Communication skills

Ms. Trần Thị Thảo Phương (Ph.D.)

Schedule

- Day 1: Communication – some basic terms
- Day 2: Culture and communication
- Day 3 and 4: Communication filter
- **Day 5: Making relationships in diverse contexts**
- **Day 6: Revision and mid-term test**

Session 1: Communication

PART ONE Foundations of Human Communication

CHAPTER TOPICS

The Nature of Human Communication

Elements of Human Communication

Principles of Human Communication

The Competent Communicator

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

1.1 Define *human communication* and identify the major forms, benefits, and myths.

1.2 Define the major elements of human communication: *context, source–receiver, messages, channels, noise, effects,* and *ethics.*

1.3 Paraphrase the principles of human communication.

1.4 Explain the characteristics of the competent communicator.

How would you describe your communications on a typical day, and what does this say about your interests and goals?

Why is it important to communicate well?

1. The importance of communication

E.g. Communication breakdowns result in barriers against your ability to develop both professionally and personally.

2. What is communication?

- Communication is the art and process of creating and sharing ideas. Effective communication depends on the richness of those ideas.

- **Communicating well and authentically with people is very important. Whether you're with friends or with colleagues, good communication is key in achieving productivity and cultivating strong, supportive relationships.**

- We live in a society where we have fewer opportunities to meet people face-to-face. We are constantly discovering new ways to communicate with one another on our devices, from apps to social channels.

- Just as the world around you continues to change, so must your approach and practice of communication. It's important to recognise that effective communication is something that you can continuously cultivate. Communication skills are a muscle to flex, like going to the gym to improve your body. It's important to develop the way you communicate across all media, from writing online via email to one-to-one meetings. If you're dedicated to developing your communication skills, you'll have greater alignment and impact in your personal life and work life.

- It takes patience, time and energy to communicate well and learn how to deliver a conversation or message in the most effective way. Good communication isn't simply about being able to best express yourself; it's also about understanding and learning from your audience.

- Communication is a partnership between all those involved, so everyone needs to work together.

- Before you explore how to communicate with others, you must first understand how you communicate with yourself. It's human nature to create a narrative that makes sense of ourselves and the world and to avoid danger. However, our brains and the world has evolved and you now have the power to be more effective in communicating. You'll explore this in the context of how you engage with events in life by responding or reacting.

Why study communication?

To improve in these areas:

- Employability
- Relationships
- Physical & emotional health

How do you like to communicate?

- **Have you ever thought about your own style of communicating? It's important to take the time to understand and acknowledge where you thrive and why.**

- Communication skills are sometimes taken for granted. Some people are natural communicators but for others it can be difficult to translate an idea into words.

- An important aspect of good communication is taking the time to understand and acknowledge your own communication methods. Start to think about the following:
  - how you approach communication
  - what environments you work best in
  - what type of communication style you use most often

THE NATURE OF HUMAN COMMUNICATION

1. The forms of human communication

- Intrapersonal communication
- Interpersonal communication
- Interviewing
- Small group communication
- Organizational communication
- Public speaking
- Computer-mediated communication
- Mass communication

TABLE 1.1 Forms of Communication

Forms of Communication	Some Theory-Related Concerns	Some Skills-Related Concerns
Intrapersonal: communication with oneself	How do self-concept and self-esteem develop? How do they effect communication? How can problem-solving abilities be improved? What is the relationship between personality and communication?	Enhancing self-esteem, increasing self-awareness, improving problem solving and analyzing abilities, increasing self-control, managing communication apprehension, reducing stress, managing intrapersonal conflict
Interpersonal: communication between two or a few persons	What is interpersonal effectiveness? Why do people develop relationships? What holds relationships together? What tears them apart? How can relationships be repaired?	Increasing effectiveness in one-to-one communication, developing and maintaining productive relationships, improving conflict management abilities
Interviewing: communication that proceeds through questions and answers	What are the legal issues in interviewing? How can interviewing responses be analyzed? What is the role of nonverbal communication?	Phrasing questions to get the information you want, presenting your best self, writing résumés and cover letters
Small group: communication within a small group of people (say, 5 to 10)	What roles do people play in groups? What do groups do well, and what do they fail to do well? What makes a leader? What types of leadership works best?	Increasing effectiveness as a group member, improving leadership abilities, using groups to achieve specific purposes (brainstorming, problem solving)
Organizational: communication within an organization	How and why do organizations grow and deteriorate? What role does culture play in the organization? What leadership styles prove most	Transmitting information; motivating workers; dealing with feedback, the grapevine, and gossip; increasing worker satisfaction, productivity, and

TABLE 1.2 Face-to-Face and Computer-Mediated Communication

Human Communication Element	Face-to-Face Communication	Computer-Mediated Communication
Sender		
• Presentation of self and impression management	• Personal characteristics (sex, approximate age, race, etc.) are open to visual inspection; receiver controls the order of what is attended to; disguise is difficult.	• Personal characteristics are hidden and are revealed when you want to reveal them; anonymity is easy.
• Speaking turn	• You compete for the speaker's turn and time with the other person(s); you can be interrupted.	• It's always your turn; speaker time is unlimited; you can't be interrupted.
Receiver		
• Number	• One or a few who are in your visual field.	• Virtually unlimited.
• Opportunity for interaction	• Limited to those who have the opportunity to meet; often difficult to find people who share your interests.	• Unlimited.
• Third parties	• Messages can be overheard by or repeated to third parties but not with complete accuracy.	• Messages can be retrieved by others or forwarded verbatim to a third party or to thousands.
• Impression formation	• Impressions are based on the verbal and nonverbal cues the receiver perceives.	• Impressions are based on text messages and posted photos and videos.
Context		
• Physical	• Essentially the same physical space.	• Can be in the next cubicle or separated by miles.

2. The benefits of studying human communication

- Critical and creative thinking skills

- Interaction skills

- Relationship skills

- Group membership and leadership skills

- Presentation skills

- Media literacy skills

_____ 1. Good communicators are born, not made.
_____ 2. The more a couple communicates, the better their relationship will be.
_____ 3. When two people are in a close relationship for a long period of time, one person should not have to communicate his or her needs and wants; the other person should know what these are.
_____ 4. Complete openness should be the goal of any meaningful interpersonal relationship.
_____ 5. Interpersonal or group conflict is a reliable sign that the relationship or group is in trouble.
_____ 6. Like good communicators, leaders are born, not made.
_____ 7. Fear of speaking in public is detrimental and must be eliminated.

3. The myths of human communication

- **True or false?**

Why myths?

1. Effective communication is a learned skill. Although some people are born brighter or more extroverted than others, all can improve their abilities and become more effective communicators.

2. If you practice bad communication habits, you're more likely to grow less effective than to become more effective; consequently, it's important to learn and follow the principles of effectiveness.

3. This assumption is at the heart of many interpersonal difficulties: People aren't mind readers, and to assume that they are merely sets up barriers to open and honest communication.

4. Although you may feel ethically obligated to be totally honest, this is generally not an effective strategy. In fact, "complete" anything is probably a bad idea.

5. Conflict does not have to involve a winner and a loser; both people can win.

6. Leadership, like communication and listening, is a learned skill that you'll develop as you learn the principles of human communication in general and of group leadership in particular.

