Communication and Conflict[*]

Robert M. Krauss and Ezequiel Morsella

Columbia University

Battle, n.   A method of untying with the teeth a political knot that would not yield to the tongue.

Ambrose Bierce, *The Devil's Dictionary,* 1911.

When neighbors feud, lovers quarrel or nations war, the predictable remedy prescribed by the voices of reason is *communication.* The prevailing view is that, faced with conflict, communicating is always the right thing to do: The U.N. Security Council encourages hostile countries to "hold talks," and marriage counselors advise quarreling couples to "express their feelings." So commonplace is the prescription, that advice to the contrary seems anomalous; it's difficult to imagine the Secretary General imploring hostile nations to refrain from dialogue. The positive role of communication in the amelioration of conflict seems so obvious that the premise is seldom given serious examination. Why should communicating be so helpful? Under what conditions will communication reduce conflict?

     An attempt to answer such questions will be the main burden of this chapter. In large part, the answers derive from a consideration of what communication entails and what its instantiation precludes, that is, what it brings to, and demands of, particular situations. To understand the complex interplay between communication and conflict, we will first describe four *Paradigms of Communication*---i.e., four models of the communication process--and consider

how each relates to conflict.[1] We will briefly examine communicative mishaps that are potential sources of conflict, and then consider how and why communication can ameliorate conflict. Finally, we will discuss some inherent limitations of communication as a peacemaker, limitations that result from the realization that *understanding*,, the cardinal goal of communication, does not imply agreement, as Bierce's definition illustrates.

FOUR COMMUNICATION PARADIGMS

Before we begin discussing the intricate interplay of conflict and communication, it is important to specify what we mean by the latter term. The concept of communication is an important focus for fields as diverse as cell biology, computer science, ethology, linguistics, electrical engineering, sociology, anthropology, genetics, philosophy, semiotics, and literary theory, each of which employs the term in its own unique way. Indeed, *communication* has been used in so many ways and in so many contexts that, as the sociologist Thomas Luckman has observed, it "has come to mean all things to all men."

Common to all conceptualizations of communication is the idea of information transfer: Information that originates in one part of a system is formulated into a message that is transmitted to another part of that system. As a result, information residing in one locus comes to be replicated at another one. In human communication, the information corresponds to what are loosely referred to as ideas or--more scientifically--mental representations. In its most elemental form, human communication may be construed as the process by which ideas contained within one mind are conveyed to other minds. Though attractive because of its simplicity, this description fails to capture the richness and

[1] In this chapter we try to summarize very briefly a large body of theory and research on the social psychology of communication as it relates to conflict. Space limitations prevent us from doing much more than skimming the surface, and in so doing we have presented a picture that is distorted in certain respects. More detailed treatments of these issues can be found in Krauss and Fussell (1996) and Krauss and Chiu (1997).

subtlety of the process by which humans communicate, an enterprise that involves far more than the automatic transfer of ideas.

The Encoding-Decoding Paradigm

The most straightforward conceptualization of communication can be found in the *Encoder/Decoder* paradigm, in which communication *is* described as the transfer of information by means of a code. A code is a system that maps a set of signals onto a set of meanings. In the simplest kind of code, the mapping is one-to-one: For every signal there is one and only one meaning, and for every meaning there is one and only one signal. Such is the case for Morse Code. In Morse Code system, the sequence •••• signifies the letter H, and only H; conversely, the letter H is uniquely represented by the sequence •••• and only that sequence.

Much of the communication in nonhuman species is based on the Encoding/Decoding principle. For example, Vervet monkeys have two distinctive vocalizations for signaling the presence of their two main predators: eagles and snakes. When one or the other of the signals is sounded, the Vervets respond quickly and appropriately, scanning the sky, in the first case, and scanning the grass around them, in the second. Just as the Morse code sequence •••• invariably designates the letter H, the Vervet "aerial predator call" unambiguously signals the presence of predacious eagles.

Viewing human communication as encoding and decoding assumes a process in which an abstract proposition is (1) encoded in a message (i.e., transformed into a signal whose elements have a one-to-one correspondence with the elements of the proposition) by the Sender, (2) transmitted over a channel to the Receiver, and (3) decoded into an abstract proposition which, it is believed, is isomorphic with the original one. For example, a speaker may formulate the proposition [JOHN] [GIVE BOOK] [MARY] and thus transmit the

message, "John, please give Mary the book." After receiving and processing the message, it is believed that John will understand that he has been asked to give a particular book to someone named Mary.

