

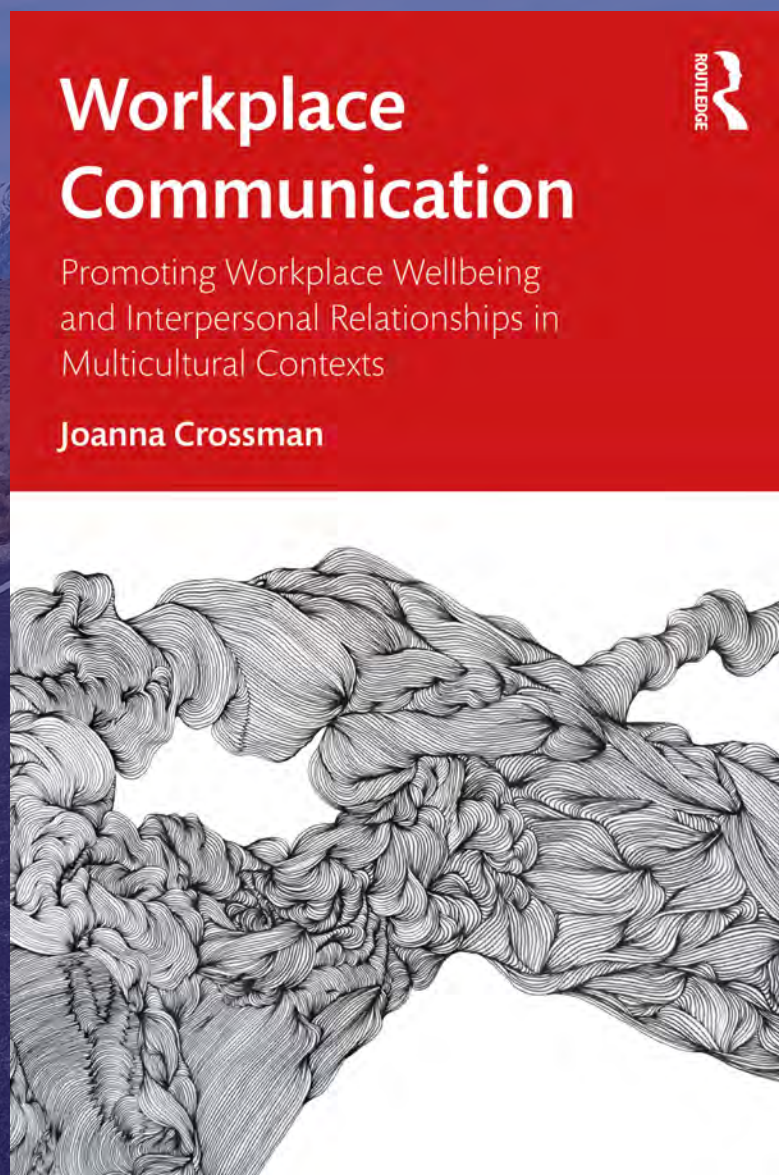
Roadmap to Inclusive Leadership and Agility

FREE CHAPTER

WORKPLACE COMMUNICATION:

Promoting Workplace Wellbeing and Interpersonal Relationships in Multicultural Contexts

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THE NATURE AND STUDY OF COMMUNICATION AND LANGUAGE

Meanings and definitions

Few dispute that communication competence is essential to thriving in most cultures (see Larson, 2018) but communicating well is far from easy (Berger, 2016), partly because, like language and meaning, it is constantly changing (Sweet, 2014). Communication is made more challenging given a range of conditions, including the pace of social and economic change, globalisation, social media, and other technologies (Servaes, 2020). Defining communication is exacting given its nuanced, complex meanings that depend upon the disciplines, interpretations, and contexts brought to the subject matter (Berger, 2016; Dwyer, 2020; Nicotera, 2019; Simonson, Peck, Craig, & Jackson, 2012; Wybraniec-Skardowska, 2017). Varied research methodologies, ranging on a continuum from the positivist positions of the natural sciences to highly qualitative, inductive and subjectivist approaches (Rocci & Saussure, 2016), also influence how communication is defined. Nevertheless, despite these complexities, from the 1960s, schools of communication began to consolidate assumptions that helped to focus and define the discipline (Miller, 2015).

