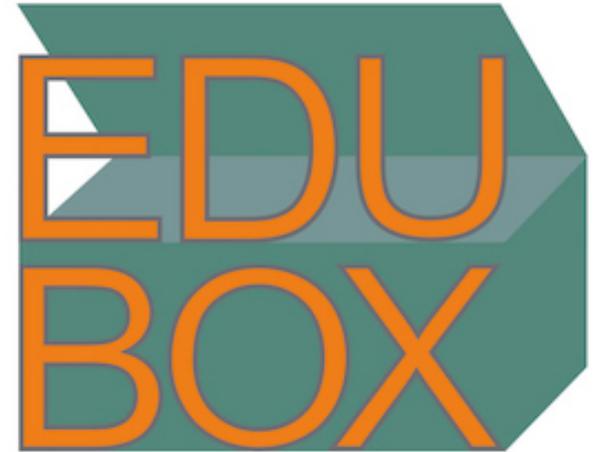


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# EduBox 02: Communication in diverse contexts



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Project: EduBoxes for Hamburg Open Online University ([www.hoou.de](http://www.hoou.de))



# INTRODUCTION TO EDUBOX 02

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Communication is a process affected by many variables and if we consider the complexity involved in human interaction, then it is logical that communicating successfully with members of diverse cultures will be even more challenging.

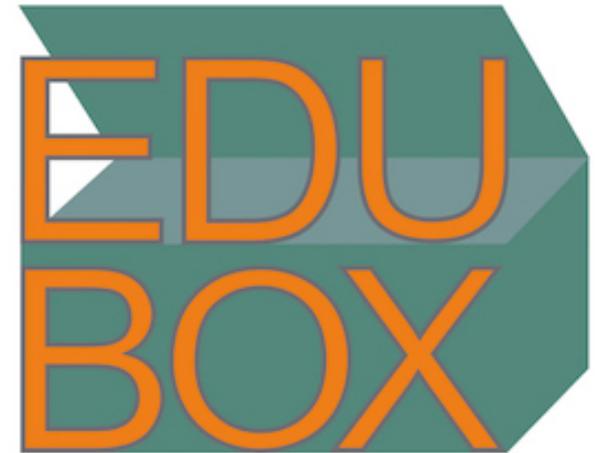
In addition, new media such as internet mediated and mobile phone communication provide us with new tools to communicate independent of space and time. However, these tools also increase the potential for misunderstandings as a multitude of factors impinge on the communication outcome.

Thus, the main purpose of this EduBox is to enable students to identify and then carefully assess factors that influence the communication process, thereby increasing their competence in developing shared meaning.

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# EduBox 02: Communication in diverse contexts

## Session 2: Communication, culture and reality construction



Author: Prof. Dr. Francisco Javier Montiel  
Project: EduBoxes for Hamburg Open Online University ([www.hoou.de](http://www.hoou.de))



# Objectives

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- 
- At the end of these session participants will be able to
- critically analyse communication models
  - recognise contextual factors of communication and define it as interaction
  - explain the relationship between communication and culture against the backdrop of cognitive processes, and
  - analyse specific socio-cultural and contextual factors of communication products (such as advertising) in order to reconstruct their meaning

# Communication, culture and reality construction

## Topics

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1. Interaction in everyday situations
2. The relationship between language and culture (Educast)
3. Communication theories: from transmission to interaction
4. Summary and conclusions
5. Theory of self-representation
6. Application: Case study Seat Ibiza

# 1. Interaction in everyday situations

Try to guess what people might be saying or thinking in the following scenes

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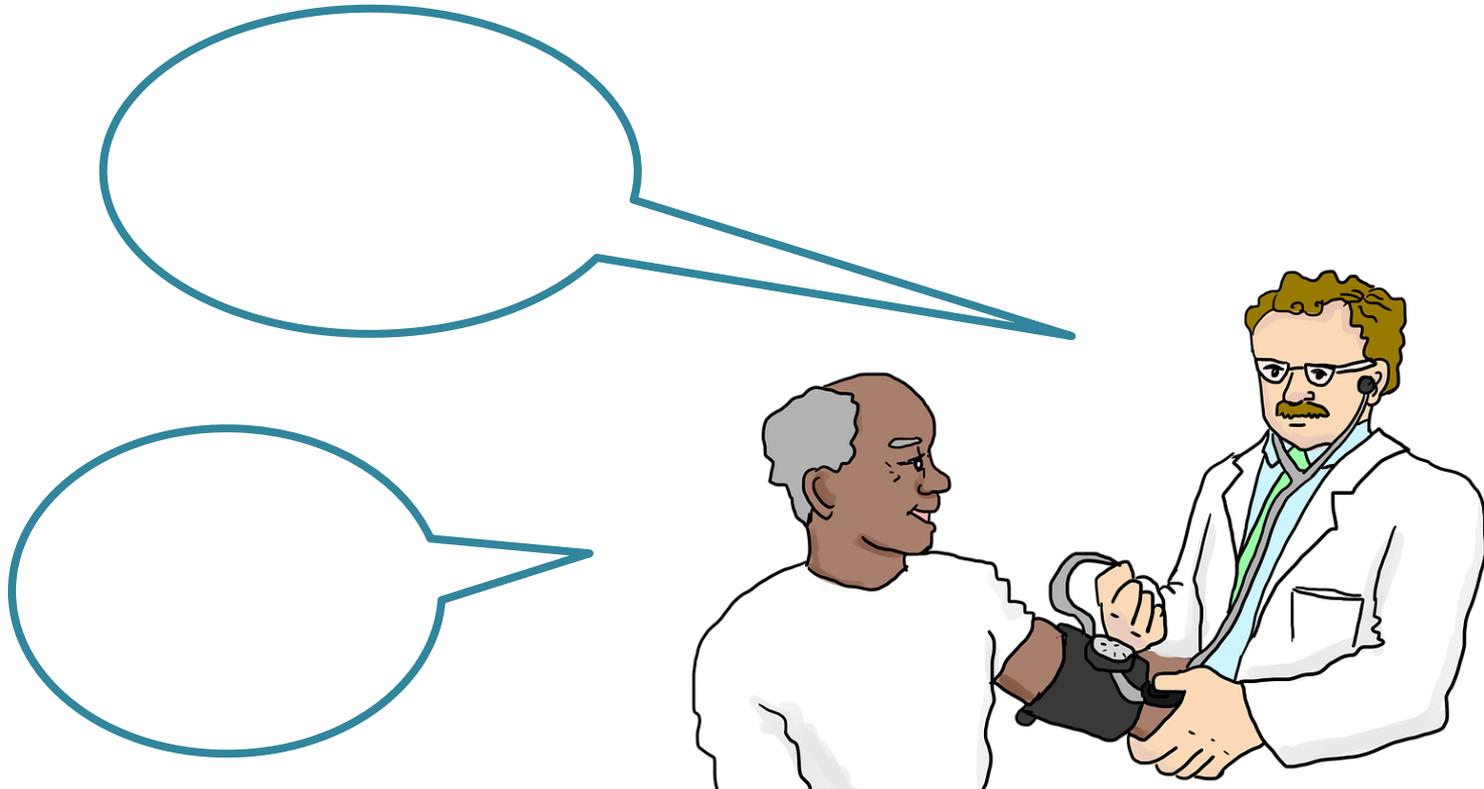