One reason that the received message may not be identical to the transmitted one is that all communication channels contribute some degree of noise (i.e., an undesired signal) to the message: The more signal there is relative to the amount of noise (the Signal-to-Noise ratio), the closer the transmitted message will be to the received message; and, hence, the more similar the received proposition will be to the original one. A low signal-to-noise ratio can distort a the meaning of a message or even render it incomprehensible.

But noise is not the only factor that can compromise communication. Even when the transmitted and received messages are identical, the retrieved proposition may differ significantly from the original. Speaker and Listener may be employing codes that differ subtly, and this may lead to misunderstanding. For example, lexical choice often reflects a speakers implicit attitude toward the subject of the utterance. In a given situation, any one of several closely related terms like *women-lady, Negro-Black-African American, crippled-handicapped-disabled-physically challenged* might serve adequately to designate or refer to a particular individual, yet each term may be associated with a somewhat different conceptualization of its referent, as part of a complex ideology or network of attitudes and values. When such ideologies or values are not shared, application of a term may be construed as antagonistic.

For example, in 1956, at the height of the Cold War, an offhanded comment made by Soviet Premier Nikita Khruschev to a British diplomat translated as "We will bury you." According to linguist Alan K. Melby, in the context of a conversation about the competition between Communism and capitalism, Khruschev's remark was essentially a restatement (in considerably

more vivid language) of Marx's claim of Communism's historic inevitability. Although "we will bury you" is an acceptable literal rendering of Kruschev's words, an equally accurate, and contextually more appropriate, translation would have been, "We will be present at your burial." Such a rendering is consistent with Kruschev's comment later in the same conversation that Communism did not need to go to war to destroy Capitalism, since the latter would eventually self-destruct. In the US, the common interpretation of "We will bury you" was taken to mean something else: that "we" referred to the USSR, and "bury" meant "annihilate." For many, the phrase became *prima facie* evidence of the USSR's malevolent intentions to destroy the US.

The controversy over the proper translation of Kruschev's remark reveals a serious shortcoming of the Encoder/Decoder account of human communication: although language is in some respects a code, in other respects it is not. The fact that "We will bury you" could yield two equally "correct" renderings that differed so radically underscores the fact that human language use does not consist simply of a set of signals mapped onto a set of meanings.

The Intentionalist Paradigm

The Kruschev episode dramatically illustrates why encoding and decoding are not good characterization of human communication. There was no question about the specific words Kruschev had uttered, nor did competent translators differ on the ways the Russian utterance might be rendered in English. What was at issue was a more complicated question: What had Kruschev *intended* that utterance to mean?

The view of communication implicit in the Encoder/Decoder position is that meanings of messages are fully specified by their elements---that meaning is encoded, and that decoding the message is equivalent to specifying its meaning. However, it's easy to demonstrate that this often is not the case. Unlike the

Vervet's aerial predator call, which has an invariant significance, in human communication the same message can be understood to mean different things in different circumstances, and this fact necessitates a distinction between a message's literal meaning and its intended meaning. "Do you know what time it is?" is literally a question about what the addressee knows, but it more often is understood as a request. Although its grammatical mood is interrogative, it is conventionally taken to be an imperative; a reasonable paraphrase might be "Tell me the time." However, not all sentences of the form "Do you know X?" are intended as requests: "Do you know how to program C++" would, in all likelihood, be understood as a question.

Utterances that are intended to be understood nonliterally are a common feature of everyday language use. Although some canonical forms of nonliteral usage are so salient that they have names (irony, metaphor, hyperbole, etc.), more mundane examples of nonliteral usage pervade everyday talk. When we say that we understand what others say, we are implicitly claiming to comprehend what they intend for us to understand. The decoded meaning of the utterance certainly contributes to that intended meaning, but it is only part of it.

Given the flexible relationship between an the literal and intended meaning of an utterance, it is remarkable how well we understand each other. Occasionally, misunderstandings do occur (e.g., as when an addressee interprets an ironic statement literally), but for the most part, we understand nonliterally intended utterances correctly, usually without being consciously aware of the other possible meanings that such an utterance could have had in different contexts.

