

THE INTERRELATIONSHIP BETWEEN LANGUAGE, CULTURE AND SOCIETY

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This article offers a comprehensive analysis of the complex and interdependent relationship between language, culture, and society. Language is presented not only as a tool for communication but also as a powerful medium through which cultural values are expressed, identities are formed, and social structures are maintained. The article begins by examining the nature of language, referencing theories such as the Sapir-Whorf Hypothesis, which suggests that language influences how people perceive and think about the world.

Culture is discussed as a system of shared meanings transmitted primarily through language, while society is positioned as the framework in which both language and culture evolve. The article explores how language reflects cultural values, social hierarchies, and collective knowledge, drawing on examples from Japanese honorifics, African multilingualism, and Indigenous oral traditions. It highlights the role of language in shaping identity, particularly in bilingual and post-colonial contexts, where language choice can signal belonging, resistance, or marginalization.

Additionally, the article analyzes how social dynamics and institutions – such as education, media, and governance – influence language policy, usage, and change. It discusses linguistic discrimination, power relations, and the political significance of language in nation-building and social justice movements.

Through real-world case studies, the article illustrates how language serves as both a mirror and a tool of cultural and societal transformation. The conclusion emphasizes the need to preserve linguistic diversity and promote inclusive language practices in our globalized, multicultural world.

ВЗАЄМОЗВ'ЯЗОК МОВИ, КУЛЬТУРИ ТА СУСПІЛЬСТВА

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Ключові слова: мова, культура, суспільство, ідентичність, багатомовність, мовна політика, лінгвістична різноманітність, комунікація, соціокультурні.

У статті здійснено глибокий аналіз складного взаємозв'язку між мовою, культурою та суспільством. Мова розглядається не лише як інструмент комунікації, а й як носій культурних цінностей, засіб формування ідентичності та підтримки соціального порядку. Автори звертаються до гіпотези Сепіра – Ворфа, що демонструє вплив мови на світосприйняття та мислення.

Культура трактується як система спільних смислів, що передається здебільшого через мову. Суспільство, своєю чергою, є контекстом, у якому мова та культура розвиваються. Стаття наводить приклади того, як мова відображає культурні цінності, соціальні ієрархії та колективну пам'ять, зокрема в японській мові, багатомовності в Африці та усній спадщині корінних народів.

Особливу увагу приділено ролі мови у формуванні культурної ідентичності, особливо в умовах двомовності, постколоніальних реалій і міграції. Мовний вибір може відображати належність, протест або асиміляцію.

Окремо проаналізовано вплив соціальних інституцій: освіти, медіа, державної політики на мовне середовище. Розглянуто питання лінгвістичної дискримінації, нерівності та мови як інструменту влади й спротиву.

Подано приклади з реального життя, що демонструють роль мови як дзеркала і рушія культурних та соціальних змін. У висновку наголошено на необхідності збереження мовного різноманіття та підтримки інклюзивної мовної політики у глобалізованому світі.

Problem statement. Language, culture, and society are deeply intertwined concepts that collectively shape human experience. Language is not merely a tool for communication; it is a fundamental mechanism through which cultural meanings are transmitted and social identities are constructed. Culture, in turn, encompasses the shared beliefs, practices, customs, and values of a group of people, all of which are expressed and preserved through language. Society provides the structural framework

within which both language and culture evolve, influencing how individuals relate to one another and to the world around them.

The aim of this article is to explore the dynamic and multifaceted relationship between language, culture, and society. Beginning with an examination of the nature of language, we then delve into the cultural systems that give language context and meaning.

The object of the research is the study of the interplay between language, culture, and society.

The subject of the research. We explore how societal structures influence both language and culture and investigate how language functions as a vessel of cultural identity. Topics such as linguistic diversity, power dynamics, intercultural communication, and the role of language in education are analyzed to provide a holistic understanding of the subject. Through case studies and theoretical insights, we aim to demonstrate that language is not an isolated phenomenon but is deeply rooted in the cultural and societal fabric of human life.

Understanding their interconnection helps us comprehend how communities form, how power dynamics manifest through language use, and how cultural values persist or shift over time. Language not only reflects the culture of a society but also plays a significant role in shaping cultural thought patterns. Similarly, society influences which languages or dialects are promoted, marginalized, or transformed.

Discussion.

1. The Nature of Language

Language is a uniquely human system of communication that allows individuals to convey thoughts, emotions, and intentions. It is a structured, rule-governed system of symbols, primarily spoken or written, that enables humans to interact and build communities. Beyond its communicative function, language also serves a cognitive and social purpose—it shapes how individuals perceive the world and how societies are organized.