7. Most speakers are nervous; managing, not eliminating, the fear will enable you to become effective regardless of your current level of fear.
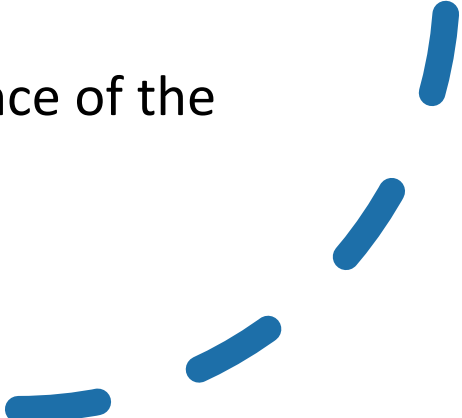
Principles of human communication

1. Communication is purposeful.

2. Communication is transactional.

3. Communication is a package of signals.

4. Communication is a process of adjustment.

5. Communication involves content and relationship dimensions.

6. Communication is ambiguous.

7. Communication is punctuated.

8. Communication is inevitable, irreversible, and unrepeatable.

Communication is Purposeful

We communicate for a purpose; some motivation leads us to communicate. When we speak or write, we are trying to send some message and trying to accomplish some goal.

5 general purposes seem relatively common to all forms of communication:

- **to learn**: to acquire knowledge of others, the world, and ourselves

- **to relate**: to form relationships with others,

- **to help**: to assist others by listening, offering solutions

- **to influence**: to strengthen or change the attitudes or behaviors of others

- **to play/entertain**: to enjoy the experience of the moment

Communication is transactional

Transactional = The elements in communication (are)
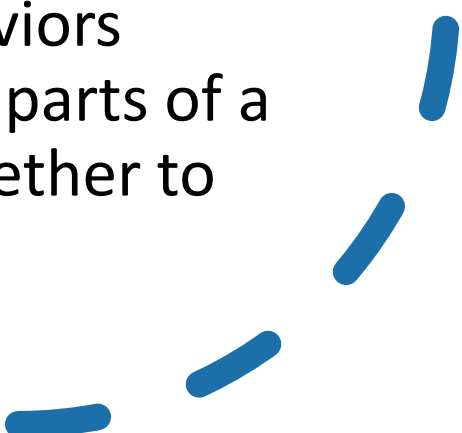
1. always changing

2. interdependent (each influences the other)

3. depend on the individual for their meaning and effect

4. result in each person in the communication act being both the speaker and listener.

Communication is a Package of Signals

Communication involve usually, verbal and nonverbal behaviors. Our entire body works together— verbally and non-verbally—to express our thoughts and feelings. The socially acceptable message is usually communicated verbally while the less socially acceptable message is communicated non verbally.

Usually, verbal and nonverbal behaviors reinforce or support each other. All parts of a message system normally work together to communicate a particular meaning.

Communication is a process of adjustment

Communication can take place only to the extent that the communicators use the same system of signals. You will only be able to communicate with another person to the extent that your language systems overlap.

In reality, however, no two persons use identical signal systems, so a process of adjustment is relevant to all forms of communication.

$\Rightarrow$ Art of communication: identifying the other person's signals, learning how they're used, and understanding what they mean.

$\Rightarrow$ Consider:

+ intercultural communication

+ communication accommodation theory
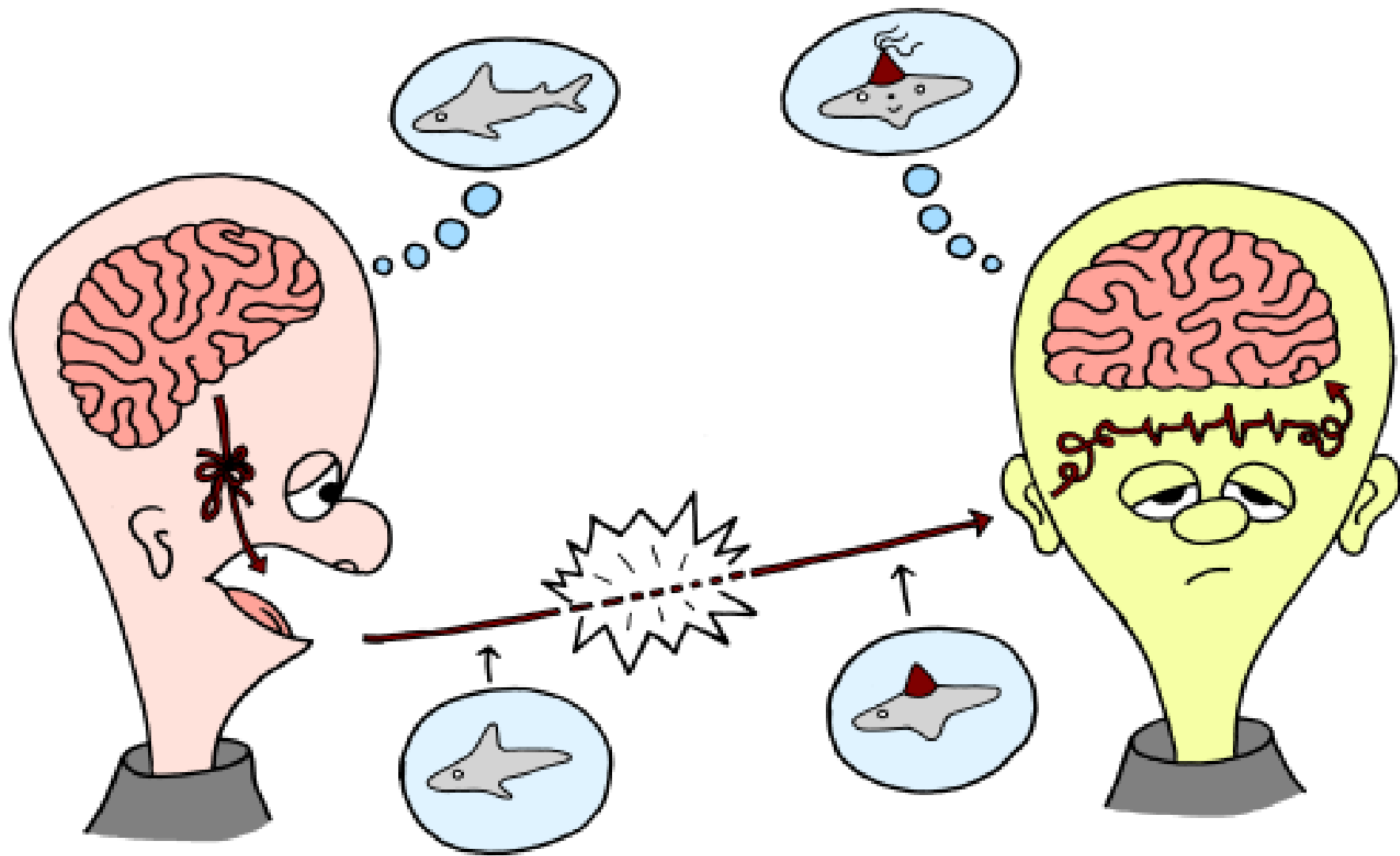
Communication involves content and relationship dimensions

In any communication situation, the content dimension may stay the same but the relationship aspect may vary.

Similarly, at times the content may be different but the relationship essentially the same.

CONSIDER:

- Ignoring relationship dimensions
- Recognizing relationship dimensions

REMEMBER: Arguments over content are relatively easy to resolve, but arguments on the relationship level are not.

Communication is ambiguous

Ambiguous messages are messages with more than one potential meaning.

Sometimes this ambiguity occurs because we use words that can be interpreted differently.

Examples

- Well, I've certainly never tasted chicken cooked that way before!

(Was the chicken good or bad?)

- I saw someone on the hill with a telescope.

