



11137CH19

# PERSPECTIVES IN COMMUNICATION

## 18

### LEARNING OBJECTIVES

After completing this chapter the learner is able to —

- know the meaning of and processes within communication.
- analyse the influence of age, education, gender, cultural background and exposure on communication.

### 18.1 INTRODUCTION

You have learnt about the important aspects of communication in the earlier chapters. Communication is a vital process for all in this information age. How does communication occur? It is a process in which a sender and a receiver are involved. A sender sends a message with some intention. Likewise, the message is received by a receiver according to her/his ability or perspective. The communication process is complete only when the intentions of the sender match with the aptitude of the receiver. If the views of the sender and the receiver match, a common meaning is derived. The perspectives of the sender and the receiver will determine effective acceptance of the message.

There are many factors that determine perspectives about communication. These are: age, education, gender, cultural background and exposure to communication. Let us study how each of these factors influence communication.

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#### Age

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Age has influence on communication. As one grows, fundamental changes take place: one is ideational (related to ideas), and the second is structural and material. Ideational changes refer to the changes in **ideas**. For example,

the ideas about career and life are different for an 18-year-old teenager who is thinking of a career, a 40-year-old executive who is settled in her career and a 55-year-old who is reaching the end of his career. **Structural changes** refer to physiological and age-related changes in cognitive functioning. Many faculties are affected with age. Vision is the first faculty to be affected. The other faculties start deteriorating, some slowly and others rapidly. Consequently, how and what one communicates is influenced by age, and messages need to be adjusted and altered accordingly. Let us take an example of older persons. As one grows older, one may begin to experience difficulty in listening. For example, in noisy environments (such as a restaurant where loud music is playing) they often find it difficult to determine who is talking and what is exactly being said. Younger people may not have any such difficulty. Further, the selection of words and style of communication also differ according to age.

**Material changes** refer to changes in use of material for communication. For example, a teenager prefers a mobile phone to listen to music, or will download it from the internet, whereas, an adult will be comfortable using a record player or a CD player. In rural areas, an older adult will be comfortable listening to the radio. The ease with which the younger generation uses equipments for communication is not matched by older age groups. Thus, communication of older and younger people is bound to be affected by age, and so is communication between them.

### ACTIVITY 1

Think about some words or phrases you commonly use at home that your parents disapprove of. What is their objection?

## Education

Education broadens the horizon of knowledge. It develops the individual's ability to think and apply knowledge, gives access to information and prepares people for careers. All these benefits enhance one's capacity and scope to communicate. An educated sender is likely to articulate and express her/his thoughts more effectively; if the receiver is equally educated it leads to good communication. For example, when a teacher explains a concept to another teacher, it is at a higher level of cognition than the concept being explained to students. This is so partly due to the differences in educational levels of students and their teachers. Similarly, when concepts like global warming, deforestation, effect of pesticides on crops, consequence of heat on nutrients, etc., are to be explained to farmers, health professionals, home-makers or officers, the vocabulary, information, the strategy and mode of communication need to be selected to suit their levels.

## Culture

Culture is a complex whole that includes knowledge, beliefs, arts, morals, laws, customs, language and other habits of human beings as members of society. When we discuss the relationship between communication and culture, it includes the total spectrum of communication such as language, non-verbal communication, customs, perceived values, and concepts of time and space.

Culture varies widely within a country and throughout the world. Variations in culture account for differences in ways of living and expectations from members. We often find that it may not be easy to communicate with persons who are from cultures that are different from our own. Through greater understanding of cultural differences and sensitivity to unknown differences, many problems that arise due to cross-cultural communication can be resolved. Culture is important in business as well. There may be cultural differences in schedule of meetings, holidays, concern for punctuality, rules of etiquette and language usage to conduct business.

People from the same culture will have shared experiences including language, customs, value system, food habits, and so on. Therefore, their communication is facilitated. For example, in India we may not be very used to saying “thank you” in our everyday interactions with family and friends. However, the intonations in the voice or the facial expression would convey that one is thankful. In Western cultures however, not saying “thank you” would be considered ill-mannered. Another common example is the way of addressing people. In India the hierarchical structure defines how one addresses persons who are positioned at a certain level in the hierarchy vis-a-vis oneself. The terms “*aap*” and “*tum*” are used accordingly. In many Western cultures, however, irrespective of the age or position of the person, it is quite acceptable to address people older than oneself by their first name. Interestingly the English language does not have any words that distinguish between “*aap*” and “*tum*”.