A key theory illustrating this concept is the Sapir-Whorf Hypothesis [Sapir, 2008; Whorf, 1956, p. 220–232], or linguistic relativity. This hypothesis suggests that the structure of a language affects its speakers' worldview and cognition. For instance, languages that have many words for snow, like Inuit, are thought to enable speakers to perceive distinctions in snow types that speakers of other languages might not notice. While the strong version of this theory – that language determines thought – has been largely discredited, the weaker form – that language influences thought – has gained wide acceptance.

Language also functions as a repository of cultural knowledge. Every word carries with it layers of cultural meaning. For example, honorifics in Japanese reflect social hierarchies and relationships, while the use of specific tenses and pronouns in various languages can reveal cultural attitudes toward time, respect, or collectivism [Triandis, 2018]. Therefore, to understand a language is not merely to understand its vocabulary and grammar, but also to grasp the cultural worldview embedded within it.

Moreover, language is dynamic. It evolves over time through interaction with other languages and in response to changes in society and culture. Slang, loanwords, and neologisms demonstrate how living languages adapt to meet the communicative needs of

their users. These changes often reflect social shifts and respond to social challenges, such as the adoption of new technologies or evolving gender roles.

In summary, language is far more than a set of linguistic rules. It is a flexible, living, evolving system deeply embedded in the cultural and social contexts of its speakers. Understanding language requires a comprehension and appreciation of its cultural meanings, and its role in shaping human thought and interaction.

2. Culture as a System of Shared Meaning

Culture can be understood as a complex system of shared symbols, beliefs, values, customs, and behaviors that members of a social group use to make sense of their world. It shapes how people interact, what they value, and how they perceive reality. Culture is not inherited biologically; it is learned and transmitted through communication – primarily through language.

Language is the primary medium through which cultural knowledge is passed down from one generation to the next. As Duranti puts it, «to speak of language as a mediating activity means to speak of language as tool for doing things in the world, for reproducing as much as changing reality» [Duranti, 1997, p. 42]. Through storytelling, rituals, religious texts, education, and everyday conversation, individuals absorb cultural norms and worldviews. From a young age, people are socialized into their culture by learning the culturally appropriate ways to speak, behave, and interpret social cues. This process – called *enculturation* – demonstrates the role of language as both a tool and product of culture.

For example, the collectivist values in many East Asian societies are reflected in their languages. In Korean, for instance, there are numerous speech levels and honorific forms that communicate respect, hierarchy, and group harmony. This linguistic structure reinforces cultural norms that emphasize social roles, respect for elders, and group cohesion. Conversely, many Western languages, such as English, emphasize individuality and directness, reflecting more individualistic cultural values.

Moreover, culture determines what is considered meaningful or valuable in communication. Some cultures prioritize high-context communication – where much is implied rather than stated directly – while others prefer low-context communication, where clarity and explicitness are valued. These differences are embedded in language use and can lead to misunderstandings in intercultural interactions if not understood properly [Language, Culture, and Society, 2025].

Cultural artifacts such as myths, poetry, proverbs, and idioms encapsulate and express collective knowledge, moral codes, and historical experience. These forms of cultural expression often lose their meaning when translated, revealing the deep link

between language and culture. As such, studying a language in isolation from its culture can lead to incomplete or inaccurate understanding.

In conclusion, culture is fundamentally about shared meanings, and language is the primary vehicle through which these meanings are constructed, conveyed, and preserved. Without language, culture cannot be sustained or transmitted.

3. Society and Its Role in Shaping Language and Culture

Society refers to a structured group of individuals bound together by shared institutions, norms, and practices. It is within society that language and culture take root, develop, and transform. The social environment exerts a significant influence on both the forms of language used and the cultural norms that are practiced.

Social structures – such as class, ethnicity, gender, and age – play a key role in shaping linguistic behavior. Language use often varies across different social groups, resulting in the development of sociolects (social dialects). For example, African American Vernacular English (AAVE) in the United States is a distinct dialect with its own grammatical rules, vocabulary, and pronunciation patterns, reflecting both the history and the cultural identity of the African American community.

Institutions such as the family, education system, religion, and media are crucial in the transmission of both language and culture. Schools, for example, are not just places for academic learning, but also form the environment for cultural socialization. Through language, children learn societal norms, moral values, and expected behaviors. Similarly, the media plays a powerful role in shaping cultural perceptions and spreading dominant language forms and ideologies.