(Did you use a telescope to see someone on the hill or did you see someone on the hill holding a telescope?)
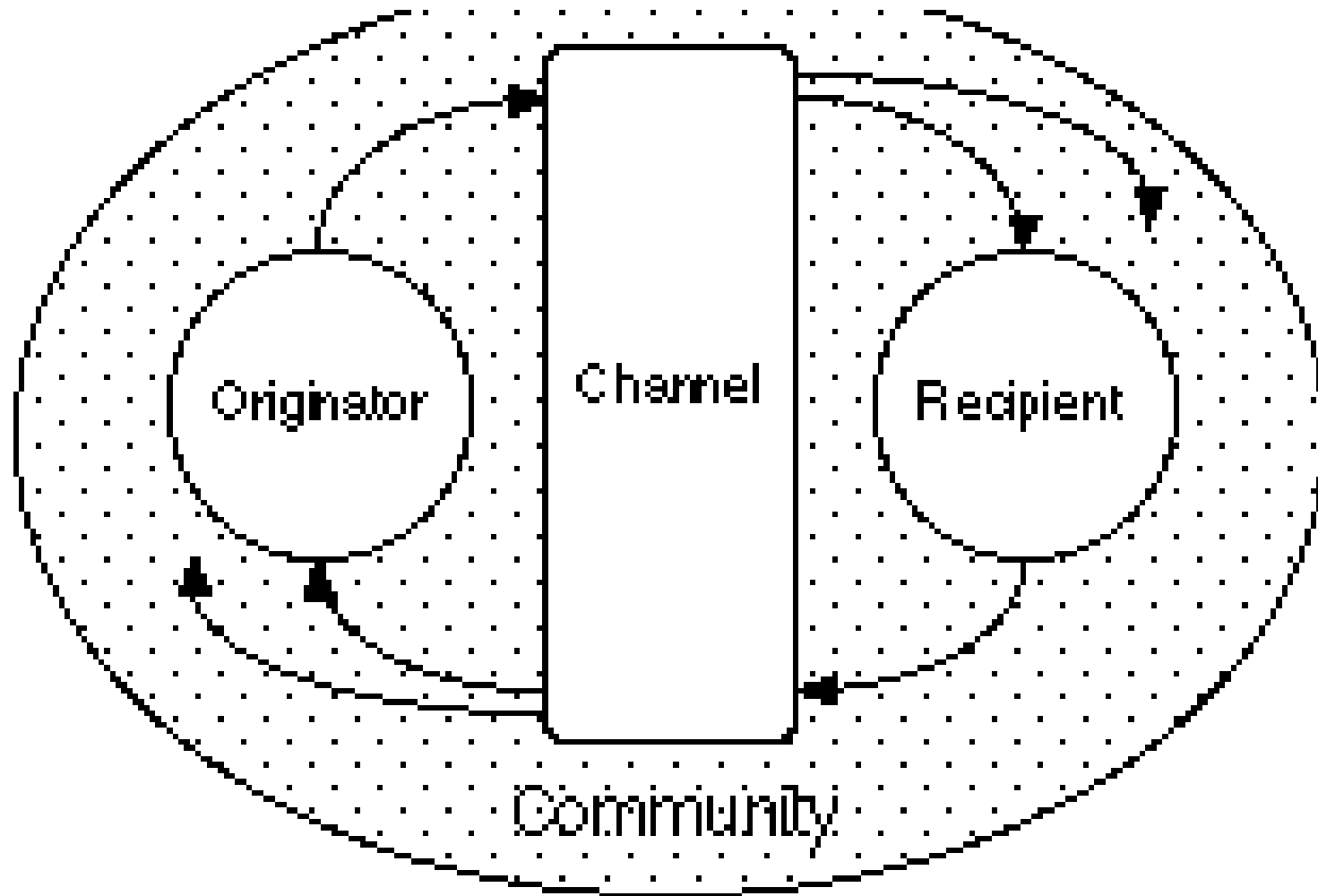
Communication is Punctuated

Communication events are continuous transactions. There's no clear-cut beginning or ending. We divide up this continuous, circular process into causes or stimuli and others effects or responses.

This tendency to divide communication transactions into sequences of stimuli and responses is referred to as punctuation of communication.

Communication is inevitable, irreversible, and unrepeatable (tất yếu, không thể thay đổi, không thể lặp lại)

Communication is a process that is inevitable, irreversible, and unrepeatable. Communication messages are (almost) always being sent, can't be reversed or uncommunicated, and are always unique and one-time occurences.

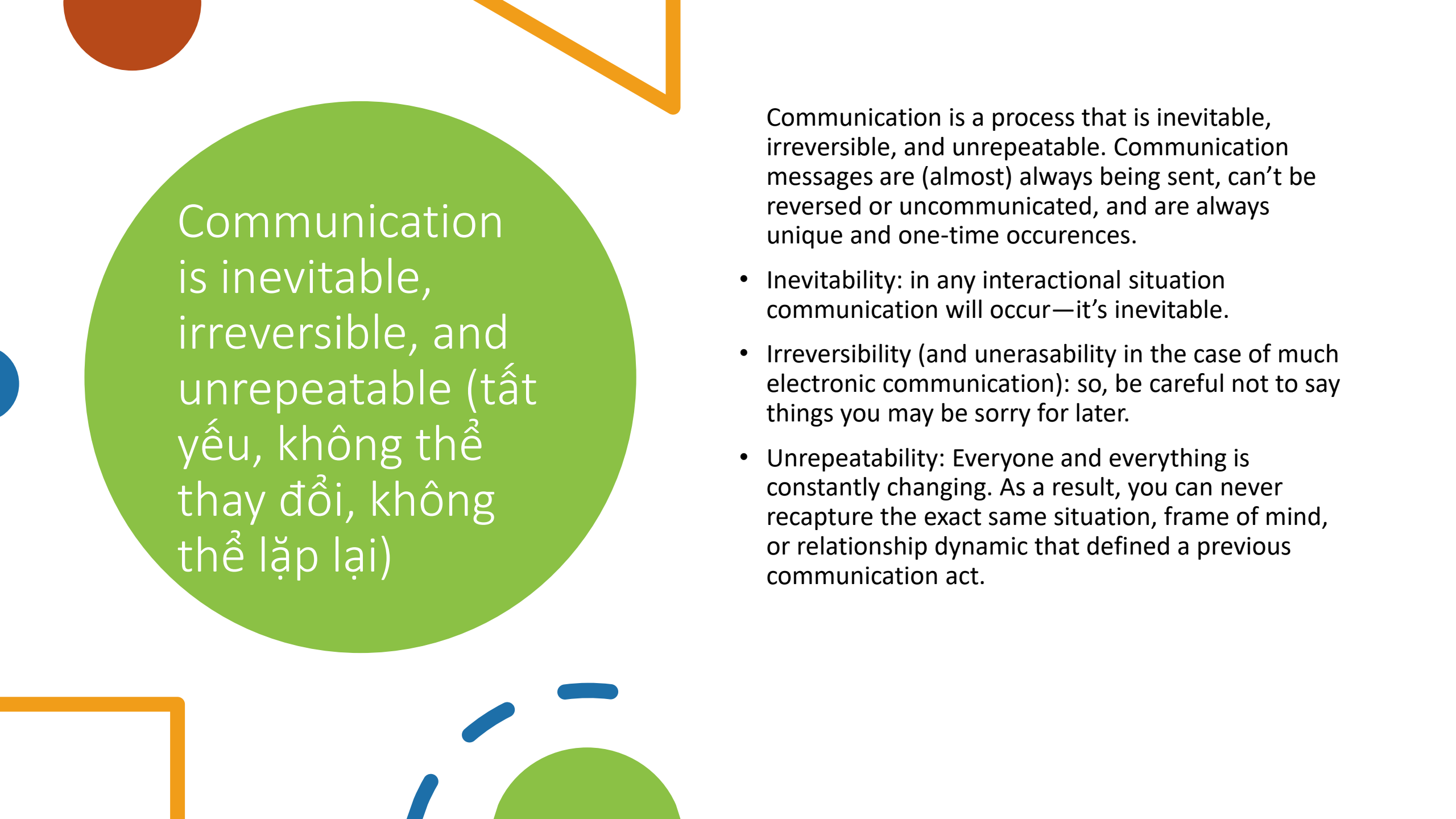- Inevitability: in any interactional situation communication will occur—it's inevitable.

