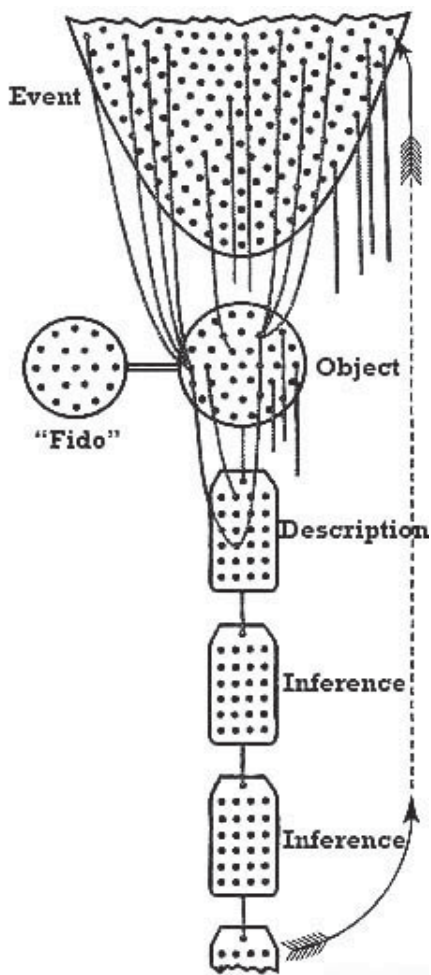

Awareness and Action:

A General Semantics Approach to Effective Language Behavior



Mary P. Lahman
Manchester University - August 2013

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INTRODUCTION

As a communication studies professor who is also a parent, I often advise my children, “Change your perception and you change your world.” As a researcher with interests in general semantics and appreciative inquiry—a method for organizational change that involves stakeholders focusing on what is going well—I recently updated my advice to include, “Words create worlds so choose wisely” (Whitney & Trosten-Bloom, 2010, p. 52). Regardless of the contexts in which we find ourselves, we might communicate more effectively if we explore our daily language behavior. A general semantics methodology provides the opportunity to do so.

I first learned about general semantics in a 1982 Language and Thought class taught by Paul Keller at Manchester. Professor Keller studied general semantics with Irving Lee at Northwestern University. Since 1996, I have taught a number of courses using books by William Haney (1992), Susan and Bruce Kodish (2001), and Steve Stockdale (2009b). I credit these authors for the various sections of this text:

1. Stockdale (2009b) outlined a “structured system of formulations” to explain general semantics, and I address two of its premises, “scientific orientation” and “time-binding,” in Chapter 1, leaving “abstraction,” “nonverbal awareness,” and “verbal awareness” for Chapter 2.
2. Kodish and Kodish (2001) operationalized “nonverbal awareness” with student-friendly exercises that I include in Chapter 2.
3. Haney (1992) explained “contributing factors” and “correctives” for patterns of miscommunication that occur when we are not aware of the abstraction process. I introduce several of these patterns in the following four chapters: Allness, Inference—Observation Confusion, Bypassing, and Differentiation Failures. For each pattern, I include case studies developed by former students.

In short, this text shows how general semantics can be used as a systematic inquiry into language behavior, followed by an application of these formulations. I use case studies to engage readers in all four phases of Kolb’s (1984) experiential learning cycle:

1. When discussing the abstractions of characters in the cases, we work with *accommodative* knowledge: the “transformation of the intuitive aspects of experience through active experimentation.”
2. When applying the contributing factors needed to address characters’ faulty language behaviors, we develop *divergent* knowledge: the “transformation of the intuitive aspects of the experience through reflection.”

3. When working together to evaluate how one corrective is better than another for each character in a case, we acquire *assimilative* knowledge by “deciding on the best solution.”
4. When role playing a case with appropriate correctives for each character to address faulty language behaviors, we create *convergent* knowledge by presenting “an implementation plan” (as cited in Kreber, 2001, p. 224).

General semantics is not just a theory but a practical approach to delay the way that humans automatically respond: it is something we must *do*. The case studies approach ensures that we practice applying the formulations, taking *action* with our newfound *awareness* of faulty language behavior.

CHAPTER 1: GENERAL SEMANTICS

Understanding Korzybski's Formulations

The changes which general semantics training is designed to bring about are not so much a matter of absorbing an “intellectual subject-matter” as of gaining a new orientation, a system of evaluation, a new way of using language.

—Frances Chisholm (1945, p. 1)

ALFRED KORZYBSKI

Alfred Korzybski first published his formulations about “time-binding,” or “what makes humans human” (Kodish & Kodish, 2011, p. 203), in *Manhood of Humanity* in 1921. According to Korzybski (2000), *time-binding* was the human capacity to share experiences with others. He hoped that this ability to pass our learning to future generations would allow “each generation [to] begin where the former left off” (Korzybski, p. xxxii). Experiencing firsthand the carnage of World War I, Korzybski often questioned how humans had “progressed so far and so rapidly in fields such as engineering, mathematics, and the sciences, and yet sociologically still were fighting wars and killing each other” (Stockdale, 2009b, p. 35). He was determined to find better ways for humans to communicate.

Korzybski (2000) believed that a *scientific orientation* toward language—questioning the accuracy of language choices—would help humans to become more effective communicators. He advocated for daily use of the scientific method because of the potential for new discoveries: “The structural revision of [scientists’] language led automatically to new results and new suggestions” (Korzybski, p. 10). Similarly, as a mathematician, he believed that the cardinal and ordinal aspects of numbers provided “an ideal human relational language of structure similar to that of the world and to that of the human nervous system” (Korzybski, p. 259). Consequently, if humans operate from a mathematical orientation, they recognize that as one variable changes in nature, so does the other: “In mathematical notation, a function is express: $y = f(x)$, and is read “y equals (f)or function of x” or “y depends on x,” or “the value of y varies as the value of x varies” (Pula, 2000, p. 67). Korzybski (2000) advocated for both a scientific and mathematical orientation toward language, so that human language behaviors accurately reflect the changing nature of the empirical world.

In addition, Korzybski (2000) proposed a map–territory analogy to encourage daily exploration of verbal “maps” (words), noting that these maps do not accurately describe what is happening in the “territory” (empirical world): “A map is *not* the territory it represents” (p. 58). He used a familiar relationship, maps and territories, so that we would remember when the territory (reality) changes, we need to update the map (language). More recently, Anton (n.d.) proposed that we are better served with the premise, “there is no not territory” (p. 11), because the territory (reality) consists of many maps. He argued,

“Once we recognize how all maps, as part of the territory, are the means by which one part selectively releases and appropriates another part at different levels of abstraction, we no longer need to postulate that ‘reality’ lies somehow ‘behind’ and/or ‘beyond’ our experiences and/or language (Anton, p. 11–12).

In his second book, *Science and Sanity*, published in 1933, Korzybski (2000) proposed his formulations as a *non-Aristotelian system* that promoted a “complete and conscious elimination of identification” (p. xcvii). For Korzybski, a “non-Aristotelian” orientation meant illuminating the limitations of Aristotle’s “law of identity,” or the “is of identity” (Pula, 2000, p. 21–22). He argued that even though people, places and things have specific characteristics, which Aristotle labeled as identity, these characteristics are constantly changing and are incomplete representations of the empirical world.

For example, I am a professor, but if that is all you say about me then you are leaving out other important roles in my life—friend, wife, counselor, mother, church member, sister, and many more. This illustration provides evidence of Korzybski’s (2000) second premise of general semantics: “No map represents *all* of ‘its’ presumed territory” (p. xvii). Recognizing that each one of us plays many roles during a lifetime, we begin to understand how one or two language labels are a static representation of a dynamic reality. Anton (n.d.) updated this premise of Korzybski’s as well, “Any map is only part of the territory” (p.11).

In the preface to the second edition of *Science and Sanity*, published in 1941, Korzybski further delineated general semantics as “a new extensional discipline which explains and trains us how to use our nervous systems most efficiently” (p. xxxviii). In other words, if nature is constantly changing—and we know it is when we see flowers bloom from barren ground in the spring—then people’s nervous systems detect, or abstract, only a small percentage of these changes. Korzybski (2000) created a diagram of this *abstraction* process, called the “*structural differential*” (p. 471), providing a visual reminder of how we leave out many characteristics when we sense objects and events. We leave out even more details when we use language to explain what we sense.

The structural differential visually demonstrates how we omit numerous characteristics of an event, or reality, and continue to use those inaccurate descriptions to make more inferences. This diagram of the abstraction process depicts Korzybski’s (2000) third premise of general semantics: “Maps are self-reflexive” (p. xvii). In order to account for abstraction levels confusion within, as well as between levels, Anton (n.d.) reworked Korzybski’s third premise: “maps” is the word used to refer to parts of the territory becoming reflexive to other parts at different levels of abstraction (p. 11). For instance, if I state that “I am angry that I got angry,” then I am making an inference about my behavior, confusing levels of abstraction and leaving out important characteristics about what angered me today. Consequently, the ability to make maps of maps (the *self-reflexive* nature of maps) when the original map is inaccurate, may confuse how we interpret events and mask what we

share that with others. Unfortunately, if my reasons for getting angry today include being passed over for a promotion because I am too old, then important conversations about age discrimination may not take place.

In the 1948 preface to the third edition of *Science and Sanity*, Korzybski stressed the need to apply general semantics formulations, arguing that “when the methods of general semantics are *applied*, the results are usually beneficial, whether in law, medicine, business, etc. . . . If they are not applied, but merely talked about, no results can be expected” (p. xxxi). Consequently, this text encourages *action*—applying language behavior correctives rooted in Anton’s (n.d.) new corollaries for general semantics premises:

1. The map is *not* the “territory,” so there is no *not* territory.
2. A map covers *not all* the territory, so any map is only *part* of the territory.
3. Maps refer to parts of the territory becoming *reflexive* to other parts at different levels of abstraction.” (p.11)

Let’s see how other scholars, in addition to Anton (n.d.), have contributed to the study of general semantics. I refer to them as general semanticists, even though they represented a number of disciplines and areas of inquiry.

GENERAL SEMANTICISTS

As Korzybski’s general theory of time-binding evolved into formulations, called “general semantics,” other scholars agreed that much could be gained from a scientific inquiry into language behavior. There are recurring themes of systematic inquiry and an efficient use of our nervous system in the following explanations of general semantics:

- Chisholm (1945) contended that general semantics is the “analysis of language as a human behavior. . . [because] there are many ways in which language, accepted uncritically by the habit of identification, provides us with a map which is unlike in structure to the territory we are talking about” (p. 37).
- Johnson (1946) praised the methodology for its potential: “It is in its deliberate and systematic concern with the techniques of inquiry that one may most readily find the distinguishing features of general semantics and the degree of promise which it holds for the emancipation of the future from the misfortunes of the past, in our own lives individually and in that cooperative adventure that men call civilization” (p. 20).
- Hayakawa and Hayakawa (1990) proposed that “methods of modern semantics. . . [allow us] to be concerned with relation between language and reality, between words and what they stand for in the speaker’s and hearer’s thoughts and emotions . . . to approach the study of language as both an intellectual and a moral discipline” (p. x)
- Postman (1996) called general semantics “the study of relationships between the world of words and the worlds of not-words, the study of the territory we

- call reality and how, through abstracting and symbolizing, we map the territory” (p. 182).
- Stockdale (2009a) defined general semantics as “the process of how we perceive, construct, evaluate, and respond to our life experiences” (p. 20).
 - Kodish and Kodish (2011) proposed that general semantics is a “general theory of evaluation. . . [one that is] concerned with understanding how we evaluate, with the non-verbal, inner life of each individual, with how each of us experiences and makes sense of our experiences, including how we use language and how language ‘uses’ us” (p. 23).

“General semantics, thus, is a “scientific orientation” toward language behavior that encourages an efficient use of the nervous system.”

Table 1 demonstrates how those who studied Korzybski’s work underscored his basic tenets of general semantics—systematic inquiry, elimination of identification, and efficient use of the nervous system. General semantics, thus, is a “scientific orientation” toward language behavior that encourages an efficient use of the nervous system.

Table 1: General Semantics Definitions

Systematic Inquiry	Elimination of Identification	Efficient Use of Nervous System
Johnson: systematic concern with techniques of inquiry	Chisholm: identification provides a map unlike the territory	Stockdale: perceive, construct, evaluate and respond to experiences
Kodish & Kodish: general theory of evaluation	Hayakawa & Hayakawa: assess relation between words and what they stand for in speaker’s and hearer’s thoughts	Kodish & Kodish: how each of us experiences and makes sense of experiences
	Postman: world of words (explore what we call “reality”)	Postman: world of not-words (explore what we call “reality”)

SCIENTIFIC ORIENTATION

Building a scientific attitude toward language behavior is difficult. As Chisholm (1945) noted, “We all know verbal definitions about scientific method, but how many of us are sure that the habitual structure of our reactions, especially to language is mature and scientific?”

(p. 2). This lack of maturity is evidenced by how little we question the assumption that the words we choose accurately convey the meanings intended. For example, how many of us delay responding to others' statements until we investigate how accurately their words represent the person, place, or thing described? We might know that the scientific method involves making observations, generating hypotheses, testing hypotheses, and revising hypotheses, but we rarely hold our language behaviors to such rigorous standards (Stockdale, 2009b).

Johnson (1946) argued that the scientific method is a "method of keeping one's information, beliefs, and theories up to date" (p. 49–50), but to use the scientific method, we need to be aware of how language influences each step of the method. Johnson summarized the impact as follows:

We may say, in the briefest summary that the method of science consists in (a) asking clear answerable questions in order to direct one's (b) observations, which are made in a calm and unprejudiced manner, and which are then (c) reported as accurately as possible and in such a way as to answer the questions that were asked to begin with, after which (d) any pertinent beliefs or assumptions that were held before the observations were made are revised in light of the observations made and answers obtained. Four main steps are indicated in this brief sketch of the scientific method. *Three of them are concerned primarily with the use of language:* the asking of the questions that guide the observations, the reporting of the observations so as to answer the questions, and the revising of beliefs or assumptions relevant to the answers obtained. (p. 49–50)

Language shapes the questions that we ask, which then affects what we observe, and, consequently, how we report findings. For example, if I ask students to discuss "peak" learning moments, including what they did and others did to learn the most *and* to enjoy the experience, they identify behaviors that both students and professors can use during the semester. Contrast those findings with inquiries that ask students, "What changes could improve the teaching or content of this course?" To that question, students identify changes to professors' behaviors, but professors are only one of the stakeholders involved in the learning experience.

Noting that language shapes the direction of the inquiry, and consequently, the results reported, I often begin my hypotheses, whether teaching or consulting, with questions about what is working well, or as Cooperrider, Whitney, and Stavros (2008) said, "what gives life" (, p. 5). Phrasing questions about what is life-generating comes from my study and use of appreciative inquiry (AI), and provides a good example of how language used at the hypothesis stage of a scientific orientation directs observations and, ultimately, results. Because human beings are uniquely qualified to use the scientific method and learn from inquiries, Korzybski (2000) proposed that people are capable of "time-binding."

TIME-BINDING

Korzybski (2000) found great hope in the uniquely human ability to use language to learn from others. He proposed that “the human nervous system is a more generalized affair than that of an animal, with more possibilities” (p. 8); hence, humans possess abilities that an animal, such as a dog, does not. As Korzybski (2000) explained:

Korzybski (2000) contended that a scientific orientation to language behavior would delay automatic evaluations from past experiences, resulting in careful exploration of past experiences in order to improve the human condition.

John Smith, through ignorance of the mechanism [time-binding], may use his nervous system as Fido; but Fido cannot copy Smith. Hence, the danger for Smith, but not for Fido. Fido has many of his own difficulties for his own survival, but, at least, he has no *self-imposed* conditions, mostly silly and harmful, such as Smith has ignorantly imposed on himself and others. (p. 8)

Fido is not trapped by language habits because he cannot access a language file labeled “resentment” when finding an empty bowl. Consequently, he eagerly wags his tail when the bowl is filled again. Unlike Fido, human beings are capable of using language to remember and share experiences with others, passing information from generation to generation.

To best use these time-binding capacities, Kodish and Kodish (2011) recommended discovering the following: “how to evaluate what we inherit from the past (our own past and the pasts of others and prior generations); how to sort out misinformation and add to our store of useful information; how to most effectively create a positive present and future” (p. 27). Korzybski (2000) contended that a scientific orientation to language behavior would delay automatic evaluations from past experiences, resulting in careful exploration of past experiences in order to improve the human condition.

Stockdale (2009b) proposed that we have the following obligations when we “bind time”:

1. Time-binding forms the basis for an ethical standard by which to evaluate human behavior. To what degree does the action or behavior promote, or retard time-binding?
2. Acknowledging our time-binding inheritance dispels us of the “self-made” notion and encourages us to “time-bind” for the benefit of those who follow. (p. 26)

Kodish and Kodish (2011) also proposed a personal time-binding obligation: we need to learn “how to make the most of our individual experiences” (p. 197), which means becoming conscious of individual abstraction. An awareness of abstraction will help us use our nervous systems, and, consequently, our language more efficiently.

SUMMARY

Korzybski (2000) was convinced that a scientific orientation toward language behavior could lead to effective time-binding and, thus, improve the human condition. He called this scientific approach, *general semantics*, a system to eliminate identification, or the “is of identity” proposed by Aristotle. Recognizing the changing nature of reality, Korzybski proposed general semantics formulations to help humans to create maps (language) that accurately represented their territories (empirical world). Moreover, if humans used this systematic approach, they would use their nervous systems and, consequently, their senses efficiently.

These general semantics formulations have been explored by a number of scholars since Korzybski (2000) first introduced this non-Aristotelian system in 1933. Wendell Johnson (1946) explored how language influences each step of the scientific process. Hayakawa and Hayakawa (1990) saw the study of language as a moral discipline. Stockdale (2009b) argued that humans have certain time-binding obligations. Kodish and Kodish (2011) encouraged individuals to make the most of personal time-binding opportunities. Responding to challenges to become more ethical communicators, we explore how to be more fully aware of the abstraction process in Chapter 2, by improving both verbal and nonverbal awareness.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Which definitions of general semantics are most like Korzybski's? Which one do you like best?
2. What is the significance of using a “scientific orientation” in your role as a student and as an employee?
3. In what settings and relationships do we need to remember “the map is not the territory” analogy the most?

CHAPTER 2: ABSTRACTION

Exploring Why the Map is not the Territory

The particular peepholes that define [our] outlook on the world become too small for [us] to see its large and exciting horizons.

