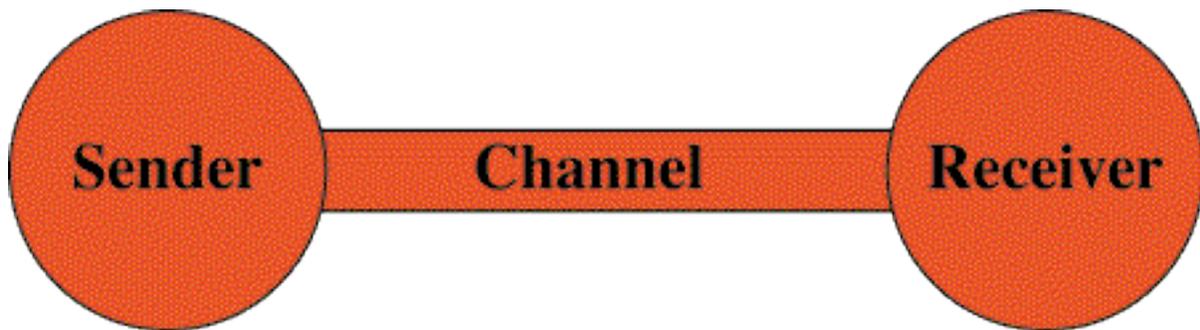# Simple Communication

We're going to be looking at mass communication and mass media in this class this semester. These are really two different areas of study, though they are related. One is a study of how communication works, the other is a study of newspapers, magazines, radio, TV, etc.

To understand how communication works in the mass media, it is often most helpful to start with a discussion of simple communication and differentiate. The good folks at AT&T, the phone company, years ago did a major study of how communication works and came up with the following model.

Sender — Channel — Receiver

Codes

Simply stated, they found that the basis of communication involved codes. Our language is a code, whether written, spoken or acted out (body language). Communication relies a great deal on all of us understanding the codes.

What the above model suggests is that a sender (coder) develops a message, converts it to a recognizable code --at least we hope it is recognizable -- and sends it along some channel to a receiver, who decodes the message.

## Sender — Channel — Receiver — Feedback
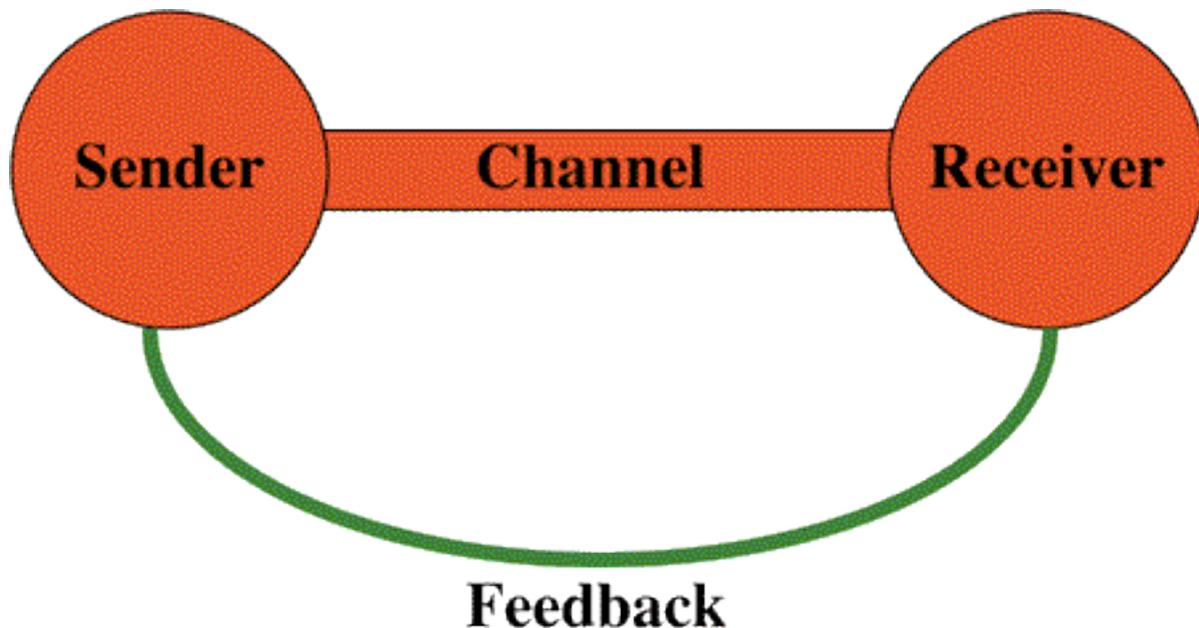
Feedback

But that is not enough. For communication to take place there must be some form of feedback. That feedback comes to the sender from the receiver in code, too. The code can be a nod of the head, an understanding look, a sharp salute, etc.

Now don't get confused. This does not mean communication has been successful, only that it has been completed.