Image by [LilyCantabile](#) on [Pixabay](#), [CC0](#)

# 1. Interaction in everyday situations

Try to guess what people might be saying or thinking in the following scenes

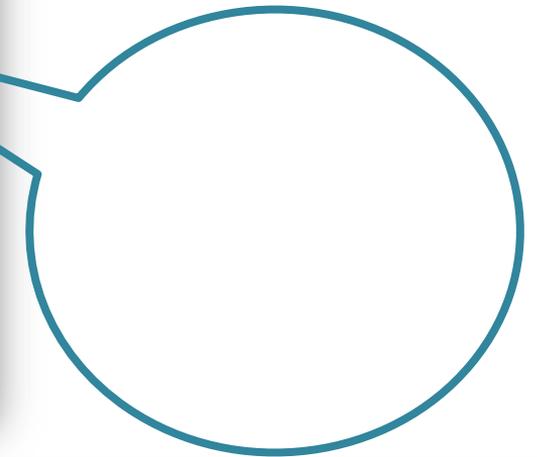
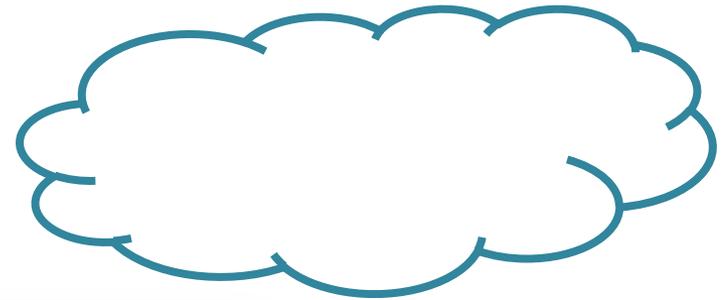


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# 1. Interaction in everyday situations