—Wendell Johnson (1946, p. 30)

ABSTRACTION

When we “abstract,” we select small portions of reality to attend to and leave out the rest. In the *abstraction* process, our senses and locations, not to mention previous training and experiences, limit what we encounter of all that is going on in the world. Bois (1978) created the acronym “WIGO” from the phrase “what is going on,” using it to represent “all known levels of existence, from atomic elements to galactic spirals racing away from one another” (p. 78). I use *WIGO* whenever I refer to a world in process—the constant changing of microscopic and submicroscopic levels of existence.

“WIGO —
the constant
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existence.”

Korzybski (2000) used a rotary fan to demonstrate the impact of our senses on perceptual accuracy in this ever-changing environment. He selected this simple demonstration because it showed that what we “see” may not be what is really there. As Korzybski (2000) argued:

Let us recall, in this connection, the familiar example of a rotary fan, which is made up of separate radial blades, but which, when rotating with a certain velocity, gives the impression of a *solid disk*. In this case the “disk” is not “reality,” but a nervous integration, or abstraction from the rotating blades. We not only see the “disk” where there is no disk, but, if the blades rotate fast enough, we could not throw sand through them, as the sand would be too slow to get through before being struck by one of the blades. (p. 382)

Similarly, our other senses may lead us astray. For instance, when I was a young child, my grandparents encouraged me to taste something “new” when I was visiting them in Florida. I ate what looked and smelled like fried chicken; basing that smell and looks on my previous dining experiences, I assumed that it *was* chicken. However, when my grandfather explained that I was eating “frog legs,” I gagged. I was fairly certain at the time that the “frog” that my cousin and I chased around the backyard did not belong on my dinner plate!

Even though it was not logical, my emotional reaction demonstrates why Korzybski (2000) coined the term “semantic reaction” (p. 24). He proposed that we *use* intellect and emotion

during abstraction, and, thereby, create meaning as a whole being—as an “organism-as-a-whole-in-the-environment” (Korzybski, p. liii). Similarly, Pula (2000) explained a *semantic reaction* as “the total (‘emotional’-‘intellectual,’ psycho-logical) response of a human organism to a given” (p. 16–17). Another option for remembering to account for both an intellectual and emotional response during abstraction is to use the verb “*think-feel-evaluate*” (Institute of General Semantics Seminar, 2002). This hyphenated verb clearly alerts people of their abstracting. How might a debate about assault weapons ban be enhanced by each person remembering “I think-feel-evaluate” during a heated argument? If this hyphenated verb reminds individuals to account for the intellectual, emotional, *and* evaluative nature of their responses, perhaps it could also encourage them to remember others abstract as well.

Even when we are aware that we think-feel-evaluate, Chisholm (1945) cautioned that our nervous systems often report “facts,” even though we are making inferences, because of past conditioning:

The point is, we don’t really come to a new experience, whatever that new experience is, with an absolutely untrained nervous system, and ‘open mind.’ We just don’t come to a situation without ourselves having a history, a trained set of habitual reactions. (p. 9).

Our senses and previous training, thus, limit what we experience of WIGO. Recently, Christof Koch, a neurobiologist, underscored the impact of our nervous systems: “We’re now beginning to understand that what I see in my head is actually constructed by my head, by my neurons” (as cited in Stockdale, 2009b, p. 14).

To clearly delineate how people abstract and the ubiquitous nature of abstraction, Korzybski (2000) created the “*structural differential*” (see Figure 1, from Stockdale, 2009a). He advocated keeping the *structural differential* nearby because we need a visual reminder of this automatic process: we omit characteristics when we sense objects (“O” level) from all the events going on around us (“E” level), and leave out even more characteristics when label the object (“D” level; p. 474).

Korzybski (2000) proposed that the object we perceive (and label) represents “a mad dance of ‘electrons,’ which is known to consist of extremely complex dynamic processes of very fine structures, acted upon by, and reacting upon, the rest of the universe, inextricably connected with everything else and dependent on everything else” (p. 387). He used a “broken-off line” on a parabola to depict this “infinite number of characteristics” found in the microscopic and submicroscopic worlds, and he included small circles to represent the characteristics of the event at the “E” level. When our senses have perceived the object from the event level, we move to the “O,” or object, level, which Korzybski (2000) denoted with a “finite” size (the big circle) and “finite” characteristics (the small circles). Both the “O” and “E” levels occur in the nonverbal world.

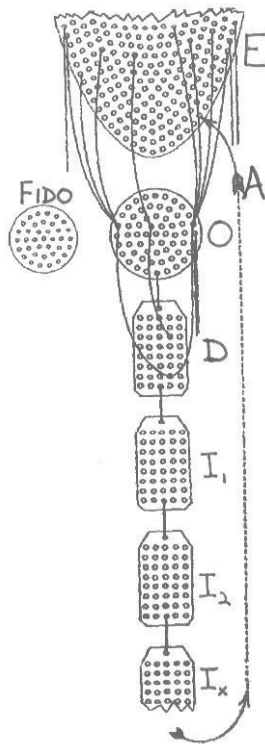


Figure 2.1: Korzybski's structural differential. Korzybski developed a visual reminder of the abstraction process.

When we finally use language to describe an object, we have reached the “D,” or descriptive, level of abstracting. As Korzybski (2000) demonstrated with the loose strings hanging from the parabola, the further we move away from nonverbal world, the fewer details we carry with us: “The number of characteristics which we ascribe by definition to the label is still smaller than the number of characteristics the object has” (p. 387). Animals, like Fido the dog (represented by the small circle), may abstract objects, but without language, animals do not have higher order abstractions on the “D” and “I” levels, nor are they capable of time-binding, as are humans.

The important thing to remember about abstraction is that we carry less and less of WIGO with us as we move from one level to the next: “The object is not the event but an abstraction from it, and the label is not the object nor the event, but a still further abstraction” (Korzybski, 2000, p. 387). The strings on the model presented in Figure 1 represent the nervous system's limited capabilities because the strings connect very few small circles from the “E” to the “O” levels, and even fewer from the “O” to the “D” levels.

Once we realize how little language represents WIGO, we further understand why Korzybski developed these map–territory analogies and Anton (n.d.) provided updated corollaries: the map is *not* the territory (there is no *not* territory) and the map cannot cover *all* of

the territory (a map is *part* of the territory). When I tasted the “chicken” offered by my grandparents, my map was not representative of what I was really eating, nor did it cover the entire dining experience.

The *false-to-fact* results of abstraction can be costly, especially when we use an already inaccurate map as the “fact” to make further inferences at other levels.

Korzybski (2000) also proposed that maps are “self-reflexive” and warned about what happens when we use language to talk about language:

If we call the level [I] an abstraction of *second order*, we must call an *abstraction from this abstraction* an abstraction of *third order*, [I1]. Once an abstraction of third order has been produced, it becomes, in turn, a fact on record, potentially a stimulus, and can be abstracted further and a statement about it, which becomes an abstraction of the fourth order [I2]. This process has no definite limits, for, whenever statements of any order are made, we can always make a statement about them, and so produce an abstraction of still higher order [Ix]. (p. 392)

Hence, the inferences that we call “facts” are really produced by abstracting limited characteristics of an object, which is why Korzybski (2000) advocated for an elimination of the “false to fact ‘is’ of identity” (p. 474). If I am shopping for a laundry detergent that normally comes in a blue box, and I scan the shelves only for blue boxes, I might overlook my detergent in its new white box. When I act as if the box “is” blue, I take my “false” map and operate as if it were “fact.” The *false-to-fact* results of abstraction can be costly, especially when we use an already inaccurate map as the “fact” to make further inferences at other levels.

To further complicate this process, we can use the same word when we are referring to different levels of abstraction. Chisholm (1945) demonstrated this problem with the statement, “never say never” (p. 54), explaining that the phrase included a behavior and a command to complete the behavior: one inference level is the behavior, whereas another inference level is what to do about the behavior. In Chapter 1, I gave the example about “being angry that I am angry,” which could result in not sharing my experiences of age discrimination. I am sure you can think of personal experiences with both of these statements and other such phrases, “I am in love with love” and “I am thinking about thinking.”

Elson (2010) suggested that we need to teach “levels literacy”—an “alertness to the interplay or relationship between levels . . . [and an] alertness to the implications of such relationships for oneself and others” (pp. 173–174). She thought that our failure to note that one level is “about” another may keep us from being conscious of abstracting: “One message component, in other words, is an observation of, or inference, evaluation about the other, and/or represents information about the other’s context that qualifies its meaning” (p. 165). She proposed teaching about levels with koans, such as the one below, as a way to operationalize differing levels of abstraction:

You are a student of Zen and the Master asks, “Does a dog have a Buddha nature?” Then he warns, “If you answer falsely I will hit you with this stick. If you say nothing I will hit you with this stick.”

Question: What should you do?

Answer: Take away his stick.

The answer takes an emergent perspective not only in that it reconciles and transcends the yes–no frame of the question, it also transcends the frame of the question and answer itself, and the frame of master and student. Transcending such frames requires an awareness that such frames are in play, as opposed to an inhabiting of the frames as a fish inhabits water (i.e., without awareness of the levels environment). Reading the levels of such a question would be the goal of levels literacy. (p. 175)

The ability to develop an awareness of levels, an understanding of higher order abstracting, is what makes time-binding possible for humans and not for animals. Time-binding was Korzybski’s (2000) great hope for humankind to learn from “the experiences of all past generations” (p. 394). Consequently, if we use the scientific method to challenge higher levels of abstraction and to find lower level descriptions, then our language will more closely resemble the territories—the nonverbal world—in which we find ourselves. It is these nonverbal and verbal worlds that we explore in the next two sections.

NONVERBAL AWARENESS

Knowing that there are more details in WIGO than our senses will ever discern, how can we improve our nonverbal awareness? First, we must distinguish between the “nonverbal” world in the abstraction process and the “nonverbal” cues known as nonverbal communication, which we interpret on the verbal level. Nonverbal cues can stand alone and/or accompany language: “physical appearance, body movements, gestures, facial expressions, eye movements, touching behaviors, the voice and the way people use objects, time and space to communication” (Morreale, Spitzberg, & Barge, 2007, p. 110). Similar to language, nonverbal cues vary across cultures and contexts: “In Japan, a nod means that one is listening—but not that one necessarily understands” (Martin & Nakayama, 2011, p. 171).

The nonverbal world that is represented by “the mad dance of electrons” (event level) and our senses (object level) is what I mean by “*nonverbal awareness*” in this section. Stockdale (2009b) called an awareness of the nonverbal world “sensory awareness” (p. 31). Korzybski (2000) recommended that we use the structural differential to explain our experiences, thereby engaging “all available nervous channels” (p. 475): seeing, hearing, speaking and moving. He proposed how to use the structural differential to make this work:

Thus, through the ear we stress verbally the formula of the rejections of the “is” of identity by indicating with our finger the different orders of abstractions, in the meantime, affecting the eye while we repeat “this is *not* this.” We utilize our kinesthetic centres, not only by pointing the finger to different levels, but also by making broad motions with our hands, indicating the stratifications. We should train in both horizontal and vertical stratifications, always using the hands. The stratification indicates the differences, or ordering of different order abstractions; the vertical stratification indicates the difference between “man” and “animal” and the differences between the different absolute individuals. In both cases the semantic effect of the “is” of identity is counteracted. (p. 475)

Students, however, seem to appreciate Stockdale’s (2009b) abstracting model (Figure 2). They find the nonverbal world easier to comprehend because of the five senses pictured and the phrase “what I sense is not what happened” (p. 29). Additionally, students appreciate the explanation of the verbal levels: “what we describe is not what we sense” and “what it means is not what we describe” (p. 29).

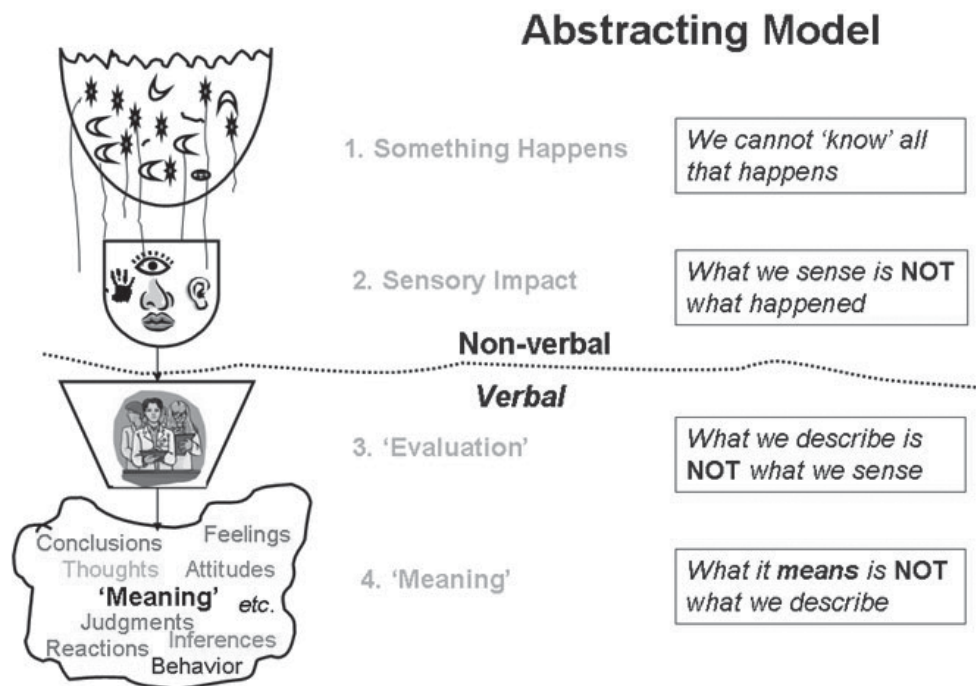


Figure 2.2: Stockdale’s abstracting model. He revised Korzybski’s structural differential, including words and pictures to explain the abstraction process.

To complement using structural differential to explain recent miscommunication events with others, we use Kodish and Kodish’s (2011) “sensory awareness” exercises to become more aware of the nonverbal world. Have someone read the following exercise to you.

Close your eyes to help you experience a world without words:

- What are you doing right now? As you [hear] these words let yourself become aware of how you are sitting or lying down or standing . . .
- How can you allow yourself to feel the support of what holds you up?
- How much do you need to hold yourself up?
- Where do you feel unnecessary tensions?
- Do you feel tension in your jaw?
- In your face?
- Where do you feel ease?
- How clearly do you feel yourself breathing?
- Many events are occurring inside and outside your skin right now. Can you allow yourself nonverbally to experience these activities? When you focus unnecessarily on labeling and explaining, you may miss something important going on in and around you. (Kodish & Kodish, p. 105–106)

Now focus on one sense at a time, completing each of the nonverbal awareness exercises on different days:

- Day 1: Touch the cloth of your clothes. Notice the sensation in your finger, your hands. Allow the sensations to travel where they will. Move to a different part of your clothes. Notice any differences in sensations.
- Day 2: Listen to whatever sounds come to you right now . . . Do you find yourself labeling what you hear? Listen again and this time if you begin to label sounds just notice that you are doing it and allow yourself to come back to the sound again.
- Day 3: Choose something to look at. Without words, take in what comes to your eyes. Continue looking: what else come to you?
- Day 4: Consider the sounds, sights, aromas around you as structures to explore. Pick an “object” such as a stone or a pencil. Examine it closely, silently, for several minutes. Use “all” of your senses: see, hear, touch, smell, taste, move it. How well can you do this without labeling or describing? (adapted from Kodish & Kodish, 2011, p. 106)

I like to use an apple for the object noted in the last exercise to ensure that I focus on the senses of taste and smell. Explore answers to the following two questions after each nonverbal awareness exercise:

1. What “structures” emerge as a function of this sense? (Awareness of abstraction)
2. What “meanings” do you discern? (Awareness of evaluation)

Keep your answers from each exercise, noting progress or lack thereof toward experiencing the nonverbal world. Many of us in the United States struggle with such exercises because we have not been taught to be silent, let alone to find value in silence. However, these exercises encourage “semantic relaxation,” making us more aware of ourselves as “map makers” (Kodish & Kodish, 2011, p. 104).

Korzybski (2000) believed that because both “affective, or ‘emotional,’ responses and blood pressure are neurologically closely connected, [then] it is fundamental for ‘emotional’ balance to have ‘normal’ blood pressure, and *vice versa*” (p. lix). Much like the relaxation techniques you might have learned in a yoga or exercise class, Korzybski worked with students to relax tensions, to be “more open to their experiences, better able to take in and evaluate information” (as cited in Kodish & Kodish, 2011, p. 104).

Ultimately, these experiential approaches help us practice what Korzybski meant by an ***extensional orientation***: giving “priority to ‘facts’ or nonverbal happenings rather than verbal definitions and labels, and maintaining our consciousness of abstracting” (Kodish & Kodish, 2011, p. 98).

In addition to the nonverbal awareness exercises focused on our five senses, Kodish and Kodish (2011) recommended the “means whereby” to focus on the “how” (p. 108) we move through the world. I have students practice getting up and sitting down, and walking around a building, trying to focus on “how” they move. They find this nearly impossible to do, as their senses focus on the weather, others’ movements, and the terrains across which they traverse.

Ultimately, these experiential approaches help us practice what Korzybski meant by an ***extensional orientation***: giving “priority to ‘facts’ or nonverbal happenings rather than verbal definitions and labels, and maintaining our consciousness of abstracting” (Kodish & Kodish, 2011, p. 98). To complement our newly acquired nonverbal awareness, we then move to building an awareness of the limitations of language itself—a ***verbal awareness***.

VERBAL AWARENESS

Korzybski (2000) argued for a “complete denial of ‘identity,’” an elimination of ***identification***, to help us match the structure of our language to the nonverbal world it represents (p. 10). In other words, we need to challenge our perceptions because, as we learned earlier, what we describe is *not* what we sense, and what we sense is *not* what happened. Korzybski was concerned with humans confusing these levels of abstraction: “When humans who are engaged in abstracting *identify* (confuse) orders of abstracting they are “identifying” . . . [and] *identification* [becomes] the primary mechanism of misevaluation” (as cited in Pula, 2000, p. 23). Similarly, Chisholm (1945) explained what happens when we confuse levels of abstraction:

What I say about it *is* what it is
 My statement = truth about subject of the statement
 WORDS=TRUTH
 What I say about anything = what it is (p. 3)

Unfortunately, our nervous systems may prevent us from knowing what “it” is for sure but our language allows us to operate as if words, or labels, represent reality. The need for

structural changes in our language is apparent in the following example:

If it *is* what I say it is, it is perfectly safe for me to guide myself entirely in terms of my verbal formulation. I don't have to look out at the world again at all because I have in me some words which are equivalent to it.