The term ‘communication’ derives from a Latin root word meaning ‘to make known’, summoning up the notion of communities connected by their communication with one another (Berger, 2016). Historically, communication has been associated with clarity and transparency or political and economic contexts such as the exchange of goods and transportation (Simonson et al., 2012). Some scholars have focused upon the purpose of communication as a means of influencing, persuading, and interacting with others and the way such interactions are largely determined by the context and culture in which they take place (Wardhaugh & Fuller, 2014).

In somewhat simple but nevertheless accessible terms, Dorochoff (2016, p. 16) defined communication as ‘verbal and nonverbal language delivered either directly

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or indirectly, that is spoken or written’. In ways that perceive communication more broadly as a construction emphasising context and social relationships, Servaes (2020, p. 5) defines communication as a ‘social process constituted in a specific spatial and temporal framework [and] is the articulation of social relations amongst people’. In his view, communication is a metaphor for the very ‘fabric of society’ (Servaes, 2020, p. 5). Similarly, Noels, Clement, Collins, and Machintyre (2019, p. 29) construct communication in terms of its societal purpose and, emphasising its shared nature;

communication is the means through which individuals learn and develop the shared frames of reference that form the basis of their world view and the consensual shared reality that fosters social cohesion.

Heath (2018, p. 2) highlights the role of influence as an integral concept of communication and intention, stating that;

[c]ommunication is the means by which people (strategically and non-strategically, intentionally and unintentionally), interact with and affect/influence one another.

ACTIVITY: CRITICAL THINKING

As individuals, search for two or three other definitions of communication. Within small groups compare and contrast these definitions, identifying those themes or concepts that appear to be highlighted conceptually. Based on a number of key concepts, try to co-construct your own definitions and share them with other small groups that have undertaken the same task. Discuss any similarities and differences in your definitions.

Communication as a discipline

The study of early communication is rooted in the classical origins of ancient Greece from 466 BC–400 AD when oral communication skills, argument, and persuasion, otherwise referred to as ‘rhetoric’, were highly regarded and formed a key element in how Aristotle (384–322 AD), a philosopher at that time, understood democracy (Berger, 2016; Berlo, 1960; Turner & West, 2018). Greek scholars developed some of the earliest theories about which strategies in speaking and writing influence the thoughts and actions of audiences (Heath, 2018).

During ‘Medieval times’ in Europe through to the Renaissance period from 400–1600 AD, orality tended to be influenced by religious worldviews but from this period onwards, rhetoric increasingly favoured empirical, secular evidence to

support conclusions that heralded the rise of social sciences, including communication (Turner & West, 2018). The concept of rhetoric or public speaking in communication was later to be studied in university schools of English around the turn of the twentieth century as business and other practitioners began to appreciate its importance in achieving success (Heads, 2017; Nicotera, 2019; Turner & West, 2018). As a sub-discipline of communication, rhetoric has now come to encompass speech making, presentations, and aspects of the mass media (film, books, social media, for example) that are accessed by large numbers of people (Berger, 2016). Others have explored how rhetorical approaches explain the way that persuasive communication shapes identity and identification (Scott, 2019). Rhetoric addresses the concept of audience and increasing the appeal and persuasiveness of speech in order to achieve the objectives of a speaker (Macnamara, 2015). The idea that communication is synonymous with the study of persuasion is now deemed questionable, however (Nicotera, 2019), but introductory texts of business communication continue to include a chapter on rhetoric and how to deliver effective presentations by drawing on the persuasive strategies of ethos, pathos, and logos, advocated by Aristotle. Ethos is concerned with highlighting personal character to demonstrate credibility, pathos draws upon emotional elements, and logos refers to the way logical arguments can be brought to persuade others (Berger, 2016; Gill, 2019). These principles of persuasion continue to inform how communication professionals develop organisational strategies and manage information in contexts such as advertising, marketing, public relations, and leadership (Heath, 2018). That is, when it is used to define and achieve purpose-driven outcomes and is thus inherently concerned with persuading others of a vision.

