CHAPTER - 5
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*General Semantics* promotes a scientific approach to human behavior. It deals with critical thinking, communication system, rational behavior, general sanity and the "perception-evaluation-communication process". It deals with studying the effects of language and the symbol systems on human behavior. By integrating knowledge from various academic fields including language, communication studies and sciences, it attempts to develop a scientific temper and an effective communication skill required for the 21st century. It has a tremendous impact on the day-to-day activities, interaction and relationships.

Michael Cole, Professor of Communication comments, “*General Semantics* provides a useful way to come to grips with the new paradigms of human relations and human interactions that have resulted as the forms of communication and mediation between individuals, groups and societies has expanded in the last few centuries”.

From *General Semantics* point of view, the success and problems of people involved in the process of communication are functionally related
to their discriminate and indiscriminate use of words. Alfred Korzybski talks about the multiordinality of terms. That means that words don’t just have one meaning. Words and symbols have different meanings to different people and different context. Words or statements, written or spoken, may be interpreted in several ways depending on the place, context, time, nature, usage and the position or stature of the speaker, object or writer.

*General Semantics* refers to the specific meanings of words, as well as the value they carry beyond their definition. For example, one could call a woman, "lady," "girl," "ma'am," "miss", “ms” or any of dozens of synonymous terms. At the same time one can address her as daughter, wife, aunt, friend, while in another situation she can be an actress, poetess, the difference among these terms, and the reason the addressee will prefer some of them and be offended by others, is based on the value she places on each definition.

In *General Semantics*, meanings are derived not only from the psychological perspective only but also from the environmental and behavioral point of view. Each environment has its own meaning. So many territories are created from the map. No meaning is fixed. It keeps on changing and generates meanings as per the environment in which it is used.
A clear understanding of semantics is crucial to prevent misunderstandings. Arguments frequently occur when two people think they are talking about the same thing, but in fact are using the same word for two different ideas or purpose.

➤ A misunderstanding over the question "What state was consignment sent in?" where one person is talking about a state of mind and the other about a geographical region. Hopefully this misunderstanding can be cleared up quickly, but for a few moments both parties are likely to be confused and possibly think the other is crazy.

➤ An argument over the definition of the word "respect" may be heard in the certain situations. One person may understand "respect" to signify a feeling, while another sees it as an attitude demonstrated through actions. Though Anand bears respect for Bina, Bina is angry that Anand did not demonstrate this respect through actions. Anand, on the other hand, is convinced he was not at fault because he does (or did) genuinely bear respect for Bina. This type of argument can drag on indefinitely with both sides vehemently defending themselves.
A few more examples could be added here:

- One boy says, "Look out." The other boy pokes his head out in the aisle and is bumped because he didn’t take the words for a warning.
- A girl says, "I wish I had a date." Her boyfriend says, "I'll bring you a box tomorrow."
- Teacher says, "We'll do the problems on page 20 too." The class does the problems on page 22.

The purpose of Business Communication is to communicate with the different people about business. Almost all the happenings in life depend on business. Business primarily depends on relationships and relationships are built and cemented by communication. These relations could be formal or informal. Behavior and practical approach plays a crucial role in Business Communication. The success or failure either in life or business largely relies on communication.

Communication is must either in the field of science and technology, trade and commerce and a 'tool' in international diplomacy. Language is an important tool of effective communication especially in present scenario to comply with the needs of globalization. It plays a vital role as an information society and employment -environment and serves as a 'link' language. A person to excel in job, needs technical skills and soft
skills such as the ability to work individually and in teams, communicate clearly and effectively, make good use of time and solve complex problems. Communication could be considered as a ‘game’ in which the speaker and listener (writer and reader) battle against the forces of confusion.

"YOU must expect to be misunderstood.
YOU must expect to misunderstand.
YOU can try to minimize misunderstanding.
YOU cannot hope to eliminate it."²

Successful business communication depends a lot on a communicator. How well has the speaker prepared for the ‘game’ when the communicator speaks and when the communicate listens. The important role of words in communication is even more evident when one looks at their influence on human progress. Language is a system of words is credited with giving us superiority over the other forms of life. Human beings alone have language and language has enabled to combat the problems of life with unusual success.