But what is *in* the cans in a grocery store is more important than the labels wound around them: if a can containing spinach is by mistake labeled pumpkin, no amount of looking at the label will make the pie of the contents palatable pie for anyone but Popeye. Yet identification behavior equates label and thing labeled, and assumes I can safely guide my reactions by the label. (Chisholm, 1945, p. 3)

“Yet identification behavior equates label and thing labeled, and assumes I can safely guide my reactions by the label.”

Even if we laugh at this fuzzy logic, how many times do we react to labels on a daily basis? Labeling some people as “kind” and others as “rude,” we move through our interactions without an awareness of how people change. This is why some general semanticists advocate for elimination of the verb “to be,” proposing that we write in “*E-prime*,” avoiding the “is” of identity (Bourland, 1989). Murphy (1992) explained that the verb “is” joins “nouns at different levels of abstraction [Mary is a woman]” and joins “a noun to an adjective that neither completely nor permanently qualifies it [Mary is cold]” (p. 20).

Write a paragraph about your best friend and then check it for forms of the verb “to be.” See how many times you use the “*is of identity*” to link nouns as if they were identical, on the same level of abstraction (e.g., my friend is a physician). Similarly, how often did you find the “*is of prediction*,” linking nouns with adjectives as if personality characteristics remain constant (e.g., she is amazing)? Just because I am “outgoing” today does not mean that I will act that way in a few days, let alone in a few years.

Murphy (1992) continued with more problems with the verb “to be”:

. . . the verb makes possible the widespread use of the passive voice, conditions us to accept detours around crucial issues of causality (“Mistakes were made”). It makes possible the raising of unanswerable, because hopelessly formulated, questions (“What is truth?”). It makes possible, too, the construction of a variety of phrases (“As is well known . . .”) that casually sweep reasoning under a rug. One also finds the verb *to be* pressed into service on behalf of stereotypical labeling (“Scotsmen are stingy”) and overbroad existential generalization (“I am just no good”). These issues aside, semanticists say, the verb *to be*, broadly

speaking, imputes an Aristotelian neatness, rigidity, and permanence to the world around us and to the relationships among all things in it—conditions that rarely have a basis in dynamic reality. (p. 20)

Such examples demonstrate the need to scrutinize the verb “to be” in our daily thinking, writing, and speaking.

Consequently, we can fully appreciate the need for verbal *and* nonverbal awareness in light of the abstraction process. The following chapters of this text help us to put this general semantics methodology into daily practice. Ultimately, we want to avoid being trapped at higher levels of abstraction and pursuing unattainable goals, the result of which is well described by Wendell Johnson (1946):

What he seeks to escape is an *absolute* failure, what he anxiously pursues is an *absolute success*—and they do not exist outside his aching head. What he does in fact achieve is a series of *relative successes*; and these are all that he, these are all that anyone, can ever achieve.

In spite of all the prizes he captures, “success” eludes him! It eludes him for the remarkably obvious, but persistently unnoticed, reason that it is merely a verbal mirage. What he seeks to escape is an *absolute* failure, what he anxiously pursues is an *absolute success*—and they do not exist outside his aching head. What he does in fact achieve is a series of *relative successes*; and these are all that he, these are all that anyone, can ever achieve. But in the midst of *relative* abundance, *absolutistic* idealists suffer the agonies of famine. (pp. 5–6)

SUMMARY

To demonstrate how our nervous systems limit perceptions of reality, Korzybski (2000) created a visual representation of the abstraction process—the structural differential. He proposed that this diagram could be used to explain semantic reactions, noting both intellectual and emotional responses of human beings during abstraction. Moreover, the structural differential explains how we think-feel-evaluate, leaving out characteristics as we move from the event (WIGO) to object level (our senses), and even more details as we use language in the descriptive and inference levels.

Because maps are self-reflexive, we can use language to talk about language, often confusing descriptive and inference levels. Korzybski (2000) warned about this “false-to-fact ‘is’ of identity”: using an inaccurate map to make further inferences. Elson (2010) proposed teaching about levels literacy, acknowledging the interplay between levels of abstraction.

Korzybski (2000) advocated using of the structural differential to explain our experiences because we could involve several senses and our kinesthetic centers when we state, “this is *not* this,” engaging the ear, with the eye focused on the motion of the hands, indicating

the big distance between WIGO and inferences. Additionally, Kodish and Kodish (2011) proposed that nonverbal awareness exercises help people explore how structures and meaning emerge as a function of their senses.

Chisholm's (1945) example about mislabeled cans of pumpkin underscored the fallacy of identification. These kind of mistakes might be what encouraged scholars to advocate using E-prime, completely eliminating any form of "to be." Murphy used the "is of identity" and "is of prediction" to demonstrate how this verb can link nouns as if they were on the same level of abstraction, when, in reality, they are not.

In the next three chapters, we move this newfound *awareness* of abstraction to *action*—correcting faulty language behaviors in our interactions with others. We explore how patterns of miscommunication occur when we overlook the basic premises of general semantics. In Chapter 3, we see how *allness* occurs when we forget that "a map cannot cover *all* its territory, so any map is only part of the territory." In Chapter 4, we discover that *inference–observation confusion* involves disregarding how "maps refer to parts of the territory becoming *reflexive* to other parts at different levels of abstraction." In Chapter 5, we address how *bypassing* results from ignoring that "a map is *not* the 'territory,' so there is no not territory."

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. How might an awareness of "small circles" and "strings" in the structural differential have helped you better understand causes of a recent problem you had with a friend?
2. How might "sensory awareness" have helped you to better understand a recent argument you had with a parent or grandparent?
3. Write a paragraph to a future employer/graduate school/internship supervisor explaining who you are without using the "is of identity" and the "is of prediction."

CHAPTER 3: ALLNESS

Discovering It is not Possible to Know Everything about Anything

In Korzybski's view, knowledge and uncertainty belong together . . . to live with both required courage—the courage to act despite imperfect knowledge and the courage to self-reflect and self-correct when needed, i.e., with frequency.

—Bruce Kodish (2011, p. 8)

DEFINITION: ALLNESS

When prompted to think of a “know-it-all,” we often envision other people and rarely see how our language may appear indisputable to others. We might agree with Haney (1992) that it is impossible to “know and say everything about something” or that what we say “includes all that is important about the subject” (p. 321), but our language choices often include words of certainty, tones of finality, and absolutes (e.g., always, never, all, and none)

Haney (1992) named this pattern of miscommunication *allness*, defining it as follows:

The attitude of those who are unaware that they are abstracting and thus assume that what they say or know is absolute, definitive, complete, certain, all-inclusive, positive, final—and all there is (or at least all there is that is important or relevant) to say or know about the subject. (p. 323)

Even though we are now aware of how “we inescapably abstract,” reducing people, places, and things to one-word descriptors, how many of us will remember to introduce family members with more than a job title? Will we distinguish colleagues from their political and religious affiliations? We easily forget that we might be “focusing-on-some-details-while-neglecting-the-rest,” thus making it easier to act as if what we know is “all that we really need to know” (Haney, 1992, p. 323).

Allness occurs because we forget the general semantics premise that “a map cannot cover *all* of its territory, so any map is only *part* of the territory.” Korzybski (2000) demonstrated this principle by asking students to tell “‘everything’ or ‘all’ about the object [an apple] in question” (p. 471). When he had collected all of the students’ responses and exhausted their patience, he would cut the apple into pieces, eventually using a magnifying glass to demonstrate that “they did *not* tell us ‘all’ about the apple” (p. 472). For instance, how many of us know that when cutting an apple in half around the middle, we will discover a “star” formed by the core and seeds?

As the following contributing factors to allness demonstrate, even if we monitor our language choices, we often act as if what we are saying, writing, or thinking includes *all* that is important about a subject, person, and event at that moment. The correctives will

help us to remember that our maps (words) do not account for *all* of the territory—that is, all that is going on in the empirical world.

CONTRIBUTING FACTORS: ALLNESS

One of the contributing factors to allness is an *unawareness of abstraction* that results in an assumption that we have covered it all. Kodish and Kodish (2011) explained why this unawareness might happen: “The scientific ‘object’ is not the ‘object’ as you or we experience it but seems to consist of events, processes, changing relations at the level of the very small, smaller than we can view even with a microscope” (p. 60). For instance, we might remember learning about the submicroscopic proton, electrons, and quarks in a high school classroom, but we rarely remember that language is an abstraction of an event, which, itself, is an abstraction of all that is happening in this submicroscopic world. To communicate more effectively with others, we must be conscious of how we abstract to delay acting on limited details gathered by our nervous systems.

We also *abstract different details* than others do, leading us to assume that what we know is what others know. How many of us have been guilty of arguing a point (e.g., who is to blame for a missing item) only to find out later that we did not know important details? Haney (1992) contended that the consequence of engaging in such behavior is “the rigid drawing of lines and unintelligent, destructive conflict” (p. 325). Perhaps we need to listen for understanding first. Covey (2004) argued for “seeking first to understand, then to be understood when we listen with the intent to understand others” (p. 153). Listening to understand means identifying “how” we abstracted different details, not who is right and who is to blame.

Another contributing factor of allness occurs when we act on the assumption that “our experience with one or a few members holds for all” (Haney, 1992, p. 327). We *evaluate a group* based on limited interactions with individuals from that group. That assumption has particularly dangerous consequences when we assign stereotypes to people solely on the basis of the political party or religious community with which they associate. We often forget to distinguish between the group and the *individuals* within that group. How many of your friends and family members who are registered Republicans or Democrats identify with *all* of the policies advocated by Republican or Democratic candidates?

Finally, Haney (1992) suggested that as we age, we may become “*closed to the new or different*” (p. 329). Even though we often accuse parents and grandparents of being closed-minded, this

Unawareness of abstraction – I have limited details due to my nervous system

Abstracting different details – I assume that what I know is what you know

Evaluating a group – I unconsciously assume that my experience with one or a few members holds for all.

Closed to the new or different – I assume my way is the correct way

indifference is not just a problem for older generations. I often ask students to compare and contrast the insatiable curiosity of a kindergartner with the quiet classroom demeanor of a college student. Students suggest that they have often censored curiosity because of concern for peer and instructor evaluations. This high self-monitoring might keep them from learning new ideas.

Furthermore, Haney (1992) explained why people might be more afraid of change as they age:

As we grow older, more and more of what we learn is actually *relearning*. To learn something new or especially something different may require we relinquish something we already hold—that we discard certain accepted assumptions and cherished beliefs. This can be an unpleasant, uncomfortable experience. But some people find it a distinctly threatening state of affairs. And when we are threatened we often resort to some defense mechanism or another. Allness can be particularly effective bastion at such times. (p.330)

This rationale reminds us that we can delay “automatic” evaluation when encountering non-life-threatening situations. We need courage to do so.

CORRECTIVES: ALLNESS

Because we know it is impossible *not* to abstract, Haney (1992) argued that the “antidote for allness is not the *avoidance* but the *awareness* of abstracting” (p. 335). What follows are his suggestions for how to become more fully aware of the abstraction process.

“we should expect
to be proven
wrong”

Develop a Genuine Humility

When we remember that abstraction inhibits our ability to cover everything, we find it easier to be humble. Haney (1992) defined *humility* as “a deep conviction that you can never know or say everything about anything” (p. 335). I like the humor he provided to help us remember these limits:

Bailiff: Do you swear to tell the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth, so help you God?

Witness: Look, if I knew the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth—I would *be* God! (p. 335)

When I first learned about general semantics, Professor Keller suggested that we should expect to be proven wrong; as Haney (1992) cited Disraeli, “To be conscious that you are ignorant is a great first step toward knowledge” (p. 335). Perhaps when we fully understand how little we really do know, we will be more curious and ask more clarifying questions.

Add (or at Least Silently Acknowledging) Etcetera

Korzybski (2000) named “etc.” as one of five extensional devices to achieve an extensional orientation. Haney (1992) summarized the use of etc. as follows: “When you see a period in my writing or hear one in my talking, please translate it as etcetera. It will remind both of us that I have not covered everything” (p. 337). Consequently, adding etc. to our thinking processes reminds us to be aware of abstraction. As rebuttals race through our minds, perhaps we can pause long enough to remember that there is more we might not know—the etcetera still waiting to be discovered.

Develop a genuine humility– I am aware that I omit details because of my nervous system
Make a habit of adding etceteras –I will add an “etc” when I hear or see a “period”
Ask myself, “Do I have an all-wall?”– I will remain open

Haney (1992) warned that, when talking, we should not “make a fetish of conspicuously ‘etcetering’ every statement” (p. 337), as doing so may lead others to evaluate us as lacking understanding or having adequate support for our conclusions. Adding “etc.” to our communication skill set is best tolerated, and perhaps most useful, when we apply it first to our thoughts. For example, we can think to ourselves, “There is more here than meets the eye,” using the familiar idiom to remind us to silently acknowledge the etcetera.

Ask Yourself, “Do I have an All-wall?”

In addition to realizing that abstraction inhibits our ability to cover everything, Haney (1992) proposed exploring how often we are closed to new and different ideas. For example, when we have a chance to hear a new perspective, do we listen carefully and then paraphrase what we hear? Many of us rarely paraphrase because we have been preparing rebuttals instead of listening. Morreale, Spitzberg, and Barge (2007) outlined various opportunities to withhold judgment during the three stages of the listening process:

1. *Receiving*: postpone evaluation of the message
2. *Constructing meaning*: set aside bias and prejudice
3. *Responding*: clarify meaning by asking questions. (p. 149)

Monitoring how often we listen to new and differing viewpoints could help us to decide whether we have an “all-wall.” Similarly, asking a close friend and family member about how well we listen might provide invaluable insight. Who knows how much we will learn when we remember to postpone evaluation as we receive their messages and set aside bias when *constructing meaning* about our interactions.

SUMMARY

Allness occurs because we forget that we are abstracting, overlooking the premise that “a map cannot cover *all* of its territory, so any map is only *part* of the territory.” Because we

are unaware that we abstract, we do not remember that others abstract different details than we do. Furthermore, we neglect to distinguish between a group and the individuals within the group, and we often are closed to new and different ideas as we grow older.

Haney (1992) advocated for an awareness of abstraction to combat allness. If we develop a genuine humility that we cannot possibly know everything about anything, we will silently add etc. to our thinking and avoid acting as if we have an all-wall. Furthermore, when we delay evaluations of messages as we listen to others and ask others questions to clarify meaning, we are using specific behaviors that demonstrate an understanding of the general semantics premise that “a map cannot cover its territory, so any map is only part of the territory.”

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. How might you teach the pitfalls of allness to a friend?
2. Compare and contrast allness and abstraction.
3. What personal correctives will you choose to address allness this week?

CASE STUDIES

The cases in this section include characters who are unaware of their allness behaviors. The students who developed these cases were familiar with the contributing factors of allness, and they created characters with such faulty language habits.

After reading Case 3.1, identify one contributing factor of allness (e.g., unawareness of abstraction, abstracting different details, or evaluating groups) exhibited by each character in the case: Georgina, Chris, Alice, and Phil. Use the “Correctives-in-Action” worksheet to define the contributing factors of allness for each character in the case (see Figure 3.1). Describe how each character exhibited the factor in the “Explanation” space that is provided.

Once you have identified contributing factors for each character, work in groups to discuss the correctives for each character. Create a new version of the case—a role play that involves each group member taking the role of a character—adding characters if needed. Each group member, then, demonstrates one of the correctives for inference—observation. For example, if the character, Georgina, needs to exhibit “a genuine humility,” immediately following her training speech, she might ask callers to explain how to complete a pledge card.

After each group member has volunteered to play a role, be sure to define the corrective (e.g., develop a genuine humility, add etc., or question all-wall) and include an explanation of how each character will use this corrective on the worksheet (see Figure 3.1). Rehearse the role play. Your group is ready to present the role-play to the class.

Role-playing the corrective ensures that you move from merely an *awareness* of allness to *actions* that address that pattern of miscommunication. Even if these new language behaviors feel and sound contrived, people use humor as a catalyst for how to use these correctives outside the classroom. This brainstorming completes the experiential learning cycle. For example, students looking at this case agreed that Georgina's character would be teased mercilessly if she really announced to callers, "I am aware that I omit details because of my nervous system." Students also agreed that asking a coworker to restate directions would call attention to the potential for missed details.

This case study protocol is repeated in each of the next three chapters. After the class understands the sample case, groups choose one of the three additional cases to analyze. Groups follow the same sequence as they did with the sample case: (a) individuals read the case, identify characters, and define contributing factors for each character in a case before meeting as a group: (b) groups meet to identify, define, and discover how to demonstrate correctives for each character in their case: and (c) groups role play a new version of the case that is followed by a discussion about how to use the correctives in the future.

Allness Case 3.1 and its corresponding "Correctives-in Action" worksheet (see Figure 3.1) appears on the next two pages. The additional cases are found on the final three pages of this chapter: Case 3.2: *Exams*; Case 3.3: *Student IDs*; and Case 3.4: *Paperless policy*.

Allness Case 3.1: *Phonathon*

Georgina, a senior business major, started working as a supervisor for the college phonathon team at the beginning of fall semester. After being a team member for 2 years, she looked forward to her new role. Her duties included creating mailing labels, training new callers, and ensuring that experienced callers stay on task.

On her first day at work, Georgina's boss, Chris, told her to train callers how to properly fill out the pledge cards. Alumni received these pledge cards after agreeing to donate. Georgina's speech included directions to "always add an ID number" and "never turn in a pledge card without a note on the back." That night, she showed callers how to fill out a pledge card and asked them to start calling.

Alice, a new team member, worked that first Monday night. After hearing Georgina's instructions, Alice promptly began calling. On the first pledge card, Alice felt confident that it was filled out correctly. Unfortunately, she forgot a vital section of the pledge card: the ID number. Alice continued this way for every pledge that she received that night. The next day, Chris had to locate every ID number for Alice's pledge, and he was frustrated that he had to add this tedious task to his normal workload.

Confident that Wednesday evening would go better, Chris reminded Georgina to instruct callers about the correct way to complete pledge cards. That night, after Georgina gave her training speech, callers asked a number of questions. Phil, a second-year team member, called Georgina over to ask questions about each pledge card; other experienced callers asked a number of questions as well. Consequently, the team members did not make many calls. The following day, Chris wondered if Georgina was having difficulty explaining the pledge-card procedure when he saw how few calls had been completed.