Communication models, theories, and concepts from the twentieth century

Twentieth-century ideas about communication may now seem somewhat unsophisticated but many early theories and allied models continue to be instructive today (Nicotera, 2019). Communication models and associated diagrams illustrate elements of a phenomenon and any relationships amongst them (Berger, 2016). Shannon and Weaver's mathematical one-way model, published in 1949, is known as a transmission model of communication (Dwyer, 2020). The model was developed for the Bell telephone company to help telephone engineers find efficient ways to transmit electrical signals and was depicted by a line drawn from left to right running through various boxes (Nicotera, 2019). The transmissive approach pertains to the transference of information via an input-output orientation in a process whereby a source encodes messages through a channel so that a receiver can then decode or make sense of them (Barge, 2019). A message is an idea or feeling with verbal and/or nonverbal elements, transmitted from a sender to a receiver who decodes or interprets the information in order to understand it (Dwyer, 2020). A channel refers to a medium or vehicle for conveying a message from one person to another that may be, for example, face to face, digital, or

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written communication (Dwyer, 2020; Rogers, 2003; Turner & West, 2018). The components of Shannon and Weaver's model included: sender (encoder), message, channel, receiver (decoder), and noise and these concepts have appeared with some modifications in many models over time.

The concept of noise

The concept of noise runs through many communication theories and is understood to be anything interfering with or distracting from the effective encoding or decoding of communication messages (see Goodwin, 2019; Hartley & Chatterton, 2015; Larson, 2018). Communication is deemed to be effective based on its level of fidelity – that is, when a message has been interpreted by a receiver as the sender intended (Berger, 2016). The concept of noise describes what happens when a message has not been received as intended. Scholars have identified a number of different kinds of noise (see, for example, Berlo, 1960; Crossman, Bordia, & Mills, 2011; De Janasz, Crossman, Campbell, & Power, 2014; Goodwin, 2019; Hartley & Chatterton, 2015; Larson, 2018; Turner & West, 2018) as exemplified in Table 1.1.

From the early 1940s, communication scholars began to criticise linear, one-directional models with a defined beginning and end that failed to take into account any interruptions or otherwise messy aspects of communication (Turner & West, 2018). Greater focus upon feedback as a verbal or nonverbal response to a message characterised this departure (Dwyer, 2020; Hartley & Chatterton, 2015). For example, shortly after the Shannon and Weaver model was published, Wilber Schramm developed a face-to-face interactional model in 1950. The model incorporated a two-way, circular, dyadic approach to communication and verbal and nonverbal feedback from sender to receiver and back to the sender. However, some

TABLE 1.1 Forms of noise

<i>Form of noise</i>	<i>Illustrations</i>
External and physical	A jackhammer being used outdoors and interfering with a conversation or a class.
Physiological.	Fatigue, a headache, hearing loss, and a consequent loss of concentration.
Semantic	Unfamiliar jargon defined as spoken or written organisational discourse that is highly technical or specialised and understood only by group members but not others, so it can serve to maintain in-groups and exclude/limit the participation of outgroups or non-users/members.
Psychological	Emotional states such as feeling overwhelmed by workplace demands, feeling irritation, bias, or prejudice towards a sender or message.

felt Schram's model still tended to focus upon the sender rather than the receiver (Nicotera, 2019; Turner & West, 2018). Criticisms of one-directional models gave rise to what came to be known as transactional communication, where messages and meanings are simultaneously exchanged and co-created through the giving and receiving of verbal and nonverbal feedback using symbols that create a shared meaning (see, Berger, 2016; Larson, 2018; Nicotera, 2019; Turner & West, 2018). Transactional models are essentially a constitutive view of communication that has provided the conceptual means for understanding many of the principles of organisational communication (Chewing, 2019; Nicotera, 2019).

Berlo (1960) also made a seminal contribution to communication in his Source, Message, Channel, Receiver (SMCR) transmission model. Berlo's model drew upon interdisciplinary perspectives and highlighted a number of contextual factors in the creation of meaning that had hitherto been largely unexplored. They included (Berlo, 1960; Dwyer, 2020):

1. the role of human relationships
2. the five senses (sight, hearing, touch, smell and taste)
3. human behaviour
4. an individual's knowledge of the subject matter
5. the social and cultural environment
6. language.

Barnlund's (1970) subsequent communication model also emphasised the co-creation of meaning (Nicotera, 2019; Turner & West, 2018) as an aspect of sense-making theory (Goodwin, 2019; Weick, 1995), generally accepted by management and organisational language scholars as the key to how individuals understand issues and events (Brown, Colville, & Pye, 2015). Thus, theories about communication from the late twentieth century became increasingly complex and holistic and included consideration of the environment (the location where it takes place, such as a sporting venue, a mosque or shopping centre), the culture, or the fields of experience of those communicating (their skills, abilities, and expertise) (see Berlo, 1960; Hartley & Chatterton, 2015; Turner & West, 2018).