Despite the facility with which this is accomplished, the process by which a listener constructs the intention of an utterance is exceedingly complex and a matter of some contention among psycholinguists. In large part, the process

depends upon the existence of knowledge that is shared between speaker and addressee, or *common ground*, as it is often called.[2]

The most elemental kind of common ground which communicators rely on is knowledge of the language they are speaking. But as many an embarrassed tourist has discovered, much of the common ground that underlies language use derives from a complex matrix of shared cultural knowledge. Absent this knowledge, many utterances will be incomprehensible, or perhaps worse, will be interpreted incorrectly. This point is particularly relevant to the use of language in conflict situations, especially when the conflict stems from differences in intentions, goals, values, and ideologies. To the extent that such differences derive from a lack of mutually shared knowledge, communication will suffer. Understanding the importance of common ground in the interpretation of utterances points to one of the drawbacks of relying too heavily on an Intentionalist interpretation of communication: Addressees cannot derive the intended meanings from messages if those meanings reside outside the realm of shared knowledge. Moreover, since what is common ground for a given speaker will vary as a function of the addressee (that is, it will vary from addressee to addressee), the speaker is obliged to generate only those utterances which he believes the addressee is capable of understanding.

The Perspective-Taking Paradigm

Perspective-Taking assumes that individuals perceive the world from different vantage points, and that because the experiences of each individual is to some degree dependent on his or her vantage point, messages must be formulated with this perspective in mind. The late Roger Brown the essential idea succinctly: "Effective coding requires that the point of view of the auditor be

---

[2] We are using *knowledge* here as a shorthand for information, beliefs, values, attitudes, motives, etc. that speakers and addresses rely on as common ground in producing and comprehending utterances.

realistically imagined." However, apart from the general admonition that the addressee's perspective be taken into account, it is not always clear how one should go about implementing the Principle of Audience Design. In the best of circumstances, it is difficult to take the perspective of another accurately, and the more different from oneself that other happens to be, the more difficult that task becomes.

In conflict situations, even more problematic than the absence of common ground may be the *misperception* of common ground--incorrect assumptions that communicators make about what their partners know. It is well established that people's estimates of what others know, believe, or value tends to be biased in the direction of their own beliefs--what they themselves know. As a result, comprehending the true intention of an utterance may require knowledge far beyond what one possesses, and this may be particularly prevalent when the cultural situations of the parties involved are markedly different. In all likelihood, it would never have occurred to so confirmed a Marxist as Nikita Kruschev that the context for the interpretation of his ill-received remark would be anything other than the doctrine of Marxism's historic inevitability.

Such misperceptions are common in conflict for two reasons: first, the magnitude of the perspectival differences that communicators must accommodate may themselves be an important source of conflict. For an ardent "pro-life" activist, it may be difficult to conduct a discussion about abortion that is not at least implicitly grounded in the position that abortion is a kind of murder; such discussion, directed at he activist's "pro-choice" counterpart, would be unlikely to ameliorate conflict.
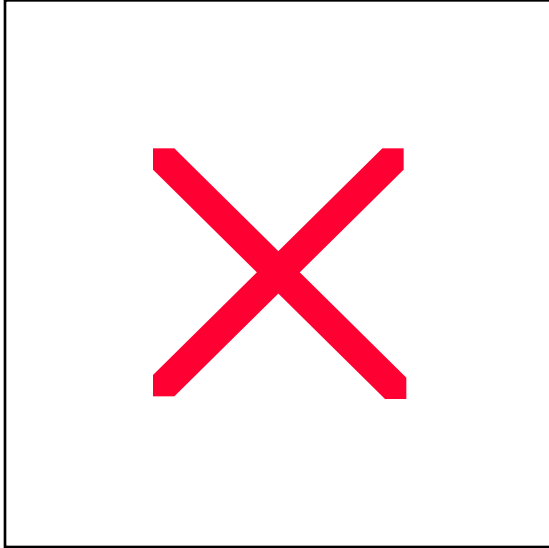
Secondly, conflict tends to make perceived distinctions among participants more salient, and in so doing heightens the tendency to categorize them as members of in-groups or out-groups. The language people use in such situations