Thursday night was the end of the calling week for the team. When Georgina asked if there were any questions, no one raised a hand. She felt that Thursday night went smoothly because callers remained on task and did not ask any questions. She did not realize, however, that the room was full of new callers who were afraid to ask questions. When Chris saw the pledge cards the next day, he was livid, as they had even more missing ID numbers than on Monday night. He needed to get to the bottom of this right away and scheduled a meeting with Georgina for later that afternoon.

Correctives-in-Action Worksheet for Allness Case 3.1: *Phonathon*

Character	Contributing Factor (define, explain)	Corrective (demonstrate, define, explain)
Georgina	<p>Definition: <i>Abstract different details</i>—I assume that what I know is what you know.</p> <p>Explanation: When Georgina uses “always” and “never,” she assumes that callers will then use IDs and include notes, like she does.</p>	<p>Definition: <i>Develop a genuine humility</i>—I am aware that I omit details because of my nervous system.</p> <p>Explanation: Georgina recognizes that she might leave out information, so she asks individuals to restate her directions and encourages them to ask questions.</p>
Chris	<p>Definition: <i>Unawareness of abstraction</i>—I have limited details due to my nervous system.</p> <p>Explanation: Chris is unaware that he has limited details about Georgina and the callers. Many things are happening outside the detection of his nervous system (e.g., callers not listening and cards not printed clearly).</p>	<p>Definition: <i>Adding ecetera</i>—I will add an “etc.” when I hear or see a “period.”</p> <p>Explanation: Chris recognizes that there is much to be discovered about phonathon activities, so he brainstorms with Georgina about other factors, the ecetera that may be affecting the callers (e.g., fatigue, long calls with alumni, and why IDs are needed).</p>
Alice	<p>Definition: <i>Closed to new and different</i>—I assume my way is the correct way.</p> <p>Explanation:</p>	<p>Definition: <i>Questioning “all-wall”</i>—I will remain open.</p> <p>Explanation:</p>
Phil	<p>Definition: <i>Evaluating a group</i>—I unconsciously assume that my experience with one or few members holds for all</p> <p>Explanation:</p>	<p>Definition:</p> <p>Explanation:</p>
Additional Character	<p>Definition:</p> <p>Explanation:</p>	<p>Definition:</p> <p>Explanation:</p>

Figure 3.1: Corrective-in-action worksheet for Allness Case 3.1. This worksheet helps students identify, define, and explain contributing factors for each character. It can be used to define and explain how to demonstrate correctives.

Allness Case 3.2: Exams

Sue walked into Professor Smith's classroom looking like she just rolled out of bed. She moped over to her seat wearing sweatpants and a t-shirt. Sue, a senior English major and good student, did not have a good morning. She stayed up late finishing a paper, overslept, and nearly missed Professor Smith's Colonial History class that morning.

Similarly, Professor Smith could not contain his foul mood. During his previous class, students whispered throughout the lecture and then asked questions about material that he just had covered. Not only did they not pay attention to his lecture but they got angry when he handed back an examination. He did not feel like dealing with difficult students today, especially when they wanted to argue about the exams that he spent hours developing and grading. If the students just paid attention, they would not get bad grades, he thought to himself.

As he returned the exams, he explained, "If you feel you have a right answer and I marked it wrong, you may explain your answer to receive partial credit."

Sue raised her hand because even though she only missed one question, she was sure that she had the right answer. When Professor Smith called on her, she asked, "Could we discuss question 5?"

"Sure. How can I help?"

"The question is 'What shape is the Earth?' I answered that it is 'flat' and you marked it wrong."

"That is the wrong answer."

"To me, the question did not give enough detail, so I thought you wanted the answer from the colonist's point of view because this is a Colonial History class."

"I provided feedback about why you missed points. Please read those comments and come see me during office hours."

Having already read the feedback, Sue was angry that they could not finish their discussion. She slammed her paper down and stormed out of the room.

Later that day, Sue had another class where the professor returned exams and asked if anyone had questions regarding exam scores. Sue had a question, but remembering how Professor Smith had embarrassed her the class period before, she decided not to ask it. She returned her exam and decided that she needed to go for a run immediately following class as running always helped her feel less stressed.

Allness Case 3.3: Student IDs

It was 1:00 am on a crisp fall morning. Nearly 20 students were studying in a library computer lab when Officer Jones, a new campus security officer, was finishing his late night rounds. He first approached a group of four students who were working on a project for their small group communication class; he requested that the students present their university IDs. He knew that the student handbook stated that students should have their university IDs with them at all times, so he was sure his checking for IDs would be no problem.

“I need to see each person’s ID, please” Officer Jones said calmly.

“Excuse me?” Shane asked. “I have gone to this school for 4 years, and I have never had to show my ID in a computer lab.”

“I’m sorry,” Officer Jones explained. “I’m going to need to see your ID, or I will have to escort you from the premises.”

“Let’s just listen to him,” said Jessica, a freshman, who nervously tried to convince the others to obey the request. She had heard a lot of stories about how campus security was very strict when enforcing the rules, even going so far as to escort students off campus in handcuffs.

“I don’t understand this!” exclaimed Eli, a sophomore international student. “Why do campus employees think that they have the right to take away student privileges?” Eli had a “run-in” with the registrar’s office earlier that day. They told him that it would take an extra year for him to finish his degree because he was missing several requirements.

“This policy is clearly stated in the student handbook. Please get your IDs out now,” Officer Jones said. He was tired of the students disrespecting his authority. Earlier in the week, he and the other security officers had to endure criticism from students who had been drinking at a party. Because another officer had just quit, Officer Jones had to pick up extra shifts around the campus, so he knew that his reputation was growing as the “new guy.”

“I live off campus, so I don’t have my ID. I have not had a reason to carry it,” Molly, a junior student, explained. “It’s really late and we are just trying to finish our project. Can’t you let it go this one time?”

“I am afraid not,” Officer Jones stated. He was tired of students disobeying the rules, so he sounded annoyed. “Those of you who cannot show me your ID need to exit the library now. If you would read the student handbook, this would not be such an ordeal.”

“I hate that students can’t get anything done without adult interference!” Eli protested angrily.

“Let’s all leave,” Jessica stammered. “I will finish the project from my room and e-mail it you.”

Shane rolled his eyes and muttered, “As a senior, I need to be in the library late to finish my senior projects. This seems unfair because we are not bothering anyone.”

“I’ll remember my ID the next time,” Molly apologized as the three of them left the computer lab.

Officer Jones watched as the students exited the lab, and scanned the room for a friendly face to begin the next ID check.

Allness Case 3.4: Paperless Policy

After surviving two difficult lectures, Amber made a beeline to the campus store where students retrieved packages because she had a package waiting for her. As a college junior, she stills gets excited when there is a package waiting because it means that somebody cares. She walked up to the counter and smiled as she requested her package.

Agatha, an experienced employee, explained, “Did you read the e-mail we just sent? You cannot pick up your package until 11:00 am.”

“But I have class at 11:00, and its 10:50, so may I have the package a little early? We used to get packages whenever the campus store was open, so why did that that policy have to change?”

Agatha tried again, “You should have received an e-mail telling you this. Policies change.”

Beth, a new supervisor, overheard the conversation and intervened, “What seems to be the problem here?”

“I cannot get my package and I have class in 10 minutes!” exclaimed Amber.

“I told her the same thing that I tell all students: no one claims packages until 11:00,” Agatha emphasized, aggravated by college students who do not read e-mail.

Beth sensed the frustration and explained, “I created this paperless policy. Do you know how long it took us to create all those yellow slips of paper? Now we send you an e-mail in the morning and you retrieve your package at lunch time.”

Amber, clearly taken aback by how much trouble a mere package was causing, sadly thought to herself how much she will miss receiving the golden slips of paper in the mail, which reminded her of *Willy Wonka and the Chocolate Factory* movie. On a more practical note, she wished that the policy would not have to change because some students did not have time for lunch. Unfortunately, she did not have time to discuss this matter any further today or she would be late to class.

CHAPTER 4: INFERENCE–OBSERVATION CONFUSION

Distinguishing Between Observation and Inference

Premature judgment often prevents us from seeing what is directly in front of us.

—S. I. Hayakawa and A.R. Hayakawa (1990, p. 27)

DEFINITION: INFERENCE–OBSERVATION CONFUSION

Now that we silently add etcetera to our thinking processes, fully aware that “any map is only *part* of the territory,” it is time to apply another general semantics principle: “maps” refer to parts of the territory becoming *reflexive* to other parts at different levels of abstraction.” This premise points us back to the structural differential to distinguish direct observations (“D”–level descriptions) from inferences (“I”–level assumptions), in addition to exploring confusion within the levels themselves. In this section, we focus on actions that demonstrate an awareness of the verbal levels of abstraction: what we describe is not what we sense and what it means is *not* what we describe (revisit Figure 2.2).

Because the English language is not structured to distinguish observations from inferences, we rarely question if others use “facts”—statements based on personal observation and/or authentication. Johnson (2004) proposed that facts are statements “made after direct observation . . . [and are] confined to what one observes,” whereas inferences may be constructed “before, during, or after an observation . . . [and] go beyond what we observe” (p. 14).

Consider the following situation: After reading about transgressions of a politician or professional athlete, we often relay the “facts” to our friends and family. In doing so, we blindly assume that news outlets have checked their “facts.” We do not consider that we may be acting on a series of inferences. Because we did not personally observe the actions, nor verify the validity of the media claims, our conclusions may be misguided inferences.

In addition to understanding what contributes to confusion *between* levels, there can be confusion within levels because words themselves are multi-leveled. Anton described two “*kinds* of words” (as cited in Elson, p. 188) that are multi-leveled:

For clarity and focus, I examine the emergence of syntactical negation, (i.e., the use of “not” as metalinguistic rule), and I also examine how shifters such as “this” and “I” (words whose referents are made evident through indexicality) are used in combinations with other words that are themselves at different levels.

(Elson, p. 188)

For instance, when we add “not” to a word (e.g., “not food”), we set boundaries about what is “not food,” placing “not” at a different level of abstraction than the variety of items and events that are “not food” (e.g., chairs, animals, *and* sales). Similarly, Anton explained

how pronouns exist on several levels because they can serve as “pointers” (Elson, p. 195): If *I* state that, “I can’t trust myself,” then *I* trust the objective report of me, which itself indicates that I am not trustworthy.

As we explore the contributing factors and correctives that are needed to proactively address *inference–observation confusion*, we recognize that the codes themselves might be multi-leveled. Learning how to distinguish between inferences and observations, we begin, as Anton recommended, “a levels orientation to language [recognizing] the diverse kinds of actions that different words do” (as cited in Elson, 2010, p. 198)

CONTRIBUTING FACTORS: INFERENCE–OBSERVATION CONFUSION

Haney (1992) explained that when people make an inference but fail to label it as one, they ignore the risks involved. Perhaps we take these *uncalculated risks* because we forget how little our inferences represent WIGO. We rarely credit the abstraction process for taking uncalculated risks, even though we might acknowledge physiological factors (e.g., hunger and fatigue) and psychological factors (e.g., values and needs) for inaccurate inferences (Haney, p. 239).

Uncalculated Risk—I fail to label an inference

Language—There are no grammatical differences between a fact and an inference

For example, after no students answer questions posed during class, I might infer that students have not read the assigned material. I may have indeed heard no voices and observed no one raising a hand to answer, but this does not necessarily mean students have not read the material. Because I was not physically present when they prepared for class, I should question my abstracting; perhaps students have read the material but are too exhausted to think clearly because of an exam that they took during the preceding class period.

As the previous example illustrates, language often contains *no grammatical markers* to indicate whether we actually observed the conclusions that we share with others. I can state as a fact (“D”–level) that “no student answered a question in class today,” but I cannot accurately infer that it was because “students did not read” (“I”–level). Without language structure to help us distinguish between fact and inference, we must employ other techniques to keep us from acting on inferences as if they were facts.

CORRECTIVES: INFERENCE–OBSERVATION CONFUSION

Haney (1992) proposed that even if we cannot completely avoid making inferences, we can become more alert to risks that we are taking. First, we need to detect and change inferential statements.

Detect Source, Scope, and Timing

To detect inferences that we make, we need to ask ourselves a series of important questions:

1. (**Source**) Did *I* make the observation?
What someone tells you about his or her observations remains hearsay—*inferential*—for you if you have not personally observed it.
2. (**Scope**) Did my statement stay with and not *exceed* my observation? I can make observational statements about students answering questions during class, but a statement about their behaviors outside the classroom would exceed my observations.
3. (**Timing**) Did I make the statement *during* or *after* but *not before* my observation? I can say that students do not read assigned material before I meet with them in class. The statement might be correct, but it would still be *inferential*. (Haney, 1992, p. 244)

When we answer “no” to any of these questions, our statements fall short of being observations at the “D”-level. When this happens, we need to assess risks involved in acting on the inference.

As a case in point, we benefit from keep track of our observations of a political debate *during* the debate by writing down the words that the candidates use. When we have a conversation about the debate *after* the event, we can refer to our notes or consult a transcript of the event. If we pay careful attention to make statements that do not *exceed* the data collected during the event, we will have detected both the **scope** and **timing** of our inferences. Although it is impossible not to make inferences because of the limited pieces of WIGO our senses abstract, we can more effectively assess inferences that we make if we identify their source, scope, and timing.

Get More Data

Once we conclude that we have made an inference, we should ask questions to better assess the risk of not having accurate information. Haney (1992) suggested that more information could “improve the quality” (p. 244) of our risks, even if we have not made a direct observation.

Returning to the issue of student participation in class, if I recognize that “students are not reading course assignments” is an inference, I can ask questions that clarify what really deters students from answering questions in class. If I merely assume that students are not reading, I am at an increased risk of making poor classroom and assignment decisions. For instance, I could waste time in class explaining parts of the reading that students already understand without ever clarifying what keeps them from answering questions in class.

Identify the source of the inference—Did I make the observation?

Identify the scope of the inference—Did my statement stay with and not exceed my observation?

Identify the timing of the inference—Did I make the statement during or after but not before my observation?

Get more data—Ask questions.

Label MY Inferences

Although this corrective seems to be redundant, because one has already labeled the source, scope, and timing of your inference, Haney (1992) added this corrective to remind people to label their inferences first. For those of us just learning limitations of language, it probably is not a good idea to immediately share what we know to be true about language with others. In our haste to help, however, we quickly forget this advice.

Keller proposed that if we become more astute to the inferences that we make and risks incurred when not getting more data, others might want to emulate our behaviors (personal communication, July 12, 1995). This means that our focus must be on our language behaviors. We are not delaying our automatic responses if we are quick to name others' patterns of miscommunication and to suggest correctives.

SUMMARY

We often take uncalculated risks because we are unaware we abstract—that what we describe is *not* what we sensed, and what we mean is not what we described. Consequently, we are at risk for not recognizing when we have confused different levels of abstraction. We can use the same words, but be at different levels of abstraction because words are *self-reflexive*. Language is not structured to distinguish between observations and inferences.

We might increase our awareness of inferences, however, if we identify the sources, scope, and timing of our observations. For instance, if we determine that our conclusions do not *exceed* our observations, then we can establish whether our conclusions were drawn *during* or *after* the observations. In addition, when we discover we have made inferences, then we need to get more data to lower the risks associated with having inaccurate information.

Ultimately, we should focus on labeling our inferences and resist the urge to point out inferences that others make. The more we can demonstrate a multi-leveled approach to language, the more others might learn from our lead.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. How would you teach the inference–observation confusion to a family member?
2. Does “who” you teach this lesson to make a difference? Why or why not?
3. Which part of the “detect the inference” will be the easiest to apply to your language habits? Admitting the “scope” of your statement? Noting the “timing” of the statement?

CASE STUDIES

The cases in this section involve inference–observation confusion. Each character in the case may exhibit allness behaviors as well, but we focus on identifying contributing factors and correctives for inference–observation confusion.

After reading Case 4.1, identify one contributing factor of inference–observation confusion (e.g., uncalculated risks or language structure) exhibited by each character in the case: Rick, James, Madison, and Sarah. Use the “Correctives-in-Action” worksheet to define the contributing factors of inference–observation confusion for each character in the case (see Figure 4.1). Describe how each character exhibited the factor in the “Explanation” space that is provided.

Once you have identified the contributing factors for each character, work in groups to discuss the correctives for each character. Create a new version of the case—a role play that involves each group member taking the role of a character—adding characters if needed. Each group member, then, demonstrates one of the correctives for inference–observation. For example, if the character, Rick, needs to “identify the scope of his inference,” he realizes that his judgment exceeded his observation and decides to drop the ball between both players, so that each team has a chance to control the ball.

After each group member has volunteered to play a role, be sure to define the corrective (e.g., identify the source, scope, and timing of the inference or get more data) and include an explanation of how each character will use this corrective on the worksheet (see Figure 4.1). Rehearse the role play. Your group is ready to present the role–play to the class.

Role–playing the corrective ensures that you move from merely an *awareness* of inference–observation to *actions* that address that pattern of miscommunication. Even if these new language behaviors feel and sound contrived, we use humor as a catalyst for how to use these correctives outside the classroom. For example, students challenged themselves not to “pass on” inferences (e.g., avoid gossiping) without getting more data and identifying the source, scope, and timing of the inference for an entire weekend. However, this experiment did not end well, as they found it exhausting and nearly impossible to verify inferences for even one weekend. Although they recognized how difficult it would be to continue this quest to be descriptive, they recognized how important it was to keep trying.

After the class understands contributing factors and correctives for Inference-observation Confusion Case 4.1, groups choose one of the three additional cases to analyze. Groups follow the same sequence they did with the sample case: (a) individuals read the case, identify characters, and define contributing factors for each character in a case before meeting as a group: (b) groups meet to identify, define, and discover how to demonstrate correctives for each character in their case: and (c) groups role play a new version of the case that is followed by a discussion about how to use the correctives in the future.

Inference-observation Confusion Case 4.1 and its corresponding “Correctives-in Action” worksheet (see Figure 4.1) appear on the next two pages. The additional cases are found on the final three pages of this chapter: Case 4.2: *Projects*; Case 4.3: *Flashback*; and Case 4.4: *Paperless policy*.

Inference–observation Confusion Case 4.1: Intramurals

On a cold Tuesday evening in March, the bleachers were full of students, more than number of students who usually attend an intramural soccer game on the indoor field. This was the championship match and everyone was excited for the players who had worked so hard to get to this final game. With 1 minute to go, the score was tied 1 to 1. James, a senior, and Madison, a freshman, were fighting for the ball when it ricocheted out of bounds.

