THEORETICAL ASPECTS OF INTERCULTURAL COMMUNICATION

STRUCTURE-INTERACTION THEORY: CONCEPTUAL, CONTEXTUAL AND STRATEGIC INFLUENCES ON HUMAN COMMUNICATION

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This paper addresses Structure-Interaction Theory (SIT), a theoretical framework that both describes communication messages as well as assists in making predictions about how human communication can be improved based on listener preferences for message structure or interaction. Communication messages may be characterized as existing on a continuum of structure-interaction. Communication *structure* is the inherent way information in a message is organized. A highly structured message is one in which the message is strategically organized using a planned arrangement of symbols to create meaning. Communication *interaction* is a way of viewing a message with give-and-take, less sustained "notes," more change in note sequence and briefer notes. SIT seeks to provide a framework to assist communicators in appropriately adapting a message for maximum effectiveness. Although Structure-Interaction Theory newly articulated here, it is anchored in both classic ways of describing communication, such as rhetoric and dialectic (Aristotle, 1959), as well as more contemporary communication theories (Salem, 2012; Littlejohn & Foss, 2008). Specifically, the paper provides an overview of the theory and its conceptual assumptions, identifies how the theory can help explain and predict communication in several communication contexts (interpersonal, group, public communication), and suggests how SIT may help identify strategies to enhance human development.

Structure-Interaction Theory is based on an assumption that a human communication message which is understood, achieves the intended effect of the communicator, and is ethical, requires an appropriate balance of two things: structure and interaction. Communication structure is the inherent way a message is constructed to provide a sustained direction to present information to another person. In linking structure and interaction to Aristotle's description of messages, rhetoric is a more structured, sustained speech or planned message. Dialectic is characterized by a more spontaneous give and take interaction of messages and response to messages. SIT posits that all communication can be placed on a continuum of structure-interaction. The paper identifies applications of SIT to several communication situations and presents communication strategies that can enhance human development. The paper also notes how SIT can be used to develop message strategies to adapt to audience preferences for structure and interaction based on culture and audience expectations. Considering the needs, interests, values (including cultural values) of the audience, is the prime determinant of the degree of structure or interaction that should be evident in a communication episode.

Appropriately applied, SIT may help both describe the nature of messages (as structured or interactive) as well as assist in making predictions as to how applications of the structure-interaction message continuum may enhance communication effectiveness.

Key words: Structure-interaction theory (SIT), communication messages, ccommunication context, communication strategies, rhetoric, dialectic.

There are fundamental principles of human communication that unite all human interaction. I have suggested that there are five fundamental principles of human communication that operate in all cultures and all communication contexts—mediated or unmediated (Beebe, Beebe & Ivy, 2016):

1. Be aware of your communication and your communication with others.
2. Effectively use and interpret verbal messages.
3. Effectively use and interpret nonverbal messages.
4. Listen and thoughtfully respond to others.
5. Appropriately adapt messages to others.

I suggest that all cultures and all people would find these principles useful. Certainly there are cultural differences in the way we use and interpret verbal and nonverbal messages and in the way we adapt and even in listening style; but all cultures value the effective use and interpretation of verbal and nonverbal messages. All communication requires some level of awareness for communication to be effective. In addition, listening and adapting are important principles for all human interaction. This paper elaborates on principle five, how to adapt messages to others. Specifically, I discuss how to adapt message structure and message interaction based on a variety of factors including culture, audience expectations and individual personality traits.

"Rhetoric is the counterpart of dialectic" (Aristotle, 1959). This opening sentence from Aristotle's seminal work, *Rhetoric*, foreshadowed a pervasive way of conceptualizing human communication. In contrasting rhetoric with dialectic, Aristotle identified fundamental ways of describing the form and function of human communication messages—the way information is organized to create a message and subsequent meaning. Rhetoric, according to Aristotle (1959), is the discovery of the available means of persuasion in a given case. To "use" rhetoric is to carefully construct a planned, intentional, pre-mediated, organized message that seeks to persuade (change or reinforce attitudes, beliefs, values and/or behavior). Although Aristotle did not define *dialectic* as crisply as he defined *rhetoric*, for Aristotle dialectic is the Socratic method of using questions, answers, debate, and dialogue to discover the truth in a given situation. Dialectical forms and functions of communication are most typically found in courtrooms in which witnesses, experts, attorneys, a jury and a judge or judges seek to discover what is true and what is false. Dialectical expression may also occur in conversations between two or more people to express a range of ideas and emotions. Group communication often exhibits considerable give-and-take truth-searching dialectical exchanges.