Try to guess what people might be saying or thinking in the following scenes

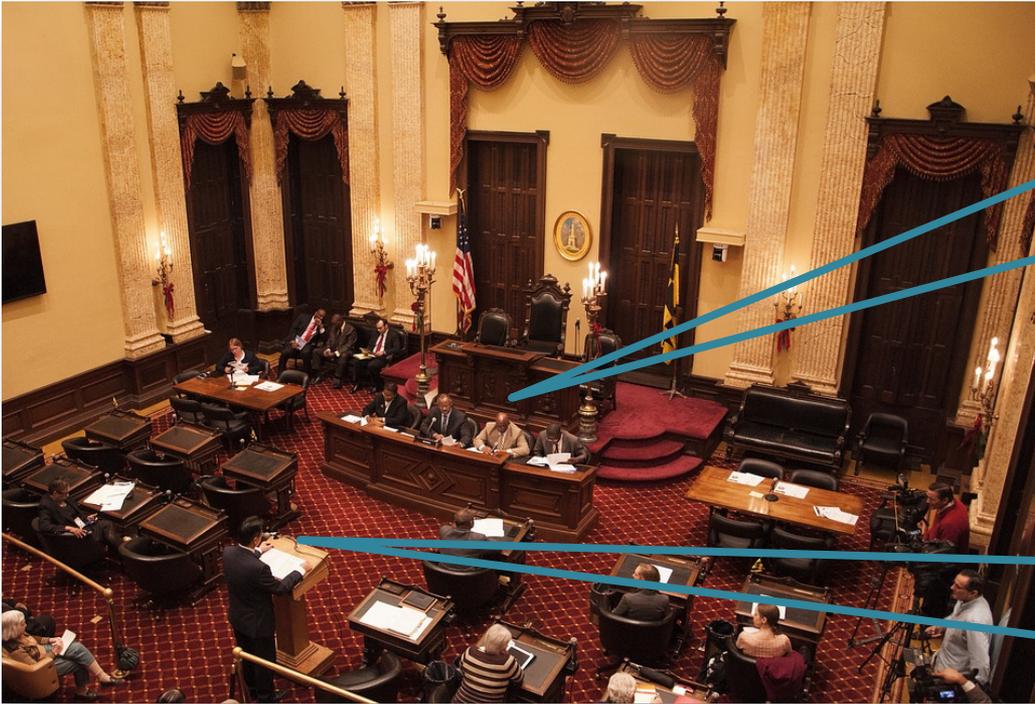
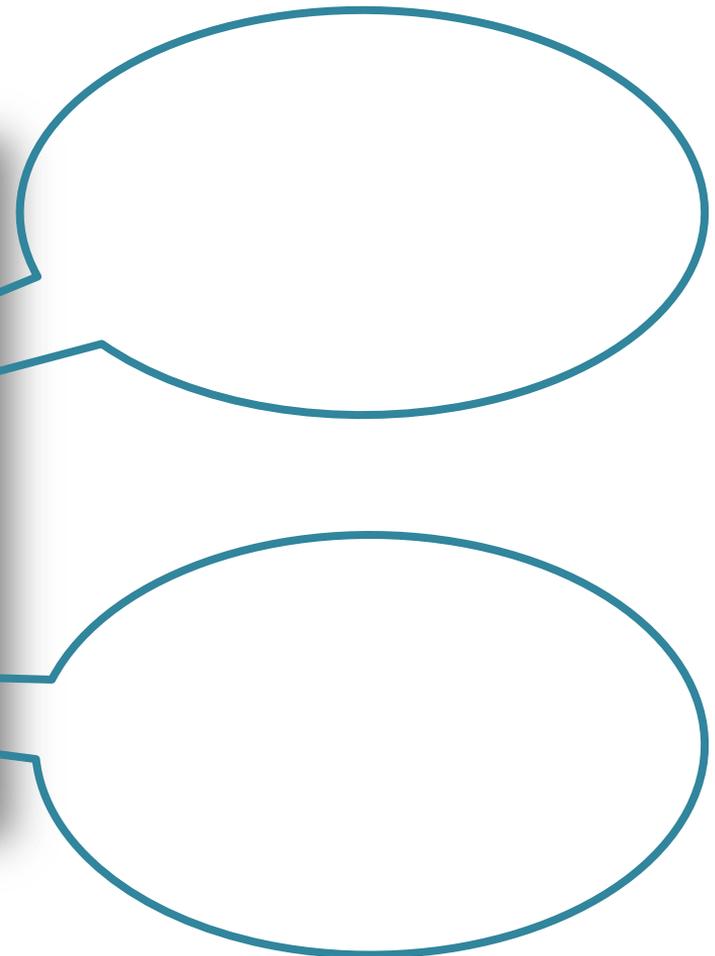


Image by [BruceEmmerling](#) on [Pixabay](#), [CC0](#)



# 1. Interaction in everyday situations

Try to guess what people might be saying or thinking in the following scenes



Image by [sasint](#) on [Pixabay](#), [CC0](#)

# 1. Interaction in everyday situations

Try to guess what people might be saying or thinking in the following scenes



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# 1. Interaction in everyday situations

Try to guess what people might be saying or thinking in the following scenes



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# 1. Interaction in everyday situations

## Questions for discussion

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- Why is it relatively easy to reconstruct the conversations and why do different observers often imagine the situation in a very similar way?
- What factors other than communication itself affect how people communicate?
- In the light of your answers, how could we define communication?

## 2. The relationship between language and culture

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- The following Educast mentions several theories of communication, language and culture.
- Try to focus on these authors, so that you can then present their perspectives on communication in your own words:
  - Ferdinand de Saussure
  - Claude Shannon & Warren Weaver
  - J. L. Austin
  - George H. Mead
  - Ludwig Wittgenstein
  - Edward Sapir & Benjamin Whorf



Image by the author

## 2. The relationship between language and culture

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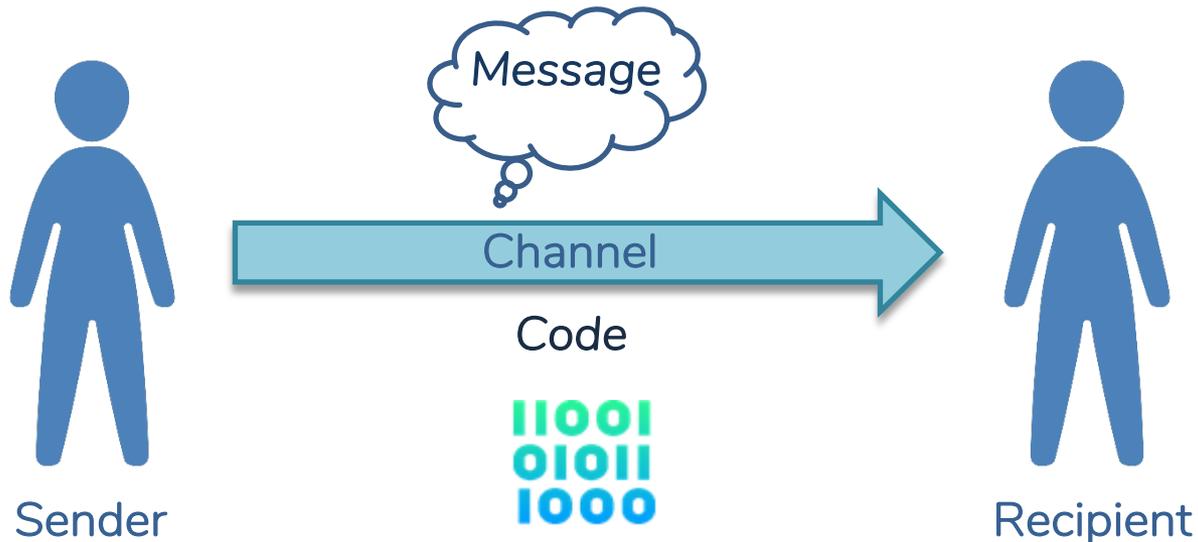