Rick, a sophomore who was the referee for the game, was at a bad angle to make the call. He was the referee appointed by the athletic director for intramural soccer; he played soccer for the University team, so he knew the rules well. Even though he knew the rules, this did help Rick to know who had last touched the ball. Rick did know, however, that the last time Rick made a call against James’s team, James was very upset. Furthermore, James was careless with the ball: clearly, he was not a team player. Madison, on the other hand, was a good team player; consequently, Rick decided to call the ball out on James.

The one individual who did have a good angle was Sarah, a junior soccer player, who had just finished officiating the consolation game. She had a front row seat to Madison and James battling for the ball, and she saw that Madison’s foot had touched the ball last. Sarah was friends with both James and Madison. Sarah knew that James would be upset, but she did not want to say anything to Rick and make matters worse, because the call had been made. As Sarah was wishing that she could do something, James was complaining about the call.

“Out on James,” Rick yelled, after blowing his whistle. “Madison, your team gets the throw-in.”

James, a fierce competitor, was irate with Rick about the call. James screamed at Rick, “I didn’t kick it out!”

“I saw you kick the ball out, and it’s my call that matters,” Rick snapped. “Madison’s team gets the ball.”

“You called it out on me because you like Madison!” James yelled back. He had heard from a few friends that the pair had been hanging out and texting all the time. He was sure that Rick was looking at Madison the entire game. James knew that if Rick gave the call to Madison, she would be happy.

“Madison, it’s your ball,” Rick said, blushing because of James’s accusations. Rick knew that people were spreading rumors about him and Madison, but he did not give her special attention on the soccer field, even if he did have a major crush on her. “Please, James, just calm down. It’s my call, and, from my view, you kicked it out.”

Madison did not know if she had kicked the ball out or not: all she remembered was running side-by-side with James. She was happy that there was no class bias in the game, seeing as a freshman had just won a major call against a senior. She had no idea what the right call was, so she ran after the ball and kept her mouth shut. She assumed that Rick had seen the play because he did not ask anyone for help with the call. Sometimes, if the referees were not sure of a situation, they would ask for help from some of the other refs that attended the game.

After the call, Madison’s team ended up winning the game with a last-second goal. Rick promised himself to keep a closer watch on games in the future. He was glad that soccer was finally over because he was tired of players being disrespectful. He might not volunteer to do this job next year.

As a ritual, Madison and Sarah went to Dairy Queen after the game. James usually went with the girls, but he was too furious with the outcome of the game, and he had a midterm for which he had to study. Sarah was great friends with Madison and James, so she was conflicted about the questionable call.

“You did a great job, Madison!” Sarah exclaimed as she was eating her ice cream. Sarah decided that because the game was over, it did not matter who really kicked the ball out of bounds. She figured that she could talk to James about it later.

“James seemed pretty mad, but Rick must know what he is talking about. I’m sure he made the right call,” Madison said. “I am just so happy that my team won!”

Sarah smiled at her friend and their conversation turned to how they should prepare for the history midterm.

Correctives-in-Action Worksheet for Bypassing Case 41: *Intramurals*

Character	Contributing Factor (define, explain)	Corrective (demonstrate, define, explain)
Rick	<p>Definition: <i>Uncalculated risk</i>—I failed to label an inference.</p> <p>Explanation: Rick failed to label his inference about James being careless with the ball.</p>	<p>Definition: <i>Identify the scope of the inference</i>—Did my statement stay with and not exceed my observation?</p> <p>Explanation: Rick realizes that his judgment exceeded his observation, so decides to have a “drop kick”—both players have equal access to the ball.</p>
James	<p>Definition: <i>Language</i>—There are no grammatical differences between a fact and an inference.</p> <p>Explanation: James shouts his inference as if it were a fact: “you like Madison.”</p>	<p>Definition: <i>Get more data</i>—Ask questions.</p> <p>Explanation: James recognizes he is too angry to be civil, so really needs to inquire about Rick’s relationship with Madison after James has cooled down.</p>
Sarah	<p>Definition:</p> <p>Explanation:</p>	<p>Definition: <i>Identify the timing of the inference</i>—Did I make the statement during or after but not before my observation?</p> <p>Explanation:</p>
Madison	<p>Definition:</p> <p>Explanation:</p>	<p>Definition: <i>Identify the source of the inference</i>—Did I make the observation?</p> <p>Explanation:</p>
Additional Character	<p>Definition:</p> <p>Explanation:</p>	<p>Definition:</p> <p>Explanation:</p>

Figure 4.1: Corrective-in-action worksheet for Inference-observation Confusion Case 4.1.

This worksheet helps students identify, define, and explain contributing factors for each character. It can be used to define and explain how to demonstrate correctives.

Inference–observation Confusion Case 4.2: Projects

On a rainy day, Valerie, a junior English major, carefully stepped over puddles on her way to her Language and Thought class. Soon after class began, she found out that she had to complete a project with a partner. Ted, another junior majoring in English, sat next to Valerie. Because Valerie and Ted already knew each other, they decided to be partners. The assignment required detailed planning, so Valerie and Ted agreed to meet for lunch to discuss the project.

After class, they made their way to the student cafeteria to discuss the assignment as they ate lunch. Because of the loud music in the room and the pouring rain hitting the windows nearby, they huddled together to hear the other person. As they talked, Lucy, Valerie’s roommate, walked in and spotted the pair eating lunch. Lucy jumped to the conclusion that there was something romantic going on between Valerie and Ted. Lucy sat down with some friends and ate her salad, keeping a close eye on Valerie and Ted.

After he finished lunch, Ted rushed out of the cafeteria to class. On the way, he texted Fred, his best friend, about his lunch date, “Fred, I just had lunch with this girl and I am convinced that she likes me. We are getting together again tomorrow night to study together.”

After seeing Ted get up and leave, Lucy hurried over to Valerie in hopes of getting the scoop. “Valerie, what exactly do you think you are doing?!”

“What are you talking about?” Valerie asked.

“I saw you guys eating together,” said Lucy.

“We are partners for a project and we were just discussing our plans.”

“I saw how closely you were sitting at the table. He probably thinks that you like him,” explained Lucy.

“I am sure that I did not give him that impression. We are only partners for a class project. Besides, he knows that I like Fred. They are best friends and we talked about him.”

After promising Lucy that they would talk more later, Valerie headed to her next class.

The following evening, Fred and Ted were studying in Fred’s apartment. When Ted got up to leave for his meeting with Valerie, Fred asked, “Where are you headed?”

“I am just going to have dinner with Valerie,” answered Ted.

“Is that the girl you were telling me about, the one you said knew who I was?” asked Fred.

“Yeah, I think she likes me. I am going to ask her if she wants to see the band playing in town next week.”

“Dude, no way you can do that! I like Valerie, and this is the girl I have been talking about, too. She likes me too, so she is off limits.”

“Sorry, dude, I have to go see her tonight to work on our project, but I promise I will not ask her out.”

Fred thanked Ted for his understanding and quickly texted Valerie to let her know that Ted had the wrong impression about their “working” lunch the previous day.

Inference–observation Confusion 4.3: Flashback

Early Sunday morning, roommates Amy and Megan headed to the coffee shop on campus. On their way, they saw Lauren walking out the back door of a residence hall that was not where she lived. She also had on the same clothes that she wore to the dance the night before. Lauren, who usually paid close attention to her appearance, looked disheveled; she had mascara running down her face and her hair was tied in a knot. Amy and Megan began whispering about what they thought happened to Lauren.

Amy, overriding her usual caring personality, scoffed, “We should expect this, as Lauren often acts inappropriately.”

Megan agreed, “Yeah, I heard about last night from several other people.”

[Flashback to Saturday night]

Amy remembered Lauren dancing closely to Jason at the party. He was not the only guy Lauren danced with that evening but he ended up being the one with whom she left. Over the roar of the party, Amy overheard Lauren say something about “taking care” of Jason. Amy was sure that she knew what that meant, because it seemed as if everyone at the party cheered for Jason when he left with Lauren.

[Back to the present]

Amy offered her opinion, “Jason lives in the residence hall that Lauren just left. You know the reputation of guys who live in *that* residence hall.”

“I just do not know why women act like that,” Megan sighed.

“Lauren must not think it is a big deal,” Amy responded.

Megan concluded, “One of my friends suggested that Lauren just does not care about her reputation.”

Both women hurried into the coffee shop to share their stories with friends. Amy told them about Lauren’s appearance, as well as what Lauren was doing at the party the previous night, and Megan explained what she heard from others who were at the party. Inferences about Lauren’s actions dominated the conversation throughout breakfast. All of the women were *sure* that they knew what had happened to Lauren.

However, Marshall, a junior who happens to live across the hall from Jason intervened, saying, “Please do not talk about Lauren in such a bad way. You really need to get your facts straight before you share them with others. Quite frankly, Jason and Lauren kept me up, all night, but it was not for what you thought. They kept me up all night because Jason was being an idiot last night and drank way too much. When Lauren said that she was

going to ‘take care of him,’ she meant that she literally was going to care for him because she was worried that he had alcohol poisoning. You jumped to conclusions that she was sleeping with him, when, in fact, she may very well have saved his life.”

Amy and Megan were shocked, as they did not expect that someone would come forward and confront them in front of so many people. More important, they were ashamed because they realized that they should not have jumped to conclusions about what happened with Lauren and Jason that night.

Inference–observation Confusion 4.4: Classmates

On an unusually warm November afternoon, Amy and Harry were playing a board game in an apartment off campus. Harry suddenly realized that it might be time for his psychology class.

“What time is it?” Harry asked as he glanced at his wristwatch. “Oh no, I have class in 10 minutes!”

Before Harry left, Amy gave him a kiss on the cheek and said, “Have a good class. We can finish our game later.”

“See you after practice,” Harry said as he rushed out the front door.

About 15 minutes later, Amy’s good friend and roommate, Melissa, happened to look out the window by the front door. She immediately did a double-take, as Harry was walking down the street with a woman. Confused, Melissa called Amy over to the window and pointed at Harry.

Amy took in the scene, staring in disbelief and then questioning her relationship with Harry. Prior to their game that afternoon, they had a heated argument. Amy, who gets overwhelmed during arguments, started worrying that their argument might have been more troubling to Harry than she thought.

Melissa, who was all too familiar with cheating boyfriends, explained, “Girl, everything adds up. He’s just like my ex-boyfriend. He broke up with me, and dated another girl within the week. Harry must have skipped class. It seems obvious to me, to anybody, really, that he might be seeing another girl.”

Amy cried, “I just can’t believe he would do something like this.”

“I am so sorry, Amy. I hope you realize that you are better than this two-timing guy.” Melissa insisted.

Defeated, Amy shrugged it off and went to her room, still trying to sort out what had happened. An hour later, she walked into her philosophy class still confused about why Harry would start dating someone else when she ran into her friend Noah.

“Hey Amy, how’s it going?” Noah asked.

“I have had a rotten day,” Amy replied. She stared at the ground, not wanting to talk about the incident with Harry.

After class, Amy went home and waited for Harry to return from cross-country practice. Amy had so many thoughts running through her mind that she felt worse the longer that she waited. As soon as Harry walked through the door, she confronted him, asking, “Who were you with today when you should have been in psychology class?”

Taken aback, Harry asked, “What are you talking about? I walked with classmates to the local coffee shop because we were conducting an experiment during psychology class. We walked by the apartment, but why would you think that I was cheating on you?”

Relieved, Amy let out a big sigh. Why, indeed, had she jumped to conclusions? They laughed as Harry explained the research that he and his classmates had completed during class.

CHAPTER 5: BYPASSING

Missing Each Other With the Words that We Choose

It is precisely because each of us sees and experiences the world differently that language becomes our most important means for coming to some kind of agreement on our individual experiences, on how we see the world.

—William Lutz (1989, p. 6)

DEFINITION: BYPASSING

The map–territory analogy resonates because people know that any given map cannot represent all of its territory. Additionally, we know that because maps are *self-reflexive*, we confuse levels of abstraction. Now, we will discover that we still can miss each other’s meanings because we forget that a map is not the territory it represents: “If we reflect upon our languages, we find that at best they must be considered only as maps. A word is not the object it represents” (Korzybski, 2000, p. 58). The map represents the assumptions and experiences of the mapmaker. This section explores what happens when people do not recognize that meaning is in the mapmaker (person), not the map (word).

How many people can remember being sure that they understood what a teacher meant by “summarize the article” but later discovered that our interpretation of “summarize” and the teacher’s interpretation were very different? Haney (1992) explained this phenomenon as *bypassing*: “the listener presumably heard the same words that the speaker said, but the communicators seem to have talked past each other” (p. 268). The listener and speaker act as if the words mean the same thing to each person, but their interpretations are different. Similarly, communicators can use different words to refer to the same thing: some call a soft drink “soda,” whereas others refer to it as “pop.” Miscommunication often results because these assumptions are faulty and go unnoticed.

When I tell students that there will be a “quiz” during the next class period, I receive few inquiries concerning the nature of the assessment. Students might ask what material will be included on the quiz, but rarely do they ask about the number or type of questions, and how the score will impact their final course grade. Many times, because quizzes are used to judge comprehension of material not mastery, there is little impact on final grades. We miss each other’s meaning because we do not check the meaning each person intended, even if we are using the same words.

“We miss each other’s meaning because we do not check the meaning each person intended, even if we are using the same words.”

Consequently, we need to explore contributing factors that lead to bypassing. Once we discover why we do not routinely inquire about others' meanings, we will be challenged to build new habits, such as paraphrasing and exploring contextual clues.

CONTRIBUTING FACTORS: BYPASSING

Haney (1992) suggested that bypassing is caused by two assumptions: words have mono-usage and they have meanings. First, we operate under the assumption that *words have mono-usage* when we forget that words have more than one meaning. Haney (1992) advocated for "learning about the prevalence of multiusage in our language . . . [so we] will anticipate that words can readily be understood differently by different people" (p. 274). He noted numerous examples of "word coinage," the invention of new word with acronyms, such as "AIDS" (p. 275), and of "usage coinage," the new use of existing words, such as "high" (p. 277).

Similarly, Haney (1992) challenged readers to find words that were used in only one way: "for the 500 of the most commonly used words in our language there is aggregate of over 14,000 dictionary definitions!" (p. 274). Regional variations and technical jargon encountered daily compound this conundrum. How many times have you been unable to understand medical terminology used by a physician? Do conversations with a plumber and car mechanic make any more sense? How many people can follow the political jargon used to debate the national debt?

With a better understanding of multiuse language, we recognize that the assumption, *words have meaning*, also is inaccurate. We know from our understanding of general semantics that the "map is not the 'territory,' so there is no *not* territory," so it follows that meaning in the person, not in the map (word). Similar to the inference–observation confusion, people take an uncalculated risk when they assume understanding based on words and nonverbal cues.

Moreover, we must remember that each person operates from a particular cultural context. According to Hofstede (1980), cultures vary along four dimensions: how they manage *power difference*, are tolerant of ambiguity (*uncertainty avoidance*), value *individualism* or collectivism, and emphasize assertiveness (*masculinity*) or nurturance (p. 11). Therefore, we may miss each other with meaning because we do not understand differences in attitudes and beliefs. As Morreale et al. (2007) explained:

In collectivist cultures, collective goals take priority over individual goals. People

Words have mono-usage—The false assumption that a word has only one meaning.

Words have meanings—The false assumption meaning is in words, not people

*Deliberate bypassing is Doublespeak: intend to mislead (Euphemism, Jargon, Gobbledygook, & Inflated language)

in collectivist cultures such as Japan, China, and Korea may find it hard to speak up and offer their opinions in a group setting, especially if those views are contrary to the group's majority opinion. Their sense of loyalty precludes them from voicing dissenting opinions and disrupting the group. (p.64)

Finally, when people use language with intent to miscommunicate, they are guilty of “*deliberate bypassing*” (Haney, 1992, p. 286). Lutz (1989) called this phenomenon “doublespeak”: language that avoids or shifts responsibility . . . that conceals or prevents thought” (p. 1). Doublespeak is used to mislead and deceive. Lutz has written several books and many articles about forms of doublespeak that are used by organizational and political leaders; in particular, he identified four forms:

1. **Euphemism**: “an inoffensive or positive word or phrase used to avoid a harsh, unpleasant, or distasteful reality” (p. 2).
2. **Jargon**: “the specialized language of a trade, profession, or similar group” (p. 3).
3. **Gobbledygook**: “a matter of piling on of words, of overwhelming the audience with words, the bigger the words and the longer the sentences the better” (p. 5).
4. **Inflated language**: “designed to make the ordinary seem extraordinary; to make everyday things seem impressive; to give an importance to people, situations, or things that would not normally be considered important; to make the simple seem complex” (p. 6).

Unfortunately, we find many examples of doublespeak in politics, business, and education. For instance, when leaders use “collateral damage” to describe civilians who die in warfare and “re-engineering” to describe layoffs, they are employing euphemisms to mislead the public involved. Similarly, when administrators use jargon and long sentences, they may be trying to obfuscate, not elaborate. These examples motivate us to confront bypassing in personal and professional contexts.

CORRECTIVES: BYPASSING

Similar to the previous patterns of allness and inference–observation confusion, we recognize that we cannot fully eliminate bypassing. However, the following correctives will prevent as much bypassing as possible. These actions must become a habit, an immediate response during a communication event.

Be Person-minded, not Word-minded

Do you ever find yourself arguing with friends over silly questions? It might be that you are not at odds about the facts involved but merely disagreeing about the “label” that each person gives those facts. For example, when you consistently arrive 15 minutes

Be person-minded, not word-minded—Disagree with dictionary and agree with person’s background

Query & paraphrase—

Summarize a speaker and then ask clarifying questions.

Be approachable—Be open to verbal and nonverbal feedback.

Be sensitive to contexts—Be mindful of the situation in which the word was used.

late for family dinners, some members may interpret your behavior as disrespectful of “family time,” whereas other family members think that it is fine to disregard a cultural norm of being punctual.

We often forget that words are meaningless symbols until someone attaches meaning to them. One of my favorite ways to demonstrate the arbitrary nature of language is to watch the *Twilight Zone* episode, “Wordplay,” which can be found on YouTube. In the “Wordplay, Episode 1,” the main character, Bill, quickly discovers that the words people use do not make sense in the context in which the words are normally used. For example, as Bill leaves for work, the neighbor refers to their dog, which just had puppies, as an “encyclopedia.” When Bill gets to work, a customer discusses celebrating 17th wedding “throw rug,” meaning, of course, a 17th wedding “anniversary.” Later in the episode, when a colleague and Bill’s wife both refer to “lunch” as “dinosaur,” Bill knows that he has entered the “twilight zone.” As “Wordplay, Episode 2” unfolds, however, Bill painstakingly communicates with his family by focusing on the people and contexts, not the words being used.

