

Bridging the Communication Gap



Content

1. Use of Language
2. The Communication Gap
3. Communication Patterns during Meetings
4. Listening Habits
5. The Language of Management

1. Use of Language

Language is a tool of communication, delivering a message—but it is much more than that: it has strengths and weaknesses which project national character and even philosophy. The nationals of each country use their language and speech in a different way.



The Japanese and English may distrust Italians because they wave their hands about, or Spaniards and Arabs because they sound emotional and loud or prone to exaggeration. The French may appear offensive because of their directness or frequent use of cynicism. No one may really know what the Japanese and Finns are thinking or what they actually said, if they said anything at all. Germans may take the English too literally and completely miss nuances of humor, understatement or irony.

Northern peoples may simply consider that Latins speak too fast to be relied on. Languages are indeed spoken at different speeds. Hawaiian and some Polynesian languages barely get through 100 syllables per minute, while English has been measured at 200, German at 250, Japanese at 310 and French at 350 syllables per minute. The whole question of people using different speech styles and wielding their language in the national manner inevitably leads to misunderstandings not only of expression but also of intent.



2.The Communication Gap

Germany

- ◆ Next week I shall become a new car. (get)
- ◆ Thank you for your kidneys. (kindness)
- ◆ What is your death line? (deadline)

Japan

- ◆ I have split up my boyfriend.
- ◆ My father is a doctor, my mother is a typewriter.
- ◆ I work hardly 10 hours a day. (hard)

Portugal

- ◆ What will you do when you retire? I will breed with my horses.

Sweden

- ◆ Are you hopeful of any change? No, I am hopeless.