reflect these distinctions. One manifestation of this is what Semin and his colleagues have termed the *Linguistic Intergroup Bias*. Any interpersonal act can be characterized at various levels of generality. For example, an observer might remark, "John carried Mary's suitcase," or "John helped Mary," or "John is a helpful person," all in reference to the same incident. A well established research finding is that people describe the actions of in-group and out-group members in systematically different ways. For actions that are negatively valent, behaviors of out-group members tend to be characterized at relatively high levels of abstraction, while those of in-group members are characterized more concretely. For positively valent behaviors, however, the pattern is reversed. Positively valent behaviors of out-group members are characterized as specific episodes, while those of in-group members are characterized abstractly. One consequence of the linguistic intergroup bias is to make stereotypes resistant to disconfirmation, since behaviors that are congruent with negative out-group stereotype will tend to be characterized as general properties (*"Smith is aggressive"*), while behaviors that are inconsistent with the stereotype will tend to be characterized in quite specific terms (*"Smith gave CPR to an accident victim"*). The enhanced salience of stereotypes in conflict situations enormously complicates the process by which "the point of view of the auditor [can be] realistically imagined," and by so doing undermines the effectiveness of communication.

The Dialogic Paradigm

Thus far, our discussion has depicted communication as an unremittingly individualistic process—the product of contributions by what Susan Brennan has called "autonomous information processors." Speakers and addressees act with respect to one another, but they act as individual entities. Communication consists of a set of discursively-related, but independent, episodes. Such a depiction may be appropriate

for certain kinds of communication—e.g., the process by which writers communicate with their readers and broadcasters with their audiences—but it seems to miss the essence of what happens in most of the situations in which people communicate.

Participants in conversations and similar highly interactive communicative forms behave less like autonomous information processors and more like participants in an intrinsically cooperative activity. Herbert Clark and Susan Brennan have made the point nicely:

> It takes two people working together to play a duet, shake hands, play
> chess, waltz, teach, or make love. To succeed, the two of them have to
> coordinate both the content and process of what they are doing…
> Communication…is a collective activity of the first order (Clark &
> Brennan, 1991).

What we will call the *Dialogic Paradigm* focuses on the collaborative nature of communicative activity. Perhaps the most fundamental respects in which the other three paradigms we have discussed differ from the Dialogic paradigm is where they locate meaning. For the Encoding/Decoding paradigm, meaning is a property of messages; for the Intentionalist paradigm, it resides in speakers'

intentions; for the Perspective-taking paradigm, it derives from the addressee's point of view.

From the Dialogic perspective, communication is regarded as joint accomplishment of the participants, who have collaborated to achieve some set of communicative goals. Meaning is "socially situated"—deriving from the particular circumstances of the interaction—and the meaning of an utterance can be understood *only* in the context of those circumstances. Because the participants are invested in understanding, and being understood by, each other, speakers and addressees take pains to ensure that they have similar conceptions of the meaning of each message before they proceed to the next one.[3]

APPLICATIONS TO CONFLICT

In a study published over 30 years ago, Krauss and Deutsch (1966) provided subjects in a bargaining experiment with an opportunity to communicate. The bargaining problem confronting subjects in the experiment was a relatively simple one to solve. However, allowing participants a means by which they could obstruct each other's progress complicated matters considerably, typically resulting in poorer outcomes for both. The means of obstruction transformed participants' focus from jointly solving a simple coordination problem to devising individual strategies that would best the other. Providing them with a verbal communication channel did not materially improve matters; indeed, in some cases, it made them worse.

The results of this experiment underscore the naïveté of regarding communication as the universal solvent for conflict, one whose application is certain to improve matters. More realistic is a view of communication as a neutral instrument—one that can be used to convey threats as well as offers of

---

[3] For a detailed description of the mechanisms that unerlie a Dialogic aproach to communication, see Clark (1996).

reconciliation, to put forth unreasonable offers as well as acceptable ones, to inflame a tense situation as well as to defuse it. Given a genuine desire to resolve a conflict, communication can facilitate the achievement of this goal. But although we can affect others (and be affected by them) through communication, we can affect them (and be affected by them) only so much. The fruit of communication is the establishment of understanding, but beyond this, communication can do little (directly) to change the state of affairs or, say, sway the outcome of a conflict based upon irreconcilable goals. Good communication cannot guarantee that conflict will be resolved or even ameliorated, but poor communication greatly increases the likelihood that conflict will be exacerbated.

