CHAPTER 6

LANGUAGE AND INTERCULTURAL COMMUNICATION

CHAPTER OBJECTIVES

After reading this chapter, you should be able to:

1. Define the Sapir-Whorf Hypothesis
2. Explain the nominalist, relativist, and qualified relativist positions on language and perception.
3. Describe the role of metaphor in understanding intercultural communication.
4. Identify cultural variations in communication style.
5. Give examples of variations in contextual rules.
6. Explain the power of labels.
7. Understand the challenges of multilingualism.
8. Explain the difference between translation and interpretation.
9. Understand the phenomenon of code switching and interlanguage.
10. Discuss the complexities of language policies.

I communicate with my friends around the world, like my friends from Germany and from Venezuela—I keep in touch with them by WhatsApp or Facebook, and sometimes Instagram. For the most part, I feel English is a power language, since a lot of people speak English or at least know it somewhat. So when I message my friends, they can understand me, but there are a lot of times when I talk with them, I have to use basic English because they don't understand some words, especially slang. Another thing is my friends from Venezuela are only three hours ahead of us but my German friends are eight hours ahead, and they usually want to talk after they finish their school work and dinner—which is the middle of the night for me. Here in America it seems that everyone is on their phones all the time.

—Monica

As our student, Monica discovered, language is a central element in intercultural communication, whether face-to-face or online. There are often challenges, like understanding slang, and the issue of power is always present—why does Monica use English rather than German or Spanish in communicating with her friends? In online communication, timing and time zones can also be a challenge. Recent communication technologies and global health concerns highlight another important challenge of language—it is constantly changing. Consider the words that have become part of English (and other languages): clickbait, selfies, podcasts—all created because of technology; social distancing, contactless delivery, super spreader, flatten the curve, quarentini—created or used more commonly during the pandemic; other words enter the English language from our interaction with other cultures: avatar, tsunami, sudoku. Some of these words may remain in use while others may disappear when no longer relevant.

How can we begin to understand the important role of language in intercultural communication in today's world, with more people on the move and technological connectivity to every corner of the earth? First, the sheer number of languages spoken in the world today, approximately 6500 is staggering. Experts estimate that 800 languages are spoken in New York City alone (Strochlic, 2018). How can people possibly communicate given all these different languages? Is intercultural communication easier online or face-to-face? Do we use language differently online? What are the difficulties in interpreting and translating? Should everyone learn a second or third language? In this chapter, we focus on language-related issues in verbal communication processes; the next chapter focuses on the nonverbal elements.

The social science approach generally focuses on individual aspects of language in relation to intercultural communication, the interpretive approach focuses on contextual uses of language practices, and the critical approach emphasizes the relations between discourse and power. This chapter uses a dialectical perspective to explore how language works dynamically in intercultural contexts. With the personal–contextual dialectic, we can consider not only how language use operates on an individual level but also how it is influenced by context. We also use the static–dynamic dialectic to distinguish between language and discourse, to identify the components of language, and to explore the relationship among language, meaning, and perception. Although it may seem that the components of language are static, the *use* of language is a dynamic process.

In this chapter, we also explore cultural variations of language and some of the barriers presented by these variations. Then we discuss the relationship between language

FRENCH LANGUAGE WATCHDOGS SAY 'NON' TO GENDER NEUTRAL STYLE

As you read the following news report, consider the underlying assumptions about language use and perception. Which of the positions (nominalist? relativist?) is represented by the "middots move"? by the French Prime Minister?

Perhaps in reaction to news stories of sexual harassment, there has been a recent move in France to be more inclusive in language, to refer to both genders in the plural form—inserting "middots" in gendered words.

"For example, the word for a mixed-gender group of readers is usually written as *lecteurs*, even if the women outnumber the men, rather than with the feminine plural, *lectrices*. Using inclusive writing, the word would be written as *lecteur·rice·s*."

However, the French prime minister, Édouard Philippe (along with the language watchdog, the Académie Française) is appalled at the idea, and he has banned the practice on all official texts: "The masculine [form] is a neutral form, which should be used for terms liable to apply to women." The Académie agrees, saying that the "punctuated 'aberration' would make French too complex, putting it 'in mortal danger.'"

Many ministries, university and trade union continue to use the gender-neutral form, because "the French language must keep up with changing times."

The debate continues.

Source: From https://www.theguardian.com/world/2017/nov/21/no-more-middots-french-pm-clamps-down-on-gender-neutral-language

and power, and between language and identity, and examine issues of multilingualism, translation, and interpretation. Finally, we look at language and identity, language policies and politics, and globalization.

SOCIAL SCIENCE PERSPECTIVE ON LANGUAGE

The social science perspective focuses on the individual aspects of language use: language perception and thought, the way cultural groups use language in different ways, and the barriers presented by these variations. People around the world speak many different languages and some scholars think that the particular language we speak influences how we see the world. Before we address the question of how to reduce language barriers in intercultural communication, we need to ask the following questions: Do speakers of Japanese, Chinese, Arabic, and other languages actually perceive the world differently, depending on the particular language they speak? Or do we all experience the world in the same way but have different ways of expressing our experiences? We tackle these questions in the next section.

STUDENT VOICES

My co-worker, Nam, who moved to the US from Vietnam with his parents when he was a child, talked with me about his difficulties with learning English. He indicated that he learned English about 10 years ago and that the first difficulty he encountered while learning English was the way we structure our words while forming sentences. He indicated to me that in English we have more "continuous tense" sentences compared to Vietnamese or Chinese. For example, the straight translation of Vietnamese to English without the reordering of words would turn "The phone rang while I was taking a bath" into "I had a bath when the phone rang."

—Jason

Language and Perception

The question of how much of our perception is shaped by the particular language we speak is at the heart of the "political correctness" debate. We can address these questions from two points of view: the nominalist and the relativist.

nominalist position The view that perception is not shaped by the particular language one speaks. (Compare with **relativist position** and **qualified relativist position.**)

The Nominalist Position According to the **nominalist position,** perception is not shaped by the particular language we speak. Language is simply an arbitrary "outer form of thought." Thus, we all have the same range of thoughts, which we express in different ways with different languages. This means that any thought can be expressed in any language, although some may take more or fewer words. The existence of different languages does not mean that people have different thought processes or inhabit different perceptual worlds. After all, a tree may be an *arbre* in French and an *arbol* in Spanish, but we all perceive the tree in the same way.

relativist position The view that the particular language individuals speak, especially the structure of the language, shapes their perception of reality and cultural patterns. (Compare with **nominalist position** and **qualified relativist position.**)

The Relativist Position According to the **relativist position,** the particular language we speak, especially the structure of that language, determines our thought patterns, our perceptions of reality, and, ultimately, important cultural components (see Figure 6-1). This position is best represented by the **Sapir–Whorf hypothesis**—proposed by Edward Sapir (1921), a linguist, and his student, Benjamin Whorf (1956), based on their research on Native American languages. According to the Sapir–Whorf hypothesis, language defines our experience. For example, there are no possessives (*his/her/our/your*) in the Diné (Navajo) language; we might conclude, therefore, that the Diné think in a particular way about the concept of possession. Another example is the variation in formal and informal forms. Consider that English speakers do not distinguish between a formal and an informal you (as in German, with *du* and *Sie,* or in Spanish, with *tu* and *usted*). In Japanese, formality is not simply noted by you, it is part of the entire language system. Nouns take the honorific "o" before them, and verbs take more formal and polite forms. Thus, "*Doitsu-go ga dekimasen*" [I—or you, he, she, we, they—don't speak German] is more polite and formal than "*Doitsu-go ga dekinai*." Does this mean that English, German, and Spanish speakers think about formality and informality differently?

Sapir–Whorf hypothesis The assumption that language shapes our ideas and guides our view of social reality. This hypothesis was proposed by Edward Sapir, a linguist, and his student, Benjamin Whorf, and represents the relativist view of language and perception.

