've been depressed. But I thought, I do need to go to this march,

because you know what, I'm tired of white people standing up for black people, right? More white people went to anti-fascist marches than black people, because life has taught us you don't win anyway. Something I meant to say right at the beginning: words for talking. Labrish is a Jamaican word for gossiping over the fence, Coronation Street, Cockney, having a cup of cha. And it's also the knowledge of knowing where a word comes from. One day I asked, "Where does that phrase 'cup of cha' come from?" I realised it comes from India and China, because they spell it the same way, but they say chai. I like to listen to what's not being said, because you learn more. Someone mentioned it earlier, because I like to talk, I know it's also important for me to listen. I like to talk with people and not to people.

Back to the Science Museum. So, eventually I leave Holborn. My heart was in the right place, what I needed was more important. One of the things I'm going to say is I will talk to anyone. I'll be laughing about something in the paper on the train, and people look at me, and I think I need to explain why I've done this loud laugh. You get talking with people. It doesn't actually take that much effort to talk, despite the supposedly English reticence. I've been told not to talk about racism in this room, right? I must think about the people who live in Middle England. But if you talk with me and with other people, you find out things. It took me a long time to feel comfortable, because I have to code-switch. When you're with your family, how you behave and how you behave with your friends, that's what code-switching means. If people talk, you will find out more, but if you just keep saying, "Don't do this, don't do this," and if you don't want to hear me talk about something that affects my life, then yes, vote on that side. But if you want to hear something about everybody in this room, I have a friend who's a white South African, and if I didn't have her as a friend and get to know her, my opinion of white South Africans would be totally different. So you need to learn to speak with and not to, or at. Thank you.

I'd like to thank the previous speaker for bringing up the point that I'd forgotten to bring up, the fact that not talking can exacerbate mental health problems and eventually lead to suicide. Very valid point. But we are here to debate whether people talk too much. Notice, we're debating whether people talk too much, not whether they speak, which is a different thing. You can get up on a box in Speaker's Corner and speak at people, and they will not talk to you. You can tweet away, you can blog and speak, and what are you really talking about? You're not communicating with anyone. AI communication, that's not talking. You might say we speak too much and talk too little. To talk is to exchange communication, to listen and to learn, to delve into the depths of human experience. "To be or not to be," that is the question, and you can only reach that by talking, which in modern society we don't. In this society, yes, we speak a lot, and we talk too little. To talk is uncomfortable. It's difficult, but now we need it more than ever. I can't really talk about a lot of situations I've seen where people really should have talked before a difficult situation arose, but if only they had talked instead of just speaking, perhaps the difficulties could have been avoided. Who knows how many world diplomacy problems could have been solved or made better simply by talking today?

There are children whose parents do not talk with them, do not articulate with them, will not bring them to a debating club like this to help them broaden their knowledge. No, I'm serious. Yes, from now on you will look back on this and say, "Thanks, Dad." In adult life, you will be able to talk. There are children today who will struggle to talk, to actually convey the depths of their emotion, to learn from other people. Instead, they will learn how to speak, how to prattle-prattle, how to just fill their lives with gossip to disguise the void within them. The void within us needs

to be filled with real discussion and understanding, real talk, and we do that too little. I'll just say I agree in one respect. I hear too much on the train, and it annoys me, but that's not talk, that's speaking. We hear people in the street, at football matches, they speak, but they do not talk. Yeah, people speak too much, but they don't talk enough in this world. Vote against the motion. We need more talk in this world, we don't have enough of it. Thank you.

I'm quite convinced by the speak/talk dichotomy, but one thing that definitely came through a lot in what people said was the thing about quality and quantity in talking. There's a difference between saying something profound or meaningful or important and just talking for the sake of talking. I have nothing against the former, it's the latter on which I am aiming my fire this evening. Also, a very good point that the opposing speaker made about the fact that it's better now that people are more forthcoming when they talk to their doctors. I totally agree, people should be very frank about their medical problems when they talk to their doctor, just not the person next to them at work or during the cup of tea overlooking the garden, exactly. So it's about being receptive. Any other good point that was made about people not listening and talking, I think we're a little bit like a radio set that's on broadcast rather than receive a lot of the time, and it was a very good point that was made about having two ears and only one mouth and using them in proportion. I think that definitely there's a thing to say for us listening more and speaking less, because I think you learn more as well, and it also means that what you say is of more quality.

Voice notes. Yes, I agree. Can we do a separate motion just to ban them? It's a good choice, good short debate. I have a friend I'll send a message that says, "Hi, how are you?" And then it comes back as a voice note, and I can see that it's about eight minutes long. So, yes, sometimes it's about being sparing, isn't it? It's that quality thing again. Three days of talking about the weather, I mean, really, we could cull it by that, couldn't we? Because that's really where I'm coming from. It's not about the important things that we talk about, the meaningful things, I have no issue with that. It's the jibber-jabber that I take issue with. I'm determined not to overrun my time this time, the irony, I think. But I think I'll leave you with two quotes. One is from Desiderata, if you've ever heard that one, that says, "Go placidly amid the noise and haste, and remember what peace there may be in silence." I think that's a good little adage to live by. But the other one is about the fact that a lot of the sort of talk I'm talking about is people talking without thinking. The first thing that comes into your mind, no filter, and there's a memorable quote, which actually nobody knows who said it, it's attributed to Abraham Lincoln, but apparently he didn't say it, so it's a mystery now. But what I'm going to leave you with is this: It is better to remain silent and be thought a fool than to speak and remove all doubt.

Thank you to our main speakers and everyone who contributed. We will now move to a vote quickly, and we'll wrap up. It's late. The motion again is: this house believes people talk too much. All those in favour of the motion, please raise your hands. Wait, does that mean you can vote if you're in favour? Yes, you think people talk too much. And all those opposed? Nine votes in favour, ten votes opposed. Thank you all for coming. Hope you enjoyed it. Our next debate is Monday, the first of June. Have a great evening.