Click on the image to see the video

Linked source: [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=i8\\_UWaGtcic&feature=youtu.be](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=i8_UWaGtcic&feature=youtu.be)

# 3. Communication theories

## Transmission model



- The Information is “**transferred**” from a sender via a channel to a recipient.
- The **data transfer** is in the focus.
- The channel is critical since interference/„noise“ → reason why the recipient might receive a different message than the one intended.
- What is the basic problem with such a model?

# 3. Communication theories

## Transmission model

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Image 1. Shannon

C. Shannon & W. Weaver:  
*The Mathematical Theory of Communication* (1949)



Image 2. Luhmann

N. Luhmann:

- The definition implies too much ontology.
- It suggests that the sender hands over something that the recipient receives.

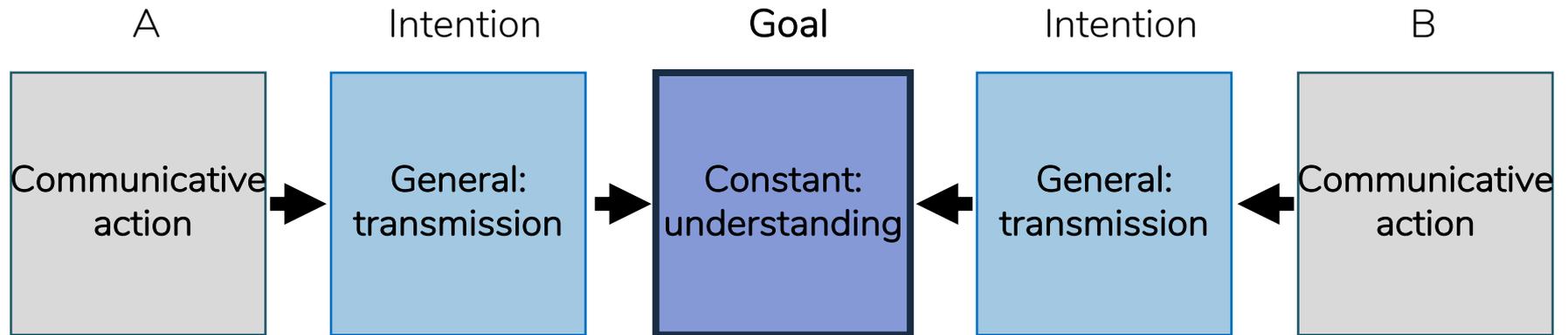
- "The company / the organization as a sender" is an attractive communication model for management theory and practice.
- The market plays the role of the recipient.
- **Does this (still) work?**

Image 1 by Konrad Jacobs, [ClaudeShannon ME0380Z, CC BY-SA 2.0 DE](#); Image 2 by Sonntag, [Luhmann, CC BY-SA 3.0](#)

# 3. Communication theories

Communication as interaction: symbolically mediated communication process

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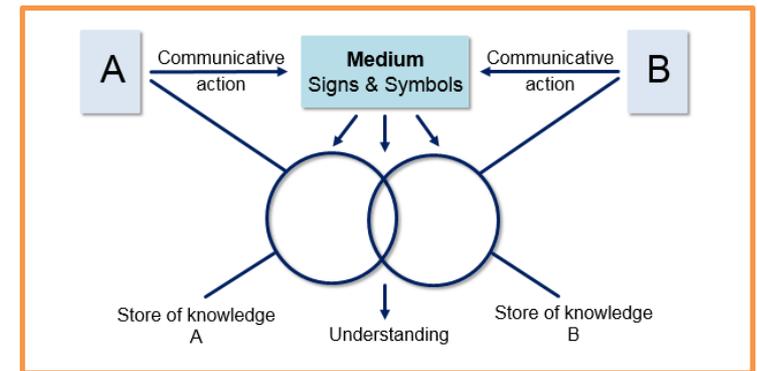
Burkart (2003: 20); translated

“Therefore human communication only exists when (at least two) individuals not only direct their communicative actions towards each other, but when they also put into effect the general intention of their actions (= wanting to share meaning content) and thus achieve the constant goal of every communicative activity (= understanding)”. (Burkart 2003:19; translated)