Each of the four paradigms we have discussed suggests some principles that an effective communicator should follow. The Encoding/Decoding paradigm underscores the importance of maintaining favorable signal-to-noise ratios. In Information Theory, noise has a specific technical meaning, but it can usefully be thought of as anything that adds undesired signal to the received message. Noise, of course, has a deleterious effect on all communication, but its effect in communication can be especially pernicious because it forces the recipient of a message to "fill in" information that the noise has distorted. Given the antagonistic interpersonal orientation that the parties in such situations often have, the filled in information is more likely to worsen, rather than reduce, conflict.

An example of a way in which noise may be introduced into communication is the use of third (or fourth or fifth) parties to transmit messages, in contrast to direct communication. As in the children's game of "telegraph," each party's successive retelling of the message is likely to introduce some distortion, so that when it arrives at its ultimate destination it may bear little resemblance to the original. There may be times when it is advisable to avoid

discussion of delicate subjects in environments in which misunderstandings are likely to occur. It also suggests that when distortion is likely, redundancy (i.e., multiply encoded messages) can be helpful. Restating the same idea in different forms will not guarantee its acceptance, but it should increase the likelihood that it will be correctly understood.

The Intentionalist paradigm highlights the danger of participants misconstruing each other's communicative intentions. Recall that understanding what someone has said consists of recognizing the communicative intention that underlies it—not the words used, but rather what the speaker intended those words to mean. In conflict, misconstruals are especially likely because individuals interpret utterances to be consistent with their own attitudes. A half century ago, Solomon Asch (1946) demonstrated that the same message *(I hold that a little rebellion, now and then, is a good thing, and as necessary in the political world as as storms are in the physical)* would be interpreted quite differently depending on whether it was attributed to Nicolai Lenin or to Thomas Jefferson (its actual author). The word *rebellion* can be interpreted in more than one way. Respondents' knowledge of the purported author was an important determinant of their interpretation of the word, and hence of the author's communicative intention.

The problem can become considerably more problematic when the parties to the conflict use different languages to communicate, as the furor caused by Khrushev's remark illustrates. The translator had provided a literal rendering in English of a Russian phrase that the context makes clear was intended to be understood figuratively. Nonliteral usage is a pervasive feature of language use. It adds enormously to our ability to formulate colorful and nuanced messages, but it does pose particular problems for a translator. In the first place, correctly apprehending the intended meaning of a nonliteral expression often requires

cultural knowledge that goes beyond technical mastery of the language.
Understanding the significance of Ronald Reagan's challenge *Go ahead! Make my day,* requires that one be at least vaguely aware of the Clint Eastwood movie it echoes. Clearly, it can require considerable cognitive effort to apprehend the speaker's communicative intention, but it is effort that must be expended if the parties are to understand each other. In the absence of this, communication can become bogged down in a cycle of misinterpretation and denial: "You said *X;"* "Yes, but what I meant by that was *Y*."

Of course, it is within participants' power to make this more or less easy to accomplish. Not only can addressees try to look beyond the speaker's words to the underlying communicative intention, but speakers can seek to express themselves in ways that will lead to the desired interpretation on their addressees' part. This, of course, is the principle derived from the Perspective-taking paradigm. How insensitivity to this principle can affect communication is illustrated in a recent controversy involving Washington DC Public Advocate David Howard's use of the word *niggardly* in a conversation with two aides. The aides, who were African-American, were unfamiliar with the archaic word, and took it to be a form of a similar-sounding racial epithet, to which it is etymologically unrelated. The ensuing flap (Howard, who is Caucasian, initially resigned, then was reinstated by Mayor Anthony Williams) polarized activists on both sides of the political spectrum. Although Howard was correct philologically, he was mistaken in assuming the word *niggardly* was in common ground. In retrospect, it seems clear that his choice of words was infelicitous. Because the word was unfamiliar, it was likely that at least some of his listeners would not know its meaning, and because of its similarity to a taboo word, the likelihood was great that it would be misinterpreted. Especially in situations where the

addressee's interpretation is consequential, an effective communicator tries to view his own utterances from the other's perspective.

A serious complication of perspective taking in conflict situations derives from what is called the *multiple audience problem.* It is not uncommon for a communication to be designed to simultaneously convey different messages to different listeners, and this seems particularly likely to occur in conflict situations. For example, a mayor negotiating a salary increase with the teacher's union may feel it's necessary to "send a message" to other municipal unions that he is willing to run the risk of a strike. Or the leader of a union must take pains to assure that a reasonable concession, part of the normal give-and-take of negotiation, is not seen by his members as a sign of weakness. The number of different (and sometimes contradictory) perspectives that a speaker must take into account can make public or open negotiations difficult . Other things being equal, participants would be well advised to reduce the number of audiences to which their messages are addressed.