- Irreversibility (and unerasability in the case of much electronic communication): so, be careful not to say things you may be sorry for later.

- Unrepeatability: Everyone and everything is constantly changing. As a result, you can never recapture the exact same situation, frame of mind, or relationship dynamic that defined a previous communication act.

TABLE 1.3

In A Nutshell — A Summary of Some Principles of Human Communication

Here, in brief, are the major principles of human communication, their basic ideas, and some skill implications.

Principles	Basic Ideas	Some Skill Implications
Communication Is Purposeful	Communication may serve a variety of purposes, for example, to learn, to relate, to help, to influence, to play.	■ Use your purposes to guide your verbal and nonverbal messages. ■ Identify the purposes in the messages of others.
Communication Is Transactional	The elements in communication are (1) always changing, (2) interdependent (each influences the other), and (3) dependent on the individual for their meaning and effect. In addition (4) each person is both speaker and listener.	■ See messages as influenced by a variety of factors. ■ Base your message understanding on the words used and the person.
Communication Is a Package of Signals	Verbal and nonverbal messages work together in "packages," usually to communicate the same meaning but at other times different or even opposite meanings.	■ See messages as a combination of signals. ■ Look to both verbal and nonverbal messages for a clearer understanding of another's meaning.

Communication Is a Process of Adjustment	Communication can take place only to the extent that the communicators use the same system of signals.	■ Learn the other person's system of signaling. ■ Adjust your verbal and nonverbal messages to the situation and the other individuals.
Communication Involves Content and Relationship Dimensions	Messages may refer to the real world, to something external to both speaker and listener (the content), *and* to the relationships between the parties.	■ Distinguish between content and relationship messages. ■ Deal with relationship issues as relationship (not content) issues.
Communication Is Ambiguous	All messages and all relationships are potentially ambiguous.	■ Use clear and specific terms. ■ Ask if you're being understood. ■ Paraphrase complex ideas.
Communication Is Punctuated	Communication events are continuous transactions, punctuated into causes and effects for convenience.	■ See communication as an ongoing process rather than breaking it into causes and effects. ■ See alternative punctuations when trying to understand another's point of view.
Communication Is Inevitable, Irreversible, and Unrepeatable	Messages are (almost) always being sent, can't be uncommunicated, and are always unique, one-time occurrences.	■ Recognize that you're invariably communicating. ■ Remember that you can't reverse communication. ■ Realize that each communication situation is unique and cannot be repeated.

The characteristics of the competent communicator

Communication competence is knowledge of the elements and rules of communication, which vary from one culture to another

Communication competence refers both to your knowledge and understanding of how communication works and to your ability to use communication effectively.

The competent communicator may be defined as one who makes effective choices, thinks critically and mindfully, effectively switches codes, is culturally sensitive, is ethical, is an effective listener, and is media literate.

The competent communicator

TABLE 1.4 In a Nutshell   The Competent Communicator

The Competent Communicator	Competent Behaviors
Makes reasoned choices	Understands that communication involves choices, has lots of available choices, can evaluate the choices from a knowledge of how communication works, and has the skills for executing the choices effectively.
Thinks critically and mindfully	Is aware of the uniqueness of each communication situation and thinks logically before acting.
Effectively code-switches	Effectively switches codes depending on the unique communication situation and the desired goals.
Is culturally sensitive	Understands, acknowledges, and adapts to cultural differences.
Is ethical	Uses communication honestly and truthfully.
Is an effective listener	Listens for understanding and communicates this back to the speaker.
Is media literate	Understands, analyzes, and evaluates media messages and can use the available media resources effectively.

SESSION 2: MAKING SENSE OF CULTURE

At the end of this lesson, you will be able to:

- describe the different facets and layers of culture;

- explain issues in communication with diverse audiences with reference to language and culture; and

- critically reflect on the role of language and culture in communication.

Session 2: What is culture? Definitions

Culture is one of the core concepts of this course. So how can 'culture' be defined?

- We can approach the concept of 'culture' from many different angles.

- When people think of culture, they often think of the products of a cultural group (e.g. their art, their music). Others argue that culture is in the minds of people, and that those that are 'like-minded' form a sub-culture.

- You can find a large variety of different definitions of culture here, as well as an in-depth discussion of their meaning. For the time being, we will adopt Helen Spencer-Oatey's definition:

- "Culture is a fuzzy set of basic assumptions and values, orientations of life, beliefs, policies, procedures and behavioural conventions that are shared by a group of people, and that influence (but do not determine) each member's behaviour and his/her interpretations of the 'meaning' of other people's behaviour." (Spencer-Oatey, 2008, p. 3)

- The definition emphasises that, on one hand, culture is grounded in individual orientations. On the other, it suggests that these orientations are shared by a group. Moreover, Spencer-Oatey makes an important distinction between being *influenced* by these assumptions and values and being *determined* by them, the latter of which would suggest that individuals have no behavioural flexibility at all. This point is crucial to bear in mind as you progress through the course.

- **In your opinion, what represents culture?**

The cultural iceberg

- **The 'cultural iceberg' model is often used as a metaphor to visualise the elements which make up cultural experience. The model also aims to illustrate which of these elements may require more effort to learn about and understand.**

- In this model, the majority of the iceberg is underwater, showing that most elements of culture, such as for values for example, are not immediately obvious or visible. Other elements, such as traditions, are represented as being above the water, suggesting that they are visible to the naked eye.

- In the next step you'll be given a real-world example illustrating the iceberg model of culture.

- *In your opinion, where does 'communication' sit in the iceberg model? Give reasons and examples.*

Your experiences

- Have you experienced occasions where you have only seen above the waterline of the iceberg and not recognised 'what lies below'? If so, please share them in the comments. What were the consequences of not taking 'what lies below' the iceberg's waterline into account?

Elements of the cultural iceberg

Above the waterline i.e. they are visible cultural elements:

- Language / gestures

- Arts (literature / music / visual arts)

- Behaviours

- Foods

- Customs

Below the waterline i.e. they are non-visible and may require more effort to learn about and understand:

- Rules of social etiquette

- Beliefs

- Norms

- Values

- Nature of personal and professional relationships

Rules of social etiquette: Cultural guides usually explain the rules of etiquette people are expected to follow in particular cultures (whose hand to shake first, etc.), so in many ways etiquette is above the water. However, what is normally not obvious are the reasons behind the expected etiquette.

Languages/gestures: Language and gestures are audible / visible. However, they are guided by underlying values and decisions which may not be as obvious. For example, is disagreement valued, or do people strive to maintain harmony? When learning a new language, we often also need to learn new "rules" for using the language.

Beliefs: denote what certain groups believe to be true, for example beliefs regarding religion, or regarding human relationships. On some occasions, a group's belief system may be relatively openly accessible to an outsider, but more often than not beliefs remain quite opaque unless they are openly explained.

Norms: Norms denote what is normal and predictable behaviour within a cultural group. For example, is it normal to arrive in time or early for an appointment, or is a certain laxity in timekeeping allowed? These norms may only become apparent to an outsider once they have been broken.