In real life, people who are aware that meaning resides “in the person” are less concerned with dictionary definitions and are more attuned to what senders mean in different contexts. If we clarify that we are using words in the same way as those with whom we communicate, we are being “person-minded.” For example, imagine how it would feel to interact with someone whose first priority is to understand what you mean by “down time.” Instead of assuming that you want to read a magazine and then take a nap, he or she would understand that cleaning might energize you more than reading and napping.

Query and Paraphrase

Curious people find it easy to be person-minded. Unlike those who are sure that they know what others mean, inquisitive individuals are more worried about learning than whether others perceive them as being intelligent. Many college professors and business managers agree with Haney’s (1992) conclusion that asking thoughtful questions will earn the respect of superiors because questions show “interest and a sense of responsibility” (p. 290).

**“Curious people
find it easy to be
person-minded.”**

Similarly, if we paraphrase—using our words to summarize a speaker’s message and to clarify the accuracy of our interpretations—we are being person-minded. If you have tried to accurately summarize what another person’s directions, you know the time-consuming nature of this process. However, when you avoid getting lost because you have paraphrased well, ultimately, you might save time and build supportive communication climates.

Be Approachable

In addition to remembering to query and paraphrase, we must do all we can to be receptive to others’ ideas and behaviors. Haney (1992) recommended asking the following question

each day: “Am I *genuinely* receptive to feedback, and do I continually communicate my receptivity to others?” (p. 293). This means paying close attention to messages that we might be unintentionally sending, both verbally and nonverbally. Researchers note the importance of nonverbal cues for mutual understanding: we need culturally appropriate occulesics (use of eyes), proxemics (use of personal space), and haptics (use of touch), in addition to effective vocalics (use of voice) and kinesics (use of body) for the various settings in which we communicate (Morreale et al., 2007).

Perhaps by identifying what makes other people approachable in various contexts, we can incorporate such verbal and nonverbal skills when interacting with others. Moreover, we could solicit feedback from those we trust. If someone suggests that lack of eye contact makes us seem “unapproachable,” we could purposefully monitor our connections with others, especially if we are living and working in the United States, where providing good eye contact is a sign of caring and respect.

Be Sensitive to Contexts

Haney (1992) proposed that the “surrounding words (verbal context) and the surrounding circumstance (situational context)” (p. 295) provide the clues needed to prevent bypassing. We know this to be true in educational contexts when we discover the meaning of new concepts by noting how they are used in a sentence.

Many of us like the challenge of a good mystery, so we might enjoy being a “language detective,” discovering the meaning in the person and the context. Postman (1976) coined the phrase “stupid talk” to refer to language used by those who ignore contextual cues; it is “talk that does not know what environment it is in” (p. 20). He argued that effective communication includes people and their purposes, in addition to “general rules of the discourse by which such purposes are usually achieved . . . [and that] particular talk actually being used in the situation” (Postman, p. 8). We need to explore whether our language is both appropriate and effective for the context.

SUMMARY

In communicating with others, we often focus on the message instead of the person with whom we are interacting. We focus on words because we believe meaning is in the word. We rely on dictionaries and past experiences to find meaning, instead of being curious about the contexts in which we find ourselves. Moreover, we forget that most of our words have multiple meanings. We are unaware that people might use euphemisms and jargon to mislead.

To implement the premise that “a map is *not* the ‘territory,’ so there is no *not territory*,” we must act as if we know that meaning is in the person. We need to be sensitive to contexts in which a person is using a word, carefully paraphrasing answers to clarifying questions. Throughout this text we have learned that additional inquiry can lead to more effective message construction because we cannot possibly know everything about anything and

because language is self-reflexive. Even though paraphrasing might be time-consuming at the outset, it builds trust in a relationship, which might save valuable time in the long run. Perhaps we might learn something new and become more approachable in the process.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Explain how you would teach bypassing to an advisor (a supervisor at work).
2. Why would we make the assumption that words mean the same to us as they do to another?
3. Are there situations where doublespeak might be ethically defensible?

CASE STUDIES

The cases in this section involve bypassing. Each person in the case may exhibit other faulty language behaviors, but try to identify contributing factors and correctives for bypassing.

After reading Case 5.1, identify one contributing factor of allness (e.g., words have mono-usage or words have meaning) exhibited by each character in the case: Jenny, Steve, and Professor Burch. Use the “Correctives-in-Action” worksheet to define the contributing factors of allness for each character in the case (see Figure 5.1). Describe how each character exhibited the factor in the “Explanation” space that is provided.

Once you have identified contributing factors for each character, work in groups to discuss the correctives for each character. Create a new version of the case—a role play that involves each group member taking the role of a character—adding characters if needed. Each group member, then, demonstrates one of the correctives for bypassing. For example, if the character, Jenny, needs to demonstrate how to “query and paraphrase,” then she might ask Professor Burch to estimate the date he hopes to return papers.

After each group member has volunteered to play a role, be sure to define the corrective (e.g., be person-minded, not word-minded; query and paraphrase; be approachable, or be sensitive to contexts) and include an explanation of how each character will use this corrective on the worksheet (see Figure 5.1). Rehearse the role play. Your group is ready to present the role-play to the class.

Role-playing the corrective ensures that you move from merely an *awareness* of allness to actions that address that pattern of miscommunication. Even if these new language behaviors feel and sound contrived, people use humor as a catalyst for how to use these correctives outside the classroom. With the bypassing, students discovered how difficult it is to be both “person-minded” and “sensitive to context.” They agreed that appropriate nonverbal cues (e.g., tone of voice, posture, and eye contact) demonstrate “approachability.”

As you know, we follow the same case study protocol in each chapter. After the class understands the sample case, groups choose one of the three additional cases to analyze.

Groups follow the same sequence as they did with the sample case: (a) individuals read the case, identify characters, and define contributing factors for each character in a case before meeting as a group: (b) groups meet to identify, define, and discover how to demonstrate correctives for each character in their case: and (c) groups role play a new version of the case that is followed by a discussion about how to use the correctives in the future.

Bypassing Case 5.1 and its corresponding “Correctives-in Action” worksheet (see Figure 5.1) appear on the next two pages. The additional cases are found on the final pages of this chapter: Case 5.2: *Hard Work*; Case 5.3: *Volume*; and Case 5.4: *Light Mayo*.

Bypassing Case 5.1: Soon

Jenny worked hard. She studied weeks before a test to make sure that she was prepared. She stuck to a strict schedule to keep her assignments and classes in order; consequently, she liked to know how she was doing in a course, to see which class needed more time. Professor Burch, her literature instructor, changed his syllabus, switched due dates, and rarely returned assignments. These actions meant trouble for Jenny.

Professor Burch assigned long papers in all his classes; therefore, it often took him several days to return papers. This literature class was one of four courses that he taught during a semester. He had assigned a 10-page paper about Shakespeare in the class that Jenny was taking.

Jenny had stayed up for several nights to complete her work, so she was relieved to be turning in the paper during Tuesday's class. Turning to Steve, she asked, "Where is your paper?"

"He said he'd accept them by the end of the business day, so I'll finish mine and then run it to him later," Steve said. "Professor Burch usually does not stick to due dates unless he specifically says that he will."

Professor Burch told the class members that he would return their papers soon. Because he said that he would turn the papers back to them soon, Jenny was confident that she would receive her paper the following week. She waited patiently but soon realized that the professor was taking much longer than she anticipated.

[2 weeks later]

Full of nervous energy, Jenny walked into class and headed straight for the professor's desk. Trying to sound as calm as possible, Jenny asked, "Professor, we still have not received our papers about Shakespeare. When are we going to get the papers back?"

Professor Burch replied, "I am just finishing up the last few grades, so you will be getting them back soon."

Jenny found a seat next to Steve and grumbled, "I cannot believe that he has not given our papers back."

Steve calmly replied, "I really do not think it is a big deal. He said that he will give them back soon, so I am sure that we will get them later this week."

Later that class period, Professor Burch assigned another paper that was longer and worth more points. Not knowing what her grade was for the previous paper, Jenny was unsure how to begin the current one. She would have to go to Professor Burch's office hours tomorrow. Perhaps he might even have her other paper graded by then.

Correctives-in-Action Worksheet for Bypassing Case 5.1: Soon

Character	Contributing Factor (define, explain)	Corrective (demonstrate, define, explain)
Jenny	<p>Definition: <i>Words have meanings</i>—The false assumption that meaning is in words, not people.</p> <p>Explanation: Jenny assumes that she and Professor Burch have the same meaning of the word “soon.”</p>	<p>Definition: <i>Query and paraphrase</i>—Summarize a speaker and then ask clarifying questions.</p> <p>Explanation: Jenny realizes that the meaning of “soon” depends on the person, so she asks Professor Burch to estimate the date he hopes to return papers.</p>
Professor Burch	<p>Definition: <i>Words have monosyllable</i>—The false assumption that a word has only one meaning.</p> <p>Explanation: Professor Burch is unaware that students have different meanings for “soon.”</p>	<p>Definition: <i>Be person-minded, not word-minded</i>—Disagree with the dictionary and agree with the person’s background</p> <p>Explanation: Professor Burch recognizes that Jenny is a student who diligently completes assignments, so he gives her a specific date for when he will be done with the last grades.</p>
Steve	<p>Definition:</p> <p>Explanation:</p>	<p>Definition: <i>Be approachable</i>—Be open to verbal and nonverbal feedback.</p> <p>Explanation:</p>
Additional Character	<p>Definition:</p> <p>Explanation:</p>	<p>Definition: <i>Be sensitive to contexts</i>—Be mindful of the situation in which the word was used.</p> <p>Explanation:</p>
Additional Character	<p>Definition:</p> <p>Explanation:</p>	<p>Definition:</p> <p>Explanation:</p>

Figure 5.1: Corrective-in-action worksheet for Bypassing Case 5.1. This worksheet helps students identify, define, and explain contributing factors for each character. It can be used to define and explain how to demonstrate correctives.

Bypassing Case 5. 2: Hard Work

Samantha, a junior volleyball player, headed to her weekly meeting with the head coach. Sometimes, these meetings went well; other times, she was scared of what might happen. This coach's behaviors differed from what Samantha usually expected of a head coach, the coach only interacted with players at individual meetings. Samantha assumed that this week's meetings would focus on the team's performance at the end of the season.

"Good morning, Samantha. How do you feel about your performance in both games and practices this year?" the head coach asked.

"I think that I worked hard during practice, but I rarely had the opportunity to play in the games."

"I thought that the amount of time you played during games matched your performances during practice," answered the coach. "Do you think that you are going to play next season?"

"I have a heavy course load, and I may need to look for a job or an internship. More important, I believe that I should be rewarded with more playing time for all my hard work."

"Well, your hard work is appreciated," explained the coach. "Regardless of whether you play, I believe that the team could use a good teammate and hard worker like you. You really show the rest of the team how to be a good sport and have a good attitude. We would like to have you on the team, but either way, I wish you luck next year."

Meanwhile, Kendra, also a junior volleyball player, met with the assistant coach. Kendra did not care about these evaluation meetings. Sometimes, she even skipped them simply because she knew that neither coach would punish her. Because she was the best player on the team, she knew it did not matter whether she tried at practice, as the coaches always played her and she started every game.

The assistant coach inquired, "Kendra, how would you rate your effort in both games and practices?"

"Well, practices never seem important because I start every game. You have my statistics, so you know how hard I work during games."

"Do you think you will play next year?" asked the assistant coach.

"Of course I'm going to play. I am not sure that the team could win without me. I work the hardest out there," claimed Kendra.

“Well, those are all the questions I have for you. Keep your grades up and we will see you next season,” the assistant coach concluded. She sighed deeply as she headed to the next round of player meetings. Someday when she was a head coach, she would definitely address players with bad attitudes.

In the hallway, Samantha and Kendra crossed paths outside of the coaches’ offices and discussed their individual meetings. Samantha rarely enjoyed these interactions, but she decided to ask Kendra about meeting with the assistant coach.

“They want me to play next year. Those silly meetings never mean anything to me. I told the assistant coach that practice was not important and she did not even get mad.”

“Coach told me they appreciate my hard work at practice. See you next season,” Samantha finished, hoping she would not cross paths with Kendra anytime soon.

Bypassing Case 5.3: Volume

Late one weeknight, Trey, a sophomore political science major, had music playing in his dorm room. The walls were thin, so the music bothered his neighbors. The bass sound started to shake the floor, which meant that the ceiling in the room below was vibrating. Trey's resident assistant, a senior named Calvin, was studying for an important 400-level chemistry exam that he needed to complete successfully to get into graduate school. Another resident, Kyle, had an 8:00 am class the next day and wanted to get some sleep.

Kyle went to Calvin's room and asked, "Can you have Trey turn his music down? I'm trying to sleep and I have class in the morning."

Calvin agreed to talk to Trey. Because the loud music was happening during "quiet" hours, Calvin ran upstairs and asked Trey to turn his music down to respect the other residents.

"This is your only warning for the night, Trey. There are other people on this floor besides you," Calvin reminded Trey. Trey begrudgingly agreed to turn down the music.

On his way back to his room to study, Calvin told Kyle that Trey agreed to turn the music down. Kyle thanked Calvin and went back to bed.

After a couple of minutes, Calvin realized that he could still hear the bass from Trey's music. He trudged back to Trey's room and firmly stated, "I thought I asked you to turn that music down. Now, I am going to have to write you up."

"I did turn it down a notch," Trey protested.

Calvin looked at the volume dial on Trey's speakers. Perhaps Trey had turned down the volume since the previous visit, but it was not enough.

"Considering that your bass still is shaking the floor, you need to turn it way down. I really do not want to write you up. At this hour, you should be the only one who can hear your music," Calvin concluded.

Trey sighed after Calvin left the room. As far as Trey was concerned, the volume was turned down. He slammed his headphones over his ears. Within minutes, he was swaying to the music, forgetting the whole incident and focusing on political science theory.

Bypassing Case 5.4: Light Mayo

On Sunday afternoon, Eliza, a 20-year-old university student, clocked in for her shift at a local restaurant.

Eliza's manager, Olivia, approached Eliza when she arrived and asked, "Eliza, can you do inventory later tonight?"

Eliza nodded in agreement and started her normal shift as a waitress. She took orders, delivered food, refilled drinks, and bused tables. Eliza knew Olivia expected assigned tasks, such as inventory, to be done before a shift was over. Because it was a Sunday night, Eliza knew that there would be a lot of down time towards the end of her shift.

After the dinner crowd dwindled, Eliza started to head to the backroom to start inventory. Just then, Todd, a regular customer, walked in, and asked, "Hello, Eliza, may I have a chicken sandwich with light mayo?"

"Sure, chicken with light mayo?" She repeated to confirm Todd's order as she typed it into the computer. Ten minutes later, Eliza served Todd his sandwich and headed for the back room.

Todd took a bite of his sandwich and called for Eliza to come back. "Eliza, I said light mayo, right?"

"Yes, a chicken sandwich with light mayo," she replied.

"I wanted a chicken sandwich with just a little bit of mayo. I cannot eat a sandwich with all of this mayo," Todd complained as he pushed the plate across the table.

"I am so sorry. I thought you wanted the brand of light mayonnaise that we use. I will have the cook make you another one." She headed back to the kitchen to correct the mistake.

"I sure wish that this one would have been right. I have so much work to finish tonight," Todd muttered. "Have the cook put it in a box for me to take home." Todd pulled out his phone to check for e-mails and waited.

When Eliza returned with Todd's sandwich, he snatched it from her and left the restaurant without tipping. Upset about the mistake, Eliza started scrubbing tables. Just then, Cindy, Eliza's overdramatic friend, rushed into the restaurant. Eliza could only imagine what had happened now. Cindy always had gossip to share, especially when Eliza was at work.

"We need to talk!" Cindy said urgently.

“Can it wait until later? I am work, remember?” Eliza asked.

“But there is no one in here! What do you have to do?” Cindy questioned.

As Cindy was begging her friend to listen, Olivia came from the back of the restaurant and reminded, Eliza, “Make sure you get to that inventory soon.”

“See, Cindy, I have do work to do,” Eliza argued.

“But Olivia said to do that soon, not right now,” Cindy protested. Cindy then took a seat at the nearest booth, rambling on about her crisis “du jour,” unaware that Eliza had stopped listening and started taking inventory.

CHAPTER 6: DIFFERENTIATION FAILURES

Avoiding Stereotyping, Frozen Evaluation, and Polarization

Too often we discriminate against rather than between individuals.

—Irving Lee (1941, p. 110).

DEFINITION: DIFFERENTIATION FAILURES

The three remaining patterns of miscommunication—stereotyping, frozen evaluation, and polarization—stem from the structure of language. In particular, the English language rarely accounts for differences among people, places, and things, in addition to how those people, places, and things change over time. Consequently, differentiation failures occur when people do not remember to separate things that are similar from one another.

Haney (1992) proposed three types of differentiation failures:

1. **Stereotyping:** failure to “recognize variations, nuances, and differences” in people, places, and things. (p. 360)
2. **Frozen Evaluation:** failure to “take into account the way person, a situation, a thing, and so on, changes over time.” (p. 423)
3. **Polarization:** failure to distinguish between “contradictories [authentic dichotomies] and “contraries [false dichotomies].” (p. 385)

We discover how language structures—an abundance of generic nouns and verbs, an assumption of nonchange, and similar grammatical forms—contribute to these patterns of miscommunication.

Each one of these failures is caused, in part, by language. We discover how language structures—an abundance of generic nouns and verbs, an assumption of nonchange, and similar grammatical forms—contribute to these patterns of miscommunication.

Similarly, we find that each differentiation failure can be corrected by *indexing* our thoughts:

1. Identifying “which” person or thing with a subscript after a noun (e.g., Christian₁ is not Christian₂.) deters stereotyping.
2. Explaining “when” with a superscript after a noun (e.g., Mary²⁰⁰⁰ is different from Mary²⁰¹³) updates frozen evaluations.
3. Adding “how much” with qualitative (e.g., almost), quantitative (e.g., 100), and middle terms (e.g., gray) avoids false dichotomies.

Indexing is the term Haney (1992) used for *indexes*, one of Korzybski’s (2000) five extensional devices. We already have discussed *etc.* as the antidote to allness; here we discuss the rest of them—*indexes*, *dates*, *quotes*, and *hyphens*—as correctives for differentiation failures. Korzybski (2000) believed that language would more accurately represent the empirical world if people routinely used these devices.

