Power of symbols/labels

I am reminded of some of the thoughts that went through my mind as I went through the CAPSA advocate training program. I have long agreed with the sentiment that words matter, and during our training sessions (and outside of them, in separate contexts) every time I heard a certain word, I cringed. Literally, I felt myself contracting, becoming smaller. The word is *victim*. As a word it conjures up a sense of helplessness, tragedy, loss and suffering; as a level of self-identification it *creates* a sense of helplessness, tragedy, loss, and suffering. My reaction to the "word-that-shall-not-be-spoken" became clearer to me when I learned about the Constitutive Theory of Communication. Mentioned almost in passing during one of Matt's lectures, nevertheless, it evoked that familiar thrill that occurs when divergent mental pathways converge and understanding gels and brightens. In my example, referring to people as "victims," can unconsciously bias our perception and interaction with that person, as well as negatively reinforce their sense of self. This is just one example among many of why and how much the words we choose to use matter.

Constitutive Communication is a "metamodel that opens up a conceptual space in which many different theoretical models of communication can interact" (Craig, 1999). Like the relationship between a river and a canyon, communication is both the process and the building blocks that create our experience of life. "Basically, communication is the root of other social processes rather than the result" (Nicotera, 2009). In other words, our experiences are both described by, and simultaneously created from language and communication.

Words are powerful. Communication researcher Donna Vocate proposed that it was the brain's process of differentiating between inner talk and outer talk that creates self-awareness in human beings (Vocate, 1994, p. 5). She was expanding on the work of Russian psychologist Lev Vygotsky who said "Inner speech is the process of a thought being realized into words" (Vygotsky, 1986). Language arises from the need to communicate in social interactions. Later language gives form to thought and gives rise to inner speech. Therefore "thought is the result of language" (McLeod, 2013). This is one way that our experience of the world both creates and is created by communication. This is why words matter.

Words are powerful. Paying attention to how we casually bandy them about, for good or for ill, represents a fundamental paradigm shift in how we view the world and interact with the people in it. As symbols, words provide shortcuts, allowing us to create relationship with the world around us without the necessity of direct, immediate contact and then words allow us to share our experiences with others. The danger comes when the symbol becomes mistaken for the object. If a person in crisis hears herself described as a victim often enough, she runs the risk of beginning to self-identify herself as a victim and then, as the constitutive theory suggests, she might begin to both create and relate to her experience as a victim, with all that word's entailments of helplessness.

I've seen this happen; it's happened to me. Without going into detail, I'll simply say that as a child, my father struggled with anger issues and projected his troubles on his family. When angry he would lash out with the most horrible and demeaning labels you can imagine. Small children have no defense against that kind of labeling and teens can act defiant, or stone-faced, on the outside while still internalizing every negative message hurtled at them. It becomes part of their rhetoric of self-talk. It became part of my rhetoric of self-talk. I've spent most of my life working to redefine the deformed shadows of my self-identity.

Language Shapes our World:

In Language, Thought and Action-CMST 4200 with Dr. Hall I learned how language shapes our world. This concept was really impactful for me because through it I realized that the language I use and that I have heard used about me directly impacts how I view and create my identity in the world. I chose to focus on this aspect for my final project where I explored what is being communicated about gender identity in commercials designed for a child audience. One of the readings I referenced in this final project was from Hall:

Humans grow up hearing people give narratives in which they are part of the action…A person does not have to accept what is said, but as people hear many of these narratives,

they can have a profound impact on the creation of personal identity and provide one window into the identity others associate with them (2010).

