



# Troublesome Language



# The language of misunderstanding



# Equivocal Language

Definition: words that have more than one correct meanings.

Example: In the fourth grade the teacher asked the class what a period was. One student raised his hand and shared everything that he learned about girls' getting their period. But the teacher was talking about the dot at the end of the sentence.



# Equivocal Language

- Serious Legal Problem
  - Women view indirect statements as equivalent to saying “no”
  - Men interpret them as less clear-cut request to stop
  - Under Law, saying no is precisely that!



# Relative Words

Definition: words that gains their meaning by comparison

Examples:

- Fast and Slow
- Smart and Stupid
- Short and Long



## Relative Words

For example, is the school you attend large or small?

Explanation: It depends on what you compare to: a campus like UCLA, with an enrollment of over thirty thousands students, it probably looks small; but compared to smaller institution, it might seem quite large.



## Relative Words

- Using relative words without explanation them can lead to communication problems.
- Example: possible:
  - 0 to 99%
  - Good Chance meant between 35 to 90%
  - Unlikely falls between 0 to 40%



## Slang and Jargon

- Slang is language used by a group of people whose members belong to a similar co-culture or other group.
  - Example: “see ya” means bye, “gonna” means, goat, bae, fam
- Other slang consists of regionalisms—terms that are understood by people who live in one geographic area but that are incomprehensible to outsiders.
- This sort of use illustrates how slang defines insiders and outsiders, creating a sense of identity and solidarity.





## Slang and Jargon

- Jargon: the specialized vocabulary that functions as a kind of shorthand by people with common backgrounds and experience.
- Example:

Some technical support staffers talk of “banana problems,” meaning those that could be figured out by monkeys, as in “This is a two-banana problemat worst.”



## Overly Abstract Language

- Most objects, events, and ideas can be described with varying degrees of specificity. Consider the material you are reading. You could call it:
  - ❑ A book
  - ❑ A textbook
  - ❑ A communication textbook
  - ❑ Understanding Human Communication
  - ❑ Chapter 3 of Understanding Human Communication



## Overly Abstract Language

- Higher-level abstractions are a useful tool, because without them language would be too cumbersome to be useful.
- It's faster, easier, and more useful to use relatively abstract terms like friendly or smart can make it easier to describe people than listing their specific actions.
- Abstract language—speech that refers to observable events or objects—serves a second, less obvious function.
- “What do you think of my new haircut?” An abstract response like “It’s really different!” may be easier for you to deliver—and for your friend to receive—than the clear, brutal truth: “It’s really ugly!”



## Overly Abstract Language

- Although vagueness does have its uses, highly abstract language can cause several types of problems.
- The first is stereotyping. Consider “Men don’t care about relationships,” Each of these claims ignores the very important fact that abstract descriptions are almost always too general, that they say more than we really mean.
- Besides creating stereotypical attitudes, abstract language can lead to the problem of confusing others too.



## Overly Abstract Language

- The best way to avoid this sort of overly abstract language is to use behavioral descriptions instead.
  1. Who is involved?
  2. In what circumstances does the behaviour occur? Where? When?
  3. What behaviour are involved?

**TABLE 3-2 Abstract and Behavioral Descriptions**

	Abstract Description	Who Is Involved	Behavioral Description		Remarks
			In What Circumstances	Specific Behaviors	
<b>Problem</b>	I talk too much	People I find intimidating	When I want them to like me	I talk (mostly about myself) instead of giving them a chance to speak or asking about their lives.	Behavioral description more clearly identifies behaviors to change.
<b>Goal</b>	I want to be more constructive.	My roommate	When we talk about household duties	Instead of finding fault with her ideas, suggest alternatives that might work.	Behavioral description clearly outlines how to act; abstract description doesn't.
<b>Appreciation</b>	"You've really been helpful lately."	(Deliver to fellow worker)	"When I've had to take time off work because of personal problems"	"You took my shifts without complaining."	Give both abstract and behavioral descriptions for best results.
<b>Request</b>	"Clean up your act!"	(Deliver to target person)	"When we're around my family"	"Please don't tell jokes that involve sex."	Behavioral description specifies desired behavior.



# Disruptive language



# Confusing Fact and Opinion

➤ Fact is something that is true, real information. It can be proven.

Example:

- Today is Thursday.
- The class start from 12:55 to 4:30 in the afternoon.
- Dogs are domestic animals.





# Confusing Fact and Opinion

- Opinion is something that you think. It isn't always true information.

Example:

- Chocolate ice cream is delicious.
- May 25th is the best day of the year.



# Confusing fact and inference

- **FACT** is a statement that can be proven true or false with some objective standard.

Example :

1. Human being use their legs to walk.
2. The sun is extremely hot.



# Confusing fact and inference

- **INFERENCE** is a statement that appears to be true based on facts or evidences.
  - using your observation to make a guess about an object or an outcome.

Example :

Nyratt bought five lottery tickets the previous day and quit work the next day.

→ His classmates can infer that he won the lottery.



## Confusing fact and inference

### FACT

He hit a lamppost while driving down the street.

You interrupted me before I finished what I was saying.

### INFERENCE

He was daydreaming when he hit the lamppost.

You don't care about what I have to say.



# Emotive Language

**Emotive language** : contains words that sound as if they're describing something when they are really announcing the speaker's attitude toward something.

**Example 1:** If you like that old picture frame, you would probably call it “an antique” but if you think it's ugly, you would describe it as “a piece of junk.”

**Example 2:** The man is forceful / The woman is pushy.

He is svelte.(positive) / He is skinny.(negative)

- Emotive words may sound like statements of fact but are always opinions.
- The usage of Emotive language are used to evoke the emotions from the audience and create the positive emotion.



# Evasive Language



# Euphemism

A pleasant term substituted for a more direct but potentially less pleasant one.

- Use for a more polite terms
- Use as comfort words
- Disguise one's intention
- softens the harsh, smooths the rough, makes what's negative sound positive



# Euphemism

Example:

- Restroom -> Toilet
- Chubby/Plump -> Fat/Overweight
- Passed away -> Died
- Collateral Damage -> Accidental Deaths
- We're letting you go -> You're fired





# Euphemism

Example: Confusing cases

- Compassion Zone
- Extraordinary Rendition
- Reinforcing Budget



# Equivocation

The deliberate use of imprecise statement to conceal the truth.

Example:

\*You and your partner already been late for a fancy restaurant for 30 minutes\*

Girl: How do I look?

Boy: \*takes a moment\* You look wonderful (But in fact you hated the dress)



# Equivocation

Equivocations have several advantages.

They spare the receiver from the embarrassment that might come from a completely truthful answer, and

It can be easier for the sender to equivocate than to suffer the discomfort of being honest.