In the sections that follow, we explore contributing factors, correctives, and case studies for each type of differentiation failure. Follow the same sequence for analyzing the cases, as outlined in earlier chapters: (a) individuals read the case, identify characters, and define contributing factors for each character in a case before meeting as a group: (b) groups meet to identify, define, and discover how to demonstrate correctives for each character in their case: and (c) groups role play a new version of the case that is followed by a discussion about how to use the correctives in the future.

Once you understand the contributing factors and correctives for stereotyping, complete correctives-in-action worksheets for cases 6.1 and 6.2: *College Kids* and *Young Ladies*. Similarly, after reading about what contributes to frozen evaluations and how to update them, fill in worksheets for cases 6.3 and 6.4: *High School Friends* and *Academic Majors*. And, finally, when you understand what causes polarization, discuss how to avoid false dichotomies and complete worksheets for cases 6.5 and 6.6: *Good or Bad* and *Mexican or Chinese*.

STEREOTYPING

Let's begin with stereotyping—the most recognized type of differentiation failure. When reading about what contributes to this pattern of miscommunication, honestly consider how stereotypes stem from a reluctance to differentiate people, places, and things.

CONTRIBUTING FACTORS: STEREOTYPING

When we fail to acknowledge individual differences, we are guilty of stereotyping.

Haney (1992) noted that our “propensity to see similarities” is because of *language structure*—an “*abundance of generic nouns and verbs*” (p. 365) in the English language. Nouns such as “student,” “animal,” and “furniture” actually come in a variety of sizes and shapes, and verbs such as “get,” “make,” and “do” represent a variety of actions. How many different actions can you note for “make”? If you are having trouble finding more than five, consult a dictionary. You will discover 47 actions for “make” as a verb and 37 more explanations for “make” as a noun, verb phrase, and/or idiom. Pula (2000) noted that the “500 most commonly used English words show more than 14,000 recorded (dictionary) uses” (p. 18).

Hardening of the categories—Disregarding individuality and substituting a generality
Language structure—Using an abundance of generic nouns and verbs.

Although we need to categorize to solve problems, Haney (1992) warned that we could be guilty of “*hardening of the categories*” (p. 360) if we focused only on similarities. When we demonstrate this behavior, we are unwilling to question our classification of people, places, and things. For example, physicians often need to name a disease to treat it, but they risk missing individual patient factors if they are limited by one label. Similarly,

when managers believe that financial incentives are needed to motivate employees, they overlook desires of individuals who might be motivated by challenging tasks and status.

CORRECTIVES: STEREOTYPING

To combat differentiation failures, Haney (1992) advocated that people adopt an *extensional orientation*: the “predisposition to inspect the territory first—and then to create the verbal maps to correspond with it” (p. 456). As noted earlier, Haney’s “which index” is based on Korzybski’s (2000) “indexes,” one of the five devices needed to “achieve extensionalization” (p. lx).

Apply the “Which Index” (Indexes)

Many of us “index” our food recipes to separate different dishes, such as salads from cakes, just as we consult “indexes” in books to find various concepts and contributors. To limit stereotyping, we need to apply the “which index” to distinguish different experiences we have with various professors, as Professor1 is not Professor2, who is not Professor3, and so on. Haney (1992) suggested that we “use the little subscript as a mental exercise, as a habitual memory jogger to call [our] attention to difference” (p. 369).

When we index, we remember that no two people or events are alike, and that each one constantly is changing. In a classroom setting, women may avoid generalizing about “men,” if they can recall details of how male1 behaved differently from male2 at a recent event. In a work setting, we can avoid generalizing about colleagues from different races and sexual orientations by referring to colleagues by name. This helps us to remember the “individual” within the group.

Internalize the Premise of Uniqueness

Many of us are familiar with the popular aphorism that explains the premise of uniqueness, “No two fingerprints are the same.” We know from elementary school days that no two snowflakes are alike and that identical twins are far from identical when we get to know them. However, we make generalizations about people, such as not trusting salespeople and lobbyists, long after we leave elementary school.

Haney (1992) proposed that, “The more we discriminate among, the less we are likely to discriminate against” (1992, p. 368), which is based the Lee’s (1941) premise that opened this chapter: “Too often we discriminate *against* rather than *between* individuals (p. 110). In other words, we need to look for differences between individuals within a group to avoid stereotyping, which ultimately could lead to discrimination. How many times have we grouped “men” together, neglecting all of the individual characteristics that distinguish one man from another man in the group? Replace “man” with

Apply “Which-Index”—

Differentiate your experiences and identify who you are describing

Internalize the premise of uniqueness—Expect individual differences.

the group you frequently stereotype. Focusing on individual differences will help you avoid stereotyping individuals based on the group membership, and groups based on individuals.

CASE STUDIES: STEREOTYPING

The stereotyping worksheet below includes definitions for contributing factors and correctives; you complete the explanation sections. Individuals explain contributing factors for each character in a case before meeting as a group. Groups, then, explain correctives for each character and discover how to demonstrate correctives in a role play.

Character	Contributing Factor (define, explain)	Corrective (demonstrate, define, explain)
	<p>Definition: <i>Language structure</i>—Using an abundance of generic nouns and verbs.</p> <p>Explanation:</p>	<p>Definition: <i>Apply “Which-Index”</i>—Differentiate your experiences and identify who you are describing.</p> <p>Explanation:</p>
	<p>Definition: <i>Hardening of the categories</i>—Disregarding individuality and substituting a generality.</p> <p>Explanation:</p>	<p>Definition: <i>Internalize the premise of uniqueness</i>—Expect individual differences.</p> <p>Explanation:</p>
	<p>Definition:</p> <p>Explanation:</p>	<p>Definition:</p> <p>Explanation:</p>
	<p>Definition:</p> <p>Explanation:</p>	<p>Definition:</p> <p>Explanation:</p>

Figure 6.1: Corrective-in Action Worksheet for Stereotyping

Stereotyping Case 6.1: College Kids

Two college students, Caroline and Suzy, rented a downtown apartment during their senior year. Their apartment was “all-inclusive,” meaning that the landlord, Jim, paid for internet, cable, electricity, and water. This meant that Caroline and Suzy did not worry about problems with the apartment. Not having to pay all the utility bills was important to them, because this was the first time they had lived alone.

Jim assumed that all college students had a carefree attitude because he had rented apartments and houses to students for nearly 10 years. He did not have good experiences with some of the students who rented his properties. Because students had damaged appliances and walls, Jim had to spend a lot of money for repairs.

One Monday in early October, Jim questioned Caroline and Suzy about the water bill, “You have used over 6,000 gallons this month. Could you both make sure that none of the faucets are leaking and that the toilet is not continually filling? I will have a plumber come take a look at the fixtures on Wednesday.”

“Neither one of us knows anything about plumbing. We do not even know what to look for,” replied Suzy.

“If you see or hear water dripping, that is obviously not good,” Jim said, as he hurried out the door.

Still not quite sure what they were looking for, Suzy and Caroline checked all the faucets and the toilet. They did not see nor hear anything out of the ordinary, so they assumed that the faucets and toilet were working properly.

The next day, Jim contacted the plumber, “I am renting an apartment to these two college kids.” Jim moaned, “I think they are using too much water, so I would like you to see if everything is working properly. I think they broke something and it is costing me a lot of money.”

On Wednesday, the plumber found out that the toilet was not filling properly, causing it to run continuously. The plumber told Caroline and Suzy to tell Jim about the toilet. Neither girl realized that the plumber looked at the toilet but did not fix it. After hearing from Suzy that the plumber found the toilet was not filling properly, Jim assumed that the plumber had fixed the toilet.

A month later, when the November bill was still very high, Jim called the plumber and complained, “Those college kids still are costing me too much money. Would you see what they broke this time?”

The plumber replied, “Sure. I wondered why I never heard back from you about fixing the toilet. Would you like me to fix it while I am there?”

An exasperated Jim exclaimed, “Of course I do!” He muttered something about “college kids” as he slammed his cell phone back into his pocket.

Stereotyping Case 6.2: Young Ladies

It was beautiful Saturday morning in late August, and Ethel was very excited to be celebrating her 78th birthday by spending the day with her family. Karen, Ethel's daughter, and John, Karen's husband, were having the party at their house. They had two beautiful children: Sean, a junior in college, and Veronica, a seventh grader.

Although Ethel loved her family, she often found their behavior inappropriate and frequently spoke up about it. Ethel often was confused as to why they were so defensive about her constructive criticism. She decided to be on her best behavior and try not to say much, so Ethel arrived with a positive attitude.

Veronica had spent most of the day doing the chores that she had been assigned by her mother. As she was putting the vacuum away, Ethel arrived and exclaimed, "I guess you have not had time to dress for the party yet." Ethel critically eyed Veronica's outfit. Veronica was wearing a very short skirt, tight blouse, fashion boots, and a brightly colored scarf.

"This is the style now, Grandma. Do you like it?" Veronica replied as she straightened her skirt.

"When I was your age young ladies didn't dress like that," Ethel sighed.

Veronica crossed her arms and walked away, hurt that her grandma would say such a thing. As Veronica stormed out of the family room into the kitchen, she ran into her older brother, Sean, who had just gotten home from college.

"Welcome home, college kid, time to finish cleaning for the party. I swear, all college kids do is party and sleep. I can't wait to go to college and get away with doing nothing all the time!" Veronica huffed, pushing her way past Sean.

Their father had just returned from the store when he saw the exchange between his children. "Sorry, Sean, Veronica does not understand what it is like to be in college," John said, trying to relate to his son. "I remember working really hard during the week so that I could relax during the weekend."

Sean just rolled his eyes at his dad. He hated it when his parents assumed they knew what college was like for him. Too exhausted to argue, Sean muttered a response to his dad and walked into the front room to lie down on the couch. He had so much studying to do this weekend that he hoped to get a quick nap in before the party began.

When Veronica returned to the kitchen, Ethel asked her granddaughter, "Dear, why don't you go put on that sweater I bought you for Christmas last year? It looks adorable on you."

“Grandma, it has a giant teddy bear on it, and I am not a little girl anymore!” Veronica was so upset about her grandma’s comments that she collapsed on one of the kitchen chairs, trying hard to hold back tears.

Karen, who had just finished cleaning the bathrooms, came to her daughter’s rescue, “Mom, please try to understand that Veronica is at an age where she is trying to find her own style. She is discovering what she likes to wear, not what we tell her to wear.”

“I just do not want her to look like a tramp,” Ethel sighed, and then she reached out to Veronica. “I will try to do better, honey. I am sorry that I hurt your feelings.”

“Thanks, grandma,” Veronica said as they hugged each other. Perhaps this would be a good party after all.

FROZEN EVALUATION

In addition to failing to note differences between people, places and things, we neglect the daily changes within each person, place, and thing. We keep people and places “frozen” in the past. Let’s discover how frozen evaluation occurs, so that we can update our perceptions (maps).

CONTRIBUTING FACTORS: FROZEN EVALUATION

Haney (1992) blamed *language structure* for perpetuating the “insidious **assumption of nonchange**” (p. 435) that causes frozen evaluations. He showed that it is easy to “speak or write (or listen or read) without taking time into account” (p. 435), by having readers guess the date of the following statements:

Assumption of non-change

–Thinking what once was will always be.

Language Structure– Not assigning a date to our statements.

1. Prompted by widespread fears that new weapons of mass destruction might wipe out Western civilization, the Pope today issues a bill forbidding their use by any Christian state against another, whatever the provocation.
2. We need law and order. Yes, without law and order our nation cannot survive. Elect us, and we shall restore law and order.
3. The earth is degenerating these days. There are signs civilization is coming to an end. Bribery and corruption abound. Violence is everywhere. Children no longer respect and obey their parents. (p. 436)

The first statement was issued by Pope Innocent in 1139, the second statement was made by Hitler in 1932, and the third statement came from an Assyrian tablet around 3000 B.C. (Haney, p. 436). Did you think that these were more recent examples? Because words can be used without reference to time, attempts to “update our maps” often are thwarted by our language.

Haney (1992) claimed that the assumption of nonchange remained a “durable fallacy” because of **subtle changes**, those that happen so gradually that one is “insensitive to them” (p. 434). How many times have you walked or driven in a familiar area when you suddenly noticed a new tree, sign, or building? A colleague of mine enjoyed keeping track of the date in the fall when I finally noticed the changing colors of the trees. One year, she claimed that I even followed up my lack of awareness with, “Has that tree always been there?”

CORRECTIVES: FROZEN EVALUATION

When we do not remember to apply a “when index,” we exhibit an “intensional” orientation that can lead to frozen evaluation. Haney (1992) explained an intensional orientation as what happens when we respond to “maps (our feelings imaginings, visualizations, formulations,

attitudes, theories, preconceptions, evaluations, inferences) as if we were responding to the territory (objects, people, happenings, relationships, things, and so on)” (p. 457). By exploring the territory first, we can update our verbal maps and not leave people, places, and things “frozen” in the past.

Assumption of non-change

–Thinking what once was will always be.

Language Structure– Not assigning a date to our statements.

Apply the “When Index” (Dates)

The “when-index” is based on the extensional device called “dates” (Korzybski, 2000, p. lx). By mentally adding a date with a superscript, we remind ourselves that people and events change over time: Professor Lahman²⁰¹² is not Professor Lahman²⁰¹³ and a Values, Arts, and Ideas (VIA) event⁹⁻⁶⁻¹³ is not a VIA event.¹⁰⁻⁴⁻¹³

One of my favorite ways to apply this corrective is to try releasing high school and college classmates from my frozen evaluations. When I hear that one of the laziest students I knew is now excelling in the workplace, I often question how that is possible. This questioning occurs because I have not updated my “map” of the current “territory.” If I seek current information about this person, I can delay my automatic response.

Internalize the Premise of Change

No matter how many times someone reminds us that “the only thing constant is change,” we rarely remember this principle in our daily interactions with others. However, Haney (1992) argued that that one must “believe firmly in the process nature of people, of situations, of things, and so forth” to update evaluations (p. 436–437).

For those of us who have experienced a devastating loss, we know that our lives change instantly. When we re-enter daily routines, we do so as very different individuals, yet few people seem to notice. If we fail to recognize these major life changes, imagine how little we will notice subtle changes of aging and adjustments in worldview. This corrective reminds us that WIGO constantly is changing, so we need to anticipate such flurry of activity.

CASE STUDIES: FROZEN EVALUATION

The frozen evaluation worksheet below includes definitions for contributing factors and correctives; you complete the explanation sections. Individuals explain contributing factors for each character in a case before meeting as a group. Groups, then, explain correctives for each character and discover how to demonstrate correctives in a role play.

Character	Contributing Factor (define, explain)	Corrective (demonstrate, define, explain)
	Definition: <i>Language structure</i> —Not assigning a date to our statements. Explanation:	Definition: <i>Apply “When-Index”</i> —Add a date to your statement. Explanation:
	Definition: <i>Assumption of non-change</i> —Thinking that once was will always be. Explanation:	Definition: <i>Internalize the premise of change</i> —Anticipate changes in people, places, and things. Explanation:
	Definition: Explanation:	Definition: Explanation:
	Definition: Explanation:	Definition: Explanation:

Figure 6.2: Corrective-in Action Worksheet for Frozen Evaluation

Frozen Evaluation 6.1: High School Friends

Over Fall Break, Stacey visited her hometown to see her family and friends. She eagerly made plans to visit with two friends from high school, Angela and Bonnie. They had not seen each other since their high school graduation in May.

Before their visit, Stacey reminisced about how she had been an average student in high school. She completed work in a timely manner and earned good grades, but she never made it to the top of the class. She played sports in high school but she decided not to play in college to concentrate on her studies. She also maintained good study habits, so she was doing quite well in school.

Stacey remembered that Bonnie had a habit of skipping class in high school. Indeed, Bonnie rarely came to school on Fridays because she thought that Friday should be part of the weekend. During the week, Bonnie copied others' homework; on the weekend, she partied with friends. One time, Stacey remembered asking if Bonnie had read the book for the book report that was due in a week, and Bonnie replied by saying she had not read a single book since eighth grade.

As Stacey continued reminiscing on her drive to Applebee's, she remembered that Angela was one of the brightest students in high school. Angela maintained a 4.0 grade point average and often bragged about how well she was doing in all of her classes. Angela received a tuition-free scholarship because of her academic record. Stacey wondered what Angela would brag about now. Stacey imagined that Angela might say, "College is just so easy and all of my professors just love me."

At Applebee's, once they found a table, Stacey began the conversation, "So, Bonnie, how is the party life at your school?"

Bonnie replied, "Actually, I have not had time to attend any parties yet. I love my college classes, so I am busy doing homework and studying. Sometimes, I find myself reading the entire weekend. I am really enjoying it and am so glad that I chose to go to college."

Stacey, stunned by the reply, exclaimed, "Wow, I did not expect you to say that. If anything, I thought that you might already have dropped out of college. The way you hated high school made me think you would not even make it into college."

"Nope, I love it. I even received a scholarship that pays for me to study Spanish in Venezuela next year!" Bonnie said with a big smile.

"Awesome! So, Angela, how is college going for you?" Stacey questioned her friend.

“College actually is really hard for me. I cannot keep up with all my work and it just keeps piling up. I am trying to maintain my scholarship that pays for tuition, but that means I need to maintain a 2.0 grade point average and I am barely at a 2.1 at midterm,” Angela sighed. “I want to give up at times and just get a job doing whatever.”

“What? You were our valedictorian. What happened?” Stacey asked.

“College is so much harder for me than high school. There is nobody telling you what to do, so you have to manage your time. I find it is much easier to party than to study,” explained Angela.

“That is a surprise. You never partied in high school. I would ask you to go to a party with me and you would never come. I have a hard time believing that you have changed this much. I never would have imagined that things would turn out this way for you,” replied Bonnie.

Frozen Evaluation Case 6.2: Academic Majors

Charlie, a senior communication major, needed to purchase candy for his “movie night” residence hall activity. Because his floor decided to kick off the month of October with a showing of *Inception*, he headed straight for the candy aisle.

As he surveyed the numerous candy choices, Charlie noticed his old advisor, Professor Rolan, looking at the Halloween candy. Professor Rolan, who retired after Charlie’s first year, often seemed absent-minded. This always aggravated Charlie even though he knew that the professor meant well. Due to the recent downturn in the economy, Charlie thought Professor Rolan may have returned to work to build her children’s college funds. Charlie debated whether to say hello, but the professor beat him to it.

“Hello, Charlie! How is college?”

“Good, how is retirement?” asked Charlie.

“Actually, I have been consulting for a pharmaceutical company for a year. My husband and I decided that we are not quite ready to retire. I heard about the new biotechnology program at the college. How do you like it?”

“Well, I am actually a communication major now,” Charlie replied.