Arts (literature, music, visual arts) The products of art created by a cultural group are often readily available for outsiders to consume and enjoy. Please note though these products of art are often a direct reflection of norms and values inherent in the cultural environment.

Behaviours It is easy to see how people native to a certain culture outwardly behave in particular situations. But it is not necessarily obvious why they behave in this manner and what assumptions are underlying their behaviours.

Values Values denote the importance or worth a group of people allocates to something. For example how important is it for a member of staff to show deference to a superior? The values a group are not normally obvious to the outsider. You may read about them in cultural guides, but need to apply caution with respect to the particular context you find yourself in.

Foods Another culture's food is something you can experience with all your senses (smell, vision, taste). However, you may find that, in some cultures, certain items of food carry associations which may be less obvious.

Customs Customs may include traditional dress, public celebrations, rituals etc. They can be observed quite easily. The reasons for why a culture follows particular customs however can remain opaque and "under the water"

Nature of personal and professional relationships This relates to how people within a social group establish and maintain intergroup relationships. This determines, for example, the social status of individuals within a group and, as a consequence, what behaviours are expected from these individuals and others.

Not just culture?

- 'Culture', as you will see throughout the course, is comprised of numerous elements that go way beyond national culture, and should not be seen as 'determining' communicative behaviour. Cultural differences are therefore unsuitable for explaining obstacles you will encounter when communicating with diverse audiences.

- Instead, the major factor determining success or failure in communication with diverse audiences is personal language use. This includes, for example, degrees of practice in particular routines, individuals' ways of in interpreting others' behaviours, and their ability to negotiate meaning.

Summary

- **This lesson has served to introduce you to the course, as well as to the key concept of 'culture' in all its multidimensionality. You have also learned how to treat sources which make claims about the properties of 'national' cultures with criticality.**

- In the lesson, you discussed and compared various definitions of culture, including the definitions provided by two experts in intercultural communication.

- Using the analogy of an iceberg, you saw how different elements of culture can be distinguished between those that are visible and those that are invisible. It is crucial that we acknowledge the presence of both the visible and invisible elements if we are to succeed in our social and professional interactions.

- Subsequently, you learned how to critically look at sources about culture, in particular those that define culture as a set of geographically bound behaviours and orientations. Instead, every individual and their behaviour should be seen in their own right.

Reflection

- ***Please share your thoughts in the comments.***

1. Do you think about 'culture' differently?

2. How does this change the way you think about situations of communication with diverse audiences?

3. What questions, if any, have arisen for you?

Extended reading

- If you want to read more about how to talk about culture without resorting to stereotypes,, the following book is highly recommended:

- Holliday, A., Hyde, M. and Kullman, J. (2004). Intercultural communication: an advanced resource book. London: Routledge.

Check your understanding

'culture' is best described as:

- shared behaviours defined by geographical boundaries.
- displays of artefacts (art, crafts) or performances, e.g. of traditional dance.
- practices and behaviours influenced by values and beliefs.

Using the 'cultural iceberg' model, which of the following can be considered to sit above the water?

- Traditional dress
- Values
- Food
- Arts
- Beliefs
- Norms
- Customs
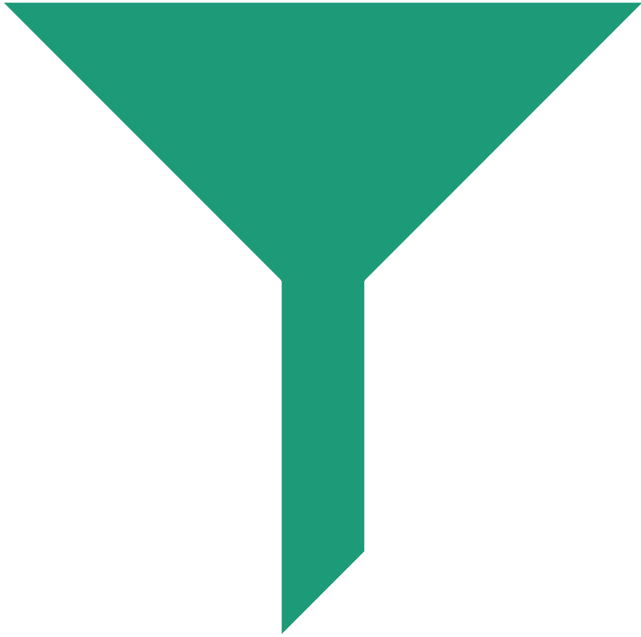
Session 3: communication filter

Objectives

Be	At the end of this lesson, you will be able to:
Assess	assess how your own socialisation, expectations and norms influence the way you communicate and the way you perceive the communication style of others;
Apply	apply concepts from this week to prevent unconscious bias based on others' language choices; and
Identify	identify your strengths and weaknesses in communication

The next few steps will provide you with some brief examples to illustrate how our cultural socialisation, expectations and experience can vary our reactions to a particular message.

E-mail 1: an e-mail from a Director of Sales

This is an e-mail from a Director of Sales to employees at an international company..

The first example is an e-mail from a Director of Sales to employees at an international company. Please read it carefully and then share in the comments how you would react if you had received the email.

Subject: Thank you
From: internationalsales@international.com
Date: Thursday, 13 August 2015 at 09:36
To: ALL-US-sales@international.com

To all sales staff,
I would like to personally thank you for your very hard work this past year, in which we have broken our previous sales records.
You have done a good job, but we need to be careful and not lose sight of our competitors whilst we are celebrating. Our competitors are trying to beat us, so you must work even harder on achieving our goals. You need to remain dutiful and loyal to this company. Failure is not an option. You mustn't become complacent and aim to do an even better job next year.
Thank you again for your hard work and your loyalty.
Director of Sales

© Email adapted from Schnurr, S. (2013). Exploring Professional Communication. London: Routledge.

E-mail 2: A new student

- **This e-mail was sent from a prospective summer course student to an academic at a UK university.**

Again, please read it carefully and consider how you might react in the academic's position. Share your reaction and the reasons for it in the comments.

Subject: Summer course

From: newstudent@email.com

Date: Friday, 8 July 2016 at 14:52

To: r.summers@university.ac.uk

My dear friend,

I am secondary school teacher and I request admission at your university for a summer course in research methods. Please send me your relevant brochure.

I hope I will not be disappointed.

© E-Mail adapted from: Schnurr, S. (2013). Exploring Professional Communication. London: Routledge.

Questions for discussion

The two emails you've just seen serve as examples of the communication filter in practice. *But what exactly do we mean by this term*?

→ The point of those examples is that what others intend to communicate is not necessarily communicated in the way intended.

Communication filters

When communicating to diverse audiences, our decisions about communicative intent are 'filtered' by a variety of factors, such as:

- **Our socialisation:** the way we've been brought up and what communication practices were normal in that context.

- **Our previous experiences:** we tend to rely on these experiences and perceive interactions that deviate from these as 'marked', meaning that we notice and often perceive them as strange.

- **Our expectations of practice:** how we expect people to behave in a particular context.

- **Our expectations of participants' roles:** what roles we expect participants to be playing. For example, whilst some students may expect their teachers to be more like guides to learning, others expect them to be omniscient masters of their subject.

- **Knowledge:** our knowledge of the world, of communicative routines, of people, of practices and so on.

- These factors influence both how we express intent through our own communicative practices and how we interpret the other speakers' intent. Speakers' use of particular communicative practices signal how they intend their messages to be understood.