# 3. Communication theories

## Communication as interaction: the symbolically mediated communication process

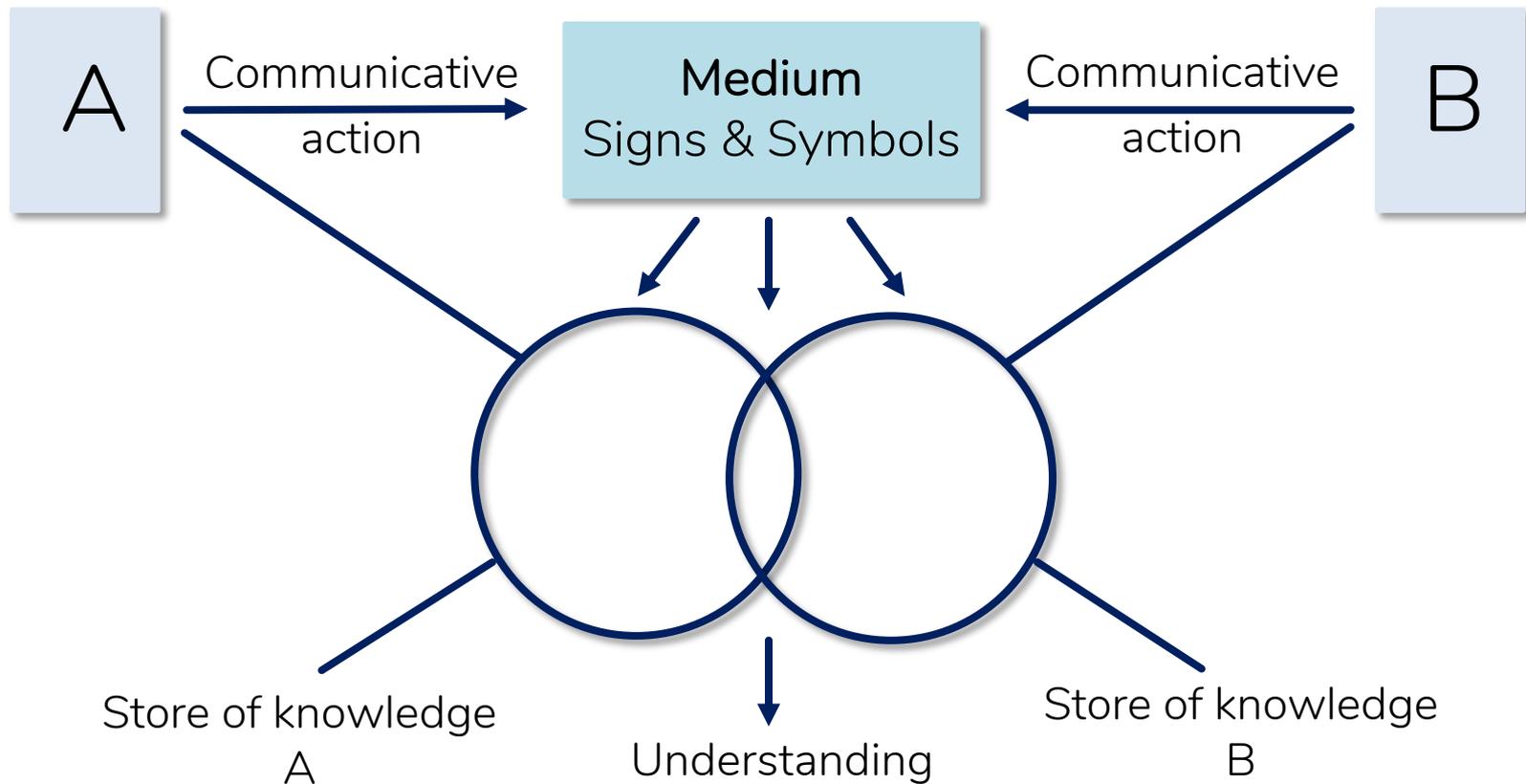
- Each “sender” is at the same time “recipient”, and each “recipient” is always also “sender”.
- Symbolically mediated interaction (G.H. Mead - Symbolic Interactionism)
- The meaning of a symbol is always (co-)determined by the respective spatio-temporal context.
- “Subjectively experienced reality.”
- “Joint updating of sense.” (Luhmann 1971)
- Joint updating of [partially] non-shared dimensions of experience (Burkart 2003: 36)



Source: Burkart 2003:35; translated

# 3. Communication theories

Communication as interaction: the symbolically mediated communication process



Source: Burkart 2003:35; translated

# 3. Communication theories

## Communication as a system

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- Interactions: (simple) social systems with fleeting encounter character (communicative episodes of the social system)
- Criterion: mutually perceived presence
- Topic: content structuring and complexity reduction.
- Paradox: continuity through disruption of continuity as the participants arrange to meet again.



(Image by [Junisa](#) on [Pixabay](#), licensed by CC0)