Society also plays a role in standardizing language. Certain dialects or accents are often privileged over others, gaining status as the «standard» or «prestigious» form. This can result in linguistic discrimination or «*linguicism*», where speakers of non-standard dialects are marginalized or deemed less educated [Larsen-Freeman, 2012, p. 28–38]. Such social attitudes reflect and reinforce existing power dynamics within a society.

Moreover, societies influence language policy and planning. Governments often decide which languages are taught in schools, used in official documents, or promoted in public spaces. These decisions can either support linguistic diversity or contribute to language loss and homogenization. For example, many indigenous languages have been suppressed by dominant societal forces, leading to the erosion of cultural knowledge and identity. The status of a certain language can become the subject of the hottest political debates and the reason for social calamities.

In essence, society provides the context in which language and culture are produced, shaped, and reproduced. It serves as both the backdrop and the active force behind the ongoing evolution of linguistic and cultural practices.

4. Language as a Carrier of Culture

Language is not only a means of communication, but also a repository of cultural knowledge. It carries within it the beliefs, customs, and values of the people who use it. Every culture has unique expressions, idioms, metaphors, and oral traditions that reveal how its members understand the world. As such, language is often considered the vehicle through which culture is expressed and preserved.

One clear example of this is found in proverbs and idioms. These linguistic elements encapsulate cultural wisdom and reflect a society's shared values. For instance, the English proverb «time is money» conveys a cultural attitude that values productivity and efficiency, while the Swahili saying «haraka haraka haina baraka» (hurry hurry has no blessing) reflects a more relaxed, community-centered perspective on time. These expressions are deeply embedded in cultural attitudes and lose their full meaning when translated literally.

Metaphors also offer insights into cultural perspectives. George Lakoff and Mark Johnson's work on conceptual metaphor theory shows how people understand abstract concepts through culturally shaped metaphors. In English, we often say we're «falling in love» or «wasting time» – metaphors that reflect how we conceptualize emotions and time [Lakoff, Johnson, 2003]. Other cultures may use different metaphors, indicating different cultural frames of reference.

Language also reflects the environment and way of life of its speakers. Many Indigenous languages have highly specific vocabulary for local flora, fauna, or natural phenomena. The Hawaiian language, for example, contains dozens of words to describe the ocean and its various states. When these languages become endangered or extinct, the cultural knowledge encoded in them often disappears as well.

Furthermore, oral traditions – songs, folktales, and rituals – are often performed in native languages, carrying the soul of the culture. These oral genres transmit moral values, communal history, and spiritual beliefs, strengthening cultural identity and continuity.

Thus, language is more than a system of signs. It is a cultural archive, a vessel that holds and transmits the collective memory and identity of a people. The loss of a language often signifies the erosion of cultural heritage, making language preservation a cultural imperative.

5. Language and Cultural Identity

Language plays a central role in the formation and expression of cultural identity. It is through

language that individuals locate themselves within a community and differentiate themselves from others. Whether spoken at home, in schools, or in public spaces, language signals belonging, heritage, and social alignment.

One of the most vivid illustrations of the link between language and identity is seen in bilingual and multilingual communities. Speakers often engage in **code-switching**, alternating between languages depending on the context or audience. This practice is not simply about convenience but is deeply tied to identity expression. A bilingual person might use one language to express intimacy and cultural belonging at home and another to navigate formal or public environments.

In post-colonial societies, language often carries the weight of historical and political identity. For instance, in many African countries, colonial languages like English, French, or Portuguese are still used in education and government, while indigenous languages are spoken in homes and local communities. This linguistic division often mirrors broader cultural tensions between tradition and modernity, or between local and global identities.

Language also becomes a powerful symbol in nationalist movements. Countries emerging from colonial rule or foreign occupation often promote native languages as part of efforts to reclaim cultural autonomy. Hebrew in Israel, Irish in Ireland, and Swahili in Tanzania have all been revitalized or elevated as national symbols, demonstrating the deep connection between language and collective identity.

Additionally, heritage language maintenance among immigrant communities highlights the role of language in preserving cultural roots [Durst-Andersen, 2011]. Many diaspora communities struggle with language attrition across generations, leading to identity shifts. For some, the loss of a heritage language can feel like the loss of a piece of their cultural self. Language policies and attitudes can either support or hinder this connection. Inclusive language education that values multilingualism reinforces positive cultural identity, while policies that stigmatize non-dominant languages can lead to cultural alienation and assimilation pressures.

Ultimately, language is both a personal and collective marker of who we are. It is central to cultural pride, continuity, and resilience.