One more misleading idea about language is the belief that words are harmless. This is not always so that is why it should always be kept in mind while using words that sticks and stones may break bones, but words can really mess up psyche. So words can hurt people very badly. A
biting criticism or personal attack can stay vivid in one's memory for years. Some words can provoke a physical response; a punch in the face perhaps. The words themselves may seem weightless, but they can bring about concrete reactions and should be used with care. Colin Cherry comments, "Words can arouse every emotion: awe, hate, terror, nostalgia, grief.... Words can demoralize a man into torpor or they can spring him into delight; they can raise him to heights of spiritual and aesthetic experience. Words have frightening power."³ Robert Wanderer opines, "We do not often ‘describe’ things, persons and events; we more commonly ‘evaluate’ them as beautiful or good, wise or stupid, ugly or bad. Such words, of course describe nothing. They express our personal standards and reflect our feelings of whatever we may be responding to."⁴

Business Communication is basically a pattern of communication where the attempts have been made by the characters involved in process that the business activities they carry must be in tune with their expectations. To achieve the goal, the available tools of communication are ample but the basic and primary tool is ‘words.’ These words carry different meanings depending on their cultural, sociological, historical, practical contexts. An enjoyable definition of words is found in under:
“A word is not a thing,
It’s a thing that is not a thing, or
It’s not a thing like other thing,
A word is not a thing-thing.

A thing can be many things,
This thing or that thing, one thing or other thing,
A thing or the thing, your own thing or my thing,
Anything but a word-thing.

A thing therefore I am.
A thing-thing, not a word –thing, not a word-thing am I.
A name is not a man or woman.
A name-thing is not me.

But a thing is not a thing, no neither.
A thing-thing is still a word –thing, I fear.
I sing or things, of thing-things and word-things,
A thing, therefore, iambic or free.

Thing is, things are not what they seem.
Things are what they are not, not-things.
The thing of things reigns without a rule,
Over not-things and name-things, word-things, and thing-things too.

A thing is nothing if not a not-thing,
And words are sweet knot-things, to tangle us up.

What we say of things is not the way of things,
But the secret of things is th'-ing."

(A) Words do not have ‘one true meaning’:

For the 500 most used words in the English language, the Oxford Dictionary, lists 14,070 meanings. There are as many as 600 uses for some common verbs like ‘to run’, ‘to break’, etc.

While examining the definitions of words like ‘spirit’, ‘crop’, ‘cross’, and ‘crown’ in the dictionary, the reader would find number of definitions. Oxford Dictionary and Thesaurus 3 gives 11 meanings of the word ‘spirit’ (could be more also...). They are:

1. Person’s essence or intelligence/soul
2. Rational being without material body
3. Ghost
4. Attitude/ prevailing tendency
5. Person’s character
6. Type of person
7. Distilled volatile liquid
8. Distilled alcoholic liquor
9. Courage/vivacity
10. Essential as opposed to formal meaning
11. Mood

The possible meanings of words and some of the usages of them could be found in the dictionary but probably the dictionary could not be told by the dictionary how a speaker used that particular word and in which context. Any word may have many uses. One should study and ask direct questions to learn how a word is used.

(B) Words mean different things at different times:

New words are coined from the old word depending on the changing environments in business.

For example: ‘Mouse’ for computer mouse,

‘Mail’ for Electronic mailing,

‘Catwalk’ for a walk by the models on the ramp

‘Net’ for internet service

‘Xerox’ for photocopying
Ripley, Robert has rightly pointed out, “Even though the English tongue, for example, contains many thousands of words and many of these have more than one recognized dictionary meaning, yet we are far from having one word for each fact. Each word and even each dictionary.”

(C) Words mean different thing in different contexts:

For example:

1. “She beat (hit) the drum with a stick.
2. He beat (defeated) Rahul at chess.
3. This journalist has the actor on his beat ( area to cover )
4. Beats me (don’t know), I am not the regular crew chief.”

