



Communication Theories I, Session 03

DEFINING COMMUNICATION

- **Defining Communication**
- **Key Terms**
- **Helix**
- **Intentionality**
- **Linear Model**
- **Interaction Model**
- **Transactional Model**

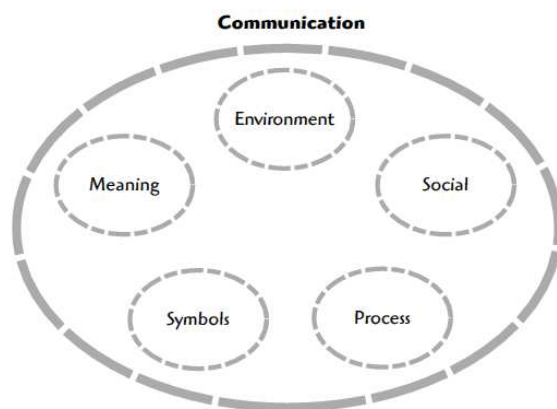
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DEFINING COMMUNICATION

- **Defining communication** can be challenging. Katherine Miller (2005:3) underscores this dilemma, stating that “conceptualizations of communication have been abundant and have changed substantially over the years.”
- **With that in mind**, let’s define five key terms in our perspective: social, process, symbols, meaning, and environment.
- **Communication is a social process** in which individuals employ symbols to establish and interpret meaning in their environment. We necessarily draw in elements of mediated communication as well in our discussion, given the importance that communication technology plays in contemporary society. With that in mind, let’s define five key terms in our perspective: social, process, symbols, meaning, and environment

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Figure 2.1 Key Terms in Defining Communication



Source: West and Turner (2010:5)

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Key Terms

- **Communication:** A social process in which individuals employ symbols to establish and interpret meaning in their environment
- 1. **Social:** the notion that people and interactions are part of the communication process.
- 2. **Process:** ongoing, dynamic, and unending occurrence.
- Individual and cultural changes affect communication.
- Some of you may be thinking that because the communication process is dynamic and unique it is virtually impossible to study.
- C. Arthur VanLear (1996) argues that because the communication process is so dynamic, researchers and theorists can look for patterns over time.

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- He concludes that “if we recognize a pattern across a large number of cases, it permits us to ‘generalize’ to other unobserved cases”
- Or, as communication pioneers Paul Watzlawick, Janet Beavin, and Don Jackson (1967) suggest, the interconnectedness of communication events is critical and pervasive. Thus, it is possible to study the dynamic communication process.
- A third term associated with our definition of communication is symbols.

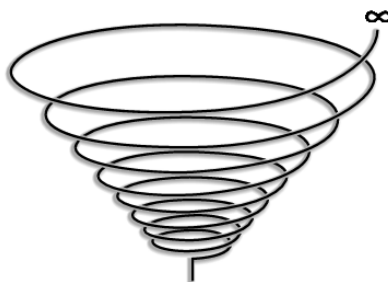
3. A symbol is an arbitrary label or representation of phenomena. Words are symbols for concepts and things—for example, the word love represents the idea of love; the word chair represents a thing we sit on.

- Labels may be ambiguous, may be both verbal and nonverbal, and may occur in face-to-face and mediated communication. Symbols are usually agreed on within a group but may not be understood outside of the group.

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Figure 3.2 Communication Process as a Helix



- Frank Dance (1967) depicts the communication process by using a spiral, or helix
- **Concrete symbol:** symbol representing an object.
- **Abstract symbol:** symbol representing an idea or thought

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- In addition to process and symbols, meaning is central to our definition of communication.
- 4. Meaning** is what people extract from a message. In communication episodes, messages can have more than one meaning and even multiple layers of meaning.
- The final key term in our definition of communication is environment.
- 5. Environment** is the situation or context in which communication occurs. The environment includes a number of elements, including time, place, historical period, relationship, and a speaker's and listener's cultural backgrounds.
- The environment can also be mediated. By that, we mean that communication can take place with technological assistance.