It had never occurred to me how impactful my words are on my perception of myself. After learning this I began to listen for the stories those around me told about me. While home one weekend my father told a story about me that I have heard him tell before. He always prefaces the story by saying that it is one of his proudest moments of me. He tells the story of one summer when a neighbor boy accidentally left the water on in the water trough in the pig pen that some local kids and my family used to raise our 4-H hogs. The pen was almost completely flooded with two feet of watery pig poop and mud. Five older boys were standing there debating about who was going to clean up the mess. I was only 12 years old but apparently I just grabbed a shovel and jumped in the mess up to my thighs and started digging the slop out. This narrative that my dad often tells about me communicates what makes him proud: to see his 12-year-old daughter work hard and not be afraid of a little dirt. Being tough and hard-working are both a huge part of my identity and I truly believe that the narratives my father told about me influenced this. I think it is important to be aware of what factors are contributing to our identities so that we know where our identity comes from and so that if they are negative, we can change them. If the only story I recite to myself about myself is the time I kicked a boy in elementary school, I may not be contributing to a very positive identity of myself. I also hope to one day be a parent and will now be much more aware of the narratives and other language I use about my child to help them form a positive identity.

Benefits and styles of conflict management

Concept #2: Conflict in Communication: Defining and Dealing with Conflict

With individuals constantly attempting to communicate meaning and influence others, conflict inevitably arises. From a communication's perspective, conflict constitutes "an expressed struggle between at least two interdependent parties who perceive incompatible goals, scarce resources, and interference from the other party in achieving their goals" (Wilmot & Hocker, 2011, p. 12). With this lens taken into account, conflict can constitute anything from a child who wants a sugary treat and a persistently health-conscientious mother to a couple debating about whether to divorce or not. Conflict is natural, inevitable and can be managed healthily with proper communication tools, and was the topic of the course "Communication and Conflict," from which the second and third concepts of this review will be derived.

There are five styles of conflict management, according to Wilmot & Hocker (2011), which lie on a grid with axis consisting of level of concern for others and concern for the self. Individuals tend to use one or two styles more frequently than the others, however all five styles can be cultivated by communicators as tools for engaging in conflict in diverse situations.

The first conflict style, which registers low in concern for others and the self, is avoiding. Avoiding, as a style, is can be characterized by an individual choosing to "sidestep an issue" or "withdraw from dealing with an issue" (Wilmot & Hocker, 2011, p. 151). I tend to use avoidance as a style with my roommates; because I am afraid of losing their friendship, I tend to not bring up issues in exchange for relational harmony. For example, it bothered me that my roommates would move my personal items to my room without asking when they were cleaning, resulting in my inability to find important documents. I did not bring the matter up because I did not want contention. Although avoidance "makes sure social bonds are not disrupted," (Wilmot & Hocker, 2011, p. 153) it also hinders progress in relationships as partners believe the other does not care

enough to engage and reinforces the negative associations concerning conflict as it is seen as negative and something to be circumvented.

A second style of conflict is accommodating, which falls high in concern for others, but low in concern for oneself on the conflict grid. Accommodators often "allow others to have their way rather than asserting [their] own point of view" (Adler & Proctor, 2011, p. 383). For example, when my family goes out to eat we accommodate to my father's desires because he is the pickiest and pays for the meal. This style can help placate conflict situations, but does not satiate the human desire to be validated, which can lead to relational imbalance if used as a rule.

Competing is a third style and is a "win-lose" approach to conflict. An individual with a competing style has low concern for others and high concern for themselves. This type of conflict communicator desires to achieve their goal at any cost to their partner. When I was a teenager, I typically used this form of conflict resolution. For example, my friends would often want to go to lunch at Mexican food places and I would always make a stand against it, deciding not to go if they went there. I never enacted other approaches to conflict in this situation. While this can be effective in receiving desired outcomes in a situation, it can come at a high cost to relationships as those who engage in conflict with a competitor may feel undervalued.

The fourth style of conflict is compromise, which involves both parties making sacrifices in order for both parties to reach partial satisfaction with the decision. It may seem as though this is the most desirable approach, but the choice is not a panacea. Though both parties obtain partial satisfaction, they are also left with partial dissatisfaction, which can be problematic with significant decisions. For example in the decision of whether or not to have a child with your partner, the cost of mutual dissatisfaction may be too high.

The final style of conflict is collaboration, which stems from high concern for self and for others and seeks for "win-win" solutions. A former romantic partner and I would go to great lengths to make sure we were both satisfied with every choice in our relationship, from what movies we watched to deep emotional needs. Like compromise, this approach may appear to be a fix-all solution, but the high-energy nature of this type of communication cannot and should not be consistently maintained in all decisions as it too can take a toll on the relationship. My partner and I were unable to maintain the high-energy collaboration in all decisions which lead to relational breakdown. The decision with a partner of whether to move across the country or not might be significant enough to garner a strong collaborative effort, however accommodation might be more appropriate for choosing movies and places to eat dinner.

No conflict style is innately better than another, but it is important to learn the different styles of conflict and the situations in which they are best-used in order to engage in effective communication.

Elaboration Likelihood Model

Lastly, I will be discussing the elaboration likelihood model, or the ELM. I learned about this model in CMST 3400, or Persuasion. In short, this model says there are two different ways to persuade someone, using a central route, or a peripheral route. If a persuader uses the central route, persuasion is more long lasting; if a persuader uses peripheral cues, persuasion is short term (Seiter, 2013c). To get an audience to follow the central route to persuasion, they must first be motivated and have the ability to process the information given to them. If the audience has a favorable reaction to the message after they have processed it, they are likely to be persuaded using the central route. However, if the audience has no motivation or ability to process the message, they are likely to look at peripheral cues such as looks, images, and body language to decide whether to be persuader by a person. Although the central route is usually preferred, sometimes the peripheral route is used in cases where the persuader does not really want the audience to hear the full message, or does not care about long-term effects of the persuasion.

The ELM has already played a big part in my life. One day I really did not feel like cooking dinner, but knew my husband would not want to go out because we had gone out for dinner the week before. I decided I was going to try and persuade him. When he came home from work that night I had the dishes all done and the kitchen clean. I went on to explain how hungry I was, but there was no food to cook. Additionally, the kitchen was so clean I did not want to mess it up by cooking meal. I told him the only food we had in the house was a salad, which he dislikes. I then told him that if we went to Olive Garden, his favorite restaurant, we could split a meal to save money. I also reminded him of the birthday money he had received the week earlier, and told him he did not like having cash anyway, so we could use it tonight. We ended up splitting fettuccine alfredo that night at Olive Garden. I used mostly peripheral cues to persuade him to come to dinner with me that night. A central route was not necessarily needed, but I could have explained to him the benefits of going out to Olive Garden and relayed a detailed message about why Olive Garden is better than home cooked pasta. In this case, peripheral cues were perfect, as I only needed a short term persuasion to occur.

Principles of power

Communication is the glue that holds our realities together. Communication occurs constantly, in all situations, with all people. We communicate when we are alone, with our loved ones, or in a crowd of complete strangers. We cannot stop communicating. There are many principles and theories that have been created to help us better understand how we communicate with each other and what messages we are inadvertently sending and receiving. I will explain just a few of these theories and principles in order to demonstrate the importance of increasing our understanding and skill as regards communication. These principles and theories tie together in the sense that they all relate to how we communicate, but otherwise are not all clearly linked to one another.

Perhaps my personality brings me to, what I consider, the most enlightening principle I have learned thus far in my education: Sources of Power (M. Sanders, personal communication, CMST 3500, October, 2013). I am a person who likes to be influential in other people's lives. Understanding where influence, or power, comes from has changed how I see the world. There are many principles of power that I will not touch on. One of the many principles is power sources. There are seven (M. Sanders, personal communication, CMST 3500, October, 2013):

- Referent power (You trust me therefore I have access to all of the people who trust you, through you)

- Reward power (I can give you things that are important to you monetarily, emotionally, etc.)

- Information power (I know something you need to know)

- Expertise power (I know how to do something that you need done)

- Position power (I have an assigned position over you)

- Coercive power (I know how to make you feel guilty or obligated for not doing something for me)

- Charisma (People like you)

Understanding the sources of power alters the way in which you interact with the world. A it did for me. Learning about the sources of power helped me understand many of the interactions, reactions, difficulties and successes that I have had throughout my life. Refer power is, at its most basic, networking, and is considered the most effective source of pow Sanders, personal communication, CMST 3500, October, 2013). For this reason I would li give an example of how influence and power are enhanced through referent power.

Before moving to Logan to attend school I was living in San Antonio, Texas. I had to Logan once or twice to visit a very good friend of mine who lived here. When I decidec transfer to Utah State my friend told me of a company that she thought I would really enjo working for. She knew someone who worked there and told me she would ask her friend to in a good word for me. When I moved to Logan several months later I found out that comp had just gone through a huge hiring influx and was told by the HR Director that they no lot had any positions open. Not 24 hours after the conversation with the HR Director I receive call from one of the managers in the company requesting that I come in for an interview. I and was hired by the end of the week. I came to find out that the manager had deliberately position open for me because of the reference that my friend's friend gave me! Referent po gives you access to influence people who are technically a couple of steps removed from y through common friends and associates.

Contrasting Cultural Dimensions/World Views

The second concept I learned and have appreciated from Dr. Koybaeva's Intercultural Communications class is cultural dimensions. Hofstede has come up with six specific cultural dimensions that are ranked on a continuum. The dimensions are individualism vs. collectivism, masculinity vs. femininity, long-term vs. short-term orientation, indulgence vs. restraint, power distance, and uncertainty avoidance (Hofstede). Before I learned these worldviews I simply thought people were strange, and did not fully understand why people did the things they did. After studying these dimensions I have a greater knowledge and understanding for all nations, cultures, and people.

I specifically remember learning about Asian culture just as I had returned from living in China for five months. I felt like I really knew the people, and a lot about their culture, but when I got home and learned about collectivism everything about China made much more sense. It enabled me to see how I handled certain situations with my cultural background as an individualist and how they in return handled everything as a collectivist society. I remember many conversations with my good friend Becky, and being so frustrated with her that she would not do anything for herself, but for the people around her. It never made sense to me until I learned how this continuum worked. For example, Becky would always take the extra jobs at work even though she would not be compensated for them. She often had to take extra classes, or host school events. Another cultural shock that made more sense to me upon learning these cultural dimensions was a sense of time across the globe. Often times American's view individuals from Polynesian cultures as lazy, however this is not true, we simply use the clock differently. American's are very busy people, always on the go using the clock to "stay ahead of the game". Polynesian's, on the other hand, are more laid back when it comes to time and use it more relationally. Neither of these cultures use of time is wrong, we merely have to understand them.

Social Exchange/Penetration Theory

Every relationship inherently comes with positive and negative aspects. Thibaut and Kelley developed the Social Exchange Theory to explain why people continue to move some relationships forward while ending others. Social Exchange Theory shows that through an analysis of costs and benefits in comparison to the alternatives available it is possible to predict the stability and satisfaction of a relationship.

Social Exchange Theory has an economic feel to it with its costs and benefits structure. Thibaut and Kelley explain that maintaining any relationship has aspects of advantage through the partnership and expenses, or sacrifices, because of this relationship. I have a friendship and relationship with each of my roommates. Some of the benefits that I receive from maintaining this relationship are: support from my peers, an economic benefit of shared costs of living, and friendship. Some of the costs of this relationship are: a lack of personal space, balancing when people can use communal space and having to live with a messy kitchen. According to the *Maximist Principal* people want to maximize the benefits while minimizing the costs of any partnership. The equation for this is Benefits - Costs = Outcome. If the costs are greater than the benefits the outcome is negative. If the benefits outweigh the costs (as in my relationships with my roommates) the outcome is positive. The outcome of an analysis of costs and benefits is not enough to determine whether one will stay in a relationship. It is more of a benchmark to compare expectations and alternatives.