FIGURE 6.1 Language is an important aspect of intercultural communication. The particular symbols used in any language are arbitrary and communicate meaning only when used in particular contexts. (*David Rubinger/Getty Images*)

As a final example, note that some languages are gendered and others are not. Thus, in English you could tell your friend, "I had dinner with a neighbor last night," and the friend would not know if the neighbor was male or female. However, if you were speaking French, you would have to indicate the gender of your neighbor: *voisine* (female) or *voisin* (male). The same is true for the many other "gendered" languages, including Spanish, German, and Russian. In these languages, not only are people gendered, but also inanimate objects—the clock, the bridge, the chair, and so forth—are all either masculine or feminine. And while speakers of gendered languages obviously know that inanimate objects do not really have biological sex, the Sapir–Whorf hypothesis would suggest that using gendered language can shape the feelings and associations speakers have concerning objects around them. Thus, this hypothesis would support "political

correctness"—the notion that language is powerful, shapes our perception, e.g., gender fluid persons asking to be referred to as "they" rather than "him" or "her." A nominalist position would argue that the language used doesn't impact how we perceive a person's gender identity (see Point of View, p. 217).

The Sapir–Whorf hypothesis has had tremendous influence on scholarly thinking about language and its impact on everyday communication. It questions the basic assumption that we all inhabit the same perceptual world, the same social reality.

However, the Sapir–Whorf hypothesis has been critiqued by a number of studies that challenge the connection between language and how we think (Deutscher, 2010). For example, if according to Sapir–Whorf, language structures thought, then language must precede and only subsequently influence thought. This raises the question whether it is possible to think without language. Studies of children's **language acquisition** seem to suggest that language and thought are so closely related that it is difficult to conclude that one initiates influence over the other—not supporting the Sapir–Whorf hypothesis. Findings from studies of cross-cultural differences in language suggest similar conclusions. The question here is, do different language groups perceive the world completely differently? The answer, according to most experts is—probably not. So even if there is no single word for the "foot" in Japanese, it does not mean that Japanese and English speakers would perceive a foot in very different ways.

language acquisition The process of learning language.

Given these and findings from other studies, most contemporary language experts advocate a middle ground, the **qualified relativist position,** suggesting that while not a "prison," the language habits that our culture has instilled in us from the time we first learn to speak probably does shape our perceptions and orientation to the world and the people and objects we encounter (Deutscher, 2010). This view allows for more freedom than the Sapir–Whorf hypothesis. As you read the research findings that follow, you may see the wisdom of the qualified relativist position.

qualified relativist position A moderate view of the relationship between language and perception. Sees language as a tool rather than a prison (compare with nominalist position and relativist position).

Language and Thought: Metaphor

One way of thinking about the relationship between language and thought is to look at metaphors. A *metaphor* is an expression where a word (or words) is used outside of its normal conventional meaning to express a *similar* concept (Lakoff, 1992). For example, "you are my sunshine." Although an individual cannot literally *be* sunshine, comparing someone to sunshine expresses a particular positive meaning. Experts used to think that metaphors are about language, or literary writing, not useful for understanding everyday speech. A famous cognitive scientist and linguist George Lakoff disagrees and proposes that metaphors are part of thinking, one way we organize our thoughts, in everyday living. In fact, metaphors are "a major and indispensable part of our ordinary conventional way of conceptualizing the world, and that our everyday behavior reflects our metaphorical understanding of experience" (p. 203).

Understanding a culture's metaphors, then, helps us understand something about the culture itself. Consider the English metaphor of likening love to a journey: *Our relationship has hit a dead-end street. Look how far we've come. It's been a long, bumpy road. We're spinning our wheels. Our relationship is off the track.* These are ordinary, everyday English expressions. They are not poetic, nor are they necessarily used for special rhetorical effect, but for *reasoning about* our relationships (Lakoff, 1992, p. 205).

Metaphors can also be a useful way to understand other cultures. Some metaphors are universal, like the metaphor of an angry person as a pressurized container, for example (Kövecses, 2005). Consider these English phrases: "His pent-up anger *welled up* inside him. Billy's just *blowing off* steam. He was *bursting* with anger. When I told him *he just exploded.*" Other languages have similar expressions. The universality of the metaphor may rest in the universal human physiology—since physical bodily changes actually occur when we are angry (blood pressure rises, pulse rate increases, temperature rises).

In English, metaphors for happiness seem to center on a feeling of being up, light, fluid in a container (She was floating on air, bursting with happiness). However, the Chinese have a metaphor that does not exist in English—that happiness is flowers in the heart. Experts suggest that metaphors reflect cultural beliefs and values; in this case, the metaphor reflects the more restrained Chinese communication style, whereas the English metaphor of "happiness is being off the ground" reflects the relatively expressive English communication style (Kövecses, 2005, p. 71).

Cultural Variations in Communication Style

What else do we need to understand in order to reduce the language and verbal barriers in intercultural communication? In addition to cultural differences in metaphor use, social science scholars also identify differences in the way people use language in everyday conversations. By this, we mean that even if people are speaking the same language, there can be misunderstandings due to differences in communication style.

Communication style combines both language and nonverbal communication. It is the **metamessage** that contextualizes how listeners are expected to receive and interpret verbal messages. A primary way in which cultural groups differ in communication style is in a preference for high- versus low-context communication. A **high-context communication** style is one in which "most of the information is either in the physical context or internalized in the person, while very little is in the coded, explicit, transmitted part of the message" (Hall, 1976, p. 79). This style of communication emphasizes understanding messages without direct verbal communication. People in long-term relationships often communicate in this style. For example, one person may send a meaningful glance across the room at a party, and his or her partner will know from the nonverbal clue that it is time to go home.

In contrast, in **low-context communication,** the majority of meaning and information is in the verbal code. This style of communication, which emphasizes explicit verbal messages, is highly valued in many settings in the United States. Interpersonal communication textbooks often stress that we should not rely on nonverbal, contextual information. It is better, they say, to be explicit and to the point, and not to leave things ambiguous. However, many cultural groups around the world value high-context communication. They encourage children and adolescents to pay close attention to contextual cues (body language, environmental cues), and not simply the words spoken in a conversation (Gudykunst & Matsumoto, 1996).

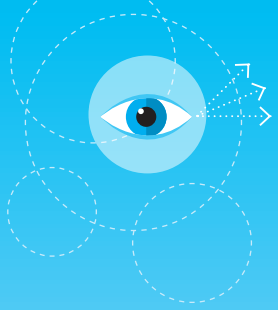
William Gudykunst and Stella Ting-Toomey (2003) identify two major dimensions of communication styles: direct versus indirect and elaborate versus understated.

communication style The metamessage that contexualizes how listeners are expected to accept and interpret verbal messages.

metamessage The meaning of a message that tells others how they should respond to the content of our communication based on our relationship to them.

high-context communication A style of communication in which much of the information is contained in the contexts and nonverbal cues rather than expressed explicitly in words. (Compare with **low-context communication.**)

low-context communication A style of communication in which much of the information is conveyed in words rather than in nonverbal cues and contexts. (Compare with **high-context communication.**)



POINT *of* VIEW

Cultural differences in communication style can have important implications in business and political negotiations. Consider the rocky trade negotiations over tariffs between Chinese and Americans. At one point, Americans assumed initial phases were completed, and were ready to move on, only to discover that the Chinese disagreed! Business scholars Akgunes and Culpepper, explain that for high-context Chinese, negotiations are never final, but rather a starting point, a way to build solid trusting relationships over long extended periods of time, to be revisited every now and then. The Columbia University business professor Shang-Jin Wei describes their attitude toward negotiations as "nothing is agreed until everything is agreed." This cultural practice presents huge challenges for low-context Americans, who believe that the written contract or legal document is what counts and holds no ambiguity.

Another cultural difference relevant for trade negotiations concerns direct and indirect styles. Global business consultant Sue Bryant points out that Chinese executives, preferring an indirect style, will often avoid giving a straight answer in order to save the other person's face. "The worst thing you can do in negotiations with Chinese colleagues is to go out of your way to prove a point, regardless of the effect it has on others" (Bryant, 2019).

Americans, who tend to be very direct and literal, find this confusing and frustrating.

Sources: From A. Akgunes & R. Culpepper (2012). Negotiations between Chinese and Americans: Examining the cultural context and salient Factors.*The Journal of International Management Studies,* 7(1), 191-200.
From S. Bryant (2019, July 17). Identifying cultural differences and similarities: China vs. the US. https://countrynavigator.com/blog/global-talent/cultural-differences-us-vs-china/
From S.-J. Wei (2019, May 14). Why the US and China see negotiations differently, Columbia Business School, https://www8.gsb.columbia.edu/articles/chazen-global-insights/why-us-and-china-see-negotiations-differently

Direct Versus Indirect Styles This dimension refers to the extent to which speakers reveal their intentions through explicit verbal communication and emphasizes low-context communication. A direct communication style is one in which verbal messages reveal the speaker's true intentions, needs, wants, and desires. An indirect style is one in which the verbal message is often designed to camouflage the speaker's true intentions, needs, wants, and desires (Gudykunst, Ting-Toomey, & Chua, 1988). Most of the time, individuals and groups are more or less direct depending on the context.

