Chapter 1 : Improving Language Skills

1. Introduction

Generally speaking, communication involves conveying a message (one-way communication).Etymologically, “communication” comes from “communicatio,” which means “to be in relationship with.” It also comes from “communicare,” which means “to share, to exchange experiences.” From the sender’s perspective, communication is any attempt to make oneself understood, and from the receiver’s perspective, it is any effort to understand.

Communication occurs in the following areas: education, family, business, politics, and economics. It is impossible not to communicate. Communication can be intentional or unintentional. Communication is transactional. Communication is not a natural gift; it is a skill.

Communication is the act of conveying information with the goal of creating a shared understanding. It is something humans do every day. In other words, communication is the activity of conveying information through the exchange of thoughts or messages, for example, through speech, visuals, signals, writing, or behavior.

Thus, discussion, speech, listening, instructions, meetings, and reports are all means of communication used to convey ideas and information to others.

2. Language Skills

"Communication is a difficult science; it is not an exact science , it can be learned and cultivated" (Jean-Luc Lagardère).

Language proficiency encompasses all the skills needed to express oneself in a native or foreign language; these skills are grouped according to the major functions of reading, writing, speaking, and listening.

Therefore, language proficiency should not be reduced to merely the use of linguistic resources, but rather lies in the effective and appropriate use of these resources in a given communicative situation.

The word “communication” is of Latin origin (Communicare); it means:

- **Sharing:** Making something common or transmitting (something).
- **Transmission:** The act of expressing one’s thoughts or feelings through speech, writing, gestures, and facial expressions, with the aim of being understood.
- **Relationship:** The act of establishing a relationship with someone.

The concept of communication is broader and more complex than that of information. Information can be defined as that which eliminates or reduces uncertainty without eliciting an immediate response in return.Communication is an exchange and a relationship between two or more people. It is a dynamic, evolving process that changes the situation.

2.1.The Different Types of Communication

There are five distinct types of communication:

- . **Interpersonal communication:** This is communication between two individuals. These relationships are defined by the following characteristics:
  - Symmetry.
  - Distance or proximity.
  - Congruence (All communication signals point in the same direction. Verbal expression corresponds to body language. The verbal content and body language are consistent).
  - Incongruence (Communication signals are unclear and point in different directions. Incongruence is a contradiction between verbal and nonverbal signals).
- **Group communication:** This type of communication takes place among the members of a group who can interact with one another. Group communication is based on the characteristics of interpersonal communication.
- **Mass communication:** This type of communication involves the transmission of a message from a sender to a very large number of receivers using mass broadcasting techniques. The tools of this communication are the mass media (press, radio, posters, movies, the Internet, TV, etc.). There is no interaction among the individuals exposed to this communication.
- **Computer-mediated communication:** This is communication that takes place between individuals using a computer (exchanging text, images, sounds, videos, etc.). There are several means of communicating via a computer, such as email, discussion forums or chat rooms, online file transfers, web searches,etc.
- **Telecommunication (electronic communication):** Telecommunication is a form of long-distance communication; it allows information to be transmitted over a distance using electronic and computer technologies.