Luhmann 1984

# 3. Communication theories

## Communication as a system: Triple selection

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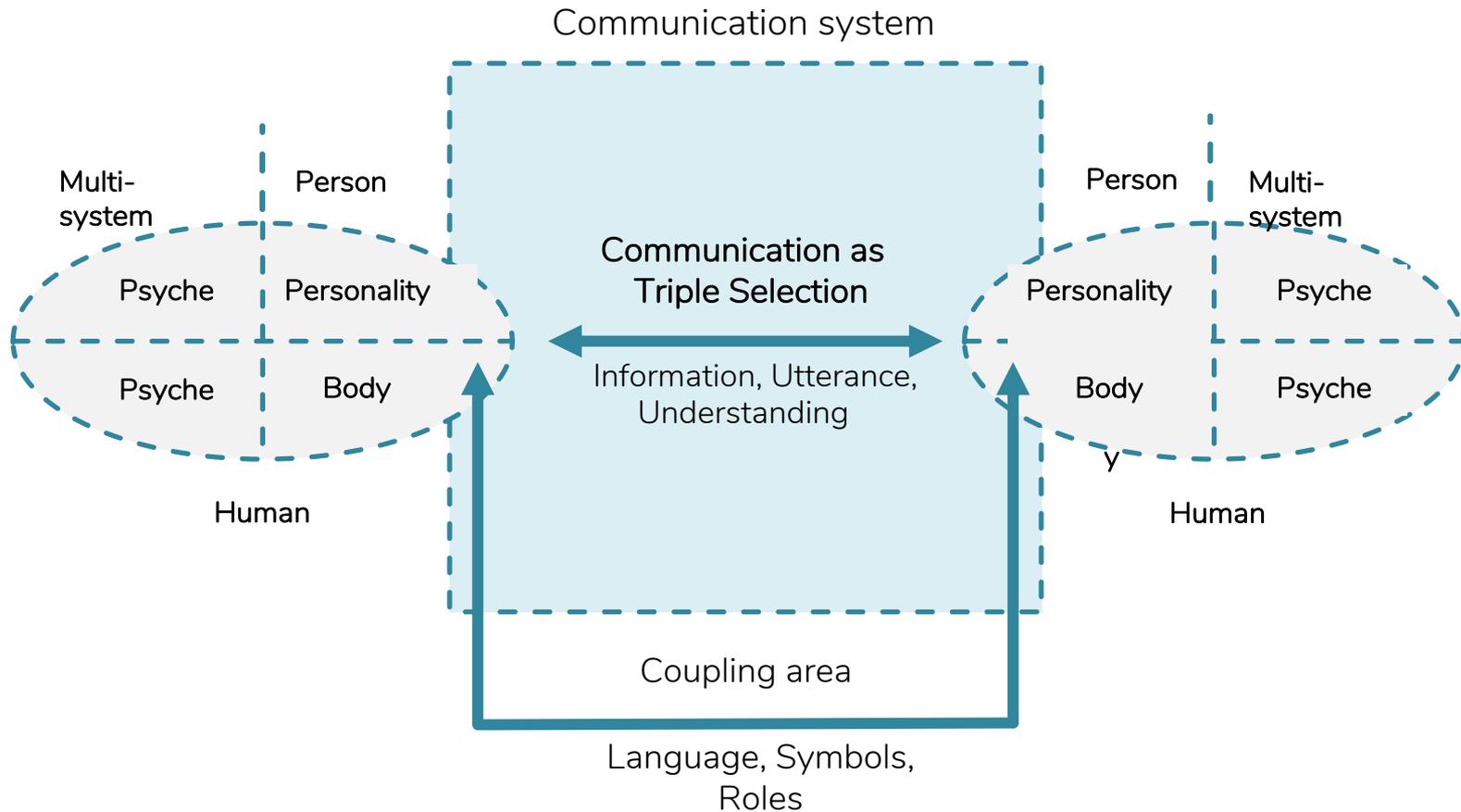
- Communication is the result of the interdependence between three selections: **information, utterance and understanding**.
- A communicative act only takes place when ego (the recipient) understands that alter (the sender) has shared some information with him/her.
- The mere utterance corresponds to the social phenomenon of "communicative action".
- Understanding is the deciding factor, because it is the conclusion of the communicative act and gives rise to the possibility of another communicative act, which sets in motion the communication process.
- A fourth selection is necessary for follow-up communication, but this is not communicative: the acceptance of the information by ego.



Niklas Luhmann

# 3. Communication theories

## Communication as a system: Triple selection



Luhmann 1984

# 3. Communication theories

## Axioms of communication

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- Axiom 1: “one cannot not communicate” – Even in the absence of any obvious communication, all behaviour can be interpreted.
- Axiom 2: “every communication has aspects of content and relationship” – The latter defines how or in what context communication is interpreted.
- Axiom 3: “communication follows rules of punctuation” – Each participant interprets the flow of communication differently and considers other’s behaviour as a response to their own behaviour.
- Axiom 4: “communication is digital and analogic” – There are some clear distinctions (e.g. syntax) and, at the same time, many fuzzy aspects.
- Axiom 5: “inter-personal communication is either symmetrical or complementary” – Depending on the relationship of the interactants, e.g. in an institutional context.



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# 3. Communication theories

## Linguistic relativism

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**“ΠΛΕΩΝ ΕΠΙ ΟΙΝΟΠΑ ΠΟΝΤΟΝ ΕΠΙ  
ΑΛΛΟΘΡΟΥΣ ΑΝΘΡΩΠΟΥΣ”**

“Sailing over the wine-dark sea to men of strange  
speech”

(Odyssey I, p.183)

- Did the ancient Greeks only see black and white?
- Could it be that only in the course of the centuries have we developed the sense of sight enabling us to perceive the colours as we do today?

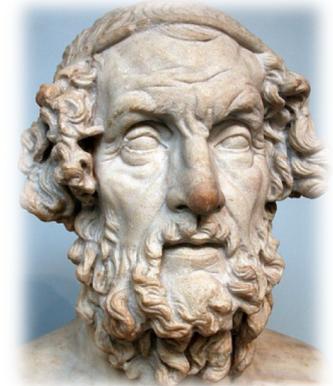


Image 1: Homer  
(ca. 8th cent. AC.)



Image 2: „William Ewart  
Gladstone (1809 -1998)