The appreciation of language in creating meaning (see Berlo, 1960) and what it signals about group membership emerged from the latter half of the twentieth century and is largely sustained by scholars today (Hartley & Chatterton, 2015). Many ideas about language and communication are informed by the work of Basil Bernstein, a British sociolinguist who found that socio-economic class influences linguistic codes and how children, and indeed adults, see their place in the world (Bernstein, 1990, 2010; Berger, 2016). Bernstein differentiated between two codes: the elaborated code and the restricted/public code whereby the former is characterised by formal, rational language, complex grammatical constructions, and a wide vocabulary, more usually adopted by the well-educated, and the latter, restricted codes are tied to local social structures, the use of metaphors, and simple

and short sentences (Berger, 2016; Bernstein, 2010) associated with marginalised socio-economic groups.

In concluding this section, it is worth reflecting upon the significant function of language for humans and groups. It is considered one of the most important means of initiating, synthesising, and reinforcing ways of thinking, feeling, and behaving within a social group. Quite simply, language provides its users with concepts that frame how the world is perceived and experienced (Piller, 2017). Disentangling language from human experience and thought is unimaginable.

The study of language and its development

Language is deeply rooted in cultural practices, learned generationally and developed through social interaction (Noels et al., 2019). It is difficult to find common agreement on a definition of language (Künstler, 2019) and indeed, a precise explanation of its relationship with communication beyond an assumption that one exists. The reason may lie in the variety of disciplinary lenses and contexts brought to the study of linguistics, as an enquiry into the structures and uses of human language and the relationship between the two (Finegan, Besnier, Blair, & Collins, 1992). Or it may be, as one scholar suggests (Corballis, 2011), that language is a great deal more complex than other forms of human communication. Stephens (1992) professed that language is a means of communication that assists humans in organising and making sense of their own lives and others' and, additionally, is used to influence others through flattery, persuasion, or command, for example. Finegan et al. (1992) differentiated between three basic forms of linguistic communication. First, oral communication, which relies on the use of speech and hearing organs, and second, two kinds of visual representation, writing and signing, which many hearing- and speech-impaired people (and their friends) rely upon for communication. Language, like meaning, is constantly changing (Sweet, 2014) so exploring how language use in communication develops over time is generally well researched (Curnow, 2009) from both a synchronic and a diachronic perspective (Burridge & Stebbings, 2016). Synchronic studies consider language at a particular point in time without reference to its historical development and diachronic research focuses on the study of language over time.

Humans have reportedly been able to speak for hundreds of thousands of years (Finegan et al., 1992). Fossil evidence of humans from at least 500,000 years ago suggests that they had developed both the vocal anatomy and neurological control necessary to produce language (Wyse, 2017). Some scholars suggest that spoken language developed between 50,000 and 100,000 years ago but without tangible evidence, these assertions cannot be verified conclusively (Fromkin et al., 2012; Yule, 2017). Most scholars concur that what distinguishes humans from animals most is the complexity of human communication (Fromkin et al., 2012). Whilst it is certainly the case that the ability to produce simple vocal patterns such as grunting originates from an ancient part of the brain shared with vertebrates

including fish, birds, frogs, and other mammals, it does not entirely constitute language in the way understood and enacted by humans (Yule, 2017). For example, unlike animals, humans are able to acquire language during childhood and through socialisation to refer to things in the past, for discussion, and to reflect upon language in reflexive ways (Burridge & Stebbings, 2016), meaning people are able to use language to think and talk about language itself (Yule, 2017). The ability to produce and understand grammatical sentences in a language is referred to as grammatical or linguistic competence. Gaining a level of linguistic competence involves demonstrating a mastery of phonological systems (the sounds a language has and how they are related to each other and combine to form words) and grammar (language rules) that are essential to encode or decode an infinite number of messages (Rowe & Levine, 2009; Saeed, 2016). Producing appropriate language and interpreting utterances given their cultural context is called communicative competence (Finegan et al., 1992). Communicative competence incorporates both linguistic and cultural knowledge, but unlike linguistic competence, interlocutors must be both technically correct and culturally and socially appropriate (Zhu, 2021).