6. Social Dynamics and Language Change

Language is not static; it evolves in response to changing social, political, and cultural dynamics. The transformation of language over time reflects broader shifts in society, including the emergence of new technologies, movements for social justice, and interactions across cultures.

One key driver of language change is **social innovation**. New words, phrases, and grammatical

constructions frequently emerge from youth culture, technology, and subcultures. Slang, for example, often originates in marginalized communities and later enters mainstream usage. Terms like «woke», «ghosting», or «flex» began as informal expressions and now convey widely recognized social meanings. These linguistic innovations can shape, and be shaped by, changing cultural norms and values.

Social movements also influence language. The feminist movement, for instance, has advocated for gender-inclusive language, leading to the adoption of terms like «chairperson» instead of «chairman» or the use of singular «they» as a gender-neutral pronoun. Similarly, the LGBTQ+ movement has introduced new vocabulary – such as «non-binary», «genderqueer», and «cisgender» – which has reshaped how society talks about and understands gender and identity [Krajewski, 2011, p.1 37–153].

Technology and globalization have accelerated the pace of linguistic change. The internet has created new forms of written language, from emojis to abbreviations like «LOL», «POV» and «BRB». Social media platforms promote language creativity, as users invent hashtags, memes, and trends that often cross linguistic and cultural boundaries. English, in particular, has become a dominant language in digital communication, influencing how people around the world use their own languages.

However, language change is not always embraced. New forms of language often face resistance from purists or older generations. Prescriptive grammar rules, for instance, may conflict with the natural evolution of usage. Nevertheless, descriptive linguistics recognizes that all language forms—including non-standard varieties – are legitimate and meaningful. Language change reflects the needs, values, and dynamics of the society in which it occurs. As such, it is a mirror of human adaptation, creativity, and resilience.

7. Multilingualism and Cross-Cultural Communication

In an increasingly globalized world, multilingualism and cross-cultural communication have become central to social, political, and economic life. Multilingual societies are those where two or more languages coexist, either through the presence of different linguistic communities or the use of multiple languages by individuals. This linguistic diversity presents both opportunities and challenges for cultural exchange and social integration.

Multilingualism offers significant cognitive and social benefits. Research shows that bilingual individuals often exhibit greater cognitive flexibility, problem-solving skills, and cultural empathy [Nuri, 2024]. On a societal level, multilingualism fosters inclusivity, intercultural understanding, and access to broader networks of knowledge and communication.

For example, in countries like Switzerland, Canada, and India, multilingual policies have been instrumental in maintaining national unity while respecting linguistic diversity.

However, effective cross-cultural communication requires more than the ability to speak multiple languages – it demands an understanding of the cultural norms, values, and communication styles that underpin language use. Intercultural communication theory, as developed by scholars such as Edward Hall and Geert Hofstede, explores how differences in time orientation, power distance, individualism vs. collectivism, and communication context (high vs. low) affect interaction across cultures. Misunderstandings often occur not because of language barriers alone but because of differing cultural expectations about politeness, formality, or turn-taking in conversation.

English has emerged as a global *lingua franca* – a common language for communication between speakers of different native languages. While this facilitates international exchange, it also raises concerns about linguistic imperialism and the marginalization of local languages and identities [Combs, Penfield, 2012, p. 461–474]. The dominance of English in business, academia, and the internet can create hierarchies of access and privilege, especially for those who are less proficient in it.

Moreover, multilingual societies must navigate issues of language policy, education, and identity. Debates often arise over which languages should be official, taught in schools, or used in government and media. If handled inclusively, such policies can promote linguistic justice and cultural harmony. If not, they can deepen divisions and reinforce inequality.

In essence, multilingualism and intercultural communication are not merely linguistic issues – they are deeply connected to identity, power, and cultural belonging in the modern world.

8. Language and Power

Language is a powerful social instrument. It not only reflects existing power structures but also reinforces and reproduces them. The ways in which language is used, regulated, and valued in society often reveal underlying social hierarchies and systems of control.

One of the most evident manifestations of power in language is the concept of **standard language ideology** – the belief that one variety of a language (usually spoken by the dominant social group) is inherently superior to others. This ideology legitimizes certain accents, dialects, or grammatical forms while stigmatizing others as «incorrect», «slang», or «broken». For example, speakers of non-standard English varieties, such as African American Vernacular English (AAVE) or Chicano English, often face discrimination in education, employment,

and public life. Such linguistic prejudice is a form of **linguicism** – discrimination based on language.

