

## Human Communication

Humans seem to have an endless need to communicate. All species communicate in one way or another, but it is a human's use of language which makes us unique. Language can be defined as a way to communicate ideas by using a system of sounds and symbols. These symbols can be arranged and rearranged to provide meaning. Humans produce sounds, words, and sentences that are meaningful to others. The application of language is not restricted to oral communication only; sign language for the hearing impaired has its own vocabulary and grammatical conventions.

Verbal language evolved from body gestures, the earliest form of communication. As language slowly developed, less body language and potential misunderstanding took place. Today, language is a powerful tool that can move us to tears and enrage us, it evolves and separates. New words are constantly being added to the English language for example, which means that the language is adapting to the needs of its users. On the other hand, language can become disconnected if it does not adapt. An example of this is the French language, whereby if it does not translate and develop new terms that are being used in other languages such as English, then it will become infiltrated with English words.

However, language need not be only in a verbal form. Just as primates rely on various signals to communicate so do we. People use body language all the time. It is used to compliment our verbal communication and to reinforce our messages. The positioning of the body, facial expressions and gestures can convey messages. This means of communicating information and attitudes in a non-verbal manner can be done consciously or subconsciously.

Body language is important in all your relationships. Many potential relationships have succeeded or failed based on the first impression portrayed. The use of body language is a global phenomenon, however the interpretation of gestures can vary from one place to the other, thus resulting in miscommunication.

Other forms of non-verbal communication are: tone and character of voice, interaction distances and clothing, and make-up. Again, all of these aspects may have different connotations in different places.

Body language and other non-verbal forms of communication are so important in transmitting the proper message that it is being used by those who use the internet as a medium of communication. E-mail text messages lack a context or can convey the wrong impression. What one person writes that may

be intended as a joke, another person may perceive it as an insult. As a result, symbols called emoticons have been developed to attempt to make up for the lack of face-to-face interactions.

As technology continues to advance, communication has become easier. However, some early enthusiasts of e-mail felt that this system of communication would revive the lost art of letter writing, since it was believed that people would write out their messages in detail. However, it now appears that although more people are using e-mail, they are using more abbreviations and incomplete sentences in their writing, thus deteriorating their written skills. This is now considered the next evolutionary step in communication with people seeking faster methods of communication, and in some academic environments, this form of writing is already being accepted as mainstream.

Reading, writing, speaking, observing, listening, and providing feedback, are all skills that are related to communication. Of all the skills, listening is the one in which most people are the most inadequate. Researchers have found that we hear only 30 to 50 percent of the things that are said to us! Good communicators function more effectively in social situations. People who listen to others without interrupting, who make good eye contact and smile frequently, and who treat others with respect often have more friends and have better social interactions than those who lack these communication qualities.

When we have a bad day, we often feel as though we are speaking a different language than everyone around us. Although we are speaking the same language, we do not understand each other. However, English itself may be the cause of a breakdown in communication because the language is ambiguous – that is, many words have two or more meanings. Furthermore, communication killers – sure-fire ways to shut down communication – can also be the cause. One should avoid doing the following in all scenarios: criticizing, interrupting, offering advice, laughing or ridiculing, threatening, manipulating or controlling, insulting, preaching, judging, prying, lecturing, counterattacking, commanding, or exaggerating.

**Why is Slang used?** Linguists feel that there are three main purposes why slang is used. First of all, it is believed that slang is used as a short-hand to verbal language, to shorten lengthy descriptions. Slang also makes it possible to provide a more precise reference to an observation or experience that is better understood within a group. Last and most importantly, slang reinforces and maintains group solidarity. Slang is a special language used by a particular group, which they can easily understand, but which is usually misunderstood by non-group members. A perfect example of this would how young people use

and understand slang, however, most adults would have no idea of its meaning. Slang is a collection of words that have special meaning only to the members of a group. It can become part of the mainstream language when other groups can decipher it, and its use becomes more widespread. Slang can change very rapidly. Sociologists believe that this happens to maintain group cohesion; once the terms are being used and understood more widely, the group decides to create new terms and once again reinforce the bond within the group.

**Do men and women communicate differently?** Studies have found that men and women often misinterpret or misunderstand each other when communicating. Deborah Tannen, a Professor of Linguistics has concluded that the following gender differences in communication styles exist:

1. Men and women may have different communication styles.
2. Men tend to talk more than women in public situations, but women tend to talk more than men at home.
3. Females are more inclined to face each other and make eye contact when talking, while males are more likely to look away from each other.
4. Girls and women tend to talk at length about one topic, but boys and men tend to jump from topic to topic.
5. When listening, women make more noises such as “mm-hmm” and “uh-huh”, while men are more likely to listen silently.
6. Women are inclined to express agreement and support, while men are more inclined to debate.
7. Men tend to be more direct in their criticism while women often soften their criticism.
8. Women tend to say “thank you” more often than men as a ritual.
9. Men tend to enjoy verbal sparring, since it forces them to clarify their ideas and seek weaknesses in their opponents.
10. Men do not necessarily expect praise for work or projects. Women seek praise as a positive reinforcement of their capabilities.

## **Assignment**

***In a paragraph, answer the question below:***

1. Have you had any personal incidents where you were misunderstood when you used e-mail or text messaging to communicate with others? Why were you misunderstood? Could you have done anything different to communicate yourself more clearly?

***Answer the following questions***

1. What are the pros and cons of using slang??
2. Slang is a part of our daily communication. Groups use it to create a language of their own which has special meaning to them. Consider your own use of slang and complete the following questions.
  - a. List some (at least 5) of the slang terms you use and explain their meaning.
  - b. What are some slang terms that have become part of our mainstream language? An example of this would be "surfing the web," which was once used as a slang term by computer techs, but its meaning is now understood by a widespread group in our society and thus used in mainstream language.
  - c. How do problems in communication arise when using slang?
  - d. What barriers to communication does it create? Think of both generational communication and individuals who might not have a good grasp of the English language.
3. How can we improve on our ability to communicate with others?