Semiotics/semiology and semantics

Semiotics is a term often used interchangeably with semiology, and indeed, semiotics/semiology, and semantics are also loosely held as approximates (see Baldrick, 2015; Parikh, 2019). That said, semiotics pertains to the study of signs that communicate collectively held meanings, expressed linguistically or non-linguistically, that are influenced by culture and context (Berger, 2016; Baldrick, 2015; Burridge & Stebbings, 2016; Saeed, 2015; Stephens, 1992; Su, 2019). Thus, it is the work of a semiotician to discover the kinds of relationships that exist between a sign and the object it represents, or, to adopt Saussure's terminology, the relationship between a signifier and signified (Saeed, 2016). The term 'signifiers' basically relates to 'words', but linguists tend to adopt the term signifier because it serves as a reminder that words are only signs rather than being things themselves (Stephens, 1992).

Semiotics is founded upon the seminal work of Ferdinand de Saussure (1857–1913). Saussure was an American philosopher, who linked linguistic meaning to sign systems (Saeed, 2016). The term generally used nowadays by linguists for signed systems is discourse (Stephens, 1992). Signs are identified and created by humans, making it possible for one thing to stand for another in a process sometimes referred to as 'signification' (Saeed, 2016). Early in the twentieth century, Charles Sanders Peirce (1839–1914) identified three kinds of signs: icons, indexes, and symbols (Berger, 2016). An icon assumes a similarity between a sign and what it represents, for example a portrait and its real-life subject; an index describes a close association between a sign and what is signified, as smoke signifies fire; and finally, a symbol, as a conventional link between the

sign and its signified in the way that military ranks are denoted by insignia or a state of mourning is symbolised by wearing black in some cultures (Saeed, 2016) or white in others.

While semiotics is the study of signs, semantics focuses on structures to create meaning, particularly as it pertains to linguistic expressions and the use of words and sentences (see Finegan et al., 1992; Parikh, 2019; Saeed, 2015) and the relationship among words, sentences, thoughts, and constructions of truth and reality (Pinker, 2007; Rowe & Levine, 2009; Saeed, 2016). Thinking semantically can be traced to the religious texts and traditions of Sanskrit, Greek, Hebrew, and Arabic from 3000 years ago (Parikh, 2019). Semantics also shares some similarities and differences with the linguistic fields of pragmatics and sociolinguistics. Semantics tends to explore the universal meanings of signs regardless of its users (often in texts), whereas pragmatics involves interpreting the intended meaning of linguistic utterances from the way they are used in a context or setting, taking into account the speakers involved, their backgrounds and knowledge; and sociolinguistics explores the contexts of daily life, roles, gender, the media, societal norms, policies, and laws (Ismaeel, 2021; Wardhaugh & Fuller, 2014). Similarly, linguists, especially those involved in studies about organisational ethnography, are interested in how language is used in workplaces.

ACTIVITY: RESEARCH SKILLS

Search online sources available to you for journal papers that are concerned with organisational ethnography and take note of how researchers have observed the way that language is used in an organisation and the implications and conclusions the researchers have drawn. Share your findings with other students online or in class.

Linguistic relativity

Language and culture are intertwining concepts in that language is an important sign for socialisation, playing a significant role in shaping the cultural context (Eaves & Leathers, 2018; Su, 2019). The relationship between language and culture is foundational to intracultural and intercultural communication. Theories about linguistic relativity provide insights into some challenges presented in intercultural communication because it reveals much about how languages are structured, influence worldviews, and the experiences of those who speak a language (Yule, 2017).

How people use language to describe and conceptualise colour is often cited as a way to illustrate cultural relativity under the assumption that culture profoundly

influences such perceptions. In the Navaho language, for example, blue and green are represented by one word, whereas in English they are differentiated, just as Innuits have multiple words for different kinds of snow whereas, in English, there are only a few (Fromkin et al., 2012). Knowing the difference between the quality of snow could mean life or death amongst the Inuit but it may not for people living in Hong Kong or Singapore. The question is, how and to what extent these culturally based distinctions determine or influence the perceptions and thoughts of speakers (Fromkin et al., 2012).