Many English speakers in the United States favor the direct speech style as the most appropriate in most contexts. This is revealed in statements like "Don't beat around the bush," "Get to the point," and "What exactly are you trying to say?" Although "white lies" may be permitted in some contexts, the direct style emphasizes honesty, openness, forthrightness, and individualism.

However, some cultural groups prefer a more indirect style, with an emphasis on high-context communication. Preserving the harmony of relationships has a higher priority than being totally honest. Thus, a speaker might look for a "soft" way to communicate that there is a problem in the relationship, perhaps by providing

contextual cues, which again has relevance for the Chinese American trade negotiations, since Chinese tend to prefer a more indirect style (see Point of View, p. 222).

Some languages have many words and gestures that convey the idea of "maybe." For example, three Indonesians studying in the United States were invited by their advisor to participate in a cross-cultural training workshop. They did not want to participate, nor did they have the time. But neither did they want to offend their professor, whom they held in high regard. Therefore, rather than tell him they couldn't attend, they simply didn't return his calls and didn't show up at the workshop.

An international student from Tunisia told Judith and Tom that he had been in the United States for several months before he realized that if someone was asked for directions and didn't know the location of the place, that person should tell the truth instead of making up a response. He explained that he had been taught that it was better to engage in conversation, to give *some* response, than to disappoint the person by revealing he didn't know.

Different communication styles are responsible for many problems that arise between men and women and between persons from different cultural groups. These problems may be caused by different priorities for truth, honesty, harmony, and conflict avoidance in relationships, and can have significant implications in personal as well as in business and political contexts.

Elaborate Versus Understated Styles This dimension of communication styles refers to the degree to which talk is used. The elaborate style involves the use of rich, expressive language in everyday talk. For example, the Arabic language has many metaphorical expressions used in everyday speech. In this style, a simple assertive statement means little; the listener will believe the opposite.

In contrast, the understated style values succinct, simple assertions, and silence. Amish people often use this style of communication. A common refrain is, "If you don't have anything nice to say, don't say anything at all." Free self-expression is not encouraged. Silence is especially appropriate in ambiguous situations; if one is unsure of what is going on, it is better to remain silent.

The exact style falls between the elaborate and the understated, as expressed in the maxim "Verbal contributions should be no more or less information than is required" (Grice, 1975). The exact style emphasizes cooperative communication and sincerity as a basis for interaction.

Differences between elaborated and understated styles can present challenges in international political negotiations. Compare the two speeches of President Obama and Libyan leader Muammar Gaddaffi in 2011, when President Obama sent troops to help manage a citizen uprising in Libya (see Figure 6-2). Obama explained his reason for sending in a very concise dispassionate manner:

> *We knew that if we waited one more day, Benghazi—a city nearly the size of Charlotte—could suffer a massacre that would have reverberated across the region and stained the conscience of the world.*
>
> *It was not in our national interest to let that happen. I refused to let that happen. And so nine days ago, after consulting the bipartisan leadership of Congress, I authorized military action to stop the killing and enforce UN Security Council Resolution 1973.*

FIGURE 6-2 Libyans in the capital city of Tripoli celebrate after toppling their government in summer 2011. *(Francisco Leong/AFP/Getty Images)*

Gaddafi addressed his people in a long, 75-minute speech, full of metaphors, and in a more indirect and elaborated style:

> *I am bigger than any Rank, I am a Revolutionary, I am the Bedouin from oasis that brought victory to enjoy it from generation to generation. Libya will remain at the top and will lead Africa and South America. We cannot hinder the process of this revolution from these greasy rats and cats. I am paying the price for staying here and my grandfather, Abdus Salam Bomanyar, who fell a martyr in 1911. I will not leave the country and I will die as a martyr in the end.* https://docs.google.com/document/d/10dy5oLJY2QL7k2VuwKonUpSgCUX-_9ATQ-134Xka9fs/edit?hl=en&pref=2&pli=1#

While some analysts were quick to point out that Gaddafi was prone to extreme language and not held in high regard by many Arab leaders, other experts point to the particular challenges of the Arab language as it is spoken today. Each Arab country region has its own local dialect, making communication within the Arab world a distinct challenge. A former British ambassador to Libya notes that Gaddafi's personal speaking style was in a Libyan dialect and clearly reflected his Bedouin background—where elaborated speech is commonplace, people talk for hours at a time, and Gaddafi's speeches regularly went on for three or four hours at a stretch (Miles, 2011).

Influence of Interactive Media Use on Language and Communication Style

Some experts wonder about the influence of communication technologies on communication style. In general, e-mail, text messaging, and especially Twitter emphasize low-context, direct and understated written communication. In these media, precision, efficiency, and making sure that the meaning is clearly conveyed are priorities. However, these interactive media provide many ways to send contextual information along with our words; we add emojis, gifs, and stickers to our texts as well as photos and videos in order to convey more emotional meanings to our messages. For example, emojis are often used to fine-tune our messages, to enhance or adjust our messages or more subtly—to express irony (Hu et. al., 2017). Thus, it's possible that non-native speakers may have difficulty in interpreting the subtlety of emoji use.

Not everyone adopts or uses all available technologies. Business experts report that in many countries where high-context, indirect communication is preferred, even though digital communication is prevalent and available (and used in marketing), some business people prefer face-to-face contact or telephone (especially for initial contacts) or use video conferencing more than e-mail and text messaging in order to incorporate more contextual information (http://www.aperianglobal.com). For example, in Kenya, many people have cell phones, young people use social media, texting is common as it is quicker and cheaper than a phone call, and conducting financial transactions via phone is common. However, most Kenyans prefer face-to-face communication versus virtual communication in business contexts, especially when dealing with serious issues (Virtual communication in Kenya, 2020). Similarly, while China is a huge telecom market and the majority of its population is online, technology has not replaced face-to-face communication. This is still an essential piece to developing and maintaining interpersonal relationships, so important there.

Moreover, people may adopt the technologies in their own style. For example, high-context communicators may prefer videoconferencing rather than e-mail because video and audio allow for more contextual cues. However, while they may prefer the "richer" communication technologies, there is some evidence that they may be perceived as less than competent by more direct, low context communicators, that "the typically indirect communication style in China can also lead to misunderstandings during virtual encounters." Thus experts recommend that "lean" media may be more desirable in some cases or followup after a virtual interaction (http://www.aperianglobal.com; Bazarova & Yuan, 2013). In addition to highlighting cultural differences in language, interactive media also have an enormous impact on slang and humor, discussed in the following section.

Slang and Humor in Language Use

Another cultural variation in language use that can present barriers is slang. According to language expert Tom Dazell (2005), slang is generally wittier and cleverer than standard language. It's inventive and creative and serves an important

function—it establishes a sense of community identity among its users, often in opposition to standard language users. Slang, then, can be perceived as a barrier to those outside the language group. Slang is particularly important for youth cultures; it's almost imperative to invent slang that belongs to each generation and is unintelligible to parents and other adults. International students struggle to learn slang (see Point of View, p. 227), as well as parents and grandparents who are mystified by the language of their children. What makes it particularly challenging is the fact that slang is dynamic and can be fleeting: here today, gone tomorrow, largely due to social media influence.

Communication accommodation theory (CAT) suggests that there is an optimum use of slang by an outsider accommodating to the slang of a particular culture. Using too much slang, or using it in inappropriate contexts, can sound awkward to the "native" listener, like when your parents try to use your slang or foreign students use lots of slang, but make mistakes in grammar and pronunciation.

Humor can be another cultural language variation that presents challenges, even when two cultural groups speak the same language. For example, some say that British humor is nuanced and subtle and often relies on irony, whereas American humor tends to be more obvious and straightforward—much like U.S. Americans themselves. However, these differences don't seem to present much of a barrier—comedy TV sitcoms have been adapted between the two countries for many years (e.g., *The Office*).