Some of the sign boards of Amul Products also indicate that words mean different things in different contexts. The business community makes of this concept wonderfully to make their products known to everyone and through that they boost up their sell.
Landslide victory of the Congress in the General Election - May '09

Centre is played upon in the above picture. In India, when the results of General Election 2009 were announced, the Congress party was to acquire the power in the Loksabha, the word ‘centre’ is used by the company in a magnificent way by mentioning that the Congress party is in the centre but Amul is always in the centre of attraction for consumers.
Inauguration of the Bandra Worli Sea link in Mumbai - July '09

Here the word ‘Jam’ is used in the advertisement conveying two meanings. One meaning is in context of the news item that is ‘traffic jam’ and another one is ‘jam’, an eatery. The advertisement has used the ‘context’ wonderfully here to advertise the product.
Copyright controversy surrounding Bollywood release- 'Three Idiots' - Jan '10

When there was a controversy over the copyrights of the successful bollywood movie ‘Thee Idiots’, the sign board of the Amul Products made use of the context by using the phrase, ‘Kisne Kisko Idiot Banaya’ and then conveying its quality by using the phrase ‘100% original’
Longest and most spectacular eclipse of the 21st century - July '09

Normally, the solar eclipse hides the powerful star like the sun for a few seconds behind the moon. The context was used with a very effective advertising phrase ‘Amul’s Never Eclipsed’, indicating that Amul is more powerful than the sun.
When the Member of the Parliament and the General Secretary of the Congress party Mr. Rahul Gandhi travelled by the local train, probably for the first time in his life, got a lot of attention of the media and of the public, too. Using the context wonderfully, the phrase ‘Chalti ka naam Gandhi’ and then said Amul ‘First Class’, showing its ‘class.’
New Words keep on emerging in different contexts:

A few more examples are incorporated here from the world of business to support the above mentioned statement. The following words were published in the leading English daily, The Times of India.

- **Email apnea**: (Sanjay Singh, Bhopal)

  It is the stress caused by the inability to process emails and connect even as mails flood the inbox. It is marked by a suspension of breathing, shallow breathing or hyperventilating while checking mail. Researcher Linda Stone coined this term after realizing that many people go through this process every morning, the mind whirling from mail to mail, filing, forwarding etc. She also found the effect of this kind of apnea on general health to be negative in the long term.

- **Software entropy** (Apr 11, 2010, 01.13am IST) (Dhruv Dadoo, Mumbai)

  The tendency, over time, for software to become difficult and costly to maintain is known as software entropy. A software system that undergoes continuous change, like new functionality added to its original design, will eventually become more complex, losing its original design structure, and may even become disorganized as it grows. In theory, it
may be better to redesign the software in order to support the changes rather than build on the existing programme.

- **Peanut-buttering?** (Mar 7, 2010, 12.01am IST) — Gayathri Sinha, Nagpur

Peanut-buttering is a term used to mean spreading resources too thin, whether money or manpower, in a manner such that it does not benefit the organization. It means, unlike what it suggests — thick creamy butter — that when it is spread, everyone has to make do with what he/she gets. A tight economy has seen taxes being peanut-buttered, so have companies managing on shoe-string budgets, and salary cuts have led to it at home. Peanut-buttering also happens when a company begins investing in too many things and thus has to stretch its cash reserves.

- **Turnkey project** (Sep 2, 2006, 07.50pm IST) Shrivardhan Marathe, recd via e-mail

One of the special modes of carrying out international business is a turnkey project. It is a contract under which a firm agrees to fully design, construct and equip a manufacturing/ business/ service facility and turn the project over to the purchaser when it is ready for operation for remuneration.
• 3G (third generation) technology (Amit Jain, Sonepat)

Third Generation technology refers to the third generation of mobile communications. It represents the convergence of various 2G wireless telecommunications systems into a single global system that includes both terrestrial and satellite components. Its ability to unify existing cellular standards such as CDMA, GSM, and TDMA, under one umbrella is its important aspect. It has brought with it mobile multimedia with high data bandwidths and sophisticated mobile terminals and new services and applications.

Basically, words are used to describe a person, an object or a thing-event and perform the role of a map. They create different territories. Not only words but a letter could also behave as a map as it carries different meanings.

(A) Letter as map

For example, X is a map and so many territories can be created on the basis of its practical and environment.

