Verbal Communication

“Sticks & stones may break my bones, but names will never hurt me.”

NOT!

What’s the difference between...

- **Verbal** communication
- **Nonverbal** communication

Language is a collection of **SYMBOLS**

Ogden & Richards

**Triangle of Meaning**
The Meanings of Words...
- ... is arbitrary
- ... is conventional
- ... is learned
- ... and perception are interrelated
  - perception affects language
  - language affects perception

Verbal messages...
- are denotative and connotative
  - vary in abstraction
  - vary in directness
  - vary in politeness
  - meanings are in people

Denotation & Connotation
- Different types of meanings attached to words
  - Denotation - the primary associations a word has for most members in a given linguistic community (dictionary definition)
  - Connotation - other, secondary associations a word has for one or more members of that community (the “feelings” people have about the words they use)
From U.S. News & World Report - July 11, 1988

Do you support or oppose a constitutional amendment: prohibiting abortions protecting the life of the unborn
Support 29% 50%
Oppose 67% 39%
Undecided 4% 11%

Are we spending too much, too little, or about the right amount on: welfare assistance to the poor
Too little 22% 81%

Ladder of Abstraction

Direct vs. Indirect speech

- **Indirect:** Attempts to get listeners to say/do something without committing the speaker
  - “I’m so bored; I have nothing to do tonight”
  - “Would you feel like hamburgers tonight?”
- **Direct:** Clearly state the speaker’s preference and then ask listeners if they agree
  - “I’d like to go to the movies. Would you like to come?”
  - “I’d like hamburgers tonight. How about you?”
Meaning is in people, not words

Private Vs. Shared Meaning

- **Private meaning** - when meaning is assigned to words without agreement; a private language used by yourself

- **Shared meaning** - in order for communication to take place between two or more individuals, meaning must be shared

The Sapir-Whorf Hypothesis

- Language shapes our thoughts and culture, and our culture and thoughts affect the language we use to describe what we perceive
  - Linguistic Determinism
  - Linguistic Relativity
Semantic Differential Scale

The Olympics

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(Charles Osgood, 1957)

Semantic Differentials, part 2

- Osgood, 1957
- Three dimensions of judgments
  - Evaluation
  - Potency
  - Activity

Language performs two important functions:

- Serves an aid to memory
- Enables us to abstract from our experience—high order skill
Word Barriers

- Lack of Precision / Abstract language - Uncertain meaning
- Bypassing / Equivocation - One word, two thoughts
- Euphemisms - Making it sound nicer
  - Bafflegab - Using big words unnecessarily

More Word Barriers

- Allness - Generalization
- Static Evaluation - Assumes rigidity
- Polarization/Dichotomies - Creating extremes (polar words)

Dichotomies

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<tr>
<th>failure</th>
<th>stupid</th>
<th>ugly</th>
<th>loser</th>
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(Journal of Applied Behavioral Science, 1970)
Still More Word Barriers

- Inferences
- Specialized Vocabulary
  - Jargon vs. Argot
    - Advantages—cohesion, efficiency
    - Disadvantages—mystification
- Biased Language - Insensitivity toward others

Sexist Language

- Feminine markers--actress, waitress
- Inclusion of gender--female surgeon, a “lady” judge
- Male pronouns and references as the universal—mankind

Male and Female Language Usage

- Deborah Tannen-- Georgetown University linguistics professor
- Books include “You Just Don’t Understand,” “Working 9 to 5”
- She is so NOT John Gray--Men are from Mars, Women are from Venus
- Conversational style
The Conversation Process

- Business
  - Feedforward
  - Feedback
- Opening
- Closing

Features of Conversations

- They have signals that indicate beginnings and endings
- They require both listening and speaking
- Roles reverse during the conversation
- Participants reverse roles by taking turns

Metacommunication

- Meta = about
- Metacommunication is Communication about communication
- Types of messages:
  - Manifest Messages: elements that are physically present and countable - WORDS
  - Latent Messages: motives, contexts, nonverbal, relationships, etc.
### Altercasting

- Defined:
  - Using language to impose a certain identity on people:
  - Can support or reject the identity of another person
- Examples:
  - "As a parent, you know..."
  - "Only an idiot would think that..."

### Language Acquisition

- Egocentric vs. socialized speech (Piaget, 1962)
- Sociocentric speech (Elliott, 1984)
  - Primordial sharing
  - Proto-conversations
  - Conversations