

Sheet Title

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Welcome at Horizon College, welcome at the Conference "Best Practices in Foreign Language Teaching, By Teachers For Teachers". A most warm welcome for the people from abroad that have crossed their Horizon to meet at this point *in* the Horizon.

My name is René van Schalkwijk and I am member of the Board of Horizon College. I am by no means an expert at Language Teaching so I hope to learn a lot at this conference too.

Sheet Catalunya

But.... I do go on vacation.. Like most of you do. And this year I went to Spain or should I say Catalunya. Speaking about languages ... as some of you may be aware of here.... there is a dispute over languages there. Catalan or Castillian. This is not a problem for me because I speak neither. It did however draw my attention again at the different important functions of language.

At a sociological and or political level language functions as a reflection of identity. Which is at the same time comforting as well as dangerous and a source or vehicle of dispute or at its worst ...war.

The fact that I am addressing you in the English language is also a reflection of the balance in political power in the world. Looking into history Russian, Arabic, Spanish, French, Latin or other languages also were used as a result of social political power.

By the way .. I owe a lot of my ability to speak English to the Beatles though..... The Beatles are a very popular music group in the past century...

And let us be true If I would be addressing you in the Dutch language to many of our guests from abroad it would sound Dutch... meaning gibberish.

Sheet English expressions on dutch language

For we have this beautiful relationship between the Dutch and the English language which you can find in these expressions.

Another function of language at another level is to transfer meaning. To remain in the holiday atmosphere it is good to look at the relations between men and women as it concerns the use of language. The saying goes that men use less words than women, but I am catching up a bit in

this address. I would like to refer to the studies of Deborah Tannen especially her book "That is not what I mean"

Sheet Deborah Tannens book

Which can be summed up by her anecdote of a husband and wife going in a car to their holiday destination. The wife asks her husband if he is hungry or thirsty and the man answered "no thanks". He drives on and does not stop at the next road restaurant. His wife burst out and asks why he did not stop at the restaurant. Out of her question he could have inferred that she was thirsty and hungry. At which he says that she could have told him so. At which she says that he was too inconsiderate to ask him that and then follows a standard marital quarrel from which those scientific studies conclude that women talk more than men. I will invite you to study this case study more thorough but...

Sheet DONT 'DO THIS AT HOME.

However efficient language is in transferring meaning it does not necessarily transfer understanding. (which by the way is an important lesson for the language conflicts at the socio-political level.)

It was Paul Watzlawick in het book **The Pragmatics of Human Communication** that drew attention to, language and communications in the field of the social psychology. Drawing on language studies (semiotics) he made the distinction between there levels of communication:

Sheet Watzlawick

- a. The syntaxis being rules or technicalities in communication things like coding capacity channelling noise in communication.
- b. The semantics agreement on the meaning of communication symbols without meaning would be dutch to everyone
- c. The pragmatics as pertaining ot the behavioural results of communication more specifically the nature of the relationship between people

Let me show you two examples of situations we often encounter in our organization

Two sheets org myths

One of Watzlawicks conclusions was that it is impossible not to communicate, because there is always communication at one of these levels.

Sheet Watzlawick

The couple in the earlier example found this out

since they did not speak a word to each other
until..... they arrived at their holiday address.....
untilthey looked each other in the eyes again.

I would like you to think this through for a bit.

This also explains the continued complain of lack of communication in organizations. If it is impossible to have lack of communication because it is always there , the complaint of lack of communication which is abundantly present in our organizations, refers more to the pragmatic aspect of communication then to the lack of the presence of the exchange of meaningful symbols.

As we know in most organizations their is more written communication available than anyone is able to read and do in a days work.

The difference between the three levels of communication once was presented very clearly in the Woody Allan film Annie Hall in which the exchanged words were subtitled in their intended meaning which again was incongruent with the image and behaviour of the people on the screen.

Congruence between language and non verbal expressions is very important in the effect of language hence the substitute use of emoticons in computer exchanges

In this sense it is also good to share with you a thought that I found in an address by Harry Starren who indicated that language can not only be seen, as is commonly done, as a *representation* of reality but also a vehicle for the *creation* of reality.

We can also see this in the increasing amount of what I call normative descriptive research. But this is something for another address..

Now we come to the point where the power and inadequacy of language as such is most selfevident.

I would like to talk to you about love...

Sheet Love

One of the most important emotions in life and the one least taught about in schools. (But probably most *thought* about. If love is taught about at school at all --I must give language teachers this credit ---it is indirectly through literature studies.

Where love often is defined as the only universal language it is funny that there is an undying inclination to put it into words. Think a bit is it not true saying I love you in your own language or in a foreign language feels different.

The inadequacy of language in this domain is best illustrated by R.D. Laings book
"Do you really love me"

Sheet Laing 1

In this book he illustrated that a positive answer to the question "Do you love me" does not resolve the issue. One can always ask "Do you really love me and Do you really, really love me etcetera etcetera.

Words that capture love can only do this because love is already present. Asking for the presence of love is expressing doubt as to its presence.

So the couple I talked about had a perfectly good holiday despite the inadequacies of language

As to love...

I love you for coming to this conference. In this conference we can share another emotion and passion. As teachers we are dedicated to the advancement of young people. We love our work and we love our students..... More often than not.

Ofcourse there is this eternal problem with the "youth of today... we once were ourselves" but we love to help young people in their development. To do this effectively, love for them and our profession is essential. Only then we can muster the energy to better ourselves in our profession, knowing that in a globalizing world, language is going to be of increasing importance at all the levels I have discussed.

With my contribution I hope that I have put languages a bit in perspective as to its importance and its inadequacy. I hope that, in the spirit of my contribution, bridging the barriers of language during this conference, will be easier.. The recipe is easy... be patient... look each other in the eye and the universal language will give you, if not words... probably a lot of understanding if not....

Love

Sheet Beatles

Shall I compare thee to a summers day

Sonnet 18

William Shakespeare

Shall I compare thee to a summer's day?
Thou art more lovely and more temperate.
Rough winds do shake the darling buds of May,
And summer's lease hath all too short a date.
Sometime too hot the eye of heaven shines,
And often is his gold complexion dimmed;
And every fair from fair sometime declines,
By chance, or nature's changing course untrimmed.
But thy eternal summer shall not fade
Nor lose possession of that fair thou ow'st;
Nor shall death brag thou wand'rest in his shade,
When in eternal lines to time thou grow'st,
So long as men can breathe or eyes can see,
So long lives this, and this gives life to thee.