- *What other factors may play a role? Describe and discuss these in the comments in the chat box.*
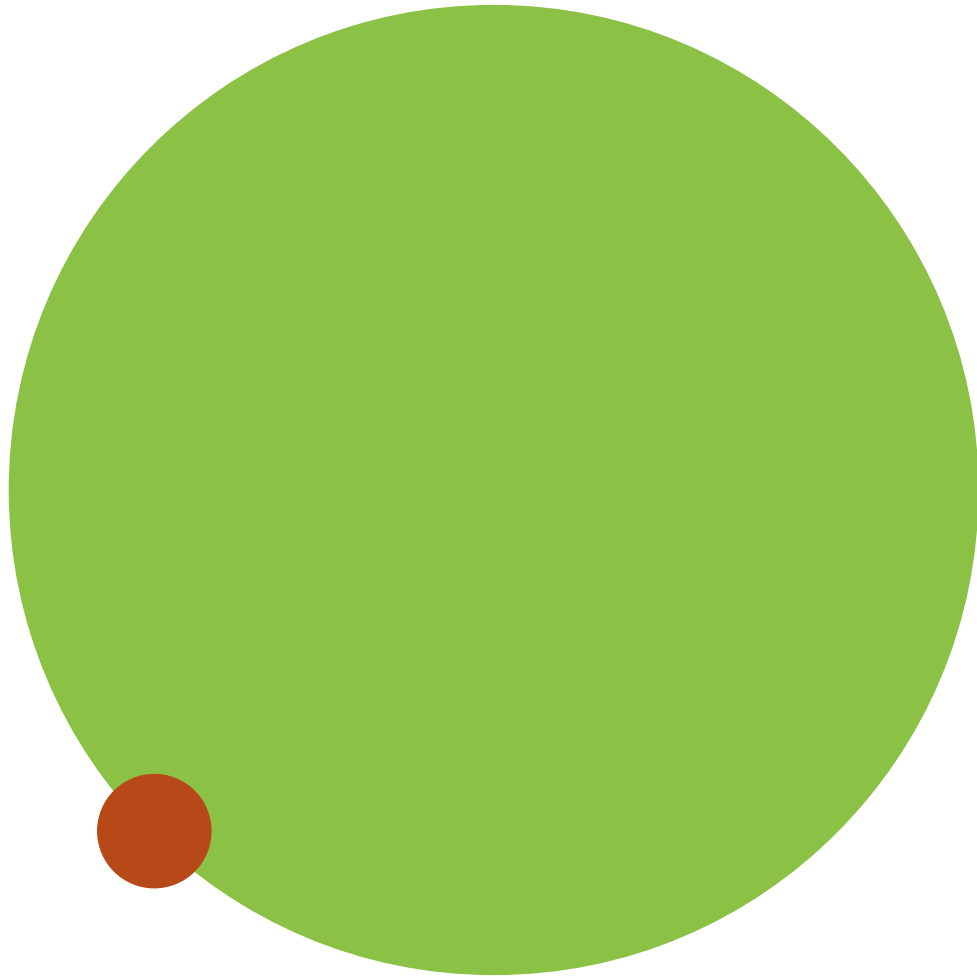
In the next step, we will look at these **'contextualisation cues'** in more detail as they are an important concept to describe the origins of misunderstanding when communicating across linguistic and cultural boundaries.

contextualisation cues

Defining contextualisation cues

John Gumperz, who developed the term 'contextualisation cues', suggests that message form communicates meaning:

"Constellations of surface features of message form are the means by which speakers signal and listeners interpret what the activity is, how semantic content is to be understood and how each sentence relates to what precedes and follows."

(Gumperz, 1982:132, 131).

He then goes on to define a contextualisation cue as:

"Any feature of linguistic form that contributes to the signalling of contextual presuppositions."

(Gumperz, 1982:132, 131).

Let's think!

"When communicating across professional, linguistic and cultural boundaries, communicative practices are often not shared and individuals are likely to have experienced different socialisation processes. In these contexts, it is therefore more likely that contextualisation cues are either not picked up or misinterpreted, leading to miscommunication or, even worse, claims of discrimination and disadvantage."

FOR EXAMPLE?

Discussion time

- **Discuss the concept of 'contextualisation cues' and relate it to your own personal experiences:**

1. Can you think of some other examples of contextualisation cues from a linguistic and cultural context you are familiar with? For example, in British English, rising intonation at the end of a sentence is normally indicative of a question, but the same may not be the case in another environment.

2. Have you, in your private or professional lives, encountered difficulties owing to differences in the use and interpretation of contextualisation cues?

- **Gumperz (1992) suggests that contextualisation cues can be drawn from all levels of speech:**

- **Prosody** – such as intonation, stress, accenting or pitch. For example, switching back to a local accent may be taken as a sign of a speaker's identity and willing to form a feeling of closeness.

- **Non-verbal signs** – such as tempo, pausing, hesitation and overlaps. For example, if someone displays a lot of hesitation in the way they speak they may – correctly or not – be taken as insecure and hesitant.

- **Code choice** – this refers to choice of style, language, dialect, ways of putting together a sentence. For example, as a teacher, I can adopt a joking tone or a more serious tone when I am with students.

- **Choice of words and formulas** – such as a use of technical vocabulary and the use of routines such as for greeting.

- *Are any of these categories particularly relevant in your native languages? What misunderstandings might they cause with speakers of other languages?*

Examples of contextualisation cues

- **Let's engage in a little re-interpretation exercise!**

- As Tannen has pointed out in her article, it is important that we are aware of biases regarding our own and other speakers' ways of using language, as they may lead us to seriously misjudge people and their intentions. This can have serious consequences for interpersonal relationships and your ability to reach your interactional goals.

- The two scenarios in this video illustrate that verbal and nonverbal behaviours that are 'contextualisation cues' to one thing in one environment, may signify something completely different in another.

1. What do you think about the customer's behaviour at the coffee shop. Is it *normal and acceptable* to place an order without saying please and thank you, or is this *unacceptably rude behaviour*?

2. In scenario 2, one student remains silent throughout this class discussion. Is the student's silence a *sign of disinterest* or a *sign of attentiveness* to the lecturer's presentation?

Discussion

- **In the second part of this role-play interview Maggie tries to elicit answers following the STAR technique – S for Situation, T for Task, A for Action and R for Result'.**

- As you will have seen, Rojeen struggles to answer Maggie's question about working under pressure in the expected format. Again, this could be due to a lack of experience with the UK interview format.

- In addition, she misses another important cue - interview recommendations on the STAR technique generally advise applicants to point out individual responsibility for a task. However, Rojeen initially emphasizes the collective effort of library staff in the introduction of the new book returns system, saying, for example 'We introduced…. '. This again is contrary to 'normal' UK expectations and in this case is likely to lead Maggie to question Rojeen's ability to take initiative.

- *In your opinion, does Maggie also have some responsibility for Rojeen's lack of success in the job interview? Think in particular about whether and how she clarified the intended meaning of her questions.*

-

Why it matters: unconscious bias

For example,

- You are at a meeting or a conference and one person interrupts frequently. You might see that person as rude and impolite. On the other hand, you could interpret their behaviour as a sign of them being interested and involved.

- You have a business meeting and are trying to do some small talk. Your conversation partner is not engaging in it. Are they impersonal and unapproachable? Another interpretation could be that they are task focused and efficient.

WHAT IS UNCONSCIOUS BIAS?

- Gumperz explains the following:

- When a listener does not react to a cue or is unaware of its function, interpretations may differ and misunderstanding may occur. It is important to note that when this happens and when a difference in interpretation is brought to a participant's attention, it tends to be seen in attitudinal terms. A speaker is said to be unfriendly, impertinent, rude, uncooperative, or to fail to understand. (Gumperz 1982:132).

