**Communication Accommodation Theory & Gender Communication**

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"People can vary their communicative styles and strategies in ways that reflect their differing personalities and temperaments, roles and relationships, and social identities" (Baxter, 2008). The Communication Accommodation Theory has been developed by Howard Giles (Migide, 2015). This theory explains how individuals have a tendency to adjust their behavior while interacting with one another. They do so through either verbal or non-verbal communication. These actions also vary among gender; people may express themselves differently when interacting with the same or opposite sex. This paper will focus on the analysis on the differences of communication styles between ages, males versus males, females versus females, and males versus females.

Communication accommodation occurs quite often in society. It is an interpersonal interaction within the communication field. Adjustment strategies, such as facial expressions, speech appropriation, and manner adaptation, happen on macro and micro scales (Hewstone, 1986). These strategies are all used to help facilitate communication between people. Individuals tend to change the way they express themselves. They do so in order to connect with those that they are trying to communicate to. In order to have a successful interaction, proper adjustments must be made in appropriate ways.

A successful interaction in turn means that there was a mutual understanding of the topic at hand (Gasiorek, 2012). When individuals unsuccessfully adapt to their audience, miscommunication will more than likely be the outcome. Miscommunication could either be seen as being off putting or disagreeable. The Communication Accommodation Theory is also influenced by social psychology (Coupland, 1991). A conversation is evaluated by understanding the perception of the speech and behavior of the other persons involved (Migide, 2015). Through that evaluation, people decide when to accommodate and fit in with whom they are communicating with.

There are two types of accommodation processes within this communication theory: convergence and divergence (Migide, 2015). The Convergence process happens when people change the way they communicate to match with the other person's characteristics to reduce their social differences (Migide, 2015). In the business world, a company in the United States trying to sell a product to another company, in a foreign country, would most likely accommodate to the other business’ culture. In certain Asian cultures, it is seen as "dis-respectful" if there is any physical touch or contact with one another. On the other hand, Americans start off many business meetings with introducing themselves and giving a firm handshake. Americans have more of a “hands on approach” and communicate in that way. If one group does not accommodate to other, the whole business transaction would start on a sour note. This would result in an unsuccessful interaction.

The divergence process contradicts adaptation and emphasizes on the social and nonverbal differences between those involved (Migide, 2015). Embracing the differences of the parties involved could result in a positive interaction. By emphasizing differences among one another- like culture and race- each group of individuals can learn about one another. New experiences can be shared and they will bond over shared stories of growing up and how different everything once was. The United States is actually a great example of an area of which many cultures interact. Within places of diversity, one can interact and embrace a different culture.

On the opposing side to the positives of the divergence process, one must be careful on what they emphasize. More so, the way an individual can focus on the differences could be in a negative way. Many have been seen to come off as rude or offensive. The product of this miscommunication becomes greater when intercultural groups mix.

Other differences have also been seen in diverse occupational groups. According to Johnsons’ (1980) observation of physicians, they have adopted “doctor-speak” (Coupland, 1991). The physicians are actually emphasizing their level of education versus those they are relaying information to (i.e. patients, immediate family, visitors). It involves “highly specified medical jargon, but can also be intermeshed with very abstract, vague statements (which can increase patients’ uncertainty levels about their medical status and consequently the physicians’ social control)” (Coupland, 1991).

Social norms “guide the accommodation process which varies in the degree of appropriateness” (Baxter, 2008). Social norms can define and change the behaviors of people and tell them how they are expected to act accordingly. Communicative behavior may also guide the conversation specifically through turn management, topic selection, and topic sharing (Hewstone, 1986).

A lack or gross amount of adjustment for communicative behavior could be felt as inappropriate (Gasiorek, 2012). This communication can be intentional or unintentional. The interaction of underaccommodation or over accommodation is often experienced as dissatisfying, unpleasant, and problematic. This evaluation can be made by either the speaker or the recipient of the communication (Hewstone, 1986). An inappropriate adjustment to behavioral communication is known as “non-accommodation”.

Age differences might first come to mind when hearing of communication accommodation. This means that one simply does not speak the same way to a peer than they would to a respectable elder. Adults, especially parents, will adjust the way they may explain issues to children. An elder will adjust their tone, either to be more pleasant or stern, with an adolescent based on the situation (Gasiorek, 2012).

Same goes for a child with an elder. A child will not speak the same way as they would a peer to an adult (Baxtor, 2008). Some may avoid using slang in order to keep communication clear. Certain gestures would also convey different tones. An eye-roll or inappropriate hand gesture from an adolescent to an adult would be a discourtesy and frowned upon.

Language choice is also becoming apparent in regards to new social media technologies (Giles, 2008). Language allows one to reflect on themselves and surroundings. With that, lingos appropriately go in and out of style; once you become used to the new terms of last season, they’ll be gone by the next. “Human speech carries an enormous amount of information such as age and gender” (Namy, 2016). This is prevalent within our current times. One may ask, “how is anyone supposed to keep up with the rapidly changing teen terminology?” (Baxter, 2008). Individuals have learned to adapt to the new “millennial world”. They have and will continue to use accommodation to seem “hip”. Language is an arbitrary aspect of communicating among different generations.