Edward Sapir (1884–1939), a student of the German educated anthropologist, Franz Boas, was a linguist and a professor of anthropology at Yale university and with his own student, Benjamin Whorf (1897–1941), the two American researchers questioned determinist approaches to language and developed the theory of linguistic relativity based largely on Whorf's research exploring culture and language amongst the Hopi and other tribes and how these factors shape perception (Berger, 2016; Piller, 2017; Turner & West, 2018; Wardhaugh & Fuller, 2014; Yule, 2017). Sapir and Whorf's reformulation of the concept of linguistic relativity is embedded in a range of intellectual traditions and is regarded as a weak form as compared to linguistic determinism that is viewed as a strong form of linguistic relativism (Piller, 2017). Linguistic determinism suggests that society is confined by the language it adopts to the extent that it determines its culture, how people speak, perceive, and think about the world. As Rathmayr (2017) pointed out, in every language, some words are difficult to translate because certain aspects of culture are peculiar to a particular culture. However, linguistic determinism is less widely accepted than the concept of linguistic relativity in its weak form (Fromkin et al., 2012). One reason for this is that linguistic determinism is criticised on the basis that it would be almost impossible for individuals to learn multiple languages if they were constrained by their native language to the extent that they would be unable to think about something for which their language had no precise translation (Fromkin et al., 2012; Wardhaugh & Fuller, 2014).

Register, dialect, and accent

The concepts of register, dialect, and accent also affect interpersonal and team communication at work. Register, dialect, and accent are largely determined by social groups but, at the same time, an individual's way of speaking, known as an idiolect, is determined by context and community and influences communication (Fromkin et al., 2012). It is crucial to adopt an appropriate register given the context and particular conventions of the social situation, professional environment, or a recreational interest (Fromkin et al., 2012; Stephens, 1992) because not doing so can invite negative impressions (Hartley & Chatterton, 2015). For example, if an applicant being interviewed for a paralegal role in a conservative organisation remarked, 'thanks a bundle, I've had an awesome time chatting things over with you', the interview would not be likely to be followed by an offer of employment.

REGISTER ACTIVITY: EXPERIENTIAL REFLECTION AND DISCUSSION

Take a few minutes to reflect on any experiences where you witnessed an inappropriate register. Jot down some notes on the context. Address these four questions:

1. Describe the context. Where did the incident occur?
2. What was said that seemed inappropriate?
3. In what way was it inappropriate?
4. How did those present react?

Discuss with others your experience, drawing on your notes. As a group, choose one of the accounts and co-construct a written case study. Share the case study with another group.

In contrast to register, a dialect refers to a language adopted within a particular region or a social or socio-economic group (Hartley & Chatterton, 2015) that may be used to identify something about someone's ethnic, regional, social, or gender affiliations (Finegan et al., 1992).

Languages and dialects are evolving all the time (Rakic & Maass, 2019). The term 'dialect' is often associated with local, non-prestigious, powerless groups that adopt some sort of variation on a standard form of the language (Wardhaugh & Fuller, 2014). Dialects develop and are reinforced when languages in one group begin to change but nevertheless continue to be understood by others, to some extent, partly because vocabulary, syntax, and grammar remain the same (Finegan et al., 1992; Fromkin et al., 2012; Saeed, 2016).

DIALECTS ACTIVITY

Discuss any differences in dialects within your own nation. Consider the following topics:

1. Is it possible to tell where someone comes from, based on how they speak?
2. Can you make assumptions about someone's socio-economic background based on their speech?
3. How might a colleague's dialect influence the assessments of others, either positively or negatively?

Accents are adopted by those from the same geographical areas or socio-economic groups. They are similar to dialects, but the emphasis is on pronunciation or phonological differences (Fromkin et al., 2012). In a globalised world, non-native accents have become the norm and they often serve as salient cues in social perceptions in the context of workplace interactions on a daily basis (Creel, 2018; Roessel, Schoel, & Stahlberg, 2018). Depending upon the cultural context, some accents are more highly regarded than others and some organisations may consciously or unconsciously consider the accent of an applicant during the recruitment process, depending on the expectations of stakeholders (Hartley & Chatterton, 2015). In the context of non-native accents in the workplace, Roessel et al. (2018) found that they can trigger negatively biased associations on dimensions of affect (a psychological concept related to experience, feelings, emotions, and mood), trust, and competence. The implications of this finding should be a matter of concern on many levels and calls for considerable organisational attention. It certainly explains why accents can sometimes be cultivated to assume membership of a desirable cultural group or identity, perhaps to improve career prospects (Hartley & Chatterton, 2015). Stereotyping someone based on accent is, however, inadvisable because in parts of the world where a high level of socio-economic fluidity exists and where an education system is based on merit, talented individuals from unprivileged backgrounds are more frequently recruited into senior positions and perform highly successfully.