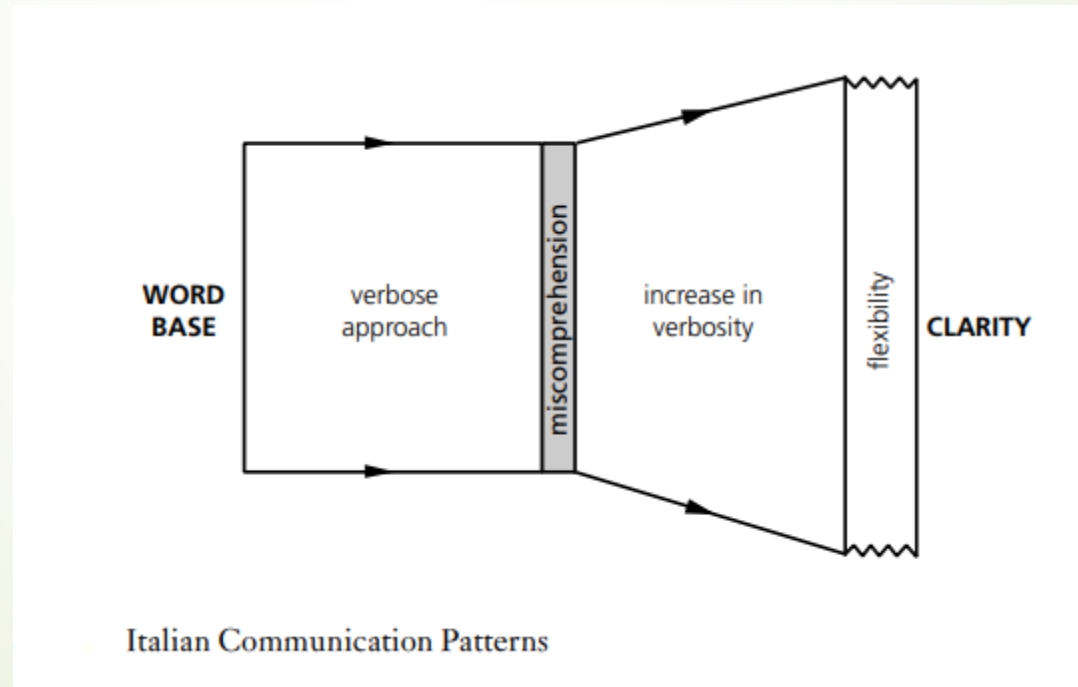
Finland

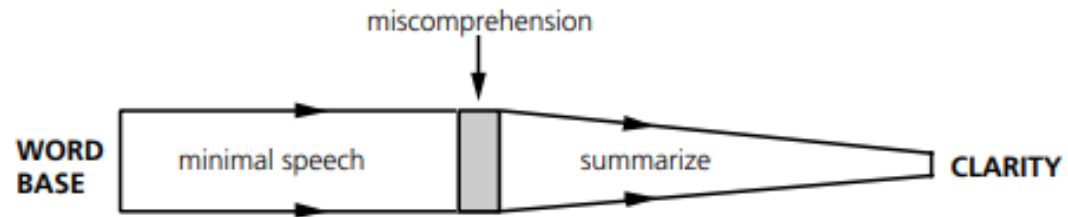
- ◆ He took two trucks every night. (drugs = pills)
- ◆ He took a fast watch. (quick look)
- ◆ How old is your son? Half past seven



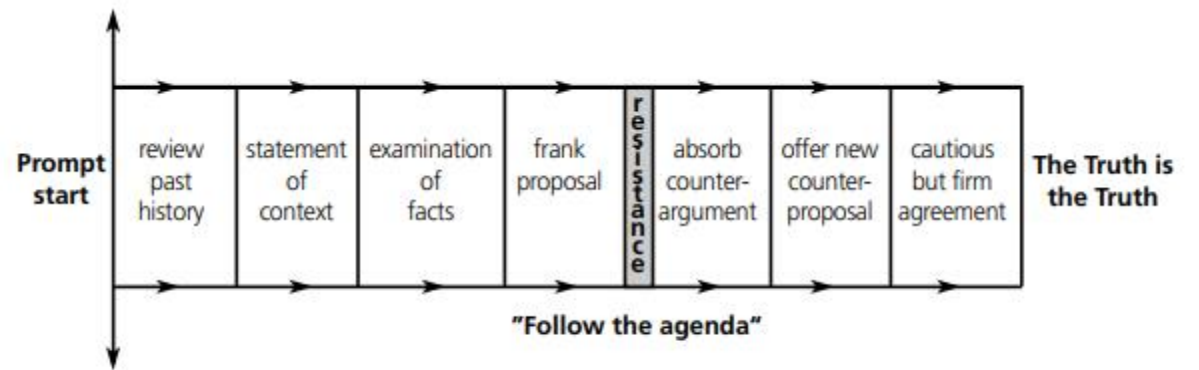
3. Communication Patterns during Meetings

We attempt to surmount the linguistic hurdle by learning the language of our partner well or by using an interpreter. When a misunderstanding arises, however, we abandon neutrality and cultural sensitivity, and our language swings back into culture-bound mode. The following figures give you an idea of how some countries' communication patterns look when they are mapped out.