- ***Gumperz further explains that listeners make judgements about speakers' intent mostly subconsciously. The danger of these subconscious processes is that incorrect judgements of intent can lead to incorrect judgements of character.***

- This process has been called **'unconscious bias',** and the consequences of it can be wide-ranging, even though they are unintentional. An organisation may not get the best person for the job, with implications for the business or service. In the case of a commercial organisation, the business may not win a contract, leading to potentially huge monetary losses. The consequences can be grave, causing allegations of discrimination or systematic disadvantage.

Why Do We Have Unconscious Biases?

- **Research** suggests that we instinctively categorize people and things using easily observed criteria such as age, weight, skin color, and gender. But we also classify people according to educational level, disability, sexuality, accent, social status, and job title, automatically assigning presumed traits to anyone we subconsciously put in those groups.

- The "advantage" of this system is that it saves us time and effort processing information about people, allowing us to spend more of our mental resources on other tasks. The clear disadvantage is that it can lead us to make assumptions about them and take action based on those biases. This results in a tendency to rely on stereotypes, even if we don't consciously believe in them.

- No matter how unbiased we think we are, we may have subconscious negative opinions about people who are outside our own group. But the more exposed we are to other groups of people, the less likely we are to feel prejudice against them.

- *WHAT DO YOU THINK?*

How to prevent unconscious bias?

- **Our own unconscious bias can lead to misinterpretation and making inaccurate judgements of others. So how can it be prevented?**

- As you have seen, the same behaviour can be interpreted in numerous ways. For example, interrupting can be seen as rude and impolite. On the other hand, it could be seen as a sign of interest and enthusiasm. At a business meeting, as you saw in Week One, someone not engaging in small talk could be described as impersonal and unapproachable, or they could simply be efficient and pre-occupied by the task at hand. And lastly, bragging about accomplishments might be seen by some as arrogant and boisterous by some or honest by others.

- The important point here is that we should never rush to judgements. Ensure that the communicative decisions you make about others are informed by an awareness of both your own norms, values, expectations and perceptions, and those of your interlocutor. In doing so, you can bring communicative decisions to the conscious mind.

- *Do you have any techniques that you use to prevent unconscious bias?*

Communication skills self-analysis

- **Knowledge and awareness of your audience, and knowledge and awareness of self, are fundamental to your ability to prevent unconscious bias, as are good practical communication skills.**

- **Good knowledge and awareness of the audience** makes you less likely to miss or misinterpret the contextualisation cues used by others.

- **Knowledge and awareness of self** allows you to recognise your own biases.

- **Practical communication skills** enable you to react flexibly and appropriately to any new situation that you might find yourself in.

- PRACTICE : https://www.mindtools.com/pages/article/newCS_99.htm

→ *What have you learned about yourself when you completed the self-assessment tool? Use the comments to discuss this.*

Summary to session 1

- **you have learnt how we apply our 'communication filter' (consisting of our own socialisation, previous experiences and knowledge of the world) to make decisions about communicative intent.**

- Now take the opportunity to reflect on this week's course content and on how it might apply to your own learning and development. Please share your thoughts in the comments.

1. Do you think differently about past encounters in which miscommunication has occurred?

2. What questions, if any, have arisen for you?

3. How are you planning to use what you have learnt about language and unconscious bias in your professional life?

Extended reading

- If you want to read more about the link between language and social justice, the following book is highly recommended:

- Piller, I. (2016). Linguistic Diversity and Social Justice. An Introduction to Applied Sociolinguistics. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Check your understanding

SESSION 4: Managing Relationships in Diverse Contexts

Rapport management and its dimensions

- To start SESSION 4, you will look at a theoretical framework by researcher Helen Spencer-Oatey outlining how relationships are managed through language. Some animations will illustrate these concepts and help relate them to yourself.

What is rapport management?

- **Helen Specer-Oatey (2000) uses the concept of 'Rapport Management' to describe management of interpersonal relationships through language.**
- She distinguishes three dimensions in which participants may feel that rapport has been threatened.

1. face sensitivities;

2. sociality rights and obligations; and

3. interactional goals.

- Being aware of these different dimensions can be especially useful when considering what interactional strategies to use in future interactions, and identifying why previous interactions did not go as intended.
- We will be covering each of these as we progress through the next steps. What do you think they describe? Discuss in the comments.

FACE

- **One of the three dimensions of Spencer-Oatey's 'Rapport Management' is that of 'face'.**

- Most languages and cultures have proverbs and sayings with the word 'face', for example 'saving face' and 'loss of face'.

- Loss of face is usually associated with being embarrassed, not being accepted by others or being pushed into a tight corner. For example, someone may point out that you have made an error, or someone may ask you to do something that you don't want to do.

FACE - DEFINITION

- One of the most frequently quoted definitions of 'face' is that by Erving Goffman, who defines 'face' as:
- The positive social value a person affectively claims for himself by the lines others assume he has taken during a particular contact . (Goffman, 1967:5)
- In other words, face is about the self-image people project, and want to have acknowledged by others.
- Helen Spencer-Oatey defines 'face' as:
- **People's sense of worth, their dignity and identity, and associated with issues such as respect, honour, status, reputation and competence.**

(Spencer-Oatey, 2008:14)

- In other words, face is linked to the identities that people want others to acknowledge, and the personal qualities they value. For example, if I am a teacher, I associate with certain role manifestations (e.g. being listened to) and qualities (e.g. integrity). If these role manifestations and qualities are attacked or not acknowledged by others, the result is loss of face.

- People usually use strategies to soften the loss of face to themselves and others. For example, when you criticise someone, you might say something positive first, e.g. "This is a really good idea, but …." or you might try to divert attention from yourself by shifting responsibility to others. The use of modal verbs (may, might, could), politeness markers such as 'please', and mitigators such as 'kind of' and 'sort of' are also very common in acts that are very face-threatening.

- Are there proverbs and sayings in your language which use the word 'face'? Please share them in the comments and explain what they mean.

- Have you experienced situations in which you felt you lost face? Tell other learners about it in the comments.

Sociality rights and obligations

- **The second dimension of rapport management is that of 'sociality rights and obligations'.**

- Spencer-Oatey distinguishes three aspects of it:

1. Implicit/explicit role conceptualisation

- This relates to the behavioural expectations associated with the roles and social positions people hold. For example, in a court room, there will be explicit rules as to what roles people take and what they are allowed to say, when and to whom. Other settings may have implicit roles. For example, participants who have been working together for an extended period of time and get together for a business meeting will normally have implicit rules, regulating whether individuals are allowed to interrupt the chair, whether a joke is allowed, etc.

2. Behavioural conventions, styles and protocols

- These relate to the specific conventionalised styles and ways of interacting with one another in particular contexts and participants' expectations. For example, **speakers may expect that a meeting has the purpose of discussion and therefore for individuals to give their opinions, interrupt, or pitch in, whilst others may expect a meeting to have the purpose of handing down information to participants who listen and take notes. Expectations rooted in experiences of corporate culture or the culture pertinent to the specific professional sector play a role in shaping these expectations.**

3.

- **Contractual/legal agreements and requirements**

- In many countries, there is now discrimination legislation in place to prevent discrimination based on gender, race, age, etc. Rapport can be threatened if someone's verbal or non-verbal behaviour does not agree with these contractual/legal frameworks, e.g. if, in a job interview, a woman is explicitly asked whether she expects to have any further children.

- Have you experienced situations in which you felt your sociality rights had been violated? Tell other learners about it in the comments.

-

Interactional goals

- **The third dimension of rapport management are speakers' interactional goals.**

- In an encounter, speakers will decide whether they prefer to:

- **Maintain rapport:** Rapport with interlocutors is equally important to the task; speakers use strategies that aim to maintain the current level of rapport (e.g. mitigating and hedging strategies, general politeness strategies).