It is not the main aim of this section to document the vast field of linguistics but to explain, where relevant to the subject matter of chapters that follow, how language and communication influence workplaces and the wellbeing of those involved in them. Of course, written language, in somewhat different ways also influences and is influenced by organisational culture.

Writing and its history

Definitions of writing tend to focus upon its use of graphic signs (as images of isolated symbols), whether in the form of handwriting or in electronic forms, as visual and symbolic representations of speech that are learned over time and convey meaning (Baird, 2014; Fromkin et al., 2012; Rowe & Levine, 2009; Turner & West, 2018; Yule, 2017). In simple terms, writing can be described as any marks inscribed that have some significance (Lyons & Marquillas, 2017) to those who interpret them. Given that writing is more resistant to change than speech (and this is why pronunciation is not always intuitively reflected by spelling), it tends to command greater trust and is therefore adopted as the main form of record keeping in most societies (Fromkin et al., 2012). For this reason alone, it has had a profound influence on civilisation.

Baird (2014) has observed that the evolution of writing tends to defy systematic analysis and, as a result, is not yet well understood and may never be so, even in cultures such as China where very old, historical records exist. Indeed, despite much scholarship, debate continues about the origin of writing and its global

spread (Coulmas, 2003; Yule, 2017). Writing is thought to date as far back as 5000 years ago (Zang, 2017) with early examples found amongst native American and Australian Aboriginal communities, the Alaskan Innuits, people living on the Island of Sulaesi, the Taliu culture, the Peruvian Incas and the Yukaginaris from Siberia (Fromkin et al., 2012; Wang, 2020; Wyse, 2017). Bronze and bone inscriptions found in China dating to at least 3000 years ago are notable but may not have received the attention they deserve, particularly from western scholars more focused on the alphabetical writing system (Zang, 2017). Wang's (2020) work on the Taliu people, an ethnic Chinese minority, is illustrative of an increasing number of ethnic writing systems that have recently been discovered and researched. The Taliu writing system laid claim to the distinctive characteristics of ideographic graphs, though the language included only nouns and numerals (Wang, 2020).

Cave drawings found in Altamira, Northern Spain, France, and the Saharan desert are thought to be at least 3600 years old (Finegan et al., 1992; Fromkin et al., 2012). These drawings, known as picture-writing or pictograms, roughly approximated to cartoons or road signs and are literal, direct, recordings of events or ideas that tell a story rather than being linguistic names given to objects or representing words or sounds from a spoken language (Finegan et al., 1992; Fromkin et al., 2012; Yule, 2017). Over time, pictograms were gradually modified and became increasingly more stylised and complex and known as ideograms, meaning idea pictures or idea writing (Finegan et al., 1992; Fromkin et al., 2012). In ideographic writing, symbols represent the idea of a message as a whole rather than any specific interpretation such as an arrow sign to suggest a direction (Baird, 2014).

A form of commercial writing, cuneiform, was also established about 5000 years ago, in Sumeria, using a sharp, pointed object called a stylus to scratch into soft clay tablets (Coulmas, 2003; Finegan et al., 1992; Mautner & Rainer, 2017). The term cuneiform is derived from the Latin word 'cuneus', meaning wedge-shaped because this was the shape of the symbols used (Finegan et al., 1992; Yule, 2017). The latest cuneiform tablet dates from 75 AD and thus testifies to the longevity of this tradition (Joannes, 2017). This kind of morphographic language is known as 'logograma', where signs represent morphemes, the minimal unit of linguistic meaning that approximate to how we use, '\$', '&', and '8' today (Finegan et al., 1992; Yule, 2017). As cuneiform spread throughout the Middle East, Asia Minor (comprising what is now mostly modern-day Turkey) and Mesopotamia (now part of Iraq) at the end of the 4th millennium BC, it became widely adopted throughout the region by 2000 BC, when in Assyria and Persia it evolved into a syllabic writing system where syllables began to stand for the sounds of words instead of symbols representing words (Fromkin et al., 2012; Joannes, 2017; Lyons & Marquilha, 2017). The Egyptians also developed a writing system based on a Sumerian one but it differed in that it adopted symbols of writing that later also appeared in the Valley of the Indus (now Pakistan and India) around 2500 BC (Finegan et al., 1992).

