Language used in every day usage is often misinterpreted, but when used correctly can also enhance a communication. The three types of symbols, arbitrary, ambiguous, and abstract each have the potential for enhancing or distracting verbal and non-verbal communication.

Language is arbitrary, meaning that words are not intrinsically connected to what they represent. For instance, the *paper* we write on has no necessary link to what we read from it. Because language is arbitrary, the meanings of words can change over time, for example, the use of the word “gay” is generally used to label homosexuals, however in recent years it has sadly taken on a new meaning of negativity. “Gay” is usually in the place of a word such as stupid or lame. When looked up in the dictionary and how it has been used in the past, gay can also mean happy or jolly. In the context of calling someone gay can distract or enhance the communication between one another because the listener can take it one of three ways, “You’re so gay.” Is the listener a homosexual, lame, or jolly?

Language is ambiguous, meaning the words aren’t clear cut or fixed. *Affordable* clothes to me may not be the same type of affordable to Paris Hilton. This is because affordable varies with peoples’ unique experiences and circumstances. We tend to assume that words mean the same thing to other people as they do us, and that’s not the case. If I told my significant other that I wish she’d be more loving, what does that tell her? She might have a completely different understanding of what “being more loving” means. Using ambiguous language can also allow us to personalize words. For example our groups had artifacts we had to explain as representing ourselves. Choosing a stuffed animal, people knew that it had more of a meaning than being a “cotton-stuffed toy”, It has unique memories attached to it as well. Knowing that certain objects or words hold a underlying meaning can enhance a conversation.

Lastly, language can be abstract meaning the words are inferences and generalizations abstracted from a total reality. Abstract language can happen through overgeneralization. For example, our group has blogged many times that, “We need to continue to progress.” But how should we progress. In more recent blogs, the more specific we have become with our words the more successful in interacting effectively we’ve become. Then again generalization can be effective in debate. Generally speaking, someone can give the general idea of a situation, allowing them to turn it into what they want. While no specifics are given, an audience can be persuaded and won over.

Many instances are situational and so when used in the correct or incorrect situation arbitrary, ambiguous, and abstract language has been proven to be effective or ineffective in enhancing or distracting a communication. 475 Words