Trying to use humor in a foreign language can be really challenging because the basis of humor is so often linked to particular cultural experiences (or history). For example, understanding Chinese sarcasm requires a thorough understanding of Chinese history and politics; sarcasm is often used in a very subtle way to criticize someone (often politicians) without losing face. So one way to mock present politicians is by criticizing an ancient Chinese emperor who was evil because he killed scholars and oppressed the peasants. A foreigner might not get the true humor (sarcasm) at all, but Chinese listeners would understand (www.quora.com/How-is-Chinese-sarcasm-different-from-Western-sarcasm). The best advice to cultural outsiders or language learners is to use humor and slang fairly sparingly, if at all.

Another type of humor that presents a barrier in intercultural communication is humor at the expense of another. For example, individuals sometimes mock another's accent or language use—a situation encountered by one of our students, Alejandro:

> *I am extremely proud of my Mexican heritage, and I usually feel offended when my identity is not respected. I have a slight accent and occasionally when I go out and mispronounce something people crack jokes. They think that it is all in good humor but it can be offensive.*

As he goes on to say, it's especially hurtful because the humor usually reflects (and perpetuates) negative stereotypes:

> *People connect too many stereotypes to Hispanics; society must learn to stop stereotyping minorities. When this happens then everyone can truly be united and respected, without preconceived notions based off a person's race.*

POINT *of* VIEW

Knowing another language isn't necessarily enough to communicate well. Consider all the slang used by speakers in every language. Here's some U.S. American slang from a website for students trying to learn English (and these are just the beginning of the alphabet)!

Amped: I'm so amped for tonight's game.

Basic: Let's get out of here. This party is basic.

Bro: What's up, bro?

Chill: We're done with exams, so let's just chill tonight.

Cray (or cray cray): The new Beyonce album is cray.

Ditch: I had to ditch study group because my dad called.

Dude: Hey dude, how's it going?

Epic: Did you see that movie? So epic.

Source: From https://shorelight.com/student-stories/a-guide-to-american-college-slang-words-in-2020/

British English slang terms—How many of these do you know?

All right?

Arse over elbow

Baccy

Bees Knees

Belt up

Biggie

Bladdered

Blimey

Source: From https://www.effingpot.com/chapters/slang/

These different uses of language communicate different things to their culturally disparate audiences. As they also demonstrate, it is not easy to interpret language use from other people's perspectives.

Taking a dialectical perspective, though, should help us avoid stereotyping specific groups (such as Arabic or English speakers) in terms of communication style. We should not expect any group to use a particular communication style all the time. Instead, we might recognize that style operates dynamically and is related to context, historical forces, and so on. Furthermore, we might consider how tolerant we are when we encounter others who communicate in very different ways and how willing or able we are to alter our own style to communicate better.

INTERPRETIVE PERSPECTIVE ON LANGUAGE

The interpretive perspective focuses on an in-depth understanding of communication use in context and how communication practices may vary from one cultural context to another.

Variations in Contextual Rules

A dialectical perspective reminds us that the particular communication style we use may vary from context to context. Think of the many contexts in which you communicate during the day—classroom, family, work, and so on—and about how you alter your communication to suit these contexts. You may be more direct with your family and less direct in classroom settings. Similarly, you may use high-context informal communication in interaction with friends and more low-context formal with your professors. These same cultural variations can apply to written communication. You probably write in more formal language when communicating with professors by e-mail than when texting to your friends.

Many research studies have examined the rules for the use of socially situated language in specific contexts. They attempt to identify contexts and then "discover" the rules that apply in these contexts for a given speech community. For example, several studies examined gender differences in the interpersonal communication "rules" of text messaging for men and women in India. In one study, through in-depth interviews, Indian women reported receiving negative reactions from parents, extended family members, husbands, and male friends when sending or reading text messages in their presence. The study also revealed the creative strategies used by Indian women to deal with these limitations placed on them by others: storing phone numbers of male friends under female names, erasing all text messages daily, and communicating through social media rather than texting. The study concludes that these differential "textiquettes" (text messaging rules) for women and men in India reflect the unequal power relations between men and women in India, and that women texting represents a threat to male patriarchy (Shuter, 2012).

A related study examined the communication patterns involved in the common practice of "nagging" in U.S. American family contexts (Boxer, 2002). Nagging (repeated requests by one family member to another) usually concerns household chores and is often a source of conflict. More importantly, the communication practice seems to be related to issues of gender, power, and control. To be more specific, men are rarely perceived as the naggers; in this study, only six of the seventy sequences involved men nagging women. The researcher suggests that this is because they are perceived as having more power and, therefore, able to successfully request and gain compliance from another family member without resorting to nagging. This also means that children can have power (if they refuse to comply with a request despite lacking status), and parents can lack power despite having status. If our styles constrain how we request and respond to requests, then by nagging we lose power. Without power, we are forced into nagging, and so it seems a vicious cycle.

Other studies compare communication styles used by different speech communities. For example, researchers have examined how communication style varies from generation to generation. One study, based on interviews with 40 gay men of various ages, investigated how communication with younger men contributed to older men's positive self-concept. They discovered that older men: (1) had a more refined and nuanced verbal communication style, sensitive to nonverbal cues, contrasted to younger men's more blunt expressive style—maybe because they came of age in a time when it was more difficult to be out and so communicated "in code"; (2) were more oriented to face-to-face communication, seeing this as more genuine and nuanced, whereas younger men were oriented to online/mediated communication—e.g., with sexual hookup apps and texting; and (3) saw their more masculine expression as positive—in contrast to their perceptions of younger men's somewhat feminine style (Hajek, 2018).

People communicate differently in different speech communities. Thus, the context in which the communication occurs is a significant part of the meaning. Although we might communicate in one way in one speech community, we might change our communication style in another. Understanding the dynamics of various speech communities helps us see the range of communication styles.

CRITICAL PERSPECTIVE ON LANGUAGE

A critical perspective on language suggests that, in order to use language effectively in intercultural encounters, we need to understand the role of power and power differentials in these encounters. Recall that discourse refers to language in use. This means that all discourse is social. The language used—the words and the meanings that are communicated—depends not only on the context but also on the social relations that are part of that interaction. For example, bosses and workers may use the same words, but the meanings communicated are not always the same. A boss and a worker may both refer to the company personnel as a "family." To the boss, this may mean "one big happy family," whereas to a disgruntled employee, it may mean a "dysfunctional family." To some extent, the disparity is related to the inequality between boss and worker, to the power differential.

In Chapter 2, we introduced communication accommodation theory. There are different ways that people accommodate or resist accommodating, depending on the situation. One such theory that encompasses various approaches is co-cultural communication, which we examine next.

Co-Cultural Communication

The co-cultural communication theory, proposed by communication scholar Mark Orbe (1998), describes how language works between dominant and nondominant groups—or **co-cultural groups.** Groups that have the most power (white, male, cisgender) consciously or unconsciously formulate a communication system that supports their perception of the world. This means that co-cultural group members (ethnic minorities, women, LGBTQ indivdiduals) must function in communication systems

co-cultural groups
Nondominant cultural groups that exist in a national culture, such as African American or Chinese American.

TABLE 6-1 CO-CULTURAL COMMUNICATION ORIENTATIONS

	Nonassertive	Assertive	Aggressive
Assimilation	Emphasize commonalities	Extensive preparation	Dissasociating
	Developing positive face	Overcompensating	Mirroring
	Censoring self	Manipulating stereotypes	Strategic distancing
	Averting controversy	Bargaining	Ridiculing self
Accomodation	Increasing visibility	Communicating self	Confronting
	Dispelling stereotypes	Intragroup networking	Gaining advantage
		Using liaisons	
		Educating others	
Separation	Avoiding	Exemplifying strengths	Attacking
	Maintaining interpersonal barriers	Embracing stereotypes	Sabotaging others

Source: From M. Orbe, & T. Roberts, "Co-Cultural Theorizing: Foundations, Applications & Extensions," Howard Journal Of Communications, *23*(4), 2012: 295–296.

that often do not represent their experiences. Nondominant groups thus find themselves in dialectical struggles: Do they try to adapt to the dominant communication style, or do they maintain their own styles?