Of course, another person's perspective is not always self evident. It probably is in the best interests of the parties to expend some effort ascertaining what is and is not in common ground, and if necessary enlarging its contents. Such mutually cooperative efforts to insure coordination on meaning is the essence of a Dialogic approach to communication. Participants deeply enmeshed in an acrimonious and apparently-intractable conflict may find it difficult to achieve the degree of sensitivity to the other that such an approach requires. But without it there can be no communication of any consequence.

UNITED AGAINST A COMMON FOE

Our discussion thus far has focused on the inherent complexity of communication, and how its misuse can engender or exacerbate conflict. At first glance, the picture it presents is bleak. Tallying all the ways a communicative

interchange can go awry leads one to wonder whether communication can ever have an ameliorative effect. Nevertheless, we all know that that at least some disputes do get resolved peacefully, that long-standing adversaries can become allies, and that even seemingly irresolvable conflicts can be isolated, allowing parties to "agree to disagree." In this section we will consider some principles that can enhance (but not guarantee) the ameliorative effects of communication.

But we should preface this discussion with a point we have alluded to earlier. Communication is not a panacea, and in the absence of a genuine desire to resolve conflict it is as likely to intensify the parties' disagreement as it is to moderate it. Although the point may seem too obvious to warrant mentioning, conflicts often serve multiple functions and the parties may approach its resolution with some ambivalence. This is especially likely when the conflicting parties are groups rather than individuals. It is a well-known (albeit ironic) fact that few things can unite a group as effectively as a common enemy, and leaders may be reluctant to forego this source of power. Individuals, too, may find that the perceived benefits of continuing conflict outweigh its costs. In such cases, communication aimed at resolving the conflict may be unavailing, and conceivably could make things worse.

Given a genuine desire to resolve the conflict, communication, artfully employed, can help achieve that end. Obviously what is most critical is the substance of the communication—the quality of the proposals and counter-proposals that each of the participants makes. It would be foolish to expect others to accept solutions not in their best interests because of "good communication." However, quite apart from substance, the form messages take can have (sometimes unintended) consequences. The very flexibility that makes communication so adaptable a tool also allows for more and less effective ways of achieving the same ends. For example, "Shut the door," "Would you mind closing

the door?" and "I wish we could keep the door open, but it's so noisy" could (in the appropriate contexts) be instances of utterances understood to have the same intended meanings. Although they differ in grammatical type and in the particular words they employ, all are understood as directives—attempts to induce the addressee to do something.

U tterances often are described in terms

Like physical actions, the things we say are intended to accomplish certain purposes, but unlike physical actions, they accomplish their purposes communicatively rather than directly. As is illustrated above, the same speech act can be accomplished by a variety of different utterances. Nevertheless, although "Shut the door" and "Would you mind closing the door" both represent directives to close the door, they differ in another respect. "Would you mind closing the door" is an *indirect speech act* (i.e., one whose literal and intended meanings differ) while "Shut the door" is a *direct speech act* which represents its meaning literally. Generally speaking, i ndirect speech acts are perceived as more polite than direct ones, probably because the two kinds of directives have implications for the status or power differential of requester and requestee. Although different versions of the same speech act may be identical insofar as the message's explicit content (construing that term narrowly) is concerned, it behooves communicators to pay attention to other information conveyed by the *form* of their messages.

Although there is no easily applied formula for making communication a constructive force in resolving conflict, there are some principles for communicating effectively in conflict situations. They are implicit in much we have already said, but we will briefly list them here to underscore their importance:

(1) *Reduce noise,* Noise is anything that adds undesired signal to the message: The larger the ratio of signal to noise, the closer the transmitted message will be to the received message. Probably the most reliable way to increase the signal-to-noise ratio—i.e., to increase the likelihood that the message the listener receives is the one being transmitted—is to increase redundancy. Succinctness may be a valued personal quality (or perhaps it is that loquacity is seldom appreciated), but pithy remarks lend themselves to misinterpretation. One way of limiting the possibilities for misinterpretation is to convey the same idea in more than one way. Had Khruschev added to "We will bury you" the idea that "In the long run, your system will be destroyed by its own contradictions, and ours will emerge triumphant" the possibility for using the unintended implication of his remark would have been minimized.