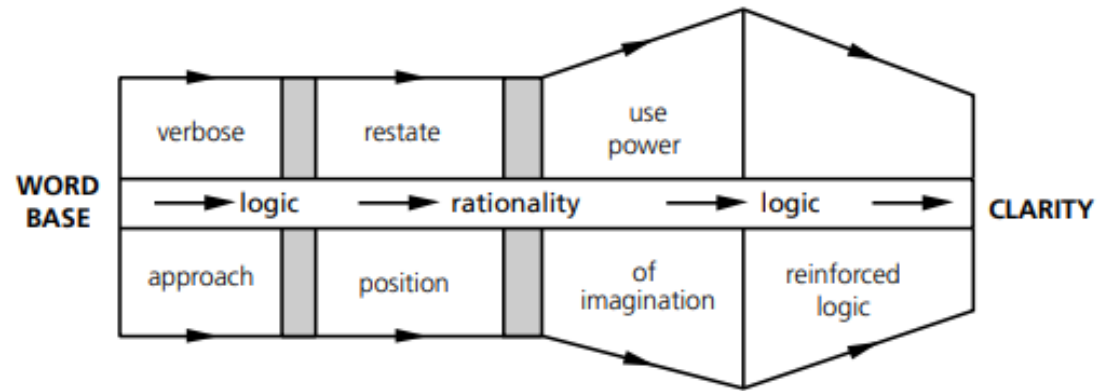




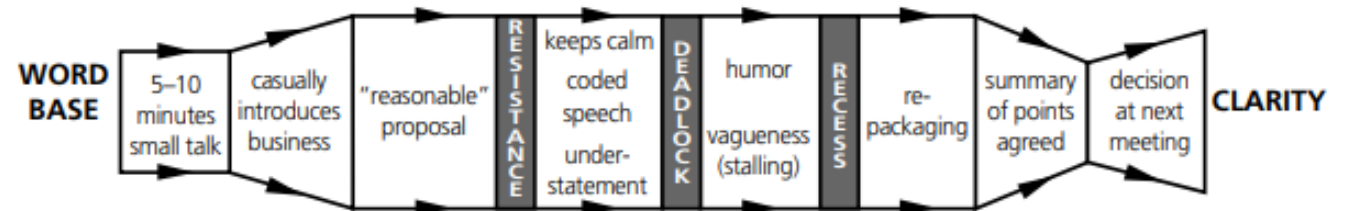
Finnish Communication Patterns



German Communication Patterns

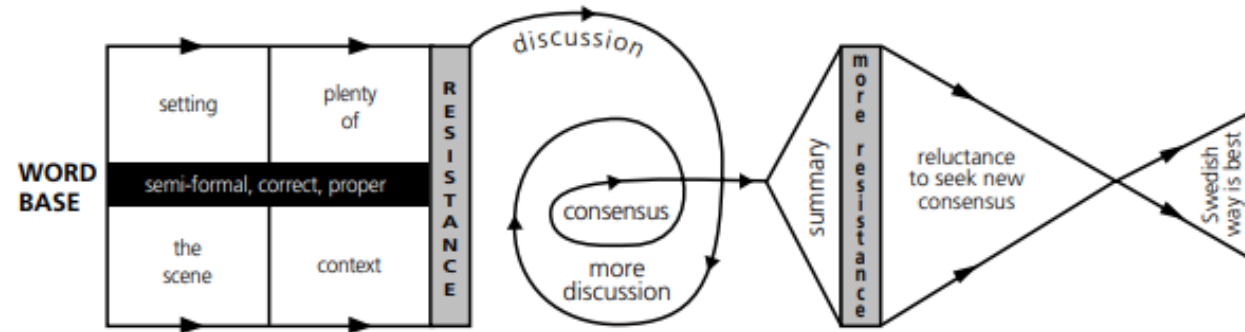


French Communication Patterns

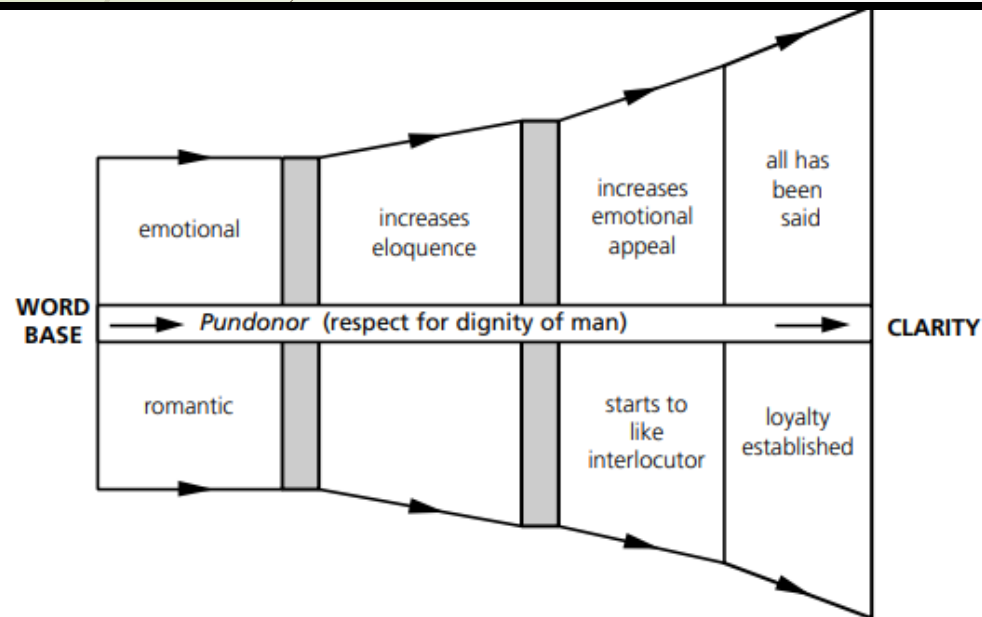


"Don't rock the boat"