Noise

If communication were that simple, we'd have fewer wars, fewer lovers' spats, fewer poor grades on tests, etc. No, something else must be interrupting the communication process. We call that interruption noise. Noise can take place anywhere in the communication process.
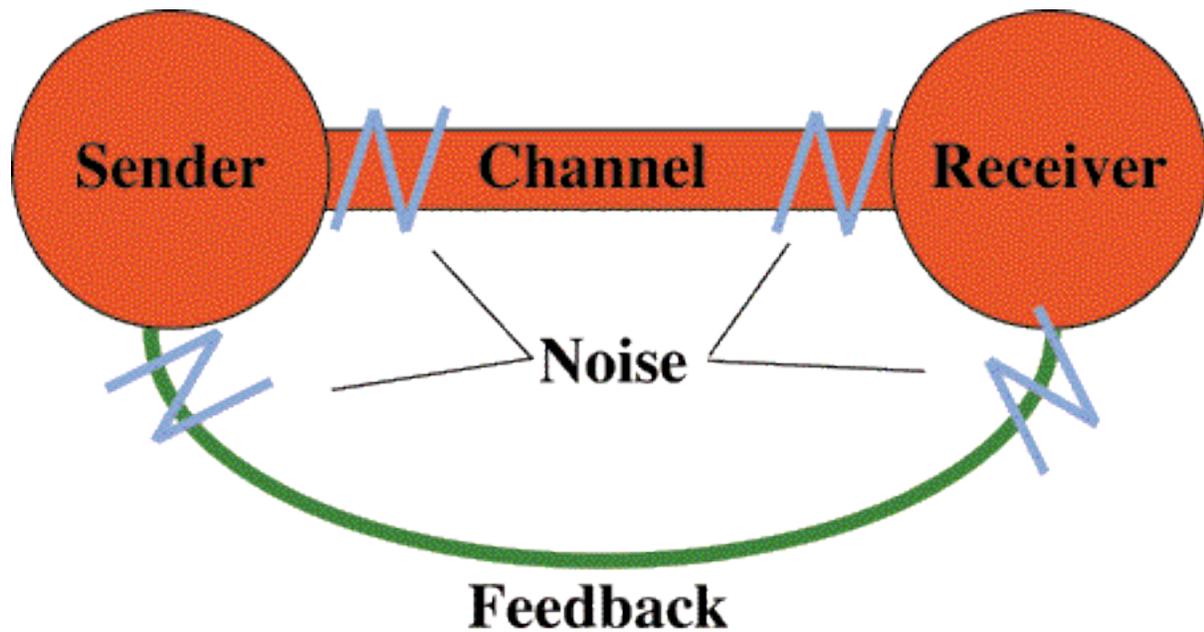
There are two types of noise: channel noise and semantic noise.

Channel Noise

Channel noise is a physical interruption of the communication process. It can be a plane flying overhead making too loud a sound. It could be laryngitis. It could be a cold that stuffs up your ears. It could be a baby crying. Or it could be a brick wall that has been erected between the sender and the receiver.

Semantic Noise

Semantics have to do with meanings or codes. If speak in Russian and you don't understand Russian, we are going to have a hard time communicating. But even if we both understand English, we can have semantic noise, especially if we use words that have multiple meanings.

Take the word "hot" for instance. While it has a traditional meaning of something with a high temperature, it also means something that is really popular. "Cool" should mean the opposite of "hot," but something can be so "cool" that it is really "hot."

Sometimes you have to look at the context and take into account ALL the codes, including tonal sounds, to understand something. Something can be good in one sense and not good in another. Take the word "fix." If you are talking about a toaster, it is good. If you are talking about a traffic ticket it is not so good, but something we'd like done. If we're talking about crack cocaine, we're talking about something really bad.

Successful communication requires that we use the same codes, but we don't always.

Redundancy

We compensate for this by being aware of a number of communication variables.

One we use commonly is redundancy. If something is redundant, we mean that it is a repeat. While the word is often considered a negative one, in communication it is good. We repeat our message in several codes and in several versions, hoping to compensate for both channel noise and semantic noise.

For instance, I might wave my arms frantically while I share a message with you. If some channel noise prevents you from hearing the message, perhaps the redundant urgency of the arm waving will give you at least part of the message. If a Chinese man comes up to you in tears and pulls on your arm, you don't have to worry about the semantic noise to know that something is wrong.

Selectivity

Communication is also enhanced if we are aware of the selectivity aspects of it. There are three aspects to selectivity:

- Selective attention
- Selective perception
- Selective retention

Put simply, people tend to pay attention to the messages that appeal to them and ignore others. I can ask my teen-aged son questions all night and he won't hear/respond to anything. But mention food, even in a whisper, and his ears perk up.

Not only do people pay attention mostly to things of important to them, they perceive or understand our message based on their own biases. Again, using my son as an example, I may

ask him if he has done his homework or not. He perceives the question as a simple "yes" or "no" question. But I mean it to mean, "If you haven't completed your homework, you should stop doing what you are doing and do it."

And finally, we tend to retain or remember only the things that are important to us. A fourth grader may be terrible at math, but ask him what Ty Cobb's batting average was on Tuesdays throughout the last two-thirds of his career and he can calculate it . . . if he doesn't already have it memorized!

Understanding that selectivity plays a role in communication helps us phrase our redundancy in ways that enhances communication.

Reading Assignment

You should be reading Chapter One in your textbook to get more information about communication.

Exercise

Describe a specific communication incident you were involved in recently that incorporated the elements outlined above and identify the parts of the simple communication process in that incident. Keep it relatively short, I'm not looking for a long essay. But be complete.

Note that when submitting the answer start the subject line with:

J100x – YourLastName – Communication

Send to rcameron@cerritos.edu