

Learning to Communicate Peacefully

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INTRODUCTION: DEFINITION

All human beings share a universal faculty: that of communicating. This multifaceted linguistic ability can be experienced through one or more of the following processes: speaking, listening, reading, writing, or using a sign language. The acquisition of language is surely the first important event in human communicative history, being sustained first by interaction at home and then by education at school. What is language? It is a mental marvel used for meaning-making. Communication is one of the ways of using language and learning to communicate is an inherent part of our being-becoming human. In fact, much of education has to do with how to communicate effectively or successfully. In this article, a case is made for the need for language users everywhere to go communicatively beyond, that is, to learn how to communicate peacefully.

APPROACHES TO PEACEFUL COMMUNICATION

Recent works in such areas as Conflict Resolution, Peace Psychology, and Peace education focus on aspects of Constructive Communication (Deutsch, Coleman & Marcus, 2006; MacNair, 2006; Lin, Brantmeier & Bruhn, 2008) but a search in the literature on communicating for peaceful purposes shows that as yet there are few well-established and emerging approaches. Among the former, two instances are: Nonviolent Communication (NVC) and Appreciative Inquiry (AI), both of U.S. origin (for details, see Gomes de Matos, 2006). Among the latter, *Languaging Peace* (Haessly, 2002) and the author's approach, launched in Portuguese as *Comunicação Construtiva* (Gomes de Matos, 1996), more fully developed in another book, also in Portuguese, with a focus on Peace Linguistics and Communicative Peace (Gomes de Matos, 2002) and in two chapters in English (Gomes de Matos, 2005 and 2006). The term Peace Linguistics was first defined by Crystal (1999). In this article, the author's approach will be presented, both theoretically and related to its applied functions.

PRINCIPLES UNDERLYING PEACEFUL COMMUNICATION

In my approach, the following principles underlie the peaceful uses of languages:

1. Love your communicative neighbor
2. Dignify your daily dialogues
3. Prioritize Positivizers in your language use
4. Be a communicative Humanizer

What does the first principle mean? Applying the biblical saying in a specific way, that is, urging that every human being, as a user of language(s), communicate caringly, compassionately, cooperatively, cordially, convergently. The second principle is a reminder of the communicative power of dignity in human interactions. The inherent dignity of all persons should be considered in our communicative acts. The third principle helps us see how communicative dignity can be practiced through the choice of words and phraseologies conveying positive or constructive values. The fourth principle is a plea for all language users to communicate in a humanizing way, that is, inspired by the ideals of dignity, human rights, justice, peace, equality, cooperation, goodness, kindness, and mutual understanding. Although Peace Education has been considered part of the Humanist Tradition, the time is ripe for that area, as well as related fields – Peace Psychology, for instance – to develop as in a more

humanizing manner as characterized above. In such spirit, all peace educators would become Humanizers, imbued with universal ideals and committed to applying them in everyday communicative interaction. The four principles are interconnected and interdependent, making up the underlying theoretical foundation for practical actions aimed at conveying peaceful communication.

How can the above set of principles be translated into practice? The next section addresses this question.

Techniques for learning to communicate peacefully

Technique 1: Creating communicative contrasts

We can communicate peacefully through the pairing of contraries, that is, by expressing oppositeness involving semantically related pairs of verbs. The list below could be a starting point for an expanded catalog of actions to avoid plus actions to implement. Note that some pairings look /sound like clear-cut antonyms while others are fruitful creative pairings. Learning to communicate peacefully calls for the ability to monitor one's communicative actions, especially as regards replacing a potentially hurtful message with a constructive one. Here are 12 of such contraries:

Don't denigrate; appreciate
Don't detract; attract
Don't suspect; respect
Don't manipulate; cooperate
Don't discard; regard
Don't offend; commend
Don't indoctrinate; illuminate
Don't impose; propose
Don't mortify; dignify
Don't humiliate; humanize
Don't resist; assist
Don't attack (verbally); question

For each pairing, imagine an interaction in which you are challenged to change from a communicatively dehumanizing to a linguistically humanizing alternative. Use the pairings as a checklist for self-assessing your ability to communicate in a continuum ranging from violent to nonviolent language use.

TECHNIQUE 2. Communicating through constructive alliterations

One of the most powerful processes for memorable meaning-making is that of alliteration, the ability to repeat the same sound or letter at the beginning of two or more words in a presumably unforgettable statement. This mnemonic device can become a strategy for self-control in constructive communication. If your communicative life is guided by an alliteration such as Dignify your Daily Dialogues (stored mentally or included in your written repertoire of reminders for communicating peacefully), you educate yourself to use language(s) in ways which can dignify both you and the person(s) you will be interacting with. Given the open ended linguistic creativity of human beings, alliterations can be created on the basis of each letter of the alphabet. Here are some alliterative statements, to inspire you and to invite you to make up your own from now on, for uses in varied contexts, especially in activities which call for previous communicative preparation, such as lessons, lectures, meetings, report writing, text-quality assessment and the like. The author of this article often relies on alliterations for his talks and workshops. Applications can be found for other communicative needs. Do cultivate your humanizing ability to alliterate for peace.