“Speech divergence may be employed to bring another’s behavior to an acceptable level or to facilitate the coordination of speech patterns” (Coupland, 1991). When someone feels uneasy in a conversation they will try to redirect so that they are more at ease with communicating. Mimicry occurs when an individual unconsciously synchronizes their verbal and nonverbal behavior when they interact (Gasiorek, 2012).

It is not uncommon for people to slow their speech rate when speaking with extremely fast-talking and or excited others in order to slow down their pace to a more comfortable communicative and cognitive level (Coupland, 1991). This is called vocal accommodation. Once this is initiated, the fast-talking individual will gradually start to slow down their speech in accordance to match with his or her peer. This demonstrates interpersonal adjustment within the communication accommodation theory.

The relationships between males and males, females and females, and opposing sex widely vary. These relationships are effected by the relations of the parties as well. Whether the relationship is platonic or romantic would influence the way things are communicated. Socialization and social motives play a demanding role in observed gender differences in perceptual sensitivity to indexical features (Namy, 2016). Both genders have been brought up to act certain way towards one another. This also relates back to social and cultural norms.

Male to male relationships embrace a different bond than with women. Male to male interactions are were believed and proven to be louder and more interruptive (Briton, 1995). The saying that men are competitive with one another is more or less true. Men also displayed a sense of nervousness and dysfluent behaviors (Briton, 1995).

Not as a shock, from a father to son, communication would be different than from peer to peer. A father was seen as a “role model”. Close proxemics were seen between father and son and peers to peers during horse play. Shows of affection were quick moments. When asked to rate the same sex, men gave much lower ratings than women had given to each other (Briton, 1995).

  Relationships between females differ than with the opposite sex. Female are more inclined as listeners. They readily detect perceptual cues to vocal accommodation when speaking (Namy, 2016). Some say women like to just gossip, but it has some science behind it. Ensuing, women engage in person-centered communication with one another. They put more emotion in their tone when talking.

Women are more expressive and involved in nonverbal behaviors with each other than men are with one another (Gasiorek. 2012). The silent treatment is a great example of this. It conveys a powerful message. Females are also known to maintain face with one another (Hewstone, 1986). Maintaining that interpersonal relationship with a friend is more important to women than men. Women also tend to rate other women higher than other gender combinations (Briton, 1995).

Studies have shown when males were expecting to speak with a cooler, rather than warmer tone, they sounded far more warm, to presumably to enhance the projected warmth of their partners they are communicating with (Coupland, 1991). According to Laura Namy, indexical cues can influence listeners’ perception of the opposite sex’s attractiveness, classification of their individual group or class, and their persuasive power of speech. Men have also been seen to show accommodation with whole sentences versus single isolated words as women are.

Mixed sex interactions also deals with pre-determined sex ideologies (Gasiorek, 2012). Male perception of themselves are to generally be more muscular and masculine as a female is to be thinner and more feminine within western culture. A female may speak softer to a male counterpart in order to coarse him to use a more emotional tone of voice.

Female and male body language are used for different meanings. “Perceived gender differences correlated positively with differences reported in observational studies, indicating that beliefs about nonverbal gender differences were generally accurate” (Briton, 1995). Women are often more likely to use touch to show liking or intimacy. Usage of haptics within male relationships is most likely to assert power and control. Gender differences in vocal accommodation was also vast (Gasiorek, 2012). Females are more likely to accommodate vocally in general versus males.

Spousal relationships call for a different type of communication versus a platonic friendship (Gasiorek, 2012). Both may mirror the same intellectual levels when conversing, but going through the same experiences would vary. The environmental element of a trip to the beach could be seen as a little get- away to a life partner rather than to a friend. The proxemics of a spouse would be much closer. A sense of interdependency would be present as well. With a platonic friendship, one would be a separate entity from the other.

All in all, communication accommodation is influenced by perceiving and understanding the situation one is in. By linking communication, speech perception, and social psychology, one can better understand how accommodation occurs (Gasiorek, 2012). The way an individual interprets a conversation can affect how they change the way they get their point across. People accommodate through verbal and nonverbal cues and communication.

Overall, the listener’s extreme sensitivity, vulnerability, and heightened state of awareness that a negative outcome may result from saying the wrong thing is a part of the schema of this theory (Coupland, 1991). The relationships one has with another effect how they converse. Age, social class, ethnicity, gender, etcetera all accumulate together to form the way we all interact.

To avoid detriment outcomes of miscommunication, it is important to learn and understand how to adjust to an individual’s responses (Gasiorek, 2012). Society has an effect on evolving interpersonal diversity. In conclusion, your audience determines how you act, behave, and communicate.

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