There seem to be three general answers to the question of how co-cultural groups can relate to the more powerful (dominant) groups: they can communicate nonassertively, assertively, or aggressively. Within each of these communication postures, co-cultural individuals may emphasize assimilation—trying to become like the dominant group—or they can try to accommodate and adapt to the dominant group. They can also try to remain separate from the dominant groups as much as possible. These three sets of orientations result in nine types of communication strategies (Table 6-1). The strategy chosen depends on many things, including preferred outcome, perceived costs and rewards, and context.

The point here is that there are both costs and benefits for co-cultural members when they choose which of these strategies to use. Because language is structured in ways that do not reflect their experiences, they must adopt some strategy for dealing with the linguistic framework. For example, if Mark wants to refer to his relationship with Kevin, does he use the word *boyfriend, friend, roommate, husband, partner,* or some other word? If Mark and Kevin are married, he might

choose to refer to Kevin as his husband in some contexts; in others (e.g., Thanksgiving dinner with disapproving family, or at work), he may choose a different term, depending on how he perceives costs and benefits in each situation. Let's look at how these strategies might work, and the costs and the benefits of each.

Assimilation Strategies The three assimilation strategies are nonassertive, assertive, and aggressive. Nonassertive strategies emphasize trying to fit and be accepted by the dominant group. Such strategies might emphasize commonalities ("I'm not that different"), be self-monitoring and, above all, avoid controversy. There are potential costs to this approach because these co-cultural individuals may feel they cannot be honest about themselves and may also feel uncomfortable reinforcing the dominant group's worldview and power.

A co-cultural individual taking an assertive assilimation strategy may downplay co-cultural differences and try to fit into the existing structures but also let people know how she or he feels from time to time. However, this strategy can promote an us-versus-them mentality, and some people find it difficult to maintain this strategy for very long.

Aggressive assimilation strategies emphasize fitting in, sometimes going to great lengths to prove they are like members of the dominant group. Sometimes this means distancing themselves from other members of their co-culture, mirroring (dressing and behaving like the dominant group), hoping they are not seen as "typical" of members of that co-culture. However, other members of that co-culture may accuse this individual of acting white, or "straight." Thus, these strategies involve constantly negotiating position with the dominant group while being isolated from one's own co-cultural group.

Accommodation Strategies Nonassertive accommodation strategies emphasize blending into the dominant culture but tactfully challenging the dominant structure to recognize co-cultural practices. For example, a Jewish co-worker may want to put up a menorah near the company's Christmas tree as a way of challenging the dominant culture. By gently educating the organization about other religious holidays, the co-cultural member may be able to change their presumptions about everyone celebrating Christmas. Using this strategy, the co-cultural individual may be able to influence group decision making while still showing loyalty to the larger organization's goals. The cost of this strategy may be that others feel that she or he is not pushing hard enough to change larger structural issues in the organization. Also, this strategy does not really promote major changes in organizations to make them more inclusive and reflective of the larger society.

Assertive accommodation strategies try to strike a balance between the concerns of co-cultural and dominant group members. These strategies involve communicating self, doing intragroup networking, using liaisons, and educating others. For example, Asian American co-workers may share information about themselves with their co-workers, but they also share information about words that are offensive, such as *Oriental* and *slope.*

Aggressive accommodation strategies involve moving into the dominant structures and then working from within to promote significant changes—no matter how

high the personal cost. Although it may seem as if co-cultural workers who use these strategies are confrontational or self-promoting, they also reflect a genuine desire to work with and not against dominant group workers. For example, a disabled co-worker may consistently remind others that facilities need to be more accessible, such as door handles, bathrooms that can accommodate wheelchairs, and so on. Co-cultural members with this orientation may periodically use assertive as well as aggressive accommodation strategies and so may be perceived as genuinely committed to the larger group's good. However, co-cultural members who consistently use aggressive accommodating strategies may find themselves alienated from both other co-cultural members and from dominant group colleagues for being too confrontational.

Separation Strategies Nonassertive separation strategies are often used by those who assume that some segregation is part of everyday life in the United States. This is generally easier for the dominant group than for co-cultural members. Some co-cultural individuals regard segregation as a natural phenomenon but also use subtle communication practices to maintain separation from the dominant group. Perhaps the most common strategy is simply avoiding interactions with dominant group members whenever possible. Thus, gay people may spend their social time with other gay people. Or women may prefer to use professional women's services (having a female doctor, dentist, and attorney) and socialize with other women. The benefits are obvious but the cost is that they cannot network and make connections with those in power positions.

Assertive separation strategies reflect a conscious choice to maintain space between dominant and co-cultural group members. One benefit is that it promotes co-cultural unity and self-determination, but it also means trying to survive without having access to resources controlled by the dominant group. Aggressive separation strategies (attacking and sabotaging others) are used by those for whom co-cultural segregation is an important priority and entails confronting pervasive, everyday, assumed discriminatory practices and structures. The cost may be that the dominant group retaliates against this open exposure of the presumed way of doing things.

Again, when confronted with various situations, dominant and co-cultural group members need to think carefully about how they wish to respond. There are benefits and costs to all of the decisions made. A real-life example of this framework is a recent study investigating communication strategies used by Black female airline pilots (a co-cultural group) to navigate the white male ranks of legacy airline pilots. It turns out that these female pilots used a variety of strategies, including assimilation (e.g., extensively preparing for every flight/eventuality), accommodating (e.g., increasing visibility by dressing in full uniform with pilot stripes visible), and separation (e.g., choosing to sometimes not hang with the male pilots off-duty). In addition, the researchers identified a new strategy: "strategic alliance building," where the female pilots strategically interacted to gain the support from respected male pilots, which in turn helped them gain the deserved respect from other pilots (Zirulnik & Orbe, 2019). There are no easy answers; the pilots could have chosen other strategies, e.g., when confronting some hostility from others—with a different

set of costs and benefits. It is important to consider what verbal communication strategies you may want to use when interacting in intercultural communication situations.

An extension of co-cultural theory–dominant group theory–identifies four types of strategies that dominant group members use in responding to the concerns of co-cultural group members: (a) strategies that reinforce their privilege, (b) strategies that reflect an awareness of their privilege, (c) strategies that express support for co-cultural groups, and (d) strategies that disrupt practices of oppression. Of course, as we emphasized in Chapter 5, individuals identities are complex and can include membership in both co-cultural and dominant groups (Razzante, 2018; Razzante & Orbe, 2018).

Discourse and Social Structure

Just as organizations have particular structures and specific positions within them, societies are structured so that individuals occupy social positions. Differences in **social positions** are central to understanding intercultural communication. For one thing, not all positions within the structure are equivalent; everyone is not the same. When men whistle at an attractive woman walking by, it has a different force and meaning than if women were to whistle at a man walking by.

social positions The places from which people speak that are socially constructed and thus embedded with assumptions about gender, race, class, age, social roles, sexuality, and so on.

Power is a central element, by extension, of this focus on social position. For instance, when a judge in court says what he or she thinks *freedom of speech* means, it carries much greater force than when a neighbor or a classmate gives an opinion about what the phrase means. When we communicate, we tend to note (however unconsciously) the group membership and positions of communication participants. To illustrate, consider the previous example. We understand how communication functions, based on the group membership of the judge (as a member of the judicial system) and of the neighbors and classmates; we need to know nothing about their individual identities.

Groups also hold different positions of power in the social structure. Because intercultural contact occurs between members of different groups, the positions of the groups affect communication. Group differences lend meaning to intercultural communication because, as noted previously, the concept of differences is key to language and the semiotic process.

The "Power" Effects of Labels

We often use labels to refer to other people and to ourselves. Labels, as signifiers, acknowledge particular aspects of our social identity. For example, we might label ourselves or others as "male" or "female," indicating sexual identity. Or we might say we are "Canadian" or a "New Englander," indicating a national or regional identity. The context in which a label is used may determine how strongly we feel about the label. On St. Patrick's Day, for example, someone may feel more strongly about being an Irish American than about being a woman or a student or a Texan.

Sometimes people feel trapped or misrepresented by labels. They might complain, "Why do we have to have labels? Why can't I just be me?" These complaints

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Growing up in Pakistan, my first languages were Urdu and Gujarati and learning English was a struggle when I came to the U.S. Grammar was especially difficult for me and I would often say things like "I ranned there" or "I supposed" (I was supposed to). One of the things one can do when trying to speak with someone who does not speak English fluently is be sensitive and not treat them like they're dumb. When I first came to America people would talk to me very loudly as if I were completely incapable of understanding.

