

The Influence Of Culture On Language And Communication

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Abstract

Language and culture are closely interconnected, as culture shapes the way people communicate, express ideas, and interpret meaning. This article explores how cultural values, traditions, and social norms influence language use and communication styles. It examines verbal and nonverbal communication differences across cultures and highlights the role of language in preserving cultural identity. The study also discusses how intercultural communication helps people understand cultural diversity and avoid misunderstandings in a globalized world. Understanding the relationship between culture and language is essential for effective communication in multicultural societies.

Key words: culture, language, communication, intercultural communication, cultural identity, social norms, globalization.

Language is not only a tool for communication but also a reflection of culture and social values. Every society develops its own communication patterns influenced by traditions, beliefs, and historical experiences. Culture affects vocabulary, expressions, communication styles, and even nonverbal behavior such as gestures and eye contact. In today's globalized world, understanding the relationship between culture and language has become increasingly important for successful intercultural communication. This article examines how culture influences language use and communication practices in different societies. Language becomes richer because people use it in different ways depending on situations, social groups, and cultural contexts. The meanings expressed through language are shaped by circumstances, society, and culture. In formal situations, speakers tend to pronounce words clearly, avoid slang, and use more complex grammatical structures. Social factors also influence language use; for example, people from different professions often use specialized vocabulary, and members of various social groups may prefer different speech styles.

Cultural meaning is reflected not only in words themselves but also in how communication behavior is interpreted by others. When situational, social, and cultural factors are examined together, variations in speech appear systematic rather than random. Communication patterns follow cultural norms that help people interpret meaning correctly. Speaking is a process in which meaning is created through context. This process can be effectively studied through an ethnographic approach to communication, which analyzes speech, social situations, and cultural expectations. Such an approach highlights the strong relationship between language and culture and helps researchers understand the social meanings conveyed through communication.

The relationship between culture, language, and thought has long been one of the most important topics for those who wish to understand the nature of human cognition. This issue has been investigated for decades across a broad range of research disciplines. However, there has been scant communication across these different disciplines, a situation largely arising through differences in research interests and discrepancies in the definitions of key terms such as 'culture,' 'language,' and 'thought.' This article reviews recent trends in research on the relation between language, culture and thought to capture how cognitive psychology and cultural psychology have defined 'language' and 'culture,' and how this issue was

addressed within each research discipline. We then review recent research conducted in interdisciplinary perspectives, which directly compared the roles of culture and language. Finally, we highlight the importance of considering the complex interplay between culture and language to provide a comprehensive picture of how language and culture affect thought. Developments in language teaching have always been connected with changing definitions of what language is. In the past, many teachers limited language learning mainly to written literary forms, especially those used by educated social groups. Foreign languages were rarely spoken in classrooms; instead, students spent most of their time discussing grammar or translating literary texts into English. Even teachers who supported spoken language often encouraged students to speak in overly formal ways rather than using natural conversational speech. Everyday expressions, contractions, and incomplete sentences common in real communication were discouraged, and learners were expected to produce complete and grammatically perfect sentences at all times.

The audiolingual movement later expanded the understanding of language by emphasizing spoken communication and giving priority to speech over written forms. Ordinary conversational language gradually replaced strictly literary styles in language teaching. More recently, scholars have focused on the strong connection between language and culture, redefining language as an essential part of cultural life. To fully understand this relationship, it is necessary to recognize the role language plays within communication itself.

Many people view language simply as a tool for exchanging information through dialogue, where one speaker makes a statement or asks a question and another responds. Although information exchange is one function of language, it is not the only or even the most important one. Communication is shaped by cultural conditions, and dialogue represents interaction between participants within a cultural context. Communication can therefore be seen as a cultural practice in which verbal language is only one component. While information sharing is important, successful communication also depends on other cultural and social elements.

Misunderstandings about the role of language in communication often appear in academic environments, particularly when scholars from different disciplines attempt to communicate without recognizing cultural aspects of language use. Understanding communication requires attention not only to linguistic structure but also to cultural meaning and social interaction. Research on the relationship between language and culture began in the eighteenth century. Wilhelm von Humboldt (1767–1835), Franz Boas (1858–1942), Edward Sapir (1884–1939), Benjamin Lee Whorf (1897–1941) and Leo Weisgerber (1899–1985) were famous scholars, who first emphasized the relatedness between language, thought and culture. The most well-known, yet controversially discussed, view being the Sapir-Whorf Hypothesis (the principle of linguistic relativity), conducted on the Hopi language of America. Benjamin Lee Whorf (1936) argued that the Hopi would lack a concept of “time” because there were neither words referring to time, nor grammatical markers for tense (“the Hopi have no concept of time” (1936: 57)). He concluded that people of different cultures (and languages) would perceive the same world differently. Actually, in 1983, Ekkehart Malotki published a huge study on the grammar of the Hopi language, refuting the view of the “non-existing” concept of time.

In 1969, the again well-known and again controversially discussed study by Brent Berlin and Paul Kay on colour terminology (*Basic Color Terms: Their Universality and Evolution*) reopened the discussion of linguistic relativity, claiming that the language spoken by a human being has an active influence on that human being’s perception and view of the world as such. Further studies were conducted, some proving the principle of linguistic relativity, others refuting it. Among the advocates of linguistic relativity, some argue that language determines cognition (strong version), whereas others claim an influence of language on cognition (weak version).

Ludwig Wittgenstein (1953) in his *Philosophical Investigations* argued that language is organized through rules, which are based on cultural use. In fact, he introduced the idea of

'language games' to discuss the cultural dimension of communication and language use (1953: 4).

The term 'intercultural communication', however, is commonly associated with Edward T. Hall and his publication *The Silent Language* (1959). Most research in the 1960s and 1970s within the field of intercultural communication were strongly influenced by Hall. Hall's most well-known cultural continuum or value is the discussion of high-context and low-context cultures. Low-context cultures, like Germany, place their information in the verbal language, whereas high-context cultures rely more on nonverbal and contextual cues. First, culture pervades what we are as human beings, how we act, how we think and, thus, how we talk and even how we listen. Human beings are socialized into their specific cultural context(s), and culture influences their interaction with each other. Second, cultural diversity is above all a fact: we are nowadays confronted with a wide range of distinct cultures. Awareness of this diversity is facilitated by increased cultural contacts. Whenever people communicate (even in the lingua franca English), problems within these intercultural dialogues typically arise when the communicators have widely different values and concepts of language-in-use. Even if both communicators are genuinely interested in communicating with each other, it can be difficult to secure successful communication if they have different values or beliefs about language-in-use. A real-life example will unveil what I mean. I have made friends with a young female researcher, felt the urgent need to address her with the German 'du' (address pronoun you) instead of the more formal and distant 'Sie' (formal address pronoun you). In German, if you want to express closeness and sympathy, you jointly agree to switch from the more distant 'Sie' to the solidarity pronoun 'du'. Actually, the Uzbek language does also differentiate between these two addressing pronouns, yet, the underlying concept of sympathy and closeness connected with the address pronoun 'du' does not exist. Often, even one's husband is addressed with 'Sie' in Uzbekistan. The concept of 'du' and 'Sie', thus, is culturally encoded. Our cognition of the underlying concept, thus, has to be taken into account in language study (cf. 'du' and 'Sie' in Weigand, 2010: 102).

In summary, intercultural awareness helps improve communication, build mutual respect, and promote successful relationships among people from different societies. Language and culture are deeply interconnected, and understanding their relationship is essential for meaningful and effective communication.

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