Introducing Communication Theory: Analysis and Application

Fourth Edition

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Communication Accommodation Theory

Chapter Overview

- CAT at a Glance
- Introduction
- Social Psychology and Social Identity
- Assumptions of CAT
- Ways to Adapt
- Integration and Critique

CAT at a Glance

- CAT explores the motivations and consequences of speakers shifting their communication styles

- People adjust their style of speaking
  - Divergence
  - Convergence

Introduction

- People mimic the speech and behavior of others

- Adjustments are made to speech, vocal patterns, and gestures

- Research focuses on communication between culturally diverse groups

Introduction

- **Accommodation** is adjusting, modifying or regulating behavior in response to others.

Social Psychology & Social Identity

- CAT is rooted in social psychology's Social Identity Theory

- **Social Identity Theory** proposes a person's identity is shaped by both personal and social characteristics
  - In-groups
  - Out-groups

Social Psychology & Social Identity

- Giles adapted Social Identity Theory
  - Focus is on the influence of in-groups on individuals' speech styles
  - Speech style affects impressions
  - Setting, topic, and type of person influence communication style
  - Process of comparison

Assumptions of CAT

- Speech and behavioral similarities and dissimilarities exist in all conversations
  - Interactants have different experiences and backgrounds
  - Experiences and backgrounds influence level of accommodation

Assumptions of CAT

- The way we perceive the speech and behaviors of others will determine how we evaluate a conversation
  - Perception
  - Evaluation
  - Motivation

Assumptions of CAT

- Language and behaviors impart information about social status and group belonging
  - Primary language reflects the person with the higher status
  - New group members are willing to accommodate

Assumptions of CAT

- Accommodation varies in its degree of appropriateness, and norms guide the accommodation process
  - Accommodation is not necessarily beneficial
  - Norms

Ways to Adapt

- Convergence

- Divergence

- Overaccommodation

Ways to Adapt: Convergence

- Selective process based on attraction

- Typically considered to be a positive strategy

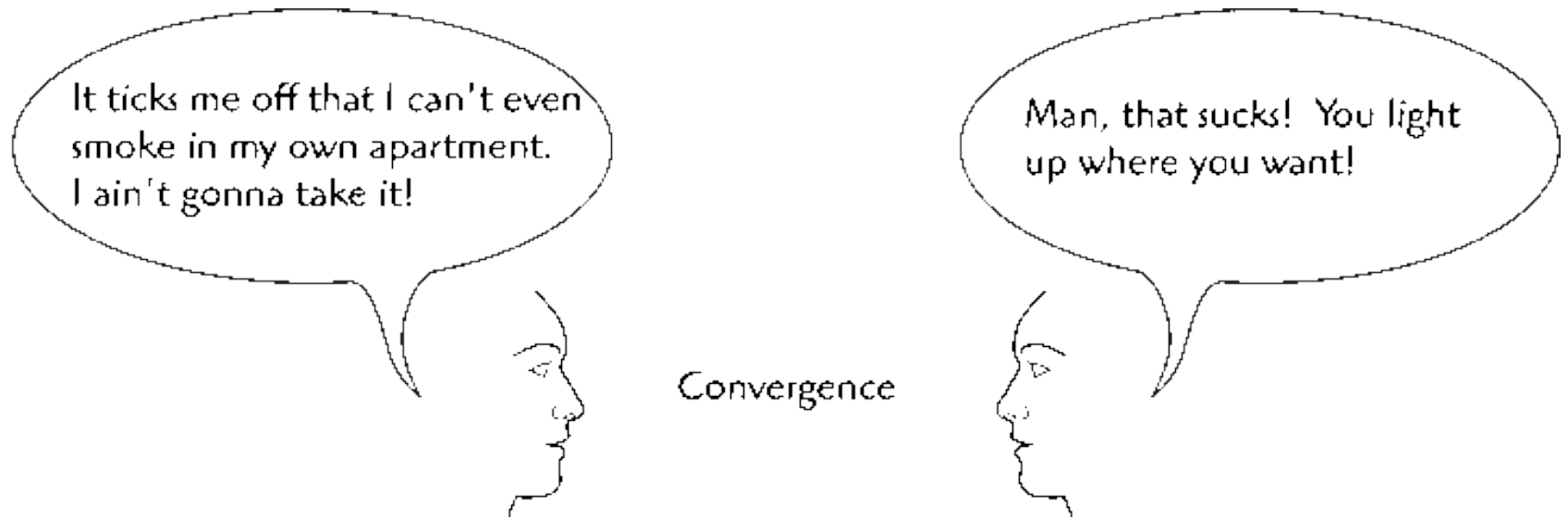- May be misused as a result of stereotypes