- **Enhance rapport:** Rapport with interlocutors is extremely important, at times more than the task at hand; speakers use strategies to actively enhance that rapport (e.g. accepting interlocutors' needs and wants, showing one's good will, etc.).

- **Neglect rapport:** Rapport with interlocutors is less important than the task; interlocutors use hardly any strategies that maintain rapport (e.g. negotiating tactics are used that do not acknowledge the partners' position at all, few or no politeness strategies are used).

- **Challenge rapport:** Rapport with interlocutors is not important; interlocutors use strategies which challenge that rapport (e.g. strategies that are likely to be perceived as impolite, rude, sarcastic or offensive).

- Use the comments to describe an incident in which there was a mismatch between your own interactional goals and the interactional goals of the person or people you interacted with. How was this situation resolved?

Strategies in rapport management

- **Speakers can draw on a large arsenal of verbal and non-verbal strategies. They need to consider the contextual factors influencing the interaction, in particular face sensitivities, behavioural conventions and interactional goals.**

- Questions that may be asked here are, for example, what is the **power relationship** between me and other speakers, such as does my interlocutor have **power over me or vice versa**? What are the **social and interactional roles** of the speaker(s)? How **psychologically or socially close** is the other speaker? **How many speakers** are there? Am I speaking to an **individual or a group**? What can I **gain** from the interaction, what are the possible **costs** of it, in particular if it goes wrong)? What is the **'activity type'** I am involved in (e.g. a lecture, a court trial) and what **behavioural conventions** are associated with that?

- These considerations are followed by behavioural choice, e.g. **whether, and how to say something**. For example, if we request something from someone, how do we word that request? There is big difference between "Open that window?" and "It is a bit hot in here, isn't it?" as a request strategy. We may also choose not to say anything at all, e.g. deciding not to ask for a pay raise, not to disagree, etc.

- Other strategy considerations include, for example:

- the **content of talk**;

- the **structure and sequencing** of talk;

- how **turns at talk are taken**: who is allowed to speak and when?, acceptability of interruptions, etc.;

- general **considerations of style**: tone, forms of address, etc;

- **eye contact, gestures, body language**;

- and how **conversational routines** (such as "How are you?" – "I am fine, how are you?") are enacted.

- What factors do you take into account when picking verbal and nonverbal strategies for managing interpersonal rapport (e.g. age of the other person, status)? Post your thoughts in the comments.

Your experiences of rapport

- **Now that we've examined the concept of rapport, how it can be managed through language and on what basis it can be threatened, we'd love hear about your experiences.**

- Use the discussion to respond to the following questions and comment on other users' contributions:

1. Have you recently experienced a situation in which rapport was threatened? If so, tell us about the situation and on what basis (face, sociality rights, interactional goals) you feel rapport was threatened.

2. Have you ever experienced a situation in which you were not sure what the expectations for rapport were, e.g. what your role was, what behavioural conventions you were meant to follow and whether it was more important to get the task done or more important to build relationships? How did you deal with this?

Sympathy or empathy?

To respond or to react?

- Human instinct quickly assesses a situation by considering it a risk and crafting a partial narrative. You then protect yourself by reacting.

- In **conscious communication**, you build a more **evolved brain and communication system** in which you actively listen, mindfully process the information and respond. Responding instead of reacting is the key to effective communication.

- For example, imagine that you're called into your boss's office and they ask why the project was not delivered on time and within budget. This is a very provoking scenario in which you could have a strong emotional reaction because you could believe the boss is implying that you failed.

- **A conscious communication approach** would be to listen to your boss without judgement, keep an open mind to truly take in what they're saying. While you're listening to the information, ensure that you're taking deep breaths to ride the wave of emotion that arises to allow you to process it. When you've finished listening, reflect on what you've heard and respond calmly and rationally. This means not reacting from emotion but instead from a centred state in which you can give a meaningful answer that helps both of you achieve the goal of delivering great work.

The diagram below illustrates the two processes your brain goes through when you react or respond to a situation.
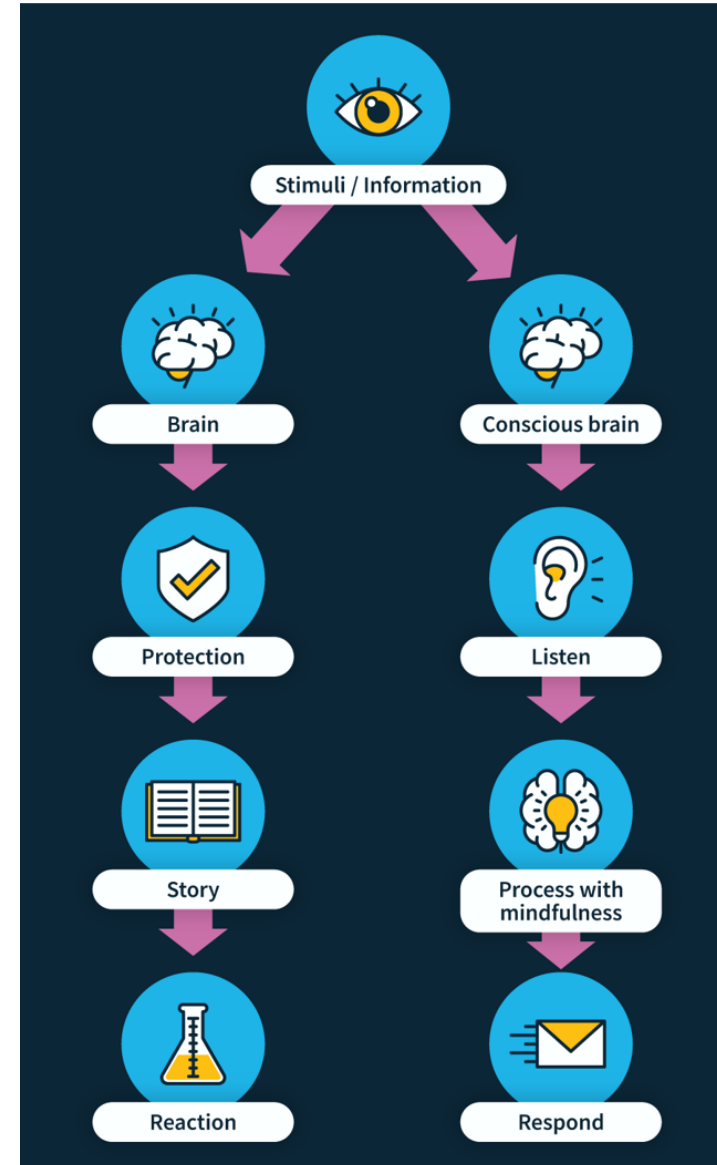
What do you think?

- Let's take a moment to reflect on this. Think about any situation; whether at work, at home, with colleagues or with friends.

- When do you feel most conscious when communicating? What was the impact?

- Is there a scenario you've had or witnessed in which someone reacted instead of responding? What was the outcome?

- Remember good communication takes more than just one person. Share your thoughts with each other.

Your communication preferences

references

- **Gumperz, J. (1992). 'Contextualization and understanding'. In C. Duranti A.; Goodwin (Ed.), (Tran.), Rethinking context: Language as an interactive phenomenon (pp. 229-252). Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, pp.231**

- **Gumperz, J., Jupp, T. & Roberts, C. (1979). Crosstalk. Southall: National Council for Industrial language Training.**

- **Roberts, C. and Campbell, S. (2005). 'Fitting stories into boxes: rhetorical and textual constraints on candidates' performances in British job interviews'. Journal of Applied Linguistics, 2(1), pp. 45-73**