“That is interesting. I always heard about fun activities in that department: watching movies, playing on cell phones, and making YouTube videos.”

“It is a lot more complex than that,” Charlie said defensively.

“Good to hear. I must be going now. I wish you the best.”

“Thanks. I wish you the best too,” mumbled Charlie.

Charlie returned to his residence hall and found Veronica, a senior chemistry major, working on an assignment. They began a conversation in the lobby.

“I ran into Professor Rolan today,” noted Charlie.

“I saw her last week. She still thinks I am an English major. I wonder how she likes retirement.”

“She still thinks I plan on pursuing a degree in biochemistry. She is consulting with a pharmaceutical company, so she is no longer retired,” Charlie explained.

“Well it seems like a lot has changed for her. I am sorry she made fun of your communication major.”

Just as Veronica finished her statement, her roommate and communication major, Sally, joined the conversation, asking “Who is making fun of our major?”

“Charlie saw an old professor who did not remember he changed majors, and the professor thought all communication majors did was watch movies and play on cell phones,” Veronica answered.

“Don’t be upset, Charlie. Professors should update their perceptions, especially when departments have new faculty and courses,” contended Sally.

POLARIZATION

The final pattern of miscommunication we explore in this chapter is polarization. Much like we neglect differences between people when stereotyping and differences within things over time when using frozen evaluations, we are guilty of polarization when neglecting differences between authentic and false dichotomies.

Haney (1992) included polarization as a special form of differentiation failure because of its relevance in public discourse: civility erodes when groups demand, “You are either for us or against us.” When we limit debates to two sides, we firmly move into opposing camps, and we escalate conflict with oversimplification of issues. Let’s explore what contributes to this either–or thinking and how we can avoid false dichotomies when interacting with others.

CONTRIBUTING FACTORS: POLARIZATION

Haney (1992) proposed that there are very few authentic dichotomies and labeled these “contradictories”: “You are six feet tall or you are not” (p. 385). These authentic dichotomies have *no middle ground*. Similarly, he labeled false dichotomies as “contraries” because they do have middle ground. We know that people are not just “tall or short” (p. 385). We can mislead others when we use contraries as if they were contradictories.

Because we use the same “*either–or*” *grammatical form* for both statements, we have a difficult time distinguishing between the two. There is nothing in word “or” that indicates we are referring to and hearing an authentic dichotomy. Perhaps we need to pause when we use and hear the word “or,” so that we accurately assess the choices before us. Experiment with simple daily tasks and observations to see if using “and” would provide more alternatives. For example, if we change a daily thought from “I can eat breakfast or I can make it to class on time” to “I can eat breakfast and make it to class on time,” then we find a way to accomplish both tasks.

Haney (1992) provided examples of issues that often are treated as authentic dichotomies even though these issues exist on a continuum (suggested by a hyphen): “health-illness, wealth-poverty, war-peace, hero-villain, sanity-insanity, beauty-ugliness, conservative-liberal, intelligence-stupidity, bravery-cowardice, line-staff, investment-speculation, right-wrong, competence-incompetence, mind-body, good-bad, heredity-environment, true-false, honesty-dishonesty, guilt-innocence” (p. 387).

A number of these issues bring to mind our recent arguments with family, friends, and colleagues. How many times do we contend that our interpretations of recent political debates are true or right? Remembering these events occur on a continuum may uncover new perspectives for old arguments.

Neglect of middle ground—

The lack of “gray” words and hyphenated terms

*Language Structure—*Similar grammatical form.

CORRECTIVES: POLARIZATION

In addition to etc., indexes, and dates noted in previous sections, Korzybski (2000) proposed using “hyphens” and “quotes” to implement an extensional orientation. These devices ensure that we apply the general semantics formulations in our daily thinking.

Apply the “How-much Index”

Haney (1992) recommended applying the “how-much index” (p. 399), which specifies the degree between the ends of a false dichotomy. Haney provided the following ways to specify degree:

1. Use a quantitative index when possible (e.g., measurements, numbers)
2. Use substantive middle terms when available (e.g., gradations, nuances)
3. Use quantifying terms (e.g., adverbs, adjectives). (p. 400)

In addition to accurate measurements, Keller proposed turning “either–or” statements into “both/and” challenges (personal communication, July 12, 1995). This technique provides answers along a continuum that would have otherwise been ignored. For example, college students often discover that more solutions are generated when they change the challenge from “should I study *or* hang out with friends” to “how can I study *and* hang out with friends.”

Quotes

Haney (1992) used “quotes” to explain how we can avoid the “I-know-reality fallacy” (p. 392) that escalates interpersonal conflict. He advised us to “acquire the *to-me-ness* and the *to-other-ness* habits [by prefacing] your value judgment with ‘to me’” (Haney, p. 404). Once again, this habit begins on the silent level as you are preparing your thoughts and listening to others’ explanations. As we become more proficient with delaying our evaluations, we might even remember to include a “to me” at the beginning or end of our spoken statements.

Many of us already place “air quotes” around words that may confuse others. This practice alerts those involved in the communication event to inquire about the meaning of those words. This brief pause encourages delayed evaluations and could lead to an awareness of different levels of abstraction.

Hyphens (En Dashes)

I found that adding hyphens to our thinking processes, much like we learned to do with etc., deterred polarizing discourse during discussions about effective learning environments. For example, if students were taught to think about classroom behaviors that led to increased

Apply “How-Much” index—

Use quantifying and qualifying terms.

Use the hyphen (en dash): Find ranges of behaviors between extremes.

Use quotes to indicate “to-me-ness” and “to-other-ness” –

Preface personal statement with “to me,” and think “to-other” in others’ statements.

learning on a “positive-negative” continuum, they could set incremental, measurable goals based on past successful behaviors *and* avoid behaviors that negatively affect learning (Lahman, 2011). The use of a hyphen avoided a false dichotomy, by focusing on what was going well (the premise of appreciative inquiry) versus focusing on what was wrong (the premise of problem-solving methods).

Perhaps, the *en dash*, which is used to indicate ranges in numbers and other types of ranges, would provide a range of options between false dichotomies. An en dash links two separate things, forcing a two-sided continuum from which nuances can be implied. For example, we might challenge ourselves to find “republican—democrat” response to health care. Similarly, how might “spend—save” plans for welfare open minds of policy makers (and those of us locked in heated personal debates)?

If we challenge ourselves to find more than “two sides to the story,” perhaps we can avoid false dichotomies. Lee (1941) cautioned people about polar words: “The point to be made is this: that two-valued statements tend to conceal the variety and differences of ‘things,’ each of which is capable of many-valued description” (p. 105). Similarly, I propose that people use en dashes that force a closer look at extremes, to find ways out of polarizing dialogue.

“Similarly, I propose that people use en dashes that force a closer look at extremes, to find ways out of polarizing dialogue.”

CASE STUDIES: POLARIZATION

The polarization worksheet below includes definitions for contributing factors and correctives; you need to complete the explanation sections. Individuals explain contributing factors for each character in a case before meeting as a group. Groups, then, explain correctives for each character and discover how to demonstrate correctives in a role play.

Character	Contributing Factor (define, explain)	Corrective (demonstrate, define, explain)
	<p>Definition: <i>Language structure</i>—Similar grammatical form.</p> <p>Explanation:</p>	<p>Definition: <i>Apply “How-Much Index”</i>—Use quantifying and qualifying terms.</p> <p>Explanation:</p>
	<p>Definition: <i>Neglect of middle ground</i>—The lack of “gray” words and hyphens (en dashes).</p> <p>Explanation:</p>	<p>Definition: <i>Use the hyphen (en dash)</i>—Find ranges of behaviors between extremes.</p> <p>Explanation:</p>
	<p>Definition:</p> <p>Explanation:</p>	<p>Definition: <i>Use quotes to indicate “to-me-ness” and “to-other-ness”</i>—Preface personal statements with “to me,” and think “to other” in others’ statements.</p> <p>Explanation:</p>
	<p>Definition:</p> <p>Explanation:</p>	<p>Definition:</p> <p>Explanation:</p>

Figure 6.3: Corrective-in Action Worksheet for Polarization

Polarization 6.1: Good or Bad

The end of the semester causes great stress for many students, and, Jan, Mary, and Cindy were no exception. During their senior year, projects, such as unit plans, poster sessions, and field experiences, had kept them very busy. With the end so near, all of them were diligently working to get everything finished on time. The Friday before finals, they were discussing their classroom management plans.

Cindy, who did not normally work very hard and had low expectations, said, “I do not understand why you both are so worried. I thought I did well with my plan. I either will get a good or bad grade; it is not a big deal.”

Jan replied, “I have to do well on this project to get a good grade in this class.” Unlike Cindy, Jan worked very hard on her grades and always tried to get an “A” on everything that she completed. Jan strived to get the very best grade and did not accept anything less.

Mary, who differed from both women, voiced her opinion, “I am not too concerned about my grade; I just do not want a failing grade.” This was a typical attitude for Mary. She was an easy-going person who did not let stress get the best of her. She did her best on all of her assignments and that was enough for her.

A week later, Jan had reached her goal of an “A,” and she was eager to share her success, so she questioned Mary and Cindy about their grades.

“I did well,” said Mary. “I got a ‘B.’”

“Really? I have to get an ‘A’ or I think that I have failed,” responded Jan.

Cindy chimed in, “I cannot relate to either one of you. I think I did really well and I earned a ‘C-.’”

Jan and Mary looked at each other knowingly, and then Jan replied, “Cindy, that is not that good.”

“I passed. Earning a ‘C-’ means I get credit for the class and that is good enough for me,” Cindy protested as she rushed to another class.

Jan explained to Mary as they walked to lunch, “I do not know how she expects to become a good teacher if she gets ‘Cs’ all the time.”

Mary replied softly, “So true. You either understand classroom management or you do not. If you do not, you will be a bad teacher.”

They shook their heads as they walked into the student union. They were worried about their dear friend.

Polarization 6.2: Mexican or Chinese

Four friends sat around Peter's dorm room on the Sunday before final exams, trying to decide what to eat. Everyone, regardless of major, felt edgy because of the stress of studying. They had been studying for exams all day and they wanted to take a break. Their options seemed limited because there were not many places to eat in their small college town. Peter, a senior chemistry major, decided to take charge.

"What shall we eat for dinner?" Peter asked.

"I can eat anything," replied Bobby, a sophomore education major.

"I do not care either," Greg, a senior English major, echoed.

"How about we decide whether we are going to eat out or cook in the lobby?" asked Clyde, a junior music major, who was the best cook of the group.

"How about *you* make that decision then, Clyde?" Peter suggested.

"I just want to go out," Clyde suggested.

"Yeah, something spicy!" Bobby chimed in.

"Okay, then, Chinese or Mexican?" Peter asked.

"I really do not care, but no egg drop soup," Greg added.

"So, should we choose Mexican, Greg?" Peter proposed.

"I do not care, as long as it is not Chinese, I will eat anything," Greg answered.

"I like Mexican, but I am craving something else. I just cannot put my finger on it," Bobby said.

"Okay, this is what we have so far. Clyde says that we are going out, Bobby likes Mexican, and Greg does not like Chinese, so we will eat Mexican," Peter concluded.

Peter grabbed his jacket and keys, and he headed for the door, followed by Bobby, Greg, and Clyde. They did not all agree with the decision but at this point, they were hungry and tired of discussing their limited restaurant options.

On the way to the restaurant, Bobby still was trying to label his craving, and Clyde wondered if a trip to the local grocery would have gotten them "out" like he suggested *and* helped

them to find the “spicy” food that Bobby wanted. Next semester, when Clyde was a senior, he would remember to include the grocery store as a way to expand their food options in their small college town.

SUMMARY

Language structure contributes to all three types of differentiation failures. We have an abundance of generic nouns and verbs, we cannot account for time, and we use either–or for both authentic and false dichotomies. Additional contributing factors include hardening of the categories when stereotyping, assuming that nothing will change and ignoring subtle changes when frozen in our evaluations, and refusing to look for middle ground when experiencing polarization.

We use a form of indexing to address all three of the differentiation failures: the “which-index” (indexes), the “when-index” (dates), and the “how-much” index. In addition to indexing, we internalize the premise of uniqueness to avoid stereotyping, internalize the premise of change to remember to “unthaw” frozen evaluations, and use hyphens and quotes to find ways out of polarizing dialogue. Fully aware of the extensional devices needed to live extensionally, we are taking action based on our awareness of general semantics formulations.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Explain the value of seeing similarities.
2. If the only thing constant is change, how do we forget this important premise?
3. What do stereotyping, frozen evaluation, and polarization have in common? How are they different?

CONCLUSION

Living Extensionally Takes a Lifetime

Beginners often take upon themselves the task of enthusiastically spreading their new-found “wisdom” to family and friends. We suggest that, for best long-term results, you temper this response.

—Susan & Bruce Kodish (2011, p. 200)

At the end of a Language and Thought course, we often conclude that *everyone* needs to learn about general semantics. Once we recognize the allness language in that statement, we discuss ways to continue the “course-generated enthusiasm” for a general semantics approach to language behavior. Fully convinced of our time-binding responsibilities, we wonder how to best teach others about the patterns of miscommunication.

One semester, I shared these discussions with Professor Keller, who proposed that we worry less about “teaching others” and more about “modeling the correctives.” I often saw him follow this advice when participating in and facilitating community group discussions. Beginning his interactions with the simple phrase, “I wonder if,” he modeled how to question *and* paraphrase. He often used the “how much,” “which,” and “when” indexes, seeking information from the territory (people and contexts) and then updating his map (language and perceptions).

After helping to edit this text, my son wondered how I could have known about the pitfalls of language for so long and still exhibit patterns of miscommunication. I explained to him, as Meiers (1952) convinced participants at The First Conference in General Semantics in 1951, that living extensionally is “a lifetime process” (p. 277). More telling is how Meiers warned newcomers of the dangers of becoming general semantics fanatics. I share Meiers’s concern, so offer several of these warnings as well:

1. Beware of accepting the disciplines of general semantics as a panacea . . . speaking of it with such “allness” of enthusiasm that it sounds like a panacea.
2. Beware of using trade jargon—that is the particular terminology of general semantics—in conversation with those who are unfamiliar with the terms.
3. Beware of the “wiser-than-thou” attitude of applying classification labels to conversational remarks of other people . . . students usually find great pleasure in their ability to recognize higher and lower abstractions in language—especially in the language of others. To make matters worse, they sometimes act as if the higher abstractions and inferences and judgments are less worthy of their consideration than descriptive statements.
4. Beware of exaggerating the use of the semantic devices to the extent of appearing ridiculous. These five little devices suggested by Korzybski—quotes, dating

[when index], indexing, hyphens, and the *etc.*—are practiced inconspicuously in the everyday language of thousands of people who make no overt reference to general semantics.

5. Beware of merely talking about general semantics without applying its principles in practice. The highly verbal individual who finds in general semantics a new and exciting philosophy is in danger of keeping it forever on the verbal level, thus increasing the very futility that its discipline hopes to correct. (pp. 275–277).

Each of these dangers resonates with those who believe that they can communicate more effectively if they keep applying general semantics formulations. People may find themselves guilty of each of these behaviors as they diligently pursue eliminating patterns of miscommunication.

In the pursuit of excellence, we may forget, that we are “acquiring an orientation, not a straitjacket” (Kodish & Kodish, 2011, p. 200). Just because we are raising our awareness of our nervous systems’ limitations, we cannot assume that others will be as willing to learn about abstraction and the resulting “miscalculations” found in language behavior.

Ultimately, we would be wise to heed the advice about “minimum expectations” offered by Kodish and Kodish (2011): “When we have minimum expectations about any situation, that is, we’re prepared for not finding what we want, we will more likely find the ‘facts’ of the situation better than we expected; we’ve prepared ourselves for curiosity, change, excitement, happiness, hope, sanity, etc.” (p. 199). Perhaps just aiming for humor in the way that we misuse language will help us to continue the extensional journey.

After all, we have a lifetime to do so . . .

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GLOSSARY

Abstraction: the process that occurs when people's senses and locations, previous training and experiences, limit what they encounter of all that is going on in the world.

Accommodative knowledge: a stage of Kolb's experiential learning cycle that involves transforming intuitive aspects of experience through active experimentation

Allness: acting as if what is said, written, or thought includes all that is important about a subject, person, and event.

Assimilative knowledge: a stage of Kolb's experiential learning cycle that involves deciding on the best solution for the experience.

Bypassing: when a listener and speaker act as if the words mean the same thing to each person, but their interpretations are different.

Convergent knowledge: a stage of Kolb's experiential learning cycle that involves designing an implementation plan for the experience.

Divergent knowledge: a stage of Kolb's experiential learning cycle that involves transforming intuitive aspects of experience through reflection.

Extensional orientation: using nervous systems most efficiently by going to the territory (lived experiences) to assess the accuracy of the maps (language choices).

E-prime: not using any form of the verb "to be" in writing.

False-to fact: using the inaccurate "is of identity" to create inferences at other levels of abstraction.

General semantics: a scientific orientation toward language behavior that encourages more efficient use of the nervous system to create more accurate maps (language choices) of territories (lived experiences).

Identification: when people confuse levels of abstraction, they are prone to misevaluation.

Indexing: indicating "which" person or thing by including a subscript after a generic noun.

Inference-observation confusion: acting on an inference as if it were an observation.

Is of identity: using any form of “to be” to link nouns as if they were identical, on the same level of abstraction.

Is of prediction: using any form of “to be” to link nouns with adjectives, as if personality characteristics remain constant.

Non-Aristotelian system: behaviors that encourage a complete and conscious elimination of identification.

Nonverbal awareness: an awareness of “the mad dance of electrons” (event level) and the limitations of senses (object level) to perceive the event level, or WIGO.

Scientific orientation toward language: questioning the accuracy of daily language choices.

Semantic reaction: the intellectual and emotional, or psycho-logical, response of a human organism to a given stimulus; these reactions constitute “meaning” for humans.

Structural differential: visual representation of how nervous systems abstract. Korzybski advocated keeping the diagram nearby because people need a visual reminder of a process that happens automatically: they leave out characteristics when they sense objects (“O” level) from WIGO (“E” level) and even more characteristics when label the object (“D” level).

Think-feel-evaluate: hyphenated verb used to refer to the intellectual and emotional response of a human being during the abstraction process.

Time-binding: a uniquely human capacity to share experiences with others and pass this learning on to future generations.

Verbal awareness: an awareness of the limitations of language accurately representing the object (senses) and event levels (WIGO) in the nonverbal world.

WIGO: the world in process, due to the constant changing of microscopic and submicroscopic levels of existence.