(2) *When speaking, take the perspective of your listener.*□□hat might be called the Humpty-Dumpty approach to communication ("When I use a word, it means just what I choose it to mean--neither more nor less") is a formula for disaster□□□□□□□□□□□□□□□ Because the potential for misunderstanding is high and misunderstanding is likely to err in a negative direction, it is especially important that speakers constrain the meanings that listeners can impute to their messages. One way of accomplishing this is to do precisely the opposite of what Humpty-Dumpty's maxim dictates: when formulating a message, consider what the listener will take your words to mean.

The iss□□□□□□ue, then, is not "What do I mean by this?" but rather "What is my counterpart likely to understand this to mean?" Often, it will be necessary for a speaker to inform (or remind) the listener of the presuppositions that form the utterance's interpretive context. Had Khruschev prefaced "We will bury you" with an allusion to Marx's claim of Communism's historic inevitability, it's unlikely that the remark would have fanned the flames of the Cold War.

(3) *When listening, try to understand the intended meaning of what your counterpart is saying.* Just as the speaker must take pains to be aware of the possible constructions listeners may place on an utterance, listeners needs to be sensitive to the alternative constructions an utterance might yield. Although we habitually respond to what others say as though it could mean one and only one thing, that seldom is the case.

(4) *Be an active listener.* An encoding-decoding approach to communication puts the listener in the role of a passive recipient whose task it is to process the meaning of the transmitted message, but a participant in a communicative interchange is not limited to this role. Active listeners raise questions, clarify ambiguous declaration, and takes great pains to insure that they and their counterpart have the same understanding of what has been said.

These recommendations seem to ask parties involved in an unresolved conflict to behave cooperatively and, indeed, that is precisely what they do. Communication is intrinsically a cooperative activity. As the Dialogic perspective makes clear, in communication the participants must collaborate to create meaning, and one reason that communication between conflicting parties so often is unavailing is that the parties are unable to collaborate to that degree. As Bismarck might have observed, communication become a continuation of conflict by verbal means. Of course, the cooperation necessary for effective communication is of a minimal sort, and participants may collaborate to express (one hopes regretfully) their inability to see a resolution that is mutually acceptable. Nevertheless, that communication can be a first step, and the development of "lines of communication" can be the foundation on which a solution ultimately rests. A paradoxical fact about human nature is that few things are as effective in inducing conflicting parties to cooperate is a common foe. In communication, the common foe is misunderstanding, and in

collaborating to vanquish this enemy the parties to a conflict may be taking the

first step toward reducing their differences.

REFERENCES

Brown, R. (1965). <u>Social psychology</u>. New York: The Free Press.

Clark, H. H., & Brennan, S. E. (1991). Grounding in communication. In L. B. Resnick, J. M. Levine & S. D. Teasley (Eds.), *Perspectives on socially shared cognition* . Washington, DC: American Psychological Association.

Krauss, R. M., & Chiu, C.-y. (1997). Language and social behavior. In D. Gilbert, S. Fiske, & G. Lindsey (Ed.), <u>Handbook of social psychology</u> (pp. 41-88). Boston: McGraw-Hill.

Krauss, R. M., & Deutsch, M. (1966). Communication in interpersonal bargaining. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, **4**, 572-577.

Krauss, R. M., & Fussell, S. R. (1996). Social psychological models of interpersonal communication. In E. T. Higgins, & A. Kruglanski (Ed.), <u>Social psychology: A handbook of basic principles</u> (pp. 655-701). New York: Guilford

Maass, A., & Arcuri, L. (1992). The role of language in the persistence of stereotypes. In G. R. Semin, & K. Fiedler (Ed.), <u>Language, interaction, and social cognition</u> (pp. 129-143). Newbury Park, CA: Sage.

Maass, A., Salvi, D., Accuri, L., & Semin, G. (1989). Language use in intergroup contexts: The linguistic intergroup bias. <u>57</u>, 981-993.

Semin, G. R., & Fiedler, K. (1992). The inferential properties of interpersonal verbs. In G. R. Semin, & K. Fiedler (Ed.), <u>Language, interaction, and social cognition</u> (pp. 58-78). Newbury Park, CA: Sage.

Clark, H. H. (1996). <u>Using language</u> . Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.