



approaching speech/communication



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Preface

This text is designed for the introductory course in speech/communication. It attempts to develop a broad understanding of the communication process, using theoretical models as well as applications from familiar life situations. New information is included in such areas as the construction of verbal messages and nonverbal and mass communication; traditional interests such as public address and persuasion are also fully explored. Our objective throughout has been to develop in the student the resources that will enable him to evaluate messages and to create his own effective messages in a time of ever-increasing information flow.

The text is organized in three sections. Part 1 focuses on the variables in the communication process. The concepts of source, receiver, and verbal and nonverbal messages are discussed in detail. The section ends with a discussion of the obstacles to effective communication. Theoretical considerations are presented through illustrations drawn from topical areas. For example, an analysis of dogmatism and its effects on communication is developed in terms of the characters of "All in the Family." And the destructive effects of polarization are illustrated by an excerpt from James Michener's study on the confrontation between demonstrators and federal troops at Kent State.

Part 2 discusses the different speech situations—dyad, small group, public address and mass communication. The section is supported with concrete examples, such as excerpts from speeches and other practical demonstrations of the communication process at work. New research is included on therapy groups and on communication in the mass market. Part 3 is devoted to the functions of communication—persuasion, information exchange, social relations and conflict resolution.

Throughout the text special care has been given to readability and graphic format. As communicators we are aware that the way in which material is presented is nearly as important as the material itself. We feel that a textbook, particularly a communication textbook, must be interesting and motivating, not dull and "texty." And like all communicators we have striven for clarity and beauty of language in the belief that even difficult concepts can be made understandable. It is our hope

that we have achieved an effective pedagogical balance between abstract concepts and practical interpretations. We have tried to keep the receiver in mind.

As part of our strategy, we have included a number of pedagogical aids. Small group and individual exercises are provided at the end of each chapter. These exercises should help personalize the information in the chapter; many are appropriate for class discussion. Each chapter also has its own annotated bibliography which includes scholarly and popular works, library references and paperbacks. The annotations often direct the student to specific chapters or sections of a work and should thus be helpful to him in research. End-of-chapter summaries are also provided for study and review. Where appropriate photos and diagrams are used to give visual support to important concepts.

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Contents

page xi

Preface

page 1

Introduction

to the communication process

The nature of the communication process 2

The transactional nature of communication

The affective nature of communication

The personal nature of communication

Defining the communication process 7

Source-oriented definitions

Receiver-oriented definitions

Models of communication 9

The Aristotelian model

The Lasswell model

The Shannon and Weaver model

The Westley and MacLean model

The Berlo model

Part one:

The variables

in the communication process

Chapter 1

page 25

Source variables

Credibility as a source variable 25

The dimensions of source credibility

The dynamics of source credibility

Homophily-heterophily in communication 36

The measurement of homophily-heterophily

The relationship of homophily-heterophily to communication

Compensations for heterophily

Power as a source variable 43

The dimensions of power

The components and types of power

Chapter 2
page 57

Receiver variables

Demographic analysis of an audience 58

Age

Sex

Social and economic background

Racial and ethnic factors

Intelligence

Personality analysis of a receiver 64

Dogmatism

Self-esteem

Aggressiveness and hostility

Anxiety

Prior attitudes

Interpersonal trust 70

The receiver's listening ability 72

Feedback: The receiver's response 74

Chapter 3
page 85

Verbal message variables

The components of a persuasive message 85

Claim

Warrant

Data

Factors affecting persuasive message
appeals 89

Using evidence to persuade

Using one-sided and two-sided messages

Using fear appeals to persuade

Using intense language to persuade

Using humor to persuade

Message discrepancy

Structuring a persuasive message 100

Organizing supporting materials

Identifying the source of evidence

Revealing your desire to persuade

Presenting problems and solutions

Stating points of agreement and disagreement

Stating your conclusions

Chapter 4
page 113

Nonverbal message variables

Difficulties in understanding nonverbal communication 114

Functions of nonverbal behavior in the communication process 115

The dimensions of nonverbal communication 116

Proxemics

Kinesics

Paralanguage

Haptics

Physical appearance and adornment

Environment and objects

Nonverbal communication: A global approach 142

Chapter 5
page 151

Obstacles to effective communication

Selectivity in communication 152

Selective exposure

Selective attention

Selective perception

Selective retention

Frozen evaluation 163

Polarization 165

Bypassing 169

Allness 171

Part two:

*The structures
of the communication process*

Chapter 6
page 183

Face-to-face communication

Factors affecting dyadic communication 184

Degree of perceived privateness

Role behavior

Previous interactions

Availability of feedback and method of interaction

Understanding self and others 192

Interpersonal self-disclosure: Benefits, risks
and obstacles

Conditions for effective self-disclosure

Interpersonal needs and dyadic communication 200

Affection

Affiliation

Control

Chapter 7 page 209

Small group communication

The functions of small groups 212

Social relationships

Education

Persuasion

Problem-solving and decision-making

Conflict resolution

Therapy

Leadership and other group roles 228

Leadership styles

Leadership and social influence

Group membership roles

Chapter 8 page 241

Public address communication

The public speaking situation 242

Initial planning of the speech 245

Deciding the purpose of the speech

Analyzing the audience

Analyzing the occasion and location

Choosing the topic

Preparing the speech 248

Invention

Disposition

Style

Delivery

Chapter 9
page 285

Mass communication

The nature of mass communication 286

Characteristics of mass communication

Functions of the mass communication

How mass communication works 295

One-step vs. two-step flow

Opinion leadership

Diffusion of information

Adoption of innovation

The effects of mass communication 306

Reinforcement and conversion

Media image

Media violence

Effects of mass media on society

Part three:

*The functions
of the communication process*

Chapter 10
page 323

Persuasion

Defining the persuasion process 324

Theories of persuasion 328

Learning theories

Consistency theories

Social judgment theory

Chapter 11
page 349

Information exchange

Accuracy of information exchange 350

Interpersonal factors affecting accuracy

Language usage and clarity

Organization, presentation and feedback

Information exchange within an
organization 357

Communication in formal organizations

Chapter 12
page 367

Social relations and conflict resolution

Interpersonal attraction 368

Physical determinants of attraction

Interpersonal liking and similarity

Social gratification 374

Therapeutic results of communication 375

Conflict and conflict resolution

The types of conflict

Strategies to reduce conflict

Epilogue
page 391

Communication and the future

Index
page 400

Introduction to the communication process

Except for the biological processes which keep us alive, probably no activity is more pervasive than communication. From the moment we awake to the moment we fall asleep, the major portion of our time is spent communicating with others. It is estimated that more than 70 percent of our daily activities involve some form of verbal communication—talking, listening, reading and writing.¹ While this estimate may, at first, seem high, it does not account for numerous nonverbal communication activities such as waving hello to someone or stopping at a street corner for a red light. Clearly, man is a communicating animal. Indeed, the very quality of humanness may be defined by the communication activities in which we engage.

The pervasiveness of communication in men's lives is an indication of the many important functions which this process serves in contemporary society. No one today exists in a vacuum; we each belong to a spiraling hierarchy of groups. We are members of a family, a group of friends, a community, a state and a nation. Man's interrelatedness is a striking characteristic of twentieth century life, and his unique methods of communication make living and working together possible.

Through communication people are able to exert some control over their physical and social environment. By sharing information, man is better able to cope with forces in nature—from tilling the soil to conquering outer space. Then too, communication helps people to initiate and inhibit changes in the social system. Whether we declare war, march for peace, build a housing project or form a commune, communication is the necessary first step in achieving our goals. Of course, communication also provides personal rewards; it enables a person to become more aware of himself and others. Thus, communication helps to establish and maintain social relationships which, in turn, help a person to reach his full potential as an individual.

Despite the pervasiveness and importance of communication in our daily lives, few of us are willing to contend that we are "effective" communicators. Consider, for example, the

¹ David K. Berlo, *The Process of Communication* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1960), p. 1.

number of times during a day you say "That's not what I meant" or "What did you mean" or "I don't understand." The fact that we communicate frequently does not necessarily mean we are good at it. Examining the communication process carefully can help to make a person a more effective communicator.

The nature of the communication process

In the first months of life, an infant begins to learn the complex process of communication. Babies cry when they want food or attention, and they quickly learn that this crying behavior is a way of exerting some control over the environment. Later a child will learn to talk, and verbal communication will be added to his repertoire of gestures and sounds. But the process of learning to communicate does not stop in early childhood. People are constantly relearning and refining their means of communication so they can adapt to changing circumstances in their personal lives or in the world around them. This is what we mean when we say that communication is a process—it is not static, with an easily defined beginning, middle and end. It is a constantly changing, dynamic function, involving exchange and interaction between its various elements. Don Fabun, a communication expert, has suggested that every sentence should begin and end with the word "and" to make people aware of the on-going nature of their communication activities.²

To see how the different elements in a process may be constantly changing and interacting, it is helpful to examine a simple biological process such as digestion. We could list the elements of the digestive process as just the organs involved: the mouth, stomach, small and large intestines, pancreas and liver. But these elements alone do not constitute the actual process of digestion. For example, the stomach cannot digest meat proteins until the meat has been broken down in the mouth and then worked on by the enzyme pepsin. In turn, pepsin cannot perform its function without the aid of hydrochloric acid. All the elements of the digestive process must work together, interacting and changing to meet different needs. Like digestion,

² Don Fabun, *Communications: The Transfer of Meaning* (Beverly Hills, Calif.: Glencoe Press, 1968), p. 4.

the process of communication also involves change, interaction, adaptation and an on-going function.