In comparing and contrasting rhetoric and dialectic as a fundamental way of describing communication genres, Aristotle provided a seminal communication taxonomy of message organization. The word counterpart (*antistrophus*) in Aristotle's taxonomy,

according to Kennedy (1980; Anderson, 2007), can also mean "correlative", "coordinate", or "converse". Communication may be described based on both its function (to persuade, inform, entertain) and form (whether brief or sustained, organized or disorganized). Rhetoric and dialectic are two distinct ways of communicating with differing goals, strategies, methods and forms. Rhetoric, based on Aristotle's (1959) treatise, is characterized as more of a sustained, organized speech presented to persuade. Dialectic is a more interactive, question and answer communication format that certainly may have persuasive intentions, but is often designed to uncover what is and is not true. More succinctly, dialectic is the search for truth; rhetoric is employed when one believes the truth has been found. Rhetoric is a more structured message; dialectic is a more interactive message.

The purpose of this paper is to describe Structure-Interaction Theory (SIT), a cogent theoretical framework useful for both explaining communication messages as well as assisting in making predictions about how human communication can be improved (both in terms of its effectiveness and appropriateness). SIT seeks to inform communication strategies that can assist with human development and enhance the quality of communication. The theory helps both describe communication messages, as well as suggests the development of communication strategies which may enhance communication effectiveness and appropriateness. Structure-Interaction Theory is anchored in both classic communication paradigms (Aristotle, 1959) as well as more contemporary communication theories (Littlejohn & Foss, 2008; Salem, 2012). Specifically, the paper provides an overview of SIT and its conceptual assumptions, identifies how the theory may be applied to communication in several communication contexts, and finally suggests how SIT may help inform strategies to enhance human communication.

CONCEPTUAL UNDERPINNINGS
OF STRUCTURE-INTERACTION THEORY

At its essence, communication is the process of acting on information (Dance & Larson, 1967). Someone creates a message and another person acts or responds to the message. A message (comprised of information) does not become communication until someone or something reacts or responds to the message. The proverbial tree that falls in the forest does not create meaningful sound until someone hears and interprets it. Similarly, encoding a message, creating information (the reduction of uncertainty) either intentionally or unintentionally, does not constitute *communication* until there is a response to the message; the response may be conscious (such as being aware of listening to a message) or unconscious (such as simply having the hammer, anvil and stirrup in the ear drums vibrate) even though there is no conscious awareness of the meaning of the message. Machines and animals communicate — they act on information. Human communication is concerned with meaning, symbols and sense making; it is the *process of making sense out of the world and sharing that sense with others by creating meaning though the use of verbal and nonverbal messages* (Beebe, Beebe & Ivy, 2016). To be effective communication should achieve three criteria; a communication message should: (1) be understood, (2) achieve the intended effect, and (3) be ethical.

The meaning that results from responding to information creates ongoing connections or relationships between other people. Simply stated, messages (information) create meaning (sense making) that results in relationships (mutual connections).

Structure-Interaction Theory is based on an assumption that effective and appropriate human communication (that achieves the three criteria stated above) needs a balance of two things: Structure and interaction. Communication *structure* is the inherent way information in a message is organized. A highly structured message is one in which the message is strategically organized using a planned arrangement of symbols to create meaning. A highly structured message typically is a more sustained message that contains fewer interruptions than an interactive message. Using a music analogy, music can be described in terms of the rhythm, pitch, sequence, and duration of the notes that constitute the music. A structured message is one that includes more sustained notes and evidences fewer changes in the note patterns, pitch and rhythm. A structured message embodies less change or variation in message organization.

Structuration theory, originally developed by Giddens (1984), provides a theoretical framework for describing how people develop social structures in societies, organizations and groups. The essence of structuration theory is that people use the rules and resources within a human system to provide order and structure. The structures that are iteratively created are based on the rules and resources of the past and the present. According to researchers (Giddens, 1984; Poole, Seibold & McPhee, 1996) the process of developing a structure is a natural and normal aspect of human groups, large or small. We use the structure of a message to help make sense of the message.

In contrast with the development of structure, communication *interaction* is a way of viewing a message with give-and-take, less sustained "notes", more change in note sequence and briefer notes. In linking structure and interaction to Aristotle's description of messages, rhetoric is a more structured, sustained or planned message. Dialectic is characterized by the give-and-take interaction of messages and responses to messages. SIT suggests that all communication messages can be placed on a continuum of structure-interaction.