Deutscher 2010

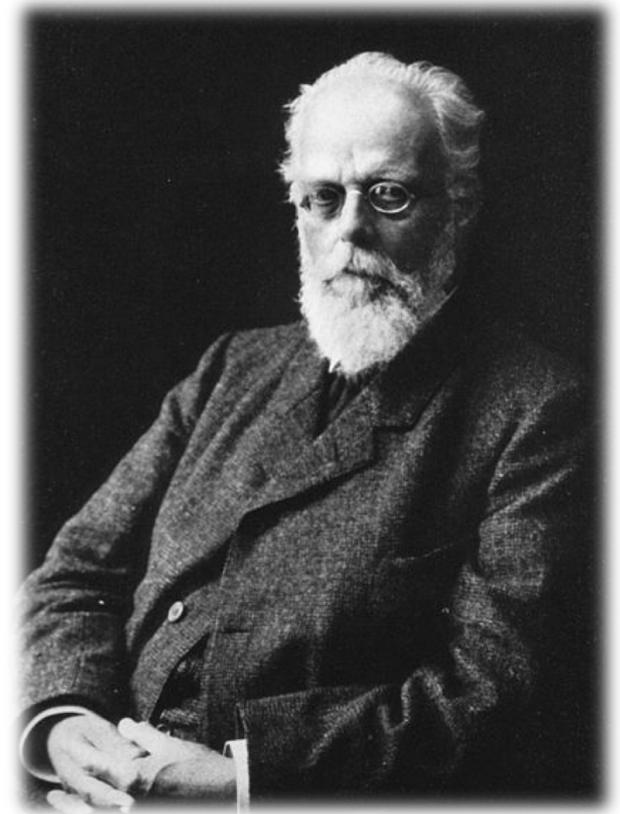
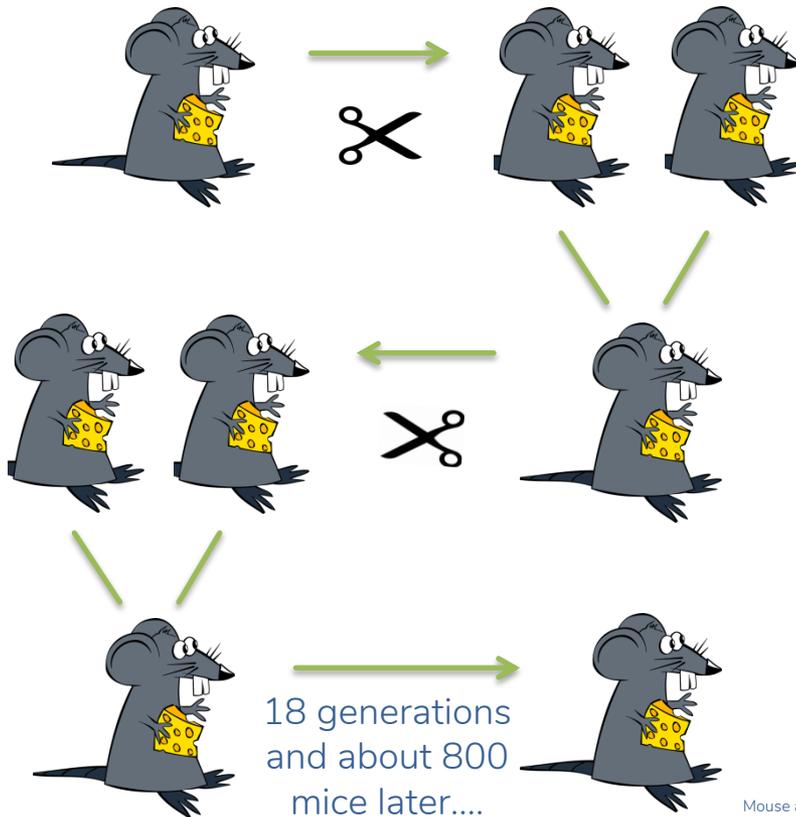
Image 1: Uploaded by JW1805, [Homer British Museum](#), marked as public domain, Details auf [Wikimedia Commons](#) /

Image 2: [John Jabez Edwin Mayall](#) creator QS:P170,Q1700595, [William Gladstone by Mayall, 1861](#), marked as public domain, pl. see details on [Wikimedia Commons](#)

# 3. Communication theories

## Linguistic relativism

### Mice experiment



August Weismann (1834 – 1914)

Mouse and scissors images by [OpenClipart-Vectors](#) on [Pixabay](#), [CC0](#). Portrait image: unknown, [August Weismann](#), marked as public domain, pl. see details on [Wikimedia Commons](#)

# 3. Communication theories

## Linguistic relativism (Sapir-Whorf)

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*Strong hypothesis:*

The native language determines the way in which reality is perceived and conceptualized. Consequently, thinking is determined by language.

Typical examples:

- The language of the Indian-people Hopi has a single word for 'flying insect', 'airplane' and 'pilot'.
- There are Inuit languages with more than 50 different words for the concept 'snow'.
- The language of the Tarahumara has only one word for 'blue' and 'green'.



Edward Sapir (1884 -1939)

Image: unknown, [Edward Sapir](#), marked as public domain, pl. see details on [Wikimedia Commons](#)

# 3. Communication theories

## Linguistic relativism (Sapir-Whorf)

### Mistakes in the Sapir-Whorf Hypothesis?

- Languages are recursive.
  - E.g.: Inuit languages are synthetic: **Aqilokoq** for “snow falling gently” and **Piegnartoq** for “snow (which is good) for sledding”.
- The pragmatic use of language places communication in an interaction context in which **the interlocutors play an essential role**.
  - E.g. – I’m swimming across the Channel – Oh!, you’re brave!
- The **metaphorical, ironic, etc.** use of language.
  - E.g. “at the foot of the mountain”
- The inclusion of the extra-verbal context in communication.
  - E.g. All cases of disambiguation (such as “bank”)

Piegnartoq?