"X is the Roman notation for ten

X is the mark of illiterate men

X is a ruler removed from the throne"
X is a quantity wholly unknown

X may mean Xenon, a furious gas

X is a ray of a similar class

Xmas is Christmas, a season of bliss

X in a letter is good for a kiss

X is for Xerxes, a monarch renowned

X marks the spot where the body was found.”9

(B) Word as map

For example, ‘Man’ is a map. So many territories are created on the basis of its practical and environment.

Man is a human species.

Man is a president.

Man is a father.

Man is a husband.

Man is a brother.

Man is an employee.

Man is a businessman.
Man is a labourer and so on...

(C) Phrase as map

The key words have the tremendous abilities to further enhance the territories of the main map. The words ‘Man’ and ‘Room’ give us different meanings to us when they are used in different environment.

As per the employment or practical point of view, the map called ‘Man’ could be viewed as:

Chairman,
Salesman,
Watchman,
Liftman,
Batsman,
Spokesman,
Businessman,
Sportsman, etc.

From the different perspective, the map called ‘Room’ could be viewed as:

Board room,
Class room,
Study room,
Bath room,
Conference room,
Trial room,
Bed room,
Living room,
Drawing room,
Store room,
Luggage room,
Staff room, etc.

(D) Sentence as map

The sentences bring very effective meaning when the words are used, keeping in the mind the changing scenario. Some the examples are given below:

1. ‘...AND THE MOUSE OVERPOWERTED CAT’

(‘The Times India’ dated 29thNovember, 2009)

In India, the common admission test which is popularly known as CAT, conducted to take up the students in the leading management institutions. When the candidates were taking the CAT exams online for the first time, the leading daily ‘The Times India’ dated 29thNovember, 2009 published the news with the headline‘...AND THE MOUSE OVERPOWERTED CAT’.
The abbreviated word CAT represents something else here than its dictionary meaning. Even the term MOUSE in the headline is an indication of the computer mouse as the examination was conducted online. The word MOUSE as per the dictionary meaning ‘a reptile animal’ but in the existing context, it gives a different meaning.

2. 100 TEXTS A DAY : THAT’S HOW GEN X TALKS

(Times of India, dated April 22, 2010, page no 16)

Messages send through cell phones are written messages which are now popularly known as Texts. Here the word ‘text’ in the above mentioned news headline does not indicate the dictionary meaning but the word in business has started coining another meaning on the basis of the environment. In the same headline the word Gen X also an indication how the next generation is introduced in the business world.

The habit of asking, “Do the words fit the facts?” should be developed in making the process of Business communication effective and purposeful. If people are trained to apply this habit, should make less false identification. They should know that talking about a situation is not doing something about it. One cause of some of our misunderstandings may be that one sometimes confuses the word with the thing it stands for; one acts as if words were objects or feelings. You have ever checked a rumor or gossip with the facts, tell about it. If one calls it ‘borrowing
permanently' when one steals a book or magazine from the university library, does it change the fact that one is taking something that belongs to someone else? Stuart Chase remarks, “A group of synonyms does not define an object. A careful description may help bring it into focus for the listener, but it is not conclusive. Final identification is achieved only by pointing to the apple, touching it with the hand, seeing it with the eyes, tasting it with the mouth, and so recognizing it as non-verbal. Here is the base from which all our proud words rise — every last one of them — and to it they must constantly return and be refreshed. Failing this, they wander into regions where there are no apples, no objects, no acts, and so they become symbols for airy chunks of nothing at all.” Irving Lee clearly states, “Words do not exist in objects, situations, feelings, etc. Words can affect human evaluations, but not ‘things.’ Calling a spade a shovel does not change it....“The basic question: not, what was it called, but what was being so called?” Further he adds, “We have no intention here of urging that talk be limited to statements which represent what can be found outside-the-skin. Such a prohibition would be impossible even if urged. We are insisting, for proper evaluation, that statements be recognized for what they do represent.”
Communicators should develop a familiarity with examples of confusing words with non-verbal facts. These examples are probably examples of confusing the word with the thing.

- Some people are more impressed by the advertisement of a product than by the product itself.
- Some believe that the Hindi movies that always have happy endings are true to life.
- Some boards of directors appoint a committee to make a report and let that conclude their activities.