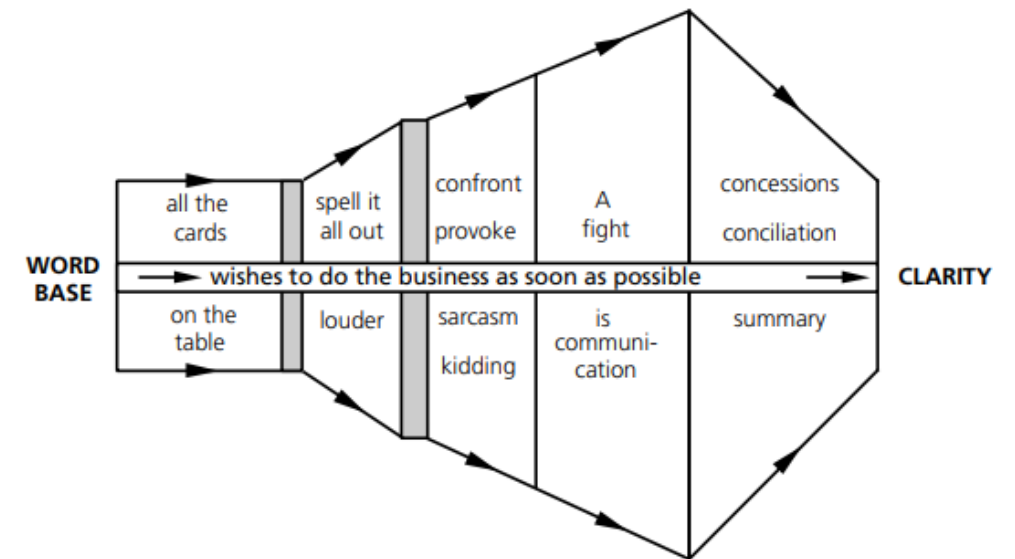
English Communication Patterns



Swedish Communication Patterns



Spanish Communication Patterns



American Communication Patterns

4. Listening Habits

Communication is a two-way process, involving not only the communicative skill of the speaker but, just as important, the listening habits of the interlocutor or audience. Just as different cultures don't use speech the same way, neither do they listen the same way. There are good listeners (Germans, Swedes, Finns) and there are bad ones (French, Spaniards). Others, such as the Americans, listen carefully or indifferently, depending on the nature of the conversation or address.



5. The Language of Management

Different languages are used in different ways and with a variety of effects. Managers of all nationalities know how to speak to best effect to their compatriots, yet they are in fact only vaguely aware of their dependence on the built-in linguistic characteristics that make their job easier.

German

Germans belong to a data-oriented, low-context culture and like receiving detailed information and instruction to guide them in the performance of tasks at which they wish to excel.

In business situations German is not used in a humorous way, neither do its rigid case-endings and strict word order allow the speaker to think aloud very easily. Information-hungry Germans are among the best listeners in the world, and their language fits the bill.



British English

In Britain the English language has quite different qualities and, as a management tool, is much more subtle. British staff members who are put off by American exaggeration and tough talk will fall for a more understated, laid-back version of English that reflects their own characteristics.

Managers manipulate subordinates with friendly small talk, humor, reserved statements of objectives and a very casual approach to getting down to work. The variety of types of humor available in the U.K. enables managers to be humorous, to praise, change direction, chide, insinuate and criticize (themselves as well as others) at will. Irony is a powerful weapon either way.





American English



The United States is a young, vigorous, ebullient nation and its language reflects the national energy and enthusiasm. Americans exaggerate in order to simplify—low-key Britons feel Americans go “over the top,” but the dynamic cliché wears well in the U.S.

The frequent tendency to hyperbolize, exaggerate chances of success and overstate aims or targets allows American managers to “pump up” their subordinates—to drive them on to longer hours and speedier results. The many neologisms in American English, used liberally by managers, permit them to appear up to date, aphoristic, humorous and democratic.

French

French managers inhabit quite a different linguistic world. They are clinically direct in their approach and see no advantage in ambiguity or ambivalence. In the French culture loquacity is equated with intelligence, and silence does not have a particularly golden sheen. The French language, unquestionably, is the chief weapon wielded by managers in directing, motivating and dominating their staff.



Thank You
For Your
Attention

