



3 Language

Activities

1. Powerful/Powerless Language	2
2. Sexist and Relative Language	4
3. Behavioural Descriptions	6
4. Facts and Inferences	8
5. Exploring the Web	9
6. Languages Styles and the Media	10
7. Popular Music and Social Roles	11
8. Evaluating Facts and Inferences	12
9. What's in Your Cultural Background?	13
10. O Boundless Bounty	14
11. Women Out Loud in Print	15

Name _____

Activity 1: Powerful/Powerless Language

Purpose

1. To expand understanding of powerless and powerful language
2. To use language which takes rather than avoids responsibility
3. To identify types of powerless language and language lacking in responsibility

Instructions: Part I

1. Read the sentences in the first chart. Identify the type of powerless language used by writing the type of language in the left column.
2. Re-write the sentence in the right column so that it expresses the idea in more powerful, but not rude or offensive, language. See Table 3.1 (page 102) in the textbook.

Type of language usage	Less powerful	Rewrite using more powerful language
polite forms	Ms. Smith, I wanted to ask you about the assignment ma'am.	I wanted to ask about the assignment.
	There's probably a better way to do this, but let me explain.	
	It was really a good speech.	
	That was a good meeting, wasn't it?	
	I sort of wanted to leave early today.	

Instructions: Part II

1. Read the sentences in the second chart.
2. Identify the type of language responsibility problem shown by writing the type of language in the left column. Then re-write the sentences with language that takes responsibility in the right column.

Type of language	Lacking responsibility	Rewrite using responsible language
You vs. I	You irritate me with your singing in the car.	I feel irritated when I'm driving and listening to your singing.
	There's no reason it won't work, but we don't have the money.	
	Do you think we could go to a Chinese restaurant rather than a pizza place?	
	It's not a good idea.	
	You really get me upset when you drive like that.	

Name _____

Activity 2: Sexist and Relative Language

Purpose

1. To expand understanding of sexist and relative language
2. To use nonsexist language and non-relative words

Instructions: Part I

1. In the first chart, identify the problem with the language on the left, and write it in the middle column.
2. Then think of other terms that could be substituted, and write them in the right column.

Sexist language	Problem	Rewrite using language which describes the function
waitress	Two people doing an identical job have different labels based on sex. Title should describe the job.	Server Wait person
mailman		
Master of ceremonies		
“peace on earth good will to men”		
In great matters men show them- selves as they wish to be seen; in small matters, as they are. —Gamaliel Bradford		

Instructions: Part II

Replace the relative word with a word that is specific and measurable.

Use relative words	Replace relative words
I'd like a small brownie.	Make mine no more than 1" square.
My dad is not very tall.	
I'll be back in a little while.	
Don't make your papers too long.	
I'm not a very good pitcher.	

Activity 3: Behavioural Descriptions

Purpose

To practice replacing abstract statements with behavioural descriptions

Instructions: Part I

1. Read the following abstract statements.
2. Rewrite each using behavioral descriptions.

Example:

You always get more help from the folks than I do.

Who is involved? Mom

In what circumstances? One time, when you couldn't pay your tuition last semester

What behaviours are involved? Paying tuition for you

Clearer statement: Mom paid your tuition last semester.

Advantages or disadvantages to using the clearer statement: In a discussion with my sister, it limits the scope of what sounds like an attack on her. There is something concrete for her to respond to. The scope of my resentment is narrowed. The "fact" is presented, rather than a vague statement.

Impact on you of having to think through the three questions: I had to stop and think of what I really meant and what the "facts" were that I was basing my broad attack on. I had to ask myself what the problem really was and stop exaggerating it.

1. School is so easy for you.

Who is involved?

In what circumstances?

What behaviours are involved?

Clearer statement:

Advantages or disadvantages to using the clearer statement:

Impact on you of having to think through the three questions:

2. The work load around here sure isn't fair.

Who is involved?

In what circumstances?

What behaviours are involved?

Clearer statement:

Advantages or disadvantages to using the clearer statement:

Impact on you of having to think through the three questions:

Instructions: Part II

1. What do you have to do in order to change abstract statements to behavioural descriptions?
2. What effect does this activity have on your thought process?
3. What effect does this activity have on the time you take to talk to yourself? To express yourself?
4. Predict what would happen if all abstract speech were converted to behavioural descriptions and other forms of more concrete, specific language. What would happen in personal relationships? Government? Classrooms? Television shows?

Activity 4: Facts and Inferences

Purpose

1. To distinguish between facts and inferences
2. To rewrite inferences in a factual statement

Instructions: Part I

Read the inferences below. And re-write them to be factual statements. If you don't know the "facts," indicate what data you would need.

1. The US is an educated society.
2. Family relationships on the Internet are better than face-to-face.
3. Everyone wants to have a meaningful job.
4. Businesses would be more productive if everyone were bilingual.
5. Generation Y students are lazy and unproductive.

Instructions: Part II

Replace the following opinions with factual statements that can be verified. Indicate what facts you would need if you don't know the facts.

Example:

This is a better school than UM.

Tuition is \$100 lower and the student/teacher ratio is 20% lower here than at UM.

1. Europe is a better place to live than the US.
2. Communication courses are more valuable than physics courses.
3. People in the US have lousy marriages.
4. Cuban food is less popular than Chinese food.

