Language is Symbolic

- Words and sounds that have been given a specific meaning. The meaning is agreed upon by a specific group or culture.
- The word or sound itself is arbitrary—it has little if no meaning on its own. It derives its meaning from those who assign the meaning.

Words have...

- Denotative meanings: the literal definition of the word ex: classroom—the room in which you learn information
- Connotative meanings: the personal reaction or definition of the word ex: classroom—a fun place to learn or a boring place that you're stuck for 2 hours.
Words are...

- Concrete and abstract—if we can experience it with our senses, it is concrete. If we can only imagine it, it is abstract. Ex: fun—abstract, dancing—concrete
- Culture bound—words mean different things in different cultures
- Context bound—if you take a word out of context, the meaning can change

Language can lead to misunderstandings

- Semantic rules—these rules reflect the way we make sense of a particular symbol, how we agree on its meaning. (ex: we agree that a car is a vehicle that we drive to get from A to B and not something that we eat)
- Equivocation occurs when a statement or word has more than one accepted meaning.
  - “He likes beer better than his wife.”
  - “Family catches fire just in time.”

Misunderstandings cont’d

- Trigger words—these are words that when heard cause an emotion inside of us, typically a negative emotion.
  - lazy detached paranoid
  - foolish cocky disturbed

Words communicate power

- Research shows that using certain types of words/language can make us appear to be powerless, rather than powerful—hedges-kinda, maybe, guess hesitations-well, um, uh, you know intensifiers-really, very, super tag questions-isn’t it, don’t you think disclaimers-I’m not sure, I think
Your Name is a word(s)

How important is your name to you?
Does it identify you?

How many like their nickname better than given name? Anyone changed their name from what parents gave them?

Language by Gender and Culture

- Men are from Mars and women from Venus. Maybe South Dakota and North Dakota
- High Culture Language
- Low Culture language

Language can be a barrier

- Using you statements:
  - You’re not telling me the truth
  - You think only of yourself
  - That was a stupid joke
  - Mind your own business
  - You left this place a mess

You statements can arouse defensiveness

- A “you statement” can imply that the person is doing something wrong

- A “you statement” can say that the speaker is qualified to judge—an idea that most listeners are not willing to accept (Even if it might be true)
Language can be a bridge

- I messages provide a more accurate way to express a complaint
- I messages have the speaker take the responsibility for the complaint
  - I get embarrassed when my bad grades are mentioned to our friends
  - I get worried when I have not heard from you when I thought I would

Small Talk

- Impersonal and often superficial conversation
- What role does it play in relationships?
  - Most relationships begin with it
  - Most relationships develop with it
  - Most is non-threatening and light
  - It can serve as a release or diversion from serious talk