Language: Barrier & Bridge

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Today's Topics

- The Nature of Language
- The Impact of Language
- The Uses (and Abuses) of Language
- Gender and Language
- Language and Culture

The Nature of Language

- Language is Symbolic
-     Words are arbitrary and don't have meaning in themselves.
-     People still act as if words had some meaning in them.

The Nature of Language

- Language is Subjective
- Words can be interpreted in many different ways causing misunderstandings. (Alice in Wonderland 182)
- The receiver doesn't always interpret what you meant.
- Communication allows you to negotiate meaning for shared understanding.

The Nature of Language

- Language is Rule-Governed

-    Symbols and language work only because people agree on how to use them. (rules)

- Phonological Rules- govern sound

- Syntactic rules- govern the way symbols are arranged - Have you the cookies brought?

- Semantic rules- govern meanings

- Pragmatic rules- what interpretation is appropriate in a given context. CMM 186

The Impact of Language

- The words we use shape our perceptions of the world and reflect our attitudes.

- Naming and Identity- the labels we choose for ourselves says a great deal.

- Dan versus Daniel

- Married names

- Ms vs Mrs vs Miss

Impact of Language

- Affiliation, attraction and interest

- Speech can build solidarity or alienate outsiders.

- Convergence - adapting your speech style to match others

- Divergence- speaking to emphasize differences

- Word choice to reflect liking and interest

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The Impact of Language

- Power-Language patterns add to or detract from a speaker's power.

- Powerless speech mannerisms -kinda, I think, I guess, uh, well, so, very, don't you think, I probably shouldn't say this . . .

- Is less powerful ever better than powerful?

- Yes, when a long-term positive relationship is desired versus immediate results.

- Powerful and polite is most effective.

The Uses & Abuses of Language

- Precision and Vagueness - we can use our language to be precise or vague.

- Both impact our communication

- What is your goal? perfect understanding or ambiguity?

- The receiver is responsible for interpretation and perception checking.

Uses & Abuses of Language

- Equivocal language - words that have more than one commonly accepted definition

- 20-year friendship ends at the alter

- Equivocal language is sometimes useful to avoid an honesty that can embarrass the speaker and the listener-

- "It's the ugliest thing I have ever seen!"

Uses & Abuses of Language

- Abstraction - convenient ways of generalizing - a useful kind of short hand in everyday situations.

- Problems caused by highly abstract language - 1) Stereotyping 2) confuses others -199 3) leaves you unclear about your own thoughts 4) Serious problems - does "no" mean "no"

Uses & Abuses of Language

- Specific Behavioral Language
- Low-level abstractions (specifics) can reduce the change of a misunderstanding.
- Specific behavioral language has 3 parts:
- Who is involved? Specific or entire group
- In what circumstances does the behavior occur?
- What behaviors are involved?

Uses & Abuses of Language

- Euphemisms - pleasant terms substituted for blunt ones - sometimes these are good, sometimes not

- Relative Language - relative words gain their meaning by comparison - how big is big? Link relative words to more measurable terms

- Static Evaluation- "is" is unchanging - people change

The Language of Responsibility

- A speaker's willingness to accept responsibility for his/her own feelings is evident by the use of clear or obscure messages.

- "It" statements replace the personal "I"

- "But" statements - cancels the thought that precedes it.

- Questions - avoid making a declaration

"I" versus "You" Language

- Advantages of "I" language
- Defense reduction
- Honesty - you can speak your mind
- Completeness- more information
- Three parts of an "I" Statement
- 1)   The other person's behavior 2) Your feelings 3) Consequences the other's behavior has for you

"We" Language

- "We" statements imply responsibility of both speaker and listener
- 'We need to figure out a budget."
- To use these three pronouns correctly:
- I- reflect position w/o being self-absorbed
- You - show concern without judging
- We - includes others w/o speaking for them.

Disruptive Language

- Eliminate three bad linguistic habits:

- 1) fact-opinion confusion- can the statement be verified as true? 212

- 2) Fact-inference confusion - inferring a conclusion based on your interpretation.

- 3) Emotive language - seems to describe but actually announces the speaker's attitude.

Gender & Language

- Content: Men- current events, sports, business; Women - personal & domestics

- Reasons for Communicating - Women - friendships, Men to accomplish the job.

- Conversation style - Men swear more and interrupt more, Women ask more questions and talk less in mixed dyads (217)

Language & Culture

- Silence or lots of talk?

- Low-context vs High-context (221)

- Linguistic determinism - the worldview of a culture is shaped and reflected in the language - Eskimo's numerous words for snow.

- Linguistic relativism - language influences our perceptions