A few more examples could be added here

- Clearly misunderstood
- Exact estimate
- Small crowd
- Act naturally
- Found missing
- Fully empty
- Easy-to-repay loan
In the examples mentioned below, the another feature that is observed is that the ‘root’ word gets different meaning when it is suffixed by different words, generating different meanings on the basis of various situations. One of the important activities of business is share market. The words which are used in the share market are the best examples of generating different meanings on the basis of various situations. The words listed below would have different meanings when they are used in the different environment. Some of the examples are given below:

- Dried up market
- Easier market
- Featureless market
- Flat market
- Graveled market or Grounded market
- Manipulated market.
- Dead market

The word ‘key’ may create a more meanings when it is associated with other words:

- Key hole,
- Key person,
- Key chain,
- Key person,
• Key board,
• Key stand,
• Key guard,
• Key answer, etc.

Another common word one might use is *table*:

• Table of interest,
• Table of furniture,
• Table of a motion,
• Table of multiplication,
• Table of contents, etc.

Robert Ripley says, “How many words can we find in comparing several newspapers to show how differently people use words? What about these: progressive or radical, politician or statesman, home or residence, plot or plan, inspector or snooper, aid or charity, brass or officers, propaganda or information?”

*General semantics* is used when the symbols are not fixed to one particular meaning. This saves situations from the breakdowns as it provides vast locales of meanings. Fortunately, breakdowns in communication are usually repairable. Misunderstandings can be explained, languages can be translated, relationships can be restored,
rumors can be controlled, and escalation limited -- all through clear, verbal communication, i.e. talking. Despite common admonishments to "improve communication skills," the majority of people are already very sophisticated at sending and interpreting messages. Robert Ripley mentions, “This is the belief that language is like the postal service, that it can transfer packages (ideas) from person to person without corruption of the original message: person A puts his thought or feelings into words and "gives" or "sends" these words to B, who "extracts" or unpacks the message. The danger of this metaphor is that it leads one to believe that language is effortless. Misunderstandings are therefore extremely frustrating in that they are not supposed to occur, and if they do occur, then someone must be at fault -- either the speaker did not correctly package the message or the listener erred in unpacking it, or both. However, no such exchange takes place. A more accurate description is that the speaker attempts to code ideas, feelings, and images with words. Those words are transmitted to the listener who then matches them with his/her own experiences. There is no universal codebook, so what A thinks of as "success" will not necessarily match person B's definition. Words correspond to different ideas and feelings for different people, and it can take multiple attempts before an idea has been understood satisfactorily. The more cultural differences there are between speakers, the more frequently they will have to stop and work out differences of
meaning.” …… “The fact that a limited number of words must serve to
cover an unlimited number of “things” leads to confusion and
misunderstanding. There is no such thing as the real sense of a word.
There is only the sense in which the word is used.”

The speaker and listener should create awareness that any word may have
a whole list of uses. Awareness should also be developed that what is
being said may not represent what they assume it does. The habit of
direct questioning should be developed to find the use of a word or
phrase.

A word may be used in so many ways that misunderstandings arise when
speaker and listener each assumes that he knows how it is used.
Similarly, the same word could have different meanings in the different
‘love’, ‘affection’, ‘liking’, ‘doubt’, etc. If it is asked do you like tea? Or
do you feel hungry? And one may say ‘yes’ in both the cases but in the
first case, the content becomes ‘tea’ and in the second ‘hungry’. So the
word ‘yes’ conveys different situation.

Of course, misunderstanding of ideas or intent can also occur when there
is an absence of communication between two groups. When two parties
are not speaking, there is no way to clarify positions, intentions, or past
actions; rumors can spread unchecked. Sometimes both parties make a concerted effort to communicate as clearly as possible, but cultural differences or language barriers obstruct clear understanding. Even within a cultural group, misunderstandings can arise because of different personal communication styles. One person will ask a lot of questions to show interest, while another person will find that to be disrespectful. Men and women, in particular, are thought to have different styles. It is also observed that even the style of using word and behavioral pattern create different territories and maps. The speaker includes impressions of thoughts to further the meaning.

CITATIONS


5. Strate, Lance. ‘An Account, Korzybski Old Chap, Of This Thing of Ours’