—Amir

My native language is Spanish. Since I was a little kid, I've been learning English so I already knew the language when I moved to the U.S. However, even to this day, I have trouble understanding slang. I feel uncomfortable when situations arise where I don't understand what is being said because of slang. . . . I think that when speaking with someone from another culture, specifically with someone who speaks (American) English as a second language, one must be more considerate toward that person's needs; e.g., speaking slower, repeating oneself if necessary, explaining and/or avoiding slang terms.

—Sergio

belie the reality of the function of discourse. It would be nearly impossible to communicate without labels. People rarely have trouble when labeled with terms they agree with—for example, "man," "student," "Minnesotan," or "Australian." Trouble arises, however, from the use of labels that they don't like or that they feel describe them inaccurately. Think about how you feel when someone describes you using terms you do not like.

Labels communicate many levels of meaning and establish particular kinds of relationships between speaker and listener. Sometimes people use labels to communicate closeness and affection for others. Labels like "friend," "lover," and "partner" communicate equality. Sometimes people intentionally invoke labels to establish a hostile relationship. Labels like "deplorables" and "anchor babies" intentionally communicate inequality. Sometimes people use labels that are unintentionally offensive to others.

Many times, these labels are spoken without any knowledge or understanding of their meanings, origin, or even current implications and can demonstrate prejudicial feelings (Cruz-Janzen, 2002). For example, many descendants of Spanish-speaking people living in the United States reject the term "Hispanic" since it was a term mandated by the U.S. government and never used by the people themselves. Similarly, "Oriental" is a term rejected by many Asians and Asian Americans, and "homosexual" communicates negative characteristics about the speaker and establishes a distance between the speaker and listener. Similarly, many indigenous people reject the term "Native American"—saying that it is only used by white people—preferring their more specific tribal name or the terms "American

Indian" or "Indian." Many prefer "First Nations" people—to underscore the fact that tribes are in fact nations, recognized by the U.S. government (Bird, 1999). And you can probably think of many other labels ("bitch," "ho," "faggot," etc.) that are sometimes casually uttered that could be considered offensive by the targeted group.

Discourse is tied closely to social structure, so the messages communicated through the use of labels depend greatly on the social position of the speaker. If the speaker and listener are close friends, then the use of particular labels may not lead to distancing in the relationship or be offensive. But if the speaker and listener are strangers, then these same labels might invoke anger or close the lines of communication. Cultures change over time, as do languages. It is important that you stay aware of these changes as much as possible so you do not unintentionally offend others. Regardless of the intentions of the speaker, negative labels can work in small but powerful ways: Each utterance works like a grain of sand in sedimentary rock or like one roll of snowball going down a hill—small in itself but said over and over serves to reproduce systems of sexism, racism, homophobia, and the like.

Furthermore, if the speaker is in a position of power, then he or she has potentially an even greater impact. For example, when politicians use discourse that invokes racist, anti-Semitic, or other ideologies of intolerance, many people become concerned because of the influence they may have. These concerns have been raised recently over anti-immigrant, anti-Semitic, anti-Islam comments by many of the leaders of the growing right-wing populism in Europe, for example, Austria's Norbert Hofer of the Freedom party, France's Marine Le Pen of the National Rally, Poland's Jaroslaw Kaczynski of the Law and Justice party, and others (Europe and Right-Wing Nationalism, 2019). Similar concerns have arisen over the political discourse of U.S. President Donald Trump and others that openly and explicitly voice anti-Muslim and anti-immigrant views, and Minnesota representative Ilhan Omar also criticized for anti-semitic and anti-Israel remarks. Of course, political office is not the only powerful position from which to speak. Fundamentalist Christian leaders have caused concern with their anti-LGBTQ discourse, and celebrities like actors Mel Gibson, YouTube stars PewDiePie, and Jack Maynard have been criticized for racist, homophobic, and/or anti-semitic discourse.

MOVING BETWEEN LANGUAGES

Multilingualism

Why do some people choose to learn foreign languages and others do not? Given the choice, some people, particularly in the United States, do not feel the need to learn a second language. They assume that most people they encounter either at home or abroad will be able to speak English (see Figure 6-3). Or perhaps they feel they have been successful so far without learning another language, so why start now? If the need arises in a professional context, they can always hire an interpreter. In fact, a recent survey of Canadian and U.S. professionals concluded that a foreign language

FIGURE 6-3 French/English stop sign. (*T. K. Nakayama*)

was not essential in doing business abroad and that language was *not* that crucial (Varner & Beamer, 2011). In a similar survey, U.S. students said they SHOULD learn another language but didn't really see it as necessary; a few were adamant that no American should need to know a foreign language—because of the prevalence of English as a worldwide language (Demont-Heinrich, 2010).

While the advantage of being an English speaker may make it easier for Americans to travel overseas, there may be some downsides. As shown in the Point of View on p. 237, some think that being monolingual makes Americans less cosmopolitan and more provincial—compared to others we're competing against in the current global economy. The fact is that a person who only knows one language may be understood by others, but that person can never understand what others are saying in their own languages and will always have to rely on translators and are more likely to misunderstand what others are saying. Perhaps more importantly, such people miss the opportunity to learn about a culture. As we have described it, language and culture are so inextricably

PARLEZ-VOUS ANGLAIS? YES, OF COURSE

Almost everyone in Europe's cities speak English! Most European students now study English for years. Europeans are now binge-watching English-language TV shows and movies, and multicultural work teams converse in almost native sounding English. All good for us U.S. Americans and Brits, right? NYTimes writer, Pamela Druckerman is not so sure. While she admits some benefits (traveling is easier for English speakers, social movements can spread faster worldwide [remember Greta Thunberg's speeches—in English]), she also describes the downsides, for us:

"Universities in the United States should watch out." U.S. college students will soon find out that the best European schools offer increasingly more and more undergraduate and graduate degrees taught in English, all for a fraction of the cost of a U.S. education. "In 2009, there were about 55 English B.A.s offered in Continental Europe; by 2017, there were 2,900."

"We're a target." Now that almost everyone everywhere speaks very good English, English-speaking societies become easier to manipulate. Investigators pointed out that the young Russians recruited by the Kremlin before the 2016 U.S. elections spoke such good English that they mostly passed for Americans on social media.

"Natives are losing their competitive edge." A few jobs still require perfect English, but in most businesses worldwide, speaking basic English is a basic requirement—like being able to use Microsoft Word—a skill that everyone has.

And finally, the most important downside, **"Crucially, the ubiquity of English lulls us Anglophones into thinking that it's O.K. to be monolingual."** She insists that it's not, that she's been at dinners in Amsterdam, for example, where the conversation is in perfect English, as long as she's at the table, but the minute she leaves the table, "they switch back to Dutch. If all we know is English, we won't know what the rest of the world is saying about us."

Adapted from: P. Druckerman (2019, August 10). Parlez-Vous Anglais? Yes, of Course. *nytimes.com* .https://www.nytimes.com/2019/08/10/opinion/sunday/europeans-speak-english.html

intertwined that to learn a new language is to gain insight into another culture and another "way of thinking and feeling of people who speak and write a language that is different from ours. . . . and so to learn to empathize with them" (Anderson, 2016). Language acquisition studies have shown that it is nearly impossible for individuals to learn the language of a group of people they dislike. For instance, Tom was talking to a student about meeting the program's foreign language requirement. The student said, "I can't take Spanish. I'm from California." When Tom said that he did not understand what she meant, she blurted that she hated Mexicans and wouldn't take Spanish under any circumstances. As her well-entrenched racism suggested, she would indeed never learn Spanish.

While some learn a foreign language in order to compete in global markets or to navigate the increasingly global village, more personal imperatives also drive people to learn languages. For example, while our student Katarina already speaks three languages (English, Spanish, and Serbian), she is not satisfied with this. She says, "With an expanding world, Americans have to be more aggressive in their pursuit of cultural knowledge. I feel that learning a fourth language, specifically Chinese, would greatly benefit me in my job prospects as well as in my ability to communicate with more of the world."