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Intentionality

- **Some communication** researchers have strongly favored the view that only intentional behaviors are communicative. For instance, Gerald Miller and Mark Steinberg (1975:15) interpret the communication process this way:

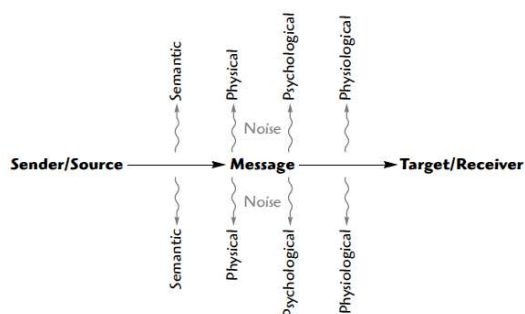
We have chosen to restrict our discussion of communication to intentional symbolic transactions: those in which at least one of the parties transmits a message to another with the intent of modifying the other's behavior By our definition, intent to communicate and intent to influence are synonymous. If there is no intent, there is no message.

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Communication as Action: The Linear Model

Figure 3.3 Linear Model of
Communication



Source: Adapted from Shannon & Weaver, 1949.

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- **Models:** simplified representations of the communication process
- **Linear model of communication:** one-way view of communication that assumes a message is sent by a source to a receiver.
- **Source:** originator of a message.
- **Message:** words, sounds, actions, or gestures in an interaction.
- **Receiver:** recipient of a message.
- **Channel:** pathway to communication.
- **Noise:** distortion in channel not intended by the source.
- **Semantic noise:** linguistic influences on reception of message.
- **Physical (external) noise:** bodily influences on reception of message

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- **Psychological noise:** cognitive influences on reception of message.
- **Physiological noise:** biological influences on reception of message

Communication as Interaction: The Interactional Model

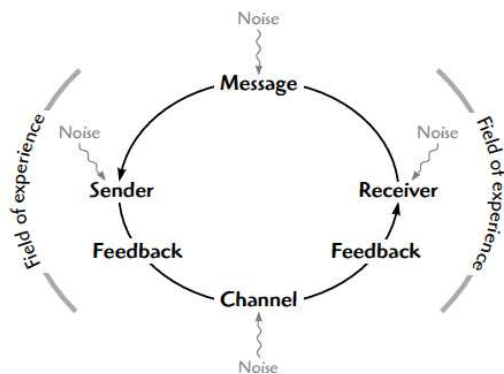
- **The linear model suggests** that a person is only a sender or a receiver. That is a narrow view of the participants in the communication process.
- **Wilbur Schramm** (1954), therefore, proposed that we also examine the relationship between a sender and a receiver.
- **He conceptualized the interactional** model of communication, which emphasizes the two-way communication process between communicators.

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- In other words, communication goes in two directions: from sender to receiver and from receiver to sender.
- **Interactional model of communication:** view of communication as the sharing of meaning with feedback that links source and receiver
- **Feedback communication:** given to the source by the receiver to indicate understanding (meaning).
- A final feature of the interactional model is a person's **field of experience**, or how a person's culture, experiences, and heredity influence his or her ability to communicate with another.
- **Field of experience:** overlap of sender's and receiver's culture, experiences, and heredity in communication.

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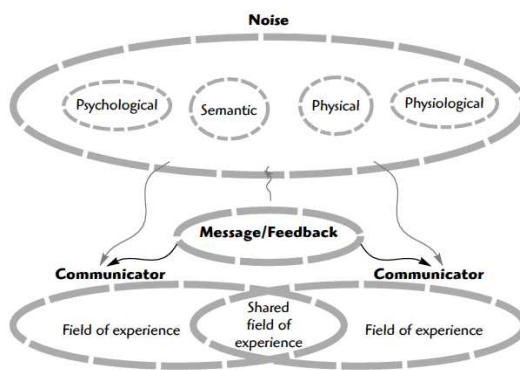
Figure 3.4 Interactional Model of Communication



- A final feature of the interactional model is a person's **field of experience**, or how a person's culture, experiences, and heredity influence his or her ability to communicate with another.

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Figure 3.5 Transactional Model of Communication



- **Transactional model of communication:** view of communication as the simultaneous sending and receiving of messages

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