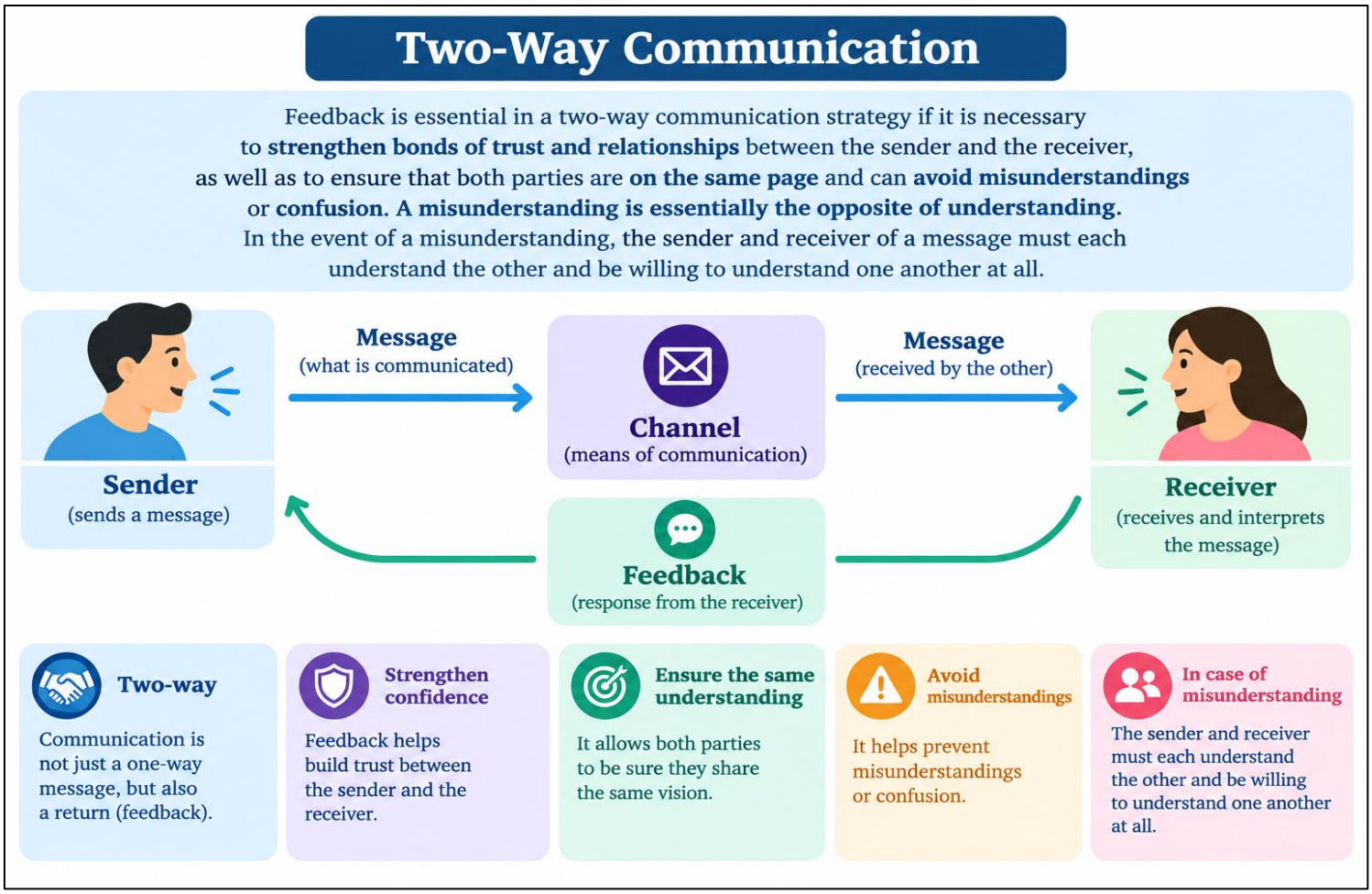
2.2.The Elements of Communication

Communication is based on six components: a sender, a receiver, a context, a message, a channel, and feedback.

- **The Sender:** The person or entity that transmits the message "orally or in writing"; this can be an individual or a group, such as a "firm, company, or system.
- **The receiver or recipient:** The person or entity that receives the message; this can be an individual, a group, a machine, etc.
- **The context:** All communication takes place within a context. This influences everything we say and how we say it. It involves at least four independent and interactive aspects: the cultural (lifestyles, values), the physical (the tangible or concrete environment.
- **The message:** This is the information conveyed during a communication. 4.5. The channel: This is the technical means used by the sender to ensure that the message reaches the recipient (face-to-face, telephone, mail, etc.).
- **Feedback:** This term refers to any comment, response, reaction, or information provided by the recipient of a message to the sender. Feedback is essential to effective communication because it helps the sender verify that their message has been understood and adjust their communication strategy if necessary.

Good feedback should be:

- Specific rather than general
- Impersonal (comments should be work-related; the receiver should not criticize anyone)
- Timely (it should be provided when it is truly necessary or when the recipient is actively seeking it.
- Focused on the sender's objective (feedback should focus solely on areas, actions, and behaviors over which the recipient has personal control).
- Understood by the recipient (use effective questioning and listening skills to ensure that your feedback can be classified as meaningful communication).



2.3. Misunderstandings (Conflicts)

A misunderstanding is the misinterpretation of information or a message; it isa lack of understanding between two or more people that leads to a disagreement between

them.How can conflicts be avoided? This is the question that arises for both the sender and thereceiver before beginning a conversation, as both wish to achieve theirgoals without any conflict. To avoid conflicts and misunderstandings, pay attention to the following points:

A. Avoid ambiguity:

- Communicate clearly.
- Pay attention to feedback.