The *comparison level* determines the level of satisfaction in a relationship based on this outcome compared with what costs and benefits are expected from the relationship. I am happy with my relationship with my roommates currently, but what if I expected something different from our relationship. If I expected them to spend more time at with me than they do, or that they should clean the apartment so that it is spotless twice a week than they would fall far short

of this ideal and I would be less satisfied with the relationship. If my expectations were less, say I expect my roommates to have a party every night and never clean up anything than their behaviors are better or equal to what I expect and I am satisfied with the relationship.

The *comparison level of alternatives* is the third component of Social Exchange Theory. The level of satisfaction is not sufficient to determine the probability of someone staying in a relationship. There are many relationships that have low levels of satisfaction that people continue to pursue, for example a negative relationship with a coworker or an unfulfilling romantic relationship. Why is it that people stay in relationships that they find unsatisfying? Thibaut and Kelley explain that only when alternative options are greater than the outcome and comparison level will a relationship be terminated. I was dissatisfied with my relationship with my coworker. The environment was hostile and toxic. I maintained the relationship because I did not see other viable alternatives for employment at the time. Even when a person is satisfied in a relationship, they may terminate it if they see a better alternative. Right now I am satisfied by my relationship with my roommates, however if some of my best friends had an opening in their apartment and I would see that relationship as a better alternative than my current living situation, I would move to be with them.

Social Exchange Theory is useful in predicting the behavior of relationships based on a cost benefit analysis, comparison level, and comparison of alternatives. Comparing the outcome to the comparison level, it is possible to note whether or not someone is satisfied or dissatisfied in a relationship. By comparing the outcome to the alternative options it can be predicted if someone will stay or terminate the partnership. It is important to note that an individual's perception affects their perspective on a relationship. What I view as a negative outcome might be perceived by someone else as a positive outcome. Despite this, Social Exchange Theory shows that through an analysis of costs and benefits in comparison to the alternatives available it is possible to predict the stability and satisfaction of a relationship.

Politeness Theory

The last concept I want to talk about it Politeness Theory. Politeness Theory is a theory designed to explain your social problems and help you get what you want (Hall). This theory includes your public image or "face" and how we manage that as it is threatened through interactions. As I got into college I also saw many different instances of Politeness Theory. The most common instance I can think of was when I would ask out different girls on a date. That is a great example of how people save face and to see different responses. Also as the relationship continues you can see the different response and how they react to each-other as you get to know each-other better. When I asked one girl out I used a lot of negative face, saying " if you're not busy later I would like to take you out" or "I bet you get asked out all the time and have plans but if you don't I would love to take you out this weekend". As I would ask girls out in this way I would be recognizing their need for autonomy. Usually I would get a response of positive face saying "that would be great I am free", usually there would be some kind of compliment but I feel weird writing compliments about myself. Another response I would get would be bald on record, sometimes they would just respond by saying "yes" and be very to the point and direct, to which I would usually with a joke or compliment using positive face.

The first date I went on with my wife I ended up using positive face, we were set up on a blind-date that we both didn't really want to go on because we lived so far away. But we knew to make those that were setting us up happy we needed to go. So when I called her up I asked if she wanted to go out and gave her some compliments telling her my sister in law thinks she is a pretty cool girl and some

other things and she responded similarly of what she has heard about me. Looking back I can see as the relationship in the beginnings we would use a lot more positive and negative face with some go off record mixed in their as well. As time went on we became a lot more direct and would use bald on record more and more. We still use a mix of it today but because of the dynamics of the relationship we aren't afraid to use the more direct responses.

I can see that the change of responses is mainly due to the difference in social distance and perceive threat of the communicative act. As me and my wife started dating there was a larger social distance between us and we used more politeness. As that distance started shrinking our responses changed as well, not that we aren't polite now but there less of it now. The other reason the effects the politeness used by us is the perceived threat of the communicative act. I feel that in different situations I usually able to determine whether I should be more polite or more direct. An example is when we got married, my wife would get dressed and say "does this make me look fat" and I would respond "it sure does" very sarcastically. She knew I was joking and that I wasn't serious. Now as she is pregnant I am very careful when answering that question. The threat is perceived differently, and the response is handled differently as well.