

Radlett and District U3A Philosophy Group Notes from meeting May 2013

Subject for discussion: -

"Meanings can be true or false. What speakers and listeners do with language in communication, and how it is used socially. We say one thing but may mean something else. The listener will interpret it as they hear it, but this might not be what was intended." Suggested by Janet Adams.

The topic raised discussion which can be gathered under the following headings: -

Methods

We communicate in many ways including body language

Communication is made up from 7% words, 55% body language and 38% tone of voice

Tone gives meaning

Meaning

There are different aspects to words and meanings

There are 52 ways of saying the word "No"

Use of language changes and evolves with political and cultural influences

The meaning of words can be distorted

The delivery of the speaker can keep, or lose, the listeners attention

Written language has limitations

Language can be misinterpreted especially in emails

Understanding

Who is responsibility for checking that the listener has understood the speaker's meaning?

The listener's response indicates whether they have understood

"Seek first to understand, then to be understood". Stephen Covey

Difficulties

The relationship between the speaker and the hearer can influence communication

Differences in sense of humour can cause difficulties in communication

Men were taught not to express emotion

Legal documents are unnecessarily complex and need lengthy explanations

Transcribing the words of others can be difficult, as it cannot include tone and body language.

A précis by a third party can lose the meaning of the original writer

Negotiators and interpreters have difficult jobs

Truth

Politicians are trained how to avoid answering questions

Subtle questioning can illicit truth

Eye movement, or lack of it, can indicate a speaker's truth or motivation

At what point is saying the absolute truth essential. It can lead to disastrous consequences

Conflict

Language can be divisive with different accents or vocabulary being used to intimidate

Words are powerful. Bullying shows the saying "sticks and stones..." to be absolute rubbish

Miscommunication causes conflict

The written word can never be erased.

Apology

Apologising can be a learned technique

Sorry can seem insincere but a genuine apology can make a real difference

Purity

2 schools of thought on language 1) Language should be protected 2) Language should evolve

Language follows the general pace of life and is often rushed

The French favour preserving and protecting their language

Youth

The beauty of language is lost to the young

The neglect of reading leads to a restricted vocabulary

Text speak means young people cannot spell

Children use words to exclude elders

We need to show interest in the language of the young

Lack of Language

Loss of language after stroke or in Alzheimer's causes distress

Profoundly deaf people without speech can be isolated and frustrated

Not finding the right words when aging causes frustration

Benefits

Talking can be therapeutic

We are lucky to have language to express desires, needs and pain

What we repress controls us, what we express frees us

“There is always an element of magic in communication, especially in face-to-face interaction, when a speaker - by means of words and non-verbal signals - makes things happen with the listener, when he induces thoughts, images, feelings, moods, and volitions in the listener's mind”. (Strömqvist)

Words are important. A life without words is unimaginable. We should be grateful that we can communicate and should use words effectively, adequately and accurately.

We should appreciate the depth and degree of the English language.