B. Communicate precisely:

- Avoid hidden (implicit) messages.
- Use simple language.

C. **Emphasize key points:**
    - Descriptive examples.
    - Variations in pitch.
    - A clear tone of voice.

D. **Repeat the core message: To reinforce important messages, the deliberate**

repetition of key messages is essential.

E. **Encourage active listening:** "The best way to persuade people is with your ears" (Dean Rusk).

F. **Communicate consistently:** Verbal and nonverbal cues go hand in hand and help prevent misunderstandings.

G. **Active listening**: This is an effective means of persuasion, a miraculous remedy for conflicts; it values the speaker and defuses misunderstandings, solicits information, and fosters better understanding. There are many active listening techniques; the listener should:
    - Give undivided attention.
    - Show interest.
    - Indicate that they have understood.
    - Not fidget.
    - Send positive verbal and nonverbal signals.
    - Use "I" messages.
    - Not interrupt.

2.4. The Different Forms of Communication

You might think that only words matter during a conversation between two people. However, if you listen carefully to the pace and tone of voice of both people and observe their gestures and facial expressions closely, you can easily decipher a wealth of information that complements the messages being conveyed.

Communication always takes two forms:

- **Verbal communication:** Conveyed through speech, consisting of words in a given language.Verbal communication refers to all the information conveyed by the voice during a communication situation (sales interview, study, survey, etc.). It is a structured and codified way of expressing an idea, aneed, etc.Verbal communication is a linguistic form of expression that involvesthe utterance of words, generally organized into sentences, whose meaning is commonly understood.
- **Nonverbal form: Nonverbal communication (or body language)** primarily expresses our inner feelings (facial expressions, gestures, intonation, attitude, symbols, facial

expressions,body movements, silence, postures, tone of voice, eye contact, facial expressions, speech rhythm, and clothing or appearance) thatcomplement the auditory message.Nonverbal communication conveys emotions, feelings, andvalues. This form of communication reinforces and lends credibility to the verbal message when itis appropriate, but can undermine that same message if it is inappropriate.

2.5. Factors That Influence the Effectiveness of a Message

2.5.1. Paraverbal Factors

- **Volume:** The volume of our voice must be loud enough to be heard by all listeners and ensure that our message is pleasant to listen to.
- **Pace:** (speech rate) During a public presentation, the listener must be able to grasp the words without needing to hear them repeated.

Therefore, speaking too quickly hinders understanding of our message. Furthermore, speaking too quickly is often a sign of the stage fright we feel when speaking in public and risks causing us to lose our train of thought.

Speaking more slowly not only improves the clarity of our message but also helps us manage the stress inherent in the situation.

- **Tone:** The tone in which a sentence is spoken strongly determines the meaning attributed to it (e.g., affirmative, interrogative, aggressive, authoritative). The intonation we use must therefore match the meaning we wish to convey.
- **Articulation and pronunciation:** The way we pronounce words is also important to consider.To be understood, we must articulate the sounds that make up words clearly, without exaggeration. As for pronunciation, it varies across different regions and over time. It contributes, in particular, to regional accents. In this regard, having a particular accent is not a flaw. However, we must be mindful of how our pronunciation affects the

2.5.2. Nonverbal Factors

- **Eye contact:** It’s about much more than just looking at our audience; it’s about establishing eye contact with them.
- **Pauses**: When speaking in public, we often tend not to allow for pauses. Either because we want to say too much in too little time, or because we want to fill the silence that frightens us.However, when used appropriately, these pauses often serve a positive purpose. Before speaking, a moment of silence helps capture the audience’s attention.

During a presentation, it can give listeners the time they need to process or reflect on important information you've just shared with them.

- **Gestures:** Our gestures always convey something. They can reveal what we're trying to hide such as our nervousness or embarrassment . Avoid freezing up by leaning on the table, putting your hands in your pockets, or crossing your arms; this reinforces an unnatural, rigid posture that hinders the delivery—and thus the understanding—of your message. Conversely, gestures can reinforce and emphasize your verbal message; they add rhythm, illustrate points, align with your speech, and bring it to life.understanding of words, especially if our audience consists of people from other regions.
- **Movement:** Moving around adds a certain dynamism to the presentation.However, it's best not to be constantly on the move or to make movements that are too predictable. The former may monopolize the listeners' attention, while the latter quickly become a source of monotony and boredom for the audience. Conversely, avoid standing completely still, as this can give the impression of a timid or distant speaker.