Many people use foreign languages to escape from a legacy of oppression in their own languages. Consider the case of Sam Sue, a Chinese American born and raised in Mississippi, who explains his own need to alter his social reality—often riddled by stigmatizing stereotypes—by changing the way he speaks:

> *Northerners see a Southern accent as a signal that you're a racist, you're stupid, or you're a hick. Regardless of what your real situation is. So I reacted to that by adapting the way I speak. If you talked to my brother, you would definitely know he was from the South. But as for myself, I remember customers telling my dad, "Your son sounds like a Yankee." (Lee, 1991, p. 4)*

Among the variations in U.S. English, the southern accent unwittingly communicates many negative stereotypes. Escaping into another accent is, for some, the only way to escape the stereotypes.

bilingual The ability to speak two languages fluently or at least competently.

multilingual The ability to speak more than two languages fluently or at least competently.

People who speak two languages are often called **bilingual;** people who speak more than two languages are considered **multilingual.** Rarely do bilinguals speak both languages with the same level of fluency. More commonly, they prefer to use one language over another, depending on the context and the topic. Sometimes entire nations are bilingual or multilingual. Belgium, for example, has three national languages (Dutch, German, and French), and Switzerland has four (French, German, Italian, and Romansh). Fifty percent of the world's population is bilingual (Mathews, 2019) and although we lag far behind, the United States has a growing number of bilinguals and multilinguals. According to a recent report, the number of people who speak a language other than English has more than doubled in the last three decades. The 10 most popular languages in the United States are:

1. Spanish
2. Chinese
3. Tagalog
4. Vietnamese
5. Arabic
6. French
7. Korean
8. Russian
9. German
10. Haitian Creole (https://www.accreditedlanguage.com/languages/the-10-most-popular-languages-in-the-us/)

On either the individual or the national level, multilinguals must engage in language negotiation. That is, they need to work out, whether explicitly or implicitly, which language to use in a given situation. These decisions are sometimes clearly embedded in power relations. For example, French was the court language during the reign of Catherine the Great in 18th-century Russia. French was considered the language of culture, the language of the elite, whereas Russian was considered a vulgar language, the language of the uneducated and the unwashed. Special-interest groups in 21 states (including Arizona, Utah, and Alabama) have statutes declaring English the official language. These attempts reflect a power bid to determine which language will be privileged.

Sometimes a language is chosen as a courtesy to others. For example, Tom joined a small group going to see the fireworks display at the Eiffel Tower on Bastille Day one year. (Bastille Day is a French national holiday, celebrated on July 14, to commemorate the storming of the Bastille prison in 1789 and the beginning of the French Revolution.) One woman in the group asked, "*Alors, on parle français ou anglais?*" ["Are we speaking French or English?"]. Because one man felt quite weak at English, French was chosen as the language of the evening.

An interesting linguistic phenomenon known as **interlanguage** has implications for the teaching and learning of other languages. Interlanguage refers to a kind of communication that emerges when speakers of one language are speaking in another language. The native language's semantics, syntactics, pragmatics, and phonetics often overlap into the second language and create a third way of communicating. For example, many English-speaking female students of German might say, "*Ich bin ein Amerikanerin,*" which is incorrect German but is structured on the English way of saying, "I am an American." The correct form is "*Ich bin Amerikanerin.*" The insertion of "*ein*" reveals the English language overlap.

interlanguage A kind of communication that emerges when speakers of one language are speaking in another language. The native language's semantics, syntactics, pragmatics, phonetics, and language styles often overlap and create a third way of communicating.

In his work on moving between languages, Tom has noted that this creation of other ways of communicating can offer ways of resisting dominant cultures. He notes that "the powerful potential of translation for discovering new voices can violate and disrupt the systemic rules of both languages" (Nakayama, 1997, p. 240). He gives the example of "*shiros,*" which is used by some Japanese Americans to refer to whites. *Shiro* is the color white, and adding an *s* at the end is the English grammatical way to pluralize words. Tom explains,

> *Using the color for people highlights the overlay of the ideology of the English language onto Japanese and an odd mixing that probably would not make sense to people who speak only English or Japanese, or those who do not live in the spaces between them. (p. 242n)*

Different people react differently to the dialectical tensions of a multilingual world. Some work hard to learn other languages and other ways of communicating, even if they make numerous errors along the way. Others retreat into their familiar languages and ways of living. The dialectical tensions that arise over different languages and different systems of meaning are played out around the world. But these dialectical tensions never disappear; they are always posing new challenges for intercultural communicators.

Translation and Interpretation

Because no one can learn all of the languages in the world, we must rely on translation and interpretation—two distinct but important means of communicating across language differences. The European Union (EU), for example, has a strict policy of recognizing all of the languages of its constituent members. Hence, many translators and interpreters are hired by the EU to help bridge the linguistic gaps.

translation The process of producing a written text that refers to something said or written in another language.

Translation generally refers to the process of producing a written text that refers to something said or written in another language. The original language text of a translation is called the **source text;** the text into which it is translated is the **target text.**

source text The original language text of a translation. (See also **target text.**)

target text The new language text into which the original language text is translated. (See also **source text.**)

Interpretation refers to the process of verbally expressing what is said or written in another language. Interpretation can either be simultaneous, with the interpreter speaking at the same time as the original speaker, or consecutive, with the interpreter speaking only during the breaks provided by the original speaker.

interpretation The process of verbally expressing what is said or written in another language.

As we know from language theories, languages are entire systems of meaning and consciousness that are not easily rendered into another language in a word-for-word equivalence. The ways in which different languages convey views of the world are not equivalent, as we noted previously. Consider the difficulty involved simply in translating names of colors. The English word *brown* might be translated as any of these French words, depending on how the word is used: *roux, brun, bistre, bis, marron, jaune,* and *gris* (Vinay & Darbelnet, 1977, p. 261).

Issues of Equivalency and Accuracy Some languages have tremendous flexibility in expression; others have a limited range of words. The reverse may be true, however, for some topics. This slippage between languages is both aggravating and thrilling for translators and interpreters. Translation studies traditionally have tended to emphasize issues of **equivalency** and accuracy. That is, the focus, largely from linguistics, has been on comparing the translated meaning with the original meaning. However, for those interested in the intercultural communication process, the emphasis is not so much on equivalence as on the bridges that people construct to cross from one language to another.

equivalency An issue in translation, the condition of being equal in meaning, value, quantity, and so on.

Many U.S. police departments are now hiring officers who are bilingual because they must work with a multilingual public. In Arizona, like many other states, Spanish is a particularly important language. Let's look at a specific case in which a police detective for the Scottsdale (Arizona) Police Department explained an unusual phrase:

> *Detective Ron Bayne has heard his share of Spanish phrases while on the job. But he recently heard an unusual expression.*
>
> *A suspect said, "Me llevaron a tocar el piano" [They took me to play the piano].*
>
> *"I knew it couldn't mean that," said Bayne, a translator for the Scottsdale Police Department. "But I had no idea what it really meant." (Meléndez, 2002, p. B1)*

This slang term, popular at the time with undocumented aliens, highlights the differences between "street" Spanish and classroom Spanish. It also points to the

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These students describe the best strategies for communicating with someone who is trying to learn a foreign language:

> *I think it's important to be patient with people. When I was in Tanzania trying to learn Swahili and trying to not use English, everyone was so helpful. Every time I made a mistake they would correct me in a positive way. They would not be rude or judge how bad it was. This was very constructive for me. It helped me have a positive outlook that I really could learn the language.*
>
> —Rachel

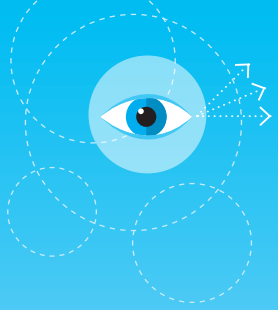
> *It's important to speak in short, simple sentences. For example when I was visiting my Aunt Josephina (from Mexico), usually around the holidays when lots of cooking is involved, I would ask her, "Can I help you with that?" rather than "Would you rather I help cook or should I just wait and do the dishes after?" A longer sentence with multiple questions usually wound up with a questionable smile. Second, I also find that "using visual aids to support what you are saying—for example, write down key words or numbers, or use simple gestures" like pointing to specific things. And third, of course, speaking slowly and being patient with the person you are speaking to who is not fluent in English. Showing frustration is only going to embarrass and ultimately leads them to pull back and stop communicating all together.*
>
> —Carrie

Source: From Carrie, excerpt from "Students Voices: It's important to . . . all together" Original work.

importance of context in understanding meaning. In this context, we know that the police did not take a suspect to play a piano. Instead, this suspect was saying that the police had fingerprinted him. The varieties of expression in Spanish reflect social class and other differences that are not always communicated through translation or interpretation.