Highly structured messages are analogous to Aristotle's definition of rhetoric. A structured message is usually planned, sustained and seeks to accomplish an intentional rhetorical goal. In contrast, interactive messages are usually shorter and are contextually synchronous with the messages both before and after the message presented. To continue the music metaphor, classical music is analogous to structure; jazz is analogous to interaction.

SIT is anchored in several theoretical frameworks and perspectives. Russian philosopher and educator Mikhail Bakhtin's conceptualization of forces that influence our life trajectory provides one foundation to SIT. Bakhtin (1930) described everyday reality as prosaic; our lives consist of sleeping, talking, eating, listening — these seemingly mundane aspects of living constitute the prosaic nature of living. Within the context of the prosaic nature of life emerge decisions and actions that result in changes to the prosaic. We live life; events and actions influence how life is lived. According to Bakhtin, two fundamental forces that result in change or lack of change are centripetal forces

and centrifugal forces. *Centripetal forces* are those that impose order (structure) on the general chaos of life. Using an analogy from physics, centripetal forces are similar to gravity. Gravity creates order out of chaos by anchoring and centering our actions; gravity creates a structure that brings stability and coherence to the prosaic, everyday actions of living. In contrast, *centrifugal forces* (interaction) are analogous to the rotation of the earth; this movement exerts a counter force to the pull of the centripetal or gravitational force. These are forces that result in movement, action and interaction with others. In describing these two forces on actions and decisions, Bakhtin was implicitly describing the nature of structure and interaction that results from these two forces. SIT presumes that there are similar forces that influence the nature, sequence and organization of human communication; centripetal forces influence the coherent structure of messages; centrifugal forces result in movement, punctuation and give and take responses that result in interaction.

Yet another way of describing the fundamental nature of communication structure and interaction may be found in perspectives emanating from scientific hypothesis. Scientist and educator Raymo (2008) has observed that the nature of scientific inquiry can be sorted into two often simultaneous quests: We seek answers to questions that reveal *universal truths* and we also strive to explain and predict phenomena in individual, *particular situations*. Scientific inquiry, by observing and measuring "what is", is designed to answer both kinds of questions—first, those that provide universal axioms (principles that provide structure) to help make sense of the chaos of life and, second, those answers that seek to explain and predict specific instances in a given situation (in a given interactive moment in time). Scientific inquiry seeks answers to these explanations and predictions *at the same time*. Again, these two elements of inquiry, universal (structure) and particular (interaction), suggest a quest to seek both a predictable, universal structure while helping to make sense of the chaotic, interactive, multisensory nature of life. SIT draws upon both of these anchoring questions — those that provide universal answers — the structure of a message, and those that seek explain specific instances — the interactive nature of messages.

Another way of viewing communication from a structure-interaction perspective is to consider the fundamental aspect of communication. As Salem (2012) has noted in his insightful analysis highlighting the process-nature of communication, *Complexity*, the most fundamental aspect of communication involves identifying similarity and differences. As Salem (2012) described it, "...there is a tension between similar and different in the enactment of communication" (p. 49). Similarity and difference in human communication form the basis of what Bateson (1958) described as balancing symmetrical and complementary patterns of communication. The symmetrical and complementary nature of communication and the nature of relationships is yet another way of describing the structuring-interactive nature of communication messages. Similarity in communication results in predictability and more communication symmetry; the communication patterns or structure of messages mirror each other. Communication differences result in change and ultimately to entropic chaos (interaction). Messages of high structure are messages that are similar and more symmetrical (mirrored) in that

one is able to predict what will occur in the message. Messages of difference involve messages in which predictability is low — also an element of interactive messages; messages compete or complement which results in a complementary relationship. So structured messages include greater predictability—there are fewer differences and therefore we are able to more accurately predict the overall structure or sequence of a message. Interactive messages include more differences and those messages have less predictability because of the differences inherent in an interactive message.

The structured and interactive nature of communication and the messages that result from the information is evident in a variety of modes of human expression; structure and interaction occur not only in verbal communication but also in art as well as in music. In describing the art of Henri Matisse, Flam (2013) noted that "The world is conceived as a continuum in which objects and people are seen as being both stable and dynamic..." (p. 17). When describing Matisse's works of art he noted, "... the energy and meanings implicit in things are fluid and individual parts have meaning only in relation to all the others" (p. 17). Meaning, then, results when humans interpret the structure and interaction of communication messages, whether in a sonnet, a symphony or a swirl of color in a Matisse painting.