Possibly inspired by the Mesopotamian writing system, the Chinese were beginning to use pictograms as symbols for words rather than concepts from about 2000 BC (Finegan et al., 1992). Transforming a picture into a sign, and referencing the

name of an object, involves a major conceptual leap (Coulmas, 2003) not captured by pictures of events. A significant benefit of the Chinese language system is that even where communicants adopt different dialects, they are able to understand one another through the written text (Fromkin et al., 2012; Yule, 2017). The written system in China has been in continuous use for 3000 years but one difficulty for those learning the language may lie in the high number of Chinese characters – though only 2500 of them are necessary for daily communication (Yule, 2017). Similarly, Japanese Kanji has tens of thousands of logographs but only a few thousand are generally necessary (Hoover & Tunmer, 2020).

The various forms of writing as they developed in different places and over time are often broadly classified as alphabetic, syllabic, and logographic though Baird (2014, p. 6) suggests that these classifications of writing systems are both ‘simplistic and contested’. Nevertheless, he concedes that alphabetic, syllabic, and logographic systems dominate almost all modern and many ancient scripts. Thus, for those who are not experts in the field, making distinctions amongst writing systems is initially useful, albeit simplistic.

In alphabetic writing systems, symbols represent phonemes as sounds (Finegan et al., 1992) in both consonants and vowels (Baird, 2014). Some debate exists about whether the alphabet emerged from logographic or pictographic scripts (Wyse, 2017), but whatever the case, these early forms of alphabet paved the way for writing in many languages including English (Wyse, 2017). However, given the focus by western academics, it is important to remember that writing is not limited to alphabetical scripts since it includes a wide variety of pictorial scripts such as Egyptian and Mayan hieroglyphic scripts or graphs from Incan cultures (Lyons & Marquilha, 2017).

The first known alphabet made up of consonants was the Phoenician/proto-Canaanite script, adapted by the Greeks from the eighth century BC who added their own five characters to represent vowels (Finegan et al., 1992; Fromkin et al., 2012; Wyse, 2017) that over time began to be associated with the form and structure of more developed writing systems (Coulmas, 2003; Mautner & Rainer, 2017). Research also dates alphabetic writing in Egypt and from Mayan hieroglyphic scripts from between 2000 BC and 1500 BC (Lyons & Marquilha, 2017; Wyse, 2017). Yet it was the Romans who in 600 BC developed the basis of the alphabet used in many western countries today. Some countries (Greece, Russia, the Ukraine, Bulgaria, and Serbia) use an alphabetic system that may differ from the Roman text, mostly in terms of the shape of some letters (Finegan et al., 1992). In contrast, syllabic writing, emerging from the ancient Middle East and East Asia, is based on graphs that represent syllables, consisting of a short consonant, a vowel, or a consonant vowel combination, developed from the earlier pictograms (Baird, 2014; Finegan et al., 1992). Logographic writing does not indicate pronunciation and is found in the Chinese Han system used also in Japan (Kanji) and Korea (Baird, 2014). Logographic writing symbols represent a meaningful unit within a written language such as a morpheme, or, simply put, a phrase or word (Finegan et al., 1992; Hoover & Tunmer, 2020). Cantonese and Mandarin are two examples

of many Chinese languages that share the same set of Chinese characters, belonging to the logographic writing system (Ma, Wu, Sun, Cai, Fan, & Li, 2020).

A number of factors contributed to the spread of writing systems around the world. Religion and spiritual philosophies undoubtedly facilitated the acceptance of writing. For example, prior to the birth of Christ, the Chinese script was disseminated via Buddhism and Confucianism (Coulmas, 2003; Künstler, 2019). Economic relationships, trade, imperialism, and other political alliances also contributed to the widening acceptance of the written word as illustrated by the spread of soviet languages throughout Korea, Turkey, Romania, and Persia (Coulmas, 2003). Yet, for many centuries, writing was limited to a small number of scribes (Rowe & Levine, 2009). Even today, some languages do not have a written form, but of those that do, only a proportion of speakers are able to write and many millions of humans remain illiterate (Coulmas, 2003; Yule, 2017). The reason for this is multi-pronged, and in all probability, linked to economic inequality and poor access to resources in ways that inhibit the growth and potential of many.

Conclusion

This chapter has introduced some early communication theories, concepts, and terminology that remain relevant to how scholars understand and discuss communication today. A brief account of the rise of rhetoric and communication as a discipline has also been addressed. The study of language and its historical development, particularly with respect to written language, was also afforded some attention. These themes provide a wider context for appreciating language and communication as a necessary basis for engaging with concepts presented in the chapters that follow.

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