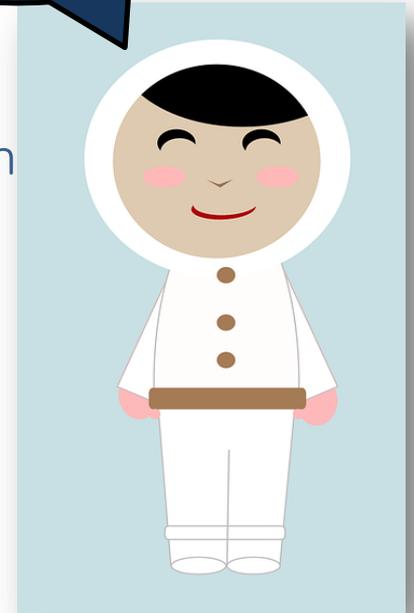


Image by [OpenClipart-Vectors](#) on [Pixabay](#), CC0

# 3. Communication theories

## Linguistic relativism (Sapir-Whorf)

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Weak hypothesis:

- The mother tongue has an **influence on the conceptualization of reality**. Therefore, speakers of different languages may have different ways of interpreting a phenomenon.
- The process goes both ways: the **cognitive paradigms** used to interpret reality influence language usage.
- It is not a linguistic or ontological question, but a communicative question: **the social construction of reality**.



Image by [Andreas Kind](#) on [unsplash](#), [unsplash license](#)

# 4. Summary and conclusions



Communicative action:

- ...takes place by means of the interaction of:
  - ✓ (Technical) transmission processes (e.g. media) → Information
  - ✓ Shared content construction → Utterance
  - ✓ Mutual relations/negotiation processes → Understanding
- ...may vary depending on the weighting of the components.
- ...is done as a common actualisation of partially different dimensions of experience.
- ...generates reality.



Image by [geralt](#) on [Pixabay](#) [CC0](#)

Also:

- Its relationship to culture is not deterministic, but related to cognitive processes.
- Cognition is variable, social and discursive (Bernárdez 2008): It has less to do with how we perceive or think of things, but how, with whom and where we talk about them.
- The specific character of a culture is not inherent in the words, the contents, the practices or the objects, but in what we ascribe to them (construction), in the form (style), in the symbolism (convention) and in the use (plausibility).

# 5. Theory of self representation

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Image キヨネ, GoffmanE., CC BY-SA 3.0

Erving Goffman (1922-1982), American sociologist

Most important work (great impact outside of sociology as well): *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life* (NY, 1959)

The main topics of his approach are:

- Interaction
- Performance
- Role

„The perspective employed in this report is that of the theatrical performance; the principles derived are dramaturgical ones. I shall consider the way in which the individual in ordinary work situations presents himself and his activity to others, the ways in which he guides and controls the impression they form of him, and the kinds of things he may and may not do while sustaining his performance before them”. (Goffman, 1998, S. 3)

# 5. Theory of self-representation

## Rules and expectations

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- **Public behaviour** is driven by expectations, but also by certain social (organizational) rules.
- We act on **the stage of everyday life**, for which there are usually no fixed rules, but through **expectations and expectation of expectations** a binding force is generated.
- Communicative rules are mostly implicit, so that we can speak of **communicative everyday knowledge**.
- Our communicative reality is characterized by a **staging of events governed by tradition**, which works with varying degrees of success.

(Goffman 1959)



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## 6. Case study SEAT Ibiza

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After having acquired SEAT at the beginning of the 90s, the Volkswagen Group embarked upon a new strategy for the SEAT brand from 2002 on. Starting from its position as a "southern European" brand (see, for example, Alfa Romeo), the aim was to make the Spanish manufacturer the sports brand of the group. In this way, a process of "cannibalization" between SEAT and Skoda (the Czech branch of the company, with similar quality characteristics to SEAT but much better prices) could be avoided, or at least that was the thinking.

The launching of this new brand policy was embodied in the TV commercial for the new Seat Ibiza, which was broadcast throughout Europe that year.

Evaluate and comment on the following points:

- The degree of communicative standardization of the commercial (The commercials that were broadcast in Germany, Spain and Italy are shown on the following slides)
- Central themes and features of the communicative design.
- How to interpret the brand slogan ("auto emoción")
- Can we identify a "Spanish communicative style" in the commercial?

## 6. Case study SEAT Ibiza

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(Linked source: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fQdzKXrwET4>)

## 6. Case study SEAT Ibiza

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## 6. Case study SEAT Ibiza

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# 6. Case study SEAT Ibiza

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- Design and production: Bates Germany (in collaboration with the partner agency in Barcelona)
- The three central themes of the concept: a) new, modern, dynamic b) Mediterranean, sporty, exciting, c) “Passion meets Technology”.
- Results: (from a purely functional point of view) successful and **highly standardised** communication across Europe
- **Symbolic content is radically different** in Spain and (among others) in Germany (analysed through discussions in online forums)
- **Spain:** Themes a) and c) dominated (reflecting a new self-confidence of Spanish identity in the late 1990s). Theme b) was regarded only as a fashionable, aesthetic element.
- **Germany:** The passionate Mediterranean accent was particularly important to create a positive association of Seat Ibiza with firmly established values of Spain's image abroad.

# 6. Case study SEAT Ibiza

## Discussion

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- With which approaches from communication theory might the case be explained and interpreted?
- What consequences can be drawn in terms of consumer culture?
- What consequences can be drawn regarding communication between companies and consumers?
- What are international, transnational or global aspects of these consequences?

# Quoted Bibliography

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- Bernárdez, Enrique (2008): *El lenguaje como cultura. Una crítica del discurso sobre el lenguaje*. Madrid, Alianza.
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- Watzlawick, Paul / Beavin Bavelas, Janet / Jackson, Don (1967): *Pragmatics of Human Communication. a study of interactional patterns, pathologies and paradoxes*, New York, Norton.

# Recommended readings

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- Griffin, Em (2009): *A first look at communication theory*, New York, McGraw-Hill, chap. 5.
- Deutscher, Guy (2010): *Through the language glass: why the world looks different in other languages*, New York, Metropolitan books, chap. 1-2.

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