

# THE UNCONSCIOUS ASPECTS OF THE CULTURE OF LINGUISTIC COMMUNICATION

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## Abstract

Language is not merely a tool for communication but also a reflection of cultural norms, values, and unconscious biases. The way people speak, the words they choose, and even their nonverbal cues are deeply embedded in cultural frameworks that often operate outside conscious awareness. This article explores the unconscious aspects of linguistic communication, examining how cultural background shapes language use, perception, and interaction without speakers realizing it.

**Keywords:** Perception, communication, nonverbal communication, cultural identity, cultural-linguistic frameworks, dominant language.

## Introduction

### 1. Linguistic Relativity and Cultural Perception

The Sapir-Whorf hypothesis suggests that language influences thought and perception (Whorf, 1956). While the strong version of this theory (linguistic determinism) is debated, studies confirm that language subtly shapes cognition. For example:

**Color Perception:** Research by Kay & Kempton (1984) found that speakers of languages with distinct color categories perceive colors differently.

**Temporal Framing:** Boroditsky (2001) demonstrated that speakers of Mandarin (which uses vertical metaphors for time) think about time differently than English speakers (who use horizontal metaphors).

These findings indicate that cultural-linguistic frameworks unconsciously guide cognition.

## METHODS

### Politeness and Indirectness in Communication

Cultural norms dictate politeness strategies, often unconsciously. Brown & Levinson's (1987) politeness theory highlights how speakers mitigate face-threatening acts (e.g., requests, criticisms) differently across cultures:

**High-Context Cultures** (e.g., Japan, Korea): Indirectness is preferred to maintain harmony (Hall, 1976). A refusal might be implied rather than stated directly.

**Low-Context Cultures** (e.g., U.S., Germany): Directness is valued for clarity, potentially leading to intercultural misunderstandings.



Speakers may not consciously realize they are adhering to these norms, assuming their communication style is universal.

#### Nonverbal Communication and Unconscious Cues

Nonverbal behavior—gestures, eye contact, proxemics—varies culturally and is often automatic:

**Eye Contact:** In Western cultures, it signifies confidence, while in some Asian cultures, prolonged eye contact may be seen as confrontational (Argyle, 1988).

**Personal Space:** Hall (1966) noted that Mediterranean and Latin American cultures prefer closer proximity than Northern Europeans.

These unconscious differences can lead to discomfort or misinterpretation in cross-cultural interactions.

### Implicit Bias in Language Use

Language reflects and reinforces societal biases, often unconsciously:

**Gendered Language:** Many languages (e.g., Spanish, French) use masculine forms as defaults, reinforcing male-centric norms (Stahlberg et al., 2007).

**Racial and Ethnic Stereotypes:** Subtle linguistic choices (e.g., describing a white suspect as "boyish" vs. a Black suspect as "threatening") perpetuate biases (Eberhardt et al., 2004).

Speakers may unknowingly reproduce these patterns due to cultural conditioning.

#### Code-Switching and Cultural Identity

Bilingual individuals often switch languages unconsciously based on social context (Myers-Scotton, 1993). This reflects:

**Social Identity:** Language choice signals group belonging (Giles & Coupland, 1991).

**Power Dynamics:** Using a dominant language (e.g., English in global business) may be an unconscious concession to linguistic hegemony (Phillipson, 1992).

### CONCLUSION

The unconscious aspects of linguistic communication reveal how deeply culture shapes language—and vice versa. From cognitive framing to politeness strategies and nonverbal cues, much of our communication is governed by implicit cultural scripts. Recognizing these unconscious influences can improve intercultural understanding and reduce miscommunication.

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