Ways to Adapt: Convergence

Figure 29.1: Ways to Adapt or Accommodate in Conversation

Ways to Adapt: Divergence

- May be used to disassociate oneself

- Different from inattentiveness

- Reasons for divergence
  - To maintain social and cultural identity
  - To render another less powerful
  - To contrast self-images
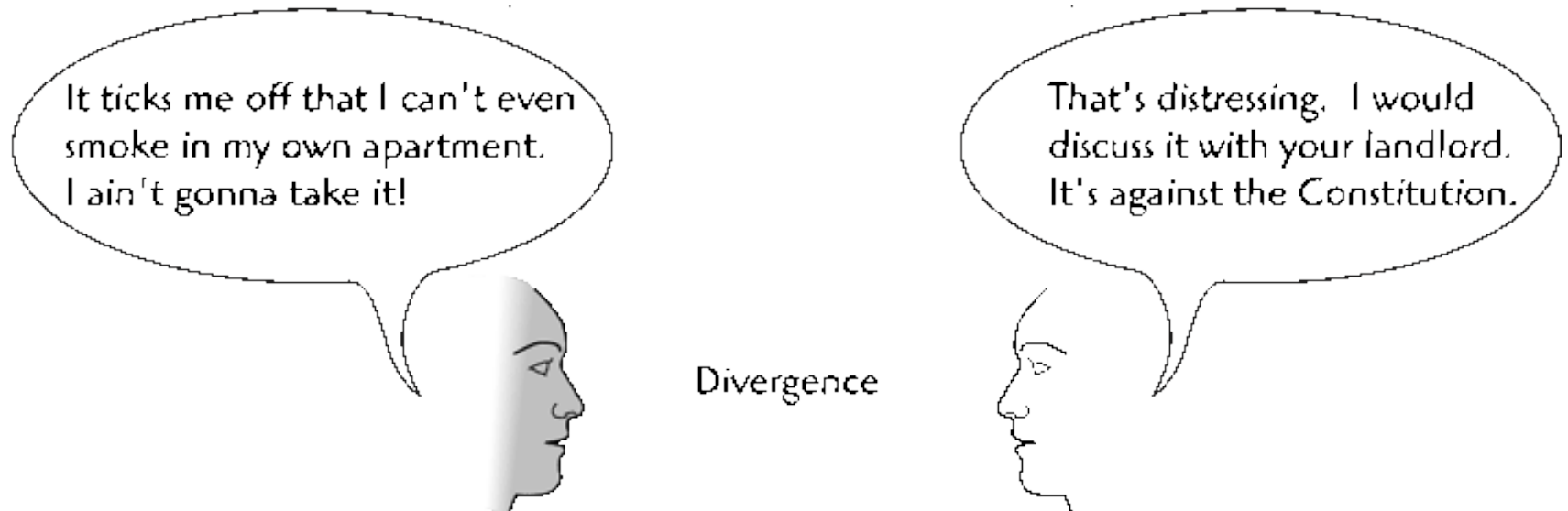
Ways to Adapt: Divergence

Figure 29.1: Ways to Adapt or Accommodate in Conversation

Ways to Adapt: Overaccomodation

- Forms of overaccommodation
    - Sensory
    - Dependency
    - Intergroup
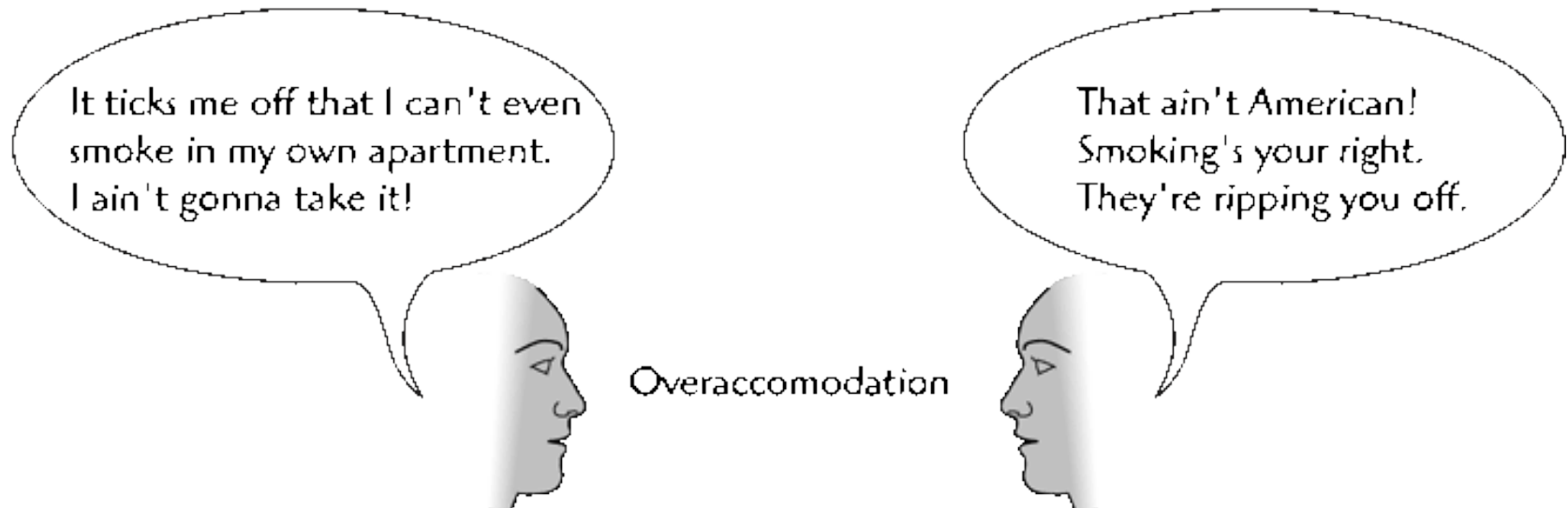
Ways to Adapt: Overaccomodation

Figure 29.1: Ways to Adapt or Accommodate in Conversation

Integration

- Communication tradition
  - Socio-psychological
- Communication context
  - Cultural
- Approach to knowing
  - Positivistic/empirical

Evaluating CAT

- Scope
  - Boundaries have expanded
  - More complex propositional forms
- Testability
  - Convergence versus divergence oversimplifies conversations
- Heurism
  - Applied to a variety of communication contexts