Language is also used to establish and maintain authority [Norton, Toohey, 2011, p. 412–446]. In political discourse, legal documents, or academic writing, formal language and technical jargon can create a sense of expertise or legitimacy, but can also obscure meaning and exclude those without access to specialized knowledge. Politicians, for instance, often use rhetorical strategies – such as repetition, metaphor, or ambiguity – to shape public opinion and assert control.

Media and technology play a key role in amplifying or silencing voices. Dominant groups often control the narratives, terms, and discourses that define public conversation. The framing of migrants as «illegals» or protestors as «rioters», for example, reflects how language can be weaponized to shape perception and justify action. On the other hand, marginalized communities have increasingly reclaimed language to resist oppression – using terms like «Black Lives Matter», «Pride», or «decolonize» as rallying cries for justice.

Language also intersects with gender and sexuality. Feminist linguistics has highlighted how many languages reflect patriarchal assumptions – for instance, the use of «he» as a generic pronoun or the feminization of job titles. Inclusive language efforts aim to challenge these norms and make language more reflective of gender diversity and equality.

Ultimately, language is not neutral. It is a site of struggle, resistance, and empowerment. Recognizing the power embedded in language is essential for understanding how culture and society function – and for imagining more equitable ways of communicating.

Education is one of the primary sites where language and culture are transmitted, reinforced, and contested. Schools not only teach academic subjects but also serve as cultural institutions where linguistic norms, social behaviors, and national identities are cultivated. As such, the language of education plays a pivotal role in shaping how individuals understand themselves and their place in society.

Language policies in education often reflect broader political and cultural priorities. In many post-colonial societies, colonial languages such as English, French, or Spanish remain the primary languages of instruction, even though they are not the native languages of most students. While these languages may provide global access and economic mobility, they can also alienate learners from their cultural roots and hinder academic performance in early education. Research consistently shows that students learn best in their first language, especially in the foundational years of schooling.

In multilingual societies, the question of which language to use in schools is deeply contested. Some

advocate for **mother-tongue-based multilingual education**, which promotes literacy and learning in a child's native language before transitioning to a second or third language [Krajewski, 2011, p. 137–153]. This approach not only improves educational outcomes but also affirms cultural identity and linguistic rights. However, implementing such policies requires significant resources, teacher training, and political will.

The content of education – what is taught and how – is equally important. Textbooks, curricula, and classroom discourse often reflect dominant cultural narratives while excluding or marginalizing minority perspectives. For example, history lessons may focus on national triumphs while ignoring colonial violence or indigenous contributions. Language can reinforce these biases through euphemisms, omissions, or framing choices. Moreover, the classroom is a space where social norms and power dynamics are reproduced through language. Teachers may unconsciously favor students who speak in more «standard» or formal registers, disadvantaging those from different linguistic backgrounds. Classroom language also shapes how students view authority, knowledge, and participation.

Education, therefore, is not a neutral process – it is a cultural and linguistic negotiation. By fostering inclusive, multilingual, and culturally responsive education, societies can promote equity, belonging, and social cohesion.

Conclusion. The interrelationship between language, culture, and society is dynamic, complex, and deeply embedded in the human experience. Language is more than a communication tool; it is a medium through which cultural values are expressed and transmitted, and social structures are maintained. Culture, in turn, gives meaning to language, shaping how people speak, what they value and verbalize, and how they interact. Society provides the broader context in which both language and culture evolve, influencing language policy, power relations, and access to cultural capital.

As we have seen, language carries the weight of identity, history, and social belonging. It can include or exclude, liberate or oppress. It evolves with technological innovation, social movements, and shifting norms, yet also serves as a reservoir of tradition and continuity. In education, law, media, and daily life, language reflects and constructs the environment we live in.

In our increasingly globalized and multilingual world, understanding the intricate ties between language, culture, and society is more important than ever. It encourages tolerance, supports equity, and enables more meaningful cross-cultural communication. It also highlights the urgent need to safeguard linguistic diversity, support endangered

languages, and promote inclusive language policies that respect cultural differences. To study language in isolation is to miss the full picture. Language lives through culture and breathes within society. Recognizing this interdependence helps us appreciate the richness of human expression and the shared, yet diverse, nature of our global community.

Further research should investigate how language shapes and reflects cultural values, social identities, and power relations in globalized digitally mediated societies. The problems to consider include linguistic adaptation in virtual and AI-driven communication, the role of language in sustainability and social justice discourses, and the emergence of hybrid cultural-linguistic identities in online spaces.

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