Some alliterations which can help you learn to communicate peacefully:

AAA - Aim at affect and amiability
BBB - Build bridges of blessings
CCC - Consider controversies constructively
DDD - Develop a democratic discourse
FFF - Foster friendship and fraternity
HHH - Honor Humanity and Humaneness
III - Inculcate integration and interdependence
JJJ - Join Justice and peace Joyfully
LLL - Lead with life-supporting love
MMM – Multiply mediation and meditation
NNN - Nourish negotiation norms
OOO - Opt for openheartedness and open-mindedness
PPP – Perceive persons as peace partners
SSS - Sustain security and solidarity
TTT - Treat others with tact and tenderness
UUU - Unite for ultimate universality
VVV - Veto violent vocabulary
WWW - Weigh your words with wisdom

As a technique for self-education in peaceful communication, the process of alliteration should pay many beautiful humanizing dividends in your life. For the use of the alliterative practice in describing three approaches to peaceful communication mentioned in this article, see Gomes de Matos (2006).

TECHNIQUE 3: Using positivizers

Learning to communicate peacefully calls for a mastery and ongoing monitoring of a vocabulary which can convey positive meanings. The lack of a specific word for such semantic territory led me to coining “positivizers” as a generic term for such peace-enhancing types of words. If we take verbs, for instance, we may come up with a list which would include accept, agree, acknowledge, assist, bless, bridge, build, celebrate, commend, construct, converge, cooperate, create, democratize, develop, dignify, educate, empathize, encourage, enhance, entertain, forgive, foster, help, honor, humanize, improve, instruct, interact, like, love, praise, promote, reconcile, respect, share, support, thank, trust and unite.

To answer the question how can we learn to communicate in peaceful ways? Add to the following adverb-focused list. By interacting affirmatively, agreeably/ amicably/ appreciatively; benevolently, benignly, big-heartedly; caringly, civic-mindedly, compassionately, conciliatorily, considerately, cordially, constructively; dignifyingly, dutifully; empathetically, empoweringly, encouragingly, equitably, ethically; fairly, forgivingly; good-heartedly, good naturedly,

generously, gently, graciously; helpfully, humanely, humanitarianly, humanizingly, humbly, honestly, harmoniously, hopefully; impartially, interdependently; joyfully, justly; kindly; lovingly; magnanimously, mercifully; neighborly, non-judgmentally, non-violently; optimistically, openly; patiently, positively; reliably, respectfully, responsibly; selflessness', sensitively, supportively, sympathetically; tactfully, tenderly, thoughtfully, trustworthily, trustingly; understandingly, unselfishly; virtuously; well-meaningly.

On a broader communicative plane, the systematic learning of peace-promoting phraseologies could also be planned. Hopefully, the design of multilingual dictionaries aiming at preparing language users for activating such peaceful phrases could be entrusted to teams of peace linguists, peace educators, and peace psychologists. In this author's workshops on constructive communication in Portuguese and in English, I challenge participants to observe daily interaction in various social settings, to write down any instances of peaceful phraseologies and to report such findings in class. The discussion following the sharing of such peace-promoting phrases provides an additional opportunity to probe a strategic dimension of peaceful communication. A very frequent type of written discourse in which phraseologies of peaceful language use can be found is that of hortatory, religious discourse – sermons, for instance – and that of diplomatic discourse. For a discussion of how communicative positivity can be applied to diplomatic communication, see Gomes de Matos (2001). For a set of peaceful vocabulary techniques for use by teachers of English as a second languages, see Gomes de Matos (2002). The use of alliterations in a Peace Psychology context, can be seen in Gomes de Matos (2006b). For an example of how to be communicatively caring and respectful, see Post and Newmark (2007). For an illuminating treatment of Yes as the key word of community, connection, and peace, see Ury (2007). An innovative sociolinguistic approach to communicative peace is found in Friedrich (2007). As creative users of the Internet, I am sure you will find other sources which can provide you with edifying examples of how to communicate peacefully with one another.

CONCLUSION

In this article, I have tried to provide the reader with a glimpse of some of the theoretical and practical aspects involved in the complex, challenging domain of educating citizens everywhere in communicating peacefully. In doing so, may I end by reiterating a plea I have been making in my publications as well as in presentations in varied professional, interdisciplinary forums: that human beings be assured the right to learn to communicate peacefully for the good of Humankind. Learning to communicate peacefully is not only a universal educational desideratum, but an urgent need if we are to fulfill our communicative duties and obligations with serenity, tranquility, justice, and above all, PEACE. May communicative peace be with you and with those you interact with, in speaking, listening, reading, writing or in using a sign language intra-culturally and across cultures.

CREATING PHRASEOLOGIES FOR PEACE . A poem-plea
by Francisco Gomes de Matos

PEACE is expressed in Eastern and Western Traditions
as exemplified by the "Peace be with you" saying
Let's enhance that heritage with our conditions
and create phraseologies that reflect our living

For example, saying "Let's Plant Planetary Peace"
could be a call to a universally shared Harmony
along with "World Friendship, please never cease"
or with the exclamation "Long live human dignity"

Many peaceful phrases we should create
for Humankind to be deeply PEACE-aware

When we wish "A sunny Peace" we radiate
the warm sentiment that we truly care

As language users let's make transformations
so our texts can be compassionate and kind
let's further humanize our communications
and peaceful interactions we will always find

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