STRUCTURE-INTERACTION THEORY APPLIED
TO COMMUNICATION CONTEXTS

A communication context is the overall situation in which the communication occurs including the number of people involved in a given communication, the norms (what normally occurs), rules (followable prescriptions) or expectations (predictions) of communication within a given situation, and the goal and function of communication within a given communication setting. Context also includes the physical environment in which the communication occurs. Classic communication contexts include interpersonal communication, group communication, public communication, and electronic and print mediated communication. There is a considerable body of research that has investigated the nature and function of communication within these contexts.

The structured or unstructured nature of a communication message is influenced by the message's goal and is especially adaptive to the receiver of the message. The structure of a given message influences the meaning a receiver creates within a given communication context. The resulting meaning, in turn, is a significant factor in the development of human relationships — the ongoing connections that occur because of communication. In the interpersonal communication context there is often meaning generated about the nature of the relationship. In group communication contexts, although relationships occur because of the need to merely associate with others (primary groups), most secondary groups exist to achieve a specific task or function. Public communication messages establish a relationship between speaker and audience as rhetors adjust ideas to people and people to ideas (Bryant, 1953). In the increasingly prevalent electronic mediated communication context, relationships are developed as suggested by social information processing theory (Tidwell and Walther, 2002), but task functions have priority over relational development, especially in business and other orga-

nizational settings. Interpersonal, group, public and electronically-mediated communication is discussed to illustrate applications of SIT to a variety of different communication contexts.

Interpersonal Communication

Interpersonal communication is a distinctive, transactional form of human communication involving mutual influence usually for the purpose of managing relationships (Beebe, Beebe and Ivy, 2016). Relationships consist of the connections we make with another person through communication; relationships may be fleeting or ongoing. As defined by Salem (2012) a relationship is "The emergent set of shared, cooriented, or compatible perceptions actors have about each other with each other" (p. 230). SIT may be used to describe interpersonal communication from several existing theoretical frameworks.

Philosopher Martin Buber influenced the discussion of interpersonal relationships when he described communication as consisting of two different qualities of relationships: an "I-It" relationship or an "I-Thou" relationship (Buber, 1958). An "I-It" relationship is more impersonal in which the other person is perceived as an "It" rather than as a unique, authentic person. "I-It" relationships occur with more structured, formulaic communication messages. In contrast, "I-Thou" relationships treat the other person as an authentic, unique individual. "I-Thou" relationships grow from interactive communication rather than static, structured messages. Such a relationship stems from dialogue rather than monologue. Or, viewed from an SIT perspective, an "I-Thou" relationship is characterized by increased interaction rather than structured messages.

A related construct to Buber's (1958) description of relationships on a continuum of "I-Thou" to "I-It" is viewing interpersonal relationships in terms of monologue or dialogue. Monologic relationships are those in which messages are more structured; there are longer periods of talk. Dialogic relationships, on the other hand, are characterized by more interactive talk; messages are listened to and responded to (Stewart, 2013). In a dialogic communication there is a greater sense of being other-oriented. To be other-oriented is to be aware of the thoughts, needs, experiences, personality, emotions, motives, desires, culture and goals of the other person. But it does not mean a person abandons his or her sense of integrity or ethics. To be other-oriented is to listen, thoughtfully respond, and appropriately adapt messages (Beebe, Beebe and Redmond, 2017).

Yet an additional theoretical perspective, anchored in the work of Mikhail Bakhtin (1930), views relationship development as the management of tensions that pull us in two directions simultaneously. Relational Dialectic Theory (Baxter, 1988; Baxter & Montgomery, 1997) seeks to describe the nature of these simultaneous tensions that operate in all relationships. According to Baxter (1988) and Baxter and Montgomery (1997), three predominant dialectical tensions include: (1) connectedness versus autonomy — the desire to both connect and be interdependent with another person and a desire to remain autonomous and independent; (2) Predictability versus novelty (certainty versus uncertainty); and (3) openness versus closedness. SIT suggests that the two directions are pressures for structure and opposing forces of interaction. Message structure and interaction is a framework for viewing the nature of interactive

connectedness versus more structured autonomy. Structured messages are more predicable whereas novel messages are inherently more interactive. Openness is more interactive in describing message structure whereas closedness is more structured. Thus, SIT may serve as a way of describing the dialectical tensions that evolved from Bakhtin's original characterizations of centripetal forces and centrifugal forces that shape the prosaic, everyday communication in interpersonal relationships.

Group Communication

Group communication is the communication that occurs among a small group of people who share a common purpose, who feel a sense of belonging to the group, and who exert influence on one another (Beebe & Masterson, 2015). Communication with others in small groups, given the number of people involved in the conversation, is often fraught with uncertainty. Although research has found group communication may (but not always) occur in predictable phases (Fisher, 1970), talk in small groups may also occur in a variety of less predictable forms described variously as punctuated equilibrium (Gersick, 1989) and multisequence models (Poole, 1983). To help group members manage the messiness of group discussion, a group needs a certain amount of structure to keep the discussion focused. Group structure, consistent with SIT, includes the agenda and other structuring techniques, rules and procedures to help a group stay focused on the task. A group also needs the energy that comes from interaction. Interaction is the give-and-take conversation that occurs when people collaborate (Beebe & Masterson, 2015).

Group researchers have found that groups which have no planned structure or agenda have more difficulty accomplishing the task (Kerr & Tindale, 2004). Specifically, without structure, groups (Sunwolf & Seibold, 1999) are characterized by these communication attributes:

♦ The group will take more time to deliberate.
♦ Group members are more likely to prematurely focus on solutions.
♦ Group members will hop from one idea to the next.
♦ The Group is more likely to be controlled by a dominating group member.
♦ Groups are likely to experience more unmanaged conflict.

A predominate research conclusion about group performance and structure is this: *Any method of structuring group problem solving and decision making is better than no method at all* (Beebe & Masters, 2015; White, 2007). Groups need a certain degree of structure because members have relatively short attention spans and because uncertainty results both from the relationships among group members and from group members' varied definition of the task. Researchers have found that groups shift topics about once a minute (Berg, 1967; also see Poole, 1983) unless there is structure or facilitation. Thus, groups benefit from an agenda and other structuring methods and techniques that keep the discussion focused on the task.

In addition to structure, groups need a counterbalance of synergistic interaction, talk, and dialogue. Too much structure and not enough interaction results in a group that becomes out of balance. An overly structured group conversation would be one that involves one person dominating the discussion and an over-reliance of techniques that squelch

conversation and group collaboration. An overly interactive group discussion would be characterized by frequent topic shifts, group members not listening, increased interruptions, and several members speaking at once. Research supports the value of appropriate amounts of interaction in group deliberations. Appropriate amounts of group interaction support these outcomes (for a summary see Beebe & Masterson, 2015):

♦ High quality contributions early in the group's discussion improve group performance.

♦ The more individuals share their information with others early in the group's history the better the overall group performance.

♦ Group members should understand the information presented for improved group performance.

For maximum group performance a group needs structure to stay on task as well as facilitation (interaction) to accomplish the goal of the group (Pavitt, Philipp & Johnson, 2004). One research team found that group members who first had a collaborative discussion before making an individual decision were more likely to make a decision that benefited the entire group (Hopthrow & Hulbert, 2005). SIT can be used to help explain why some groups are more successful than others. Successful groups have an appropriate balance of structure and interaction; ineffective groups have either too much structure that limits collaboration, or too much interaction that results in disjointed, unconnected conversation that is not focused on accomplishing the group's task.

Public Speaking

Public speaking is the process of presenting a thoughtful message to an audience, small or large (Beebe & Beebe, 2015). Aristotle's wise and cogent observation that "Rhetoric is the counterpart of dialectic" provides the foundational taxonomy of the public communication context and presupposes the importance of relying on both structure and interaction to seek and present credible messages to an audience. SIT suggests that at times either the speaker or audience may prefer a more structured message. At other times, a more interactive dialogue is more appropriate and effective in achieving the communication goals of speaker or listeners. Public speaking texts note both the structured and interactive nature of public communication. As Beebe and Beebe (2015) observed in their introductory public speaking text:

The skill of public speaking builds upon your normal, everyday *interactions* with others. In fact, as you begin to study and practice public speaking, you will discover that it has much in common with conversation, a form of communication in which you engage in every day. Like conversation, pubic speaking requires you to focus and verbalize your thoughts.

Yet in addition to the interactive nature of communication, public speaking involves a more sustained, prepared and structured message. Specifically, public speaking:

♦ Takes more preparation than conversation.
♦ Has a more formal syntax than conversation.
♦ Assumes more clearly defined roles of speaker and listener.

Each of these observations is predicated on the assumption that public speaking is more structured than impromptu conversation (Beebe & Beebe, 2015). So both in-

teractive and structured communication is needed for effective public communication. In some situations, a highly structured, sustained message is needed to achieve the goals of the communication. High structure is needed when: (1) the speaker has a clear rhetorical goal, and (2) the audience expects and needs ample information to manage uncertainty.

Electronically Mediated Communication

In some respects, all communication is "mediated": all communication involves some channel that carries the encoded message to a receiver. In face-to-face communication contexts sound and light waves mediate the message. Electronic mediated communication (EMC) consists of any communication that is carried out using an electronically mediated channel; a channel other than those used in face-to-face communication connects the message from sender to receiver. Research suggests that EMC is pervasive; in 2012 over a billion people were using Facebook and 70% of people connected to the Internet in the U.S. used Facebook (Stewart, 2013, p. 85). Differences between face-to-face and electronic communication include: (1) time, (2) varying degrees of anonymity, (3) potential for deception, (4) nonverbal messages, (5) written messages, and (6) distance (Amichai-Hamburger, 2005).

The more synchronous our interaction (messages that occur in real time) as compared with asynchronous messages (a message not seen or heard at the same time the message is sent) the more the electronic mediated message emulates the feeling of social presence. Social presence is the sense that we act and think as if we were involved in an unmediated, face-to-face conversation.

Some EMC messages may need more structure if selected cues, such as nonverbal cues, are not available to the receiver. Cues-filtered-Out theory, an early theory of EMC, suggests that emotional expression is severely restricted when we communicate using only text messages. (Sproull & Kiesler, 1986). The theory predicts that because of the lack of nonverbal cues people are *less* likely to use text-based EMC to manage conflict in an interpersonal communication situation that is more complicated such as managing relationships. An additional theory of EMC, called Media Richness Theory, suggests that the richness of a communication channel is based upon four criteria: (1) the amount of feedback that the communicators receive, (2) the number of cues the channel conveys, (3) the variety of language that communicators use, and (4) the potential for expressing emotions and feelings (Trevino, Daft & Lengel, 1990). Based on these four criteria, researchers have developed a continuum of communication channels from rich to lean. Face-to-face is the most communication rich channel. A poster or impersonal memo is media lean. Media rich channels are those in which there is considerable potential for interaction. Media lean channels are those characterized by little interaction and high structure. The overall prediction of the appropriateness of a mediated channel is the degree of structure or interaction the channel permits or encourages. Specifically, media rich communication is likely to call for greater interaction and less structure; media lean messages are likely to result in less interaction and more structure.

When the communicator wishes to discourage feedback by the communicator and interaction then a more structured message in a more media-lean channel is preferred (Tidwell & Walther, 2002). When feedback and responses to messages are encouraged a more interactive, media-rich channel is selected. Thus, the preference for the channel of a communication is related to the amount of structure or interaction expected from the receiver of the message.

Social Information-Processing Theory suggests that people do communicate relational and emotional messages via electronically mediated channels, but that it takes longer to express messages and develop relationships when electronically mediated. Whereas the Cues-filtered-Out Theory suggests that there are no or significantly diminished nonverbal/emotional/relational cues in an EMC, Social Information-Processing Theory suggests that the social and relational cues (primarily nonverbal cues) are evident in ECM but that it takes more time for the cues to be decoded and interpreted. The social and relational cues exist but are subtler. Computer-mediated exchanges in comparison with face-to-face exchanges typically involve asking more direct questions that result in people revealing more, not less information about themselves when online.

Implications of Structure-Interaction Theory for Developing Communication Strategies

Structure-Interaction Theory describes the nature of communication message organization varying on a continuum from highly structured, organized and predictable to less structured, less predictable and more interactive. The theory is not only descriptive of communication message but can facilitate prescriptions for enhanced communication effectiveness and appropriateness.

The fundamental prescription stemming from SIT is this: *The appropriate degree of message structure and interaction is influenced by the nature, values, culture and expectations of the receiver of the communication message.* In supporting a receiver-centric approach to communication Aristotle (1959) suggested: "For of the three elements in speechmaking—speaker, subject, and person addressed---it is the last one, the hearer, that determines the speech's end and object". Thus, the "person addressed" (audience or listener) is the prime determinant of the appropriate degree of message organization as structured or interactive.

In analyzing an audience to assess the degree of structure or interaction to incorporate in a message one should be mindful of three general observations about a listener: (1) similarities; (2) differences, and (3) based on the analysis of similarities and differences, the identification of common ground with listeners. An audience's preference for structure or interaction is but one strategy among many to consider. The appropriate degree of message structure and interaction is rooted, in part, in the cultural expectations of listeners.

The degree of similarity and difference among audience member characteristics (as also noted earlier by Salem, 2012) is a factor in considering the degree of message structure or interaction that audiences would prefer. Audience demographic uniformity and similarity would predict a preference and expectation for greater message structure.

Greater uniformity among audience members would suggest less need to manage listener uncertainty thus greater message organizational structure. Increased structure would suggest increased predictability. Audiences with greater variation in demographic characteristics would value increased message interaction.

Larger, homogenious audiences would suggest a preference and expectation for message structure. In public speaking contexts audience members have less expectation of participating in the interactive "conversation" than in interpersonal situations in which the number of people involved in the communication is smaller. Smaller groups or dyadic communication would suggest a preference for greater interaction.

Displaying visual text, such as using PowerPoint during a public presentation, is a way of reinforcing the structure of a message. The degree of message redundancy expected during oral presentations (such as the often prescribed, "Tell us what you are going to tell us; tell us; tell us what you told us) is a way of increasing message structure. Oral communication in more formal communication context which is indicative of a larger audience, requires greater redundancy (structure) to enhance its effectiveness. Oral communication in less formal situations which involve fewer people would require less structure and more interaction.

Culture

One of the key elements of audience or listener is the cultural expectations and values of the communication receiver. Culture is the learned system of knowledge, behaviors, attitudes, beliefs, values and norms that are shared by a group of people. A common culture is one in which there are more shared similarities among a group of people than there are differences. Specifically, SIT may be used to help explain and predict communication effectiveness and appropriateness depending on the cultural context (high or low) and values.

Cultural context, as described by Hall (1976), refers to high and low context message preferences. Cultural values, as described by Hofstede (1991) in his classic taxonomy of cultural values, include: (1) individualism and collectivism, (2) masculine and feminine values, (3) tolerance for uncertainty, (4) power distance, and (5) orientation to time.

Cultural Context

Preference for the influence of context is a receiver/listener/audience cultural variable that influences preferences for high and low structured or interactive messages. In high-context cultures people rely heavily on implicit, nonverbal cues to interpret the meaning of messages (Hall, 1976).

In low-context cultures there is greater reliance on the words that are spoken and the explicit message content when interpreting encoded messages. Greater use of redundancy, including the use of message "sign posts" to communication message structure, developing explicit outline of verbal messages, message previews, message summaries, message transitions and other methods of adding to message structure would enhance clarity and meaning. SIT would suggest that people from low-context cultures (who value verbal messages) would prefer greater structure when seeking to interpret

messages of others. Additionally, someone from a low context culture may seek to reduce uncertainty by asking questions and seeking additional information through conversation. Individuals with a low context orientation, however, are more likely to rely more on words to manage their uncertainty.

In high-context cultures the interaction and meaning occur with emphasis on the nonverbal messages; so verbal interaction is less important than in low context cultures. Images and other nonverbal message elements would be valued by listeners who rely more heavily on more subtle, implicit strategies to organize messages. Individuals from high context cultures usually prefer less verbal interaction and are more comfortable with the ultimate form of message structure—silence.

Individualism and Collectivism

The relative importance of cultural values as described by Hofstede (1991) is another cultural variable that influences in how humans interpret messages. One of the most predominate cultural values is the preference for individualism or collectivism. People from a culture with strong individualism values tend to place greater emphasis on individual accomplishment than do people from collectivistic cultures (Hofstede, 1991).

SIT would predict that collectivist cultures would have greater preference for structured messages—messages that have similar, common, predictable structures. Individualistic cultures would prefer more interactive, unique messages—interaction adapted to the individual rather than structure designed to appeal to a collective group of listeners.

Masculine-Feminine Cultural Dimension

In masculine cultures people tend to value more traditional roles for both men and women; there is also a high value placed on achievement, assertiveness, heroism and material wealth. SIT would suggest greater preference for message structure for masculine cultures that emphasize the content or instrumental nature of communication. People from feminine cultures tend to value caring for the less fortunate, greater sensitivity toward others and an overall enhanced quality of life (Hofstede, 1991). More feminine, relationally-oriented cultures would resonate with more interactive messages that would facilitate the development of relationships.

Tolerance for Uncertainty

Cultures in which people value certainty more than uncertainty are more likely to prefer interactive, dialectic communication than a sustained, non-interactive monologue; they want to predict the future by reducing uncertainty through the use of questions. People who have a greater tolerance for uncertainty may not expect answers to questions and therefore may be comfortable with more message structure. Interactive, spontaneous messages are likely to be preferred in situations in which there is a need to know answers to the question of "what happens next?" Greater tolerance for uncertainty, characterized by such sentiments as "just go with the flow" and "it will sort itself out" may result in communicators asking fewer questions. Consequently communicators would expect more message structure.

Power Distribution

According to Hofstede (1991) some cultures prefer an equal, or a decentralized distribution of power, whereas other cultures prefer and are more comfortable with concentrated, centralized power structures. More centralized distributions of power would predict a preference for messages with greater structure. Decentralized power distributions would suggest a preference for greater interactive messages to negotiate power and manage uncertainty. Where power is concentrated in more centralized structures the messages would be expected to be more structured and less interactive. More distributed power would result in the need for more give-and-take, interactive messages.

Time Orientation

Time orientation falls on a continuum between long-term and short-term time values. People with a long-term orientation to time place greater emphasis on what will happen in the future; they value perseverance and thrift. With an emphasis on endurance and a value for predictability, long-term time cultural orientations may likely result in communicator preferences for enhanced message structure. Short-term time orientations would predict a general preference for briefer more ephemeral interaction.

Conclusion

These initial ideas about the role and conclusion influence of culture and preferences for structured or interactive messages are speculative. Additional research is needed to examine the validity and reliability of these prescriptions and strategies. SIT is offered as a general framework to assist in both describing the nature of communication in specific contexts as well as helping to predict the receiver preference for structure or interaction in communication messages. Listener preference for structure or interaction is based on expectations according to communication context and culture.

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ТЕОРИЯ СТРУКТУРНОГО ВЗАИМОДЕЙСТВИЯ: КОНЦЕПТУАЛЬНЫЕ, КОНТЕКСТУАЛЬНЫЕ И СТРАТЕГИЧЕСКИЕ ОПРЕДЕЛЯЮЩИЕ КОММУНИКАЦИИ

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В статье описывается Теория структурного взаимодействия (ТСВ), в рамках которой рассматриваются коммуникативные сообщения и предлагаются способы улучшения коммуникации, основанные на выборе наиболее предпочтительной для реципиента структуры сообщения или способа взаимодействия. Хотя Теория структурного взаимодействия является новой, она уходит корнями в такие классические науки, описывающие коммуникацию, как риторика и диалектика (Аристотель, 1959), а также современные теории коммуникации (Салем, 2012; Литтлджон, Фосс 2008). В статье даются основные положения Теории структурного взаимодействия, показано, как она может помочь объяснить и предсказать ход коммуникации в разных контекстах (в межличностной, групповой и общественной коммуникации) и определить стратегии, нацеленные на улучшение общения (что обсуждалось на конференции Российской коммуникативной ассоциации).

Согласно Теории структурного взаимодействия, для того, чтобы сообщение было понято и достигло цели говорящего, необходим баланс двух составляющих: структуры и взаимодействия. Структура коммуникации — неотъемлемый элемент, участвующий в донесении информации до собеседника. Согласно описанию Аристотеля, в структуре связей и взаимодействия риторика является наиболее структурированной и четкой моделью передачи сообщения. Диалектика характеризуется более спонтанным обменом сообщениями. Согласно ТСВ, вся коммуникация может быть рассмотрена в рамках культурного взаимодействия. Данная работа иллюстрирует применение ТСВ к некоторым коммуникативным ситуациям и предлагает стратегии улучшения общения. В частности, рассматриваются возможности развития сообщений в соответствии с предпочтениями аудитории, основанными на коммуникативных ожиданиях и культурной специфике. Структура взаимодействия должна определяться запросами, интересами, ценностями (включая культурные ценности) аудитории, которые влияют на тип коммуникации.

Ключевые слова: Теория структурного взаимодействия (ТСВ), коммуникативные сообщения, коммуникативный контекст, коммуникативные стратегии, риторика, диалектика.