### ACTIVITY 2

Select any five words in your local language, and request two college students and two older persons to write down their meanings. Study the similarities and differences in their understanding.

Yet another example is of the concept of time. In India if people are invited for dinner to someone’s place and asked to come at 8.00 p.m., they generally interpret it as any time after 8 p.m. Even the person who is extending the invitation is more likely to say, “Come around 8 p.m.”.

However, in many other cultures, like the Japanese, one is supposed to abide by the actual time given. In fact, not keeping to the time is considered rude, and in the workplace it may actually lead to a negative comment on one's assessment report.

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## Gender

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The differences between men and women range from biological to social ones. The extent of biological basis in gender differences is still a heavily debated issue in developmental psychology. Whether the tendencies are biological or learned, there is no denying that differences between men and women exist. Gender and culture intersect in ways that make the distinction between the two almost impossible. Although there are some universal gender stereotypes, culture intervenes to bring about differences in how these are manifested. Thus, it is relatively impossible to understand gender differences in communication without considering cultural context and social history. In certain cultures, men and women are socialised to communicate in different ways. For instance, women are encouraged to be more concerned with social consensus, sharing and caring; whereas, men are urged to focus on information, competitiveness and finding solutions.

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## Exposure to new knowledge

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Exposure to new software and new technology provides practical insights into long-term social and economic implications of information communication technologies. These include automation in offices, in production, telecommunications, and electronic networks that connect organisations. As you may know, the advancement of communication technology has created new fields such as information management. With exposure to modern technologies, the way one looks at work patterns, shares information and ideas, and networks has changed. For example, with access to the internet, school students are able to do project work with relative ease and their approach to assignments has changed. People in offices communicate through e-mail. Today it has become easier to share one's views on different issues with people anywhere in the world; reading, posting and exchanging information on the internet is one such mode. For example, a teacher wanted to write an article on "Teacher's Day" which falls on 5th September. She did not want to write a routine article. She surfed on the internet and found that Teachers' Day was celebrated in many countries in different ways. With access to the internet she was able to write an interesting and informative article. Children (under 10 years) of today who have access to TV channels such as National Geographic and Animal Planet get a lot of information on animals, their habitat,

habits, and life patterns. Sensitising people to problems related to wastage of water, environment degradation, hygiene, etc., can be done effectively through exposure to media. Thus, as you would have noted perspectives in communication will continue to change and new ideas and knowledge will be added.

We have now reached the end of the textbook on Human Ecology and Family Sciences. The last chapter that follows expects you to reflect on the responsibilities and rights of individuals such that these not only lead to their own well-being, but also that of their family and society.

## ACTIVITY 2

Given below are a few situations. Study them and identify the factors that led to a different understanding for the sender and the receiver.

1. In a film appreciation class, the teacher had selected a Hindi film “*Hari Bhari*” by Shyam Benegal as an example of good cinema. The students did not feel the same way. They felt that “*Dilwale Dulhania Le Jayenge*” was an excellent movie. Why so?
2. A family was deciding where to go for an outing on a week-end. For the teenage children a nearby hill station was the perfect place for the outing, whereas, the grandparents preferred to go to a historical monument or visit temples.

Why was the week-end outing perceived differently by the children and the grandparents?

3. Nanda, a student of Class X was engrossed in the class, listening to the teacher Shri Pathak. Suddenly she said, “Sir, your screw is loose”. The whole class burst out laughing. Shri Pathak said, “I do not approve of what you just said. Do you not have manners”?

Naturally, the teacher was angry. Nanda was serious, she did not realise why she received such reactions from her classmates and the teacher. She was summoned by the teacher and asked to explain.

**Nanda:** Sir, the screw of your spectacle had become loose, so I thought I’ll tell you otherwise the eye glass will fall down.

**Shri Pathak:** Oh! I did not realise this. It’s okay, thanks for telling me.

The class was amused by her reply and in a way relieved that no mischief was intended. The teacher quickly checked his spectacles and set the screw tight.

**Question:** In the above example there was a difference in the perspectives of Nanda and Shri Pathak which caused a misunderstanding. What were their perspectives?

## Key Terms

Perspective, Communication, Rapport talk, Report talk, Culture

### ■ REVIEW QUESTIONS

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1. Describe the role of culture in determining perspectives in communication.
2. How do age, gender and education influence the communication process?

### ■ WEBSITE FOR REFERENCE

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<http://www.aging.utoronto.ca/node/95>