The transactional nature of communication

Whatever your goals in life, you will eventually find it necessary—and advantageous—to learn to communicate more effectively. If you are interviewed for a job, you will have an immediate need to communicate your skills, intelligence and desire to work. If you are beginning a dating relationship, you may wish to communicate acceptance or rejection of your partner's actions. If you hold a managerial position in a corporation, you will need to communicate your business ideas to your subordinates and superiors.

All communication, regardless of the situation and number of people involved, is transactional by nature. The transaction occurs when one person called the *source* sends a message which is picked up by another person called the *receiver*. Communication only occurs when there is a relay or transfer of meaning between people.

When you talk to a friend, you are acting as the source of a message, and he is acting as the receiver. One of the first things you look for when relaying your message is the reaction of your friend. Is he interested in what you are saying? Does he seem to understand your message? You look for visual responses (a smile or eye movement, for example) and then a verbal response to your message. When the receiver reacts to a message sent by the source, he provides cues for the source about the way his message is being received. These cues are known as *feedback*, an important concept in the study of communication. Without feedback, it would probably be impossible to know if a message was received and how accurately it was received. In short, feedback enables the source of a message to know if he has accomplished his purpose in sending it.

Feedback, however, is not a one-way process. While the receiver of the message is reacting and sending signals back to the source, the source is simultaneously reacting to the feedback he is receiving and sending more feedback to the receiver. Of course, the amount of feedback varies in different communication situations; nevertheless, all communication activities involve a transaction or transfer of meaning between people.



Figure 1 Feedback may take the form of both verbal and nonverbal cues. In face-to-face situations, feedback between the interactants is usually intense and simultaneous.

The affective nature of communication

There is an old riddle that asks the question, "If a tree falls in a deserted forest, has a sound really been made?" In other words, if no one is around to hear the crash, might we suppose that the sound did not exist at all? Communication, whether

it is verbal or nonverbal, cannot exist if no one is there to receive the signals. Everything we label as communication is affective because it has an impact on someone. The woman who smiles at a man at a party is communicating with him, and that communication will have some impact on the man. Just what that impact will be is difficult to predict, because the man's responses will depend on his perception, awareness and experience. In a similar way, the woman will be affected by the response which the message stimulates in the receiver. Even if the message does not get through, this lack of communication will affect the sender; the woman may try to send another message, or she may simply walk away.

While all experts agree that communication is affective, some theorists support the idea that it is impossible not to communicate. They believe that all behavior is communication and that there is no such thing as nonbehavior. Therefore, they argue that a person cannot *not* communicate.³ While this argument may sound somewhat circular, many everyday experiences provide sound evidence to support it. For instance, when a person does not answer a question, his lack of words may

³ Paul Watzlawick, Janet H. Beavin, and Don D. Jackson, *Pragmatics of Human Communication* (New York: W. W. Norton & Co., 1967), pp. 48-49.

Figure 2 The men in this photograph do not want to communicate with each other, yet their behavior is communicating this fact. Can people not communicate?



indicate ignorance of the answer or hostility toward the person who asked it or any number of things depending on the context of the situation. In any event, the “nonresponse” is communicating something and may actually be more eloquent than words.

The personal nature of communication

Words are important to communication because they are convenient symbols by which we can transfer meaning. A word, however, is not the thing it represents. Likewise, the meaning or “message” is not in a word but in the people who use the word. Examining a common word such as “chair” illustrates this point. What kind of “chair” do you visualize when you hear this word? Do you see a large, overstuffed living room chair, a hard wooden dining room chair, or a metal folding chair? If you heard someone say, “They gave him the chair,” would you know what is meant? Would the message have the same meaning if the person being talked about was in one case a college professor and in another case a murderer?

Because meanings are in people, communication is as personal as the individuals who use it. It is impossible to separate self from the communication process because all our experiences, attitudes and emotions are involved and will affect the way we send and interpret messages. According to Kenneth Boulding, an eminent economist, every individual has a unique “image” of himself—a special way of viewing the word which is the result of all his personal experiences since childhood. A person’s image of himself affects his communication activities:

... our image is in itself resistant to change. When it receives messages which conflict with it, its first impulse is to reject them as in some sense untrue. Suppose, for instance, that somebody tells us something which is inconsistent with our picture of a certain person. Our first impulse is to reject the proffered information as false. As we continue to receive messages which contradict our image, however, we begin to have doubts, and then one day we receive a message which overthrows our previous image and we revise it completely. The person, for instance, whom we saw as a trusted friend is now seen to be a hypocrite and a deceiver.⁴

Of course, the purpose of any communication is to achieve shared meanings. However, the symbolic nature of communication makes this difficult to accomplish. Not only is language

⁴ Kenneth E. Boulding, *The Image: Knowledge in Life and Society* (Ann Arbor, Mich.: University of Michigan Press, 1956), pp. 8-9.