Name _____

Activity 5: Exploring the Web

Instructions

In order to “test” the power of machine translation, go to <http://www.babelfish.com/> or <https://translate.google.com/>.

1. Write out a simple command in English. (“Go to the store and buy some eggs.” “Pick up my laundry on the way home.” “Put the book on the desk.”)

Write it here: _____

2. Now, use the web translator to translate from English into French, German, Portuguese, or Italian. If you are fluent in one of those languages, see how their translation compares to yours. Once you have the translation, copy it and translate from that language back to English.

Write the English retranslation here: _____

3. If the translation comes back differently (and even humorously) from your original English, speculate on what the difficulties were. It usually will not be exactly the same as your original. If it is exact, speculate why it would be.

4. Now try it with a more complex thought, such as your political ideas or your feelings about a complex issue. Go through the same steps as above.

Sentence typed in: _____

English re-translated: _____

5. What did you predict would happen when the sentence was re-translated back into English? Why?
6. What properties of language account for some of the difficulties?
7. How would you assess the overall usefulness of a site like BabelFish or Google Translate to translate your school’s homepage?
8. What might happen if government officials relied on machine translation?

Name _____

Activity 6: Language Styles and the Media

Purpose

To compare different language styles across nationalist lines in the media

Instructions

Watch the news on CBC and Fox and decide what elements of language and presentation are different and what makes the two approaches to the news representative of their respective country's prevailing mindset. Are the approaches as you would expect based on the stereotypical beliefs attached to each culture?

Name _____

Activity 7: Popular Music and Social Roles

Purpose

To analyze contemporary song lyrics for their defining of social roles

Instructions

Pick three contemporary songs from three different music genres. Examine the lyrics and see what kinds of social roles are defined by them.

Activity 8: Evaluating Facts and Inferences

Purpose

To evaluate inferential statement masquerading as factual statements

Instructions

The textbook explains that an inferential statement is a conclusion at which one arrives based on an interpretation of evidence, whereas a factual statement can be verified as true or false. Inferential statements are common, frequently showing up in political rhetoric, opinion and commentary, and day-to-day conversation.

For this task, choose an issue that is currently topical in the news, e.g., the price of oil, standards of education, freedom of expression, or control of Internet bandwidth. Survey local and regional newspapers, magazines, and online sources for inferential statements presented as facts. Collect six examples and add them to the chart that follows; see the example at the top of the chart.

Statement	Explanation
Example: “Despite the forthcoming legislation, the government is much more interested in maintaining a top-secret surveillance state,” Lisa Brown said outside the legislative assembly yesterday evening.	Speaker assumes she knows the government’s intention and is stating her interpretation of government interest as fact
1.	
2.	
3.	
4.	
5.	
6.	

Name _____

Activity 9: What's in your Cultural Background?

Purpose

To reflect on one's background communication style

Instructions

Do you or your family members exhibit more low-context or more high-context communication behaviours? Depending on your cultural background, you may be more or less sensitive to context when you communicate—or more or less invested in the words you use as carriers of meaning. The textbook provides a number of examples of high-context and low-context cultures (see pages 121–123).

Write a short reflection (200–250 words) considering your family's cultural background and the cultural background of some of your significant others. Are you a high-context communicator or a low-context communicator, or do you switch depending on your communication setting? Has your communication style ever led to communication trouble? What was the problem and how did you resolve it? What have you learned about communication from thinking about high-context and low-context cultures?

If you want to extend your learning, share your reflection with some classmates or members of your study group and ask about their communication backgrounds and style. Are you surprised by how other people communicate, and by their expectations in communication situations?

Name _____

Activity 10: O Boundless Bounty

Purpose

1. To examine personal reactions to words in context
2. To understand how words in context shape communication efficacy

Instructions

Spend some time on Erin McKean’s Wordnik site (www.wordnik.com), which positions itself as “the world’s biggest online English dictionary.” Be sure to check out the Word of the Day and the Random Word sections. Now that you have a better sense of this resource, select ten words that are new to you and that delight you in some way: because they’re musical, unexpected, useful, ungainly, or simply beautiful. Write down the words, their part(s) of speech, their meanings, and their pronunciation. Commit to using these words at some point—in conversation, in a paper, or in your journal, for instance—over the next week. How do people respond to the words you’ve selected?

Activity 11: Women Out Loud in Print

Purpose

1. To examine the gendered effects of language use on women and men
2. To understand how language circulates differently depending on who utters it

Instructions

On page 115 of the textbook, the authors observe, “Women have made significant advances in recent years in the workplace, politics, and the trades and professions.” This point leads the authors to conclude that “because women’s equality has accelerated significantly in Canada, formerly acceptable power differentials . . . are being completely realigned.” The text describes some differences in gender-based use of language and more inclusive terms to represent a wider spectrum of gender and sexual diversity.

Yet women who write and publish—particularly Indigenous women, women of colour, lesbian women, and trans women—still face many barriers and a considerable degree of intentional silencing. Do some primary research. Talk to women professors, women writers, women in publishing, and women librarians about women’s representation in writing, reviewing, and publishing. What do these women in your community perceive? Assemble your findings into a post or article for your class blog, your campus newspaper, or a local newspaper or magazine.