Yet the context for interpreters and translators must also be recognized. The need for Spanish speakers in the U.S. Southwest represents only the tip of the "linguistic iceberg." The continuing "war on terror" has created another need for translators and interpreters who are fluent in Arabic, Farsi, Urdu, Punjabi, Pashto, and Dari. The changing context for intelligence work has changed the context for translators and interpreters as well, to say nothing of the languages that are highly valued. These issues, although beyond the scope of equivalency and accuracy, are an important part of the dynamic of intercultural communication.

The Role of the Translator or Interpreter We often assume that translators and interpreters are "invisible," that they simply render into the target language whatever they



POINT *of* VIEW

Translation can create amusing and interesting intercultural barriers. Consider the following translation experiences:

- When McDonald's brought its big Mac to France, it translated to the name "Gros mec" which actually means "big pimp"
- Frank Perdue's Chicken hit Spanish markets, its tagline "It takes a strong man to make a tender chicken" to "it takes an aroused man to make a chicken affectionate"
- Coors' "Turn it loose" campaign in Spain was translated to "you will suffer from diarrhea"
- Clairol didn't realize when it marketed its "Mist Stick" curling iron in Germany that "mist" is slang for manure in German
- Schweppes campaign tried to sell Italian consumers "toilet water" instead of "tonic water"
- Hunt-Wesson introduced its baked beans in French Canada as "Gros Jos" not realizing that's slang for "big breasts"
- KFC mistakenly translated its "Finger-lickin good" tagline to "eat your fingers off" in Chinese
- "Got Milk" campaign was less successful among Latinos since the literal translation was "Are you lactating?"

Source: From K. Weinmann (2011, October 17), "13 Slogans that got hilarious when they were lost in translation." Available at http://www.businessinsider.com/13-hilarious-slogans-lost-in-translation-2011-10.

hear or read. The roles that they play as intermediaries, however, often regulate how they render the original. Tom believes that it is not always appropriate to translate everything that one speaker is saying to another, in exactly the same way, because the potential for misunderstanding due to cultural differences might be too great. Translation is more than merely switching languages; it also involves negotiating cultures. Writer Elisabeth Marx (1999) explains,

> *It is not sufficient to be able to translate—you have to comprehend the subtleties and connotations of the language. Walter Hasselkus, the German chief executive of Rover, gave a good example of this when he remarked: "When the British say that they have a 'slight' problem, I know that it has to be taken seriously." There are numerous examples of misunderstandings between American English and British English, even though they are, at root, the same language. (p. 95)*

It might be helpful to think of translators and interpreters as cultural brokers who must be highly sensitive to the contexts of intercultural communication.

We often assume that anyone who knows two languages can be a translator or an interpreter. Research has shown, however, that high levels of fluency in two languages do not necessarily make someone a good translator or interpreter. The task obviously requires the knowledge of two languages. But that's not enough. Think about all of the people you know who are native English speakers. What might account for why some of them are better writers than others? Knowing English, for example, is a prerequisite for writing in English, but this knowledge does not necessarily make a person a good writer. Because of the complex relationships between people, particularly in intercultural situations, translation and interpretation involve far more than linguistic equivalence, which traditionally has been the focus (see Point of View, p. 242).

With the continued growth and progression of translation apps such as Google Translate, iTranslate 3 (voice to voice), Say hi (voice to text), and Textgrabber (reads signs and menus and translates), many people wonder if we soon will no longer need to teach foreign languages in schools. Language educators think not, and give several reasons: (1) Instant translators aren't always accurate, as you probably already know. (2) Instant translation ignores context, so the sarcastic comment you mean to be a joke is put through an instant translator, the translation might come across as serious or even offensive—distorting your meaning. (3) Of course, instant translation tools do not know all the idioms and slang of most languages, so if you try looking for a "chill" restaurant, you might end up at a place that blasts air conditioning.

While the field of translation studies has much to contribute to intercultural communication, foreign language programs are being eliminated at an alarming rate; a record 651 disappeared in past three years. The decline started with recession and decreasing college enrollment and is continuing, due to fewer language requirements and more emphasis on STEM courses. Perhaps also the worldwide spread of English as lingua franca (Johnson, 2019) (see Point of View, p. 237).

LANGUAGE AND IDENTITY

In the previous chapter, we discussed cultural identity and its complexities. One part of our cultural identity is tied to the language(s) that we speak. As U.S. Americans, we are expected to speak English. If we travel to Nebraska, we assume the people there speak English. We expect Russians to speak Russian, Koreans to speak Korean, and Indonesians to speak Indonesian. But things get more involved, as we noted in Chapter 4, when we consider why Brazilians speak Portuguese, Congolese speak French, and Australians speak English. The relationship between language and culture becomes more complicated when we look at the complexity of cultural identities at home and abroad.

Language and Cultural Group Identity

When Tom was at the Arizona Book Festival recently, a white man held up a book written in Chinese and asked Tom what it was about. "I don't read Chinese," Tom replied. "Well, you should," he retorted and walked away. Two assumptions seem to be

at work here: (1) Anyone who looks Asian must be Chinese, and (2) Asian Americans should be able to speak their ancestral languages. This tension has raised important identity questions for Asian Americans. Writer Henry Moritsugu (1992), who was born and raised in Canada and who later immigrated to the United States, explains:

> *There is no way we could teach our children Japanese at home. We speak English. It wasn't a conscious effort that we did this. . . . It was more important to be accepted. . . . I wish I could speak the language better. I love Japanese food. I love going to Japanese restaurants. Sometimes I see Japanese groups enjoying themselves at karaoke bars . . . I feel definitely Western, more so than Asian. . . . But we look Asian, so you have to be aware of who you are. (p. 99)*

The ability to speak another language can be important in how people view their group membership.

Many Chicana/os also have to negotiate a relationship to Spanish, whether or not they speak the language and 76% of Latinos ages 18–33 say they speak only English at home or "very well" (Krogstad, 2016). Communication scholar Jacqueline Martinez (2000) explains:

> *It has taken a long time for me to come to see and feel my own body as an ethnic body. Absent the capacity to express myself in Spanish, I am left to reach for less tangible traces of an ethnic self that have been buried under layers of assimilation into Anglo culture and practice. . . . Yet still there is a profoundly important way in which, until this body of mine can speak in Spanish, gesture in a "Spanishly" way, and be immersed in Spanish-speaking communities, there will remain ambiguities about its ethnic identification. (p. 44)*

Although some people who migrate to the United States retain the languages of their homelands, many other U.S. American families no longer speak the language of their forebears. Historically, bilingualism was openly discouraged in the United States. Writer Gloria Anzaldúa (1987) recalls how she was discouraged from speaking Spanish:

> *I remember being caught speaking Spanish at recess—that was good for three licks on the knuckles with a sharp ruler. I remember being sent to the corner of the classroom for "talking back" to the Anglo teacher when all I was trying to do was tell her how to pronounce my name. If you want to be American, speak "American." If you don't like it, go back to Mexico where you belong. (p. 53)*

Even today we often hear arguments in favor of making English the official language of the nation. The interconnections between cultural identity and language are indeed strong.

Another intersection between identity and language occurred in 2006, when a controversy arose over the release by some Latino pop stars of a Spanish version of the U.S. national anthem ("Star Spangled Banner"), with somewhat different lyrics ("The time has come to break the chains"), called *Nuestro Himno* (Our Anthem). For the song's producer and singers, it was about trying to help engage immigrants, as a tribute to the United States. For others, the national anthem was a symbol of unity that should be sung only in English. Here, we see the importance of contexts. What many people don't know is that the national anthem was translated into Spanish (and

many other languages) by the Bureau of Education and has been available in those languages since 1919—with no controversy until the issue becomes related to the current immigration debate (Goldstein, 2006).

What about the challenges facing cultural groups whose languages are nearing extinction? Although millions of people speak Chinese, Japanese, and Spanish, some languages are spoken by only a handful of people. Consider that every 14 days, one of the world's nearly 7,000 languages "dies" (Strochlic, 2018). Linguists say that each language is a unique lens, a unique way of viewing the world, and they are increasingly concerned about what is being lost when a language goes extinct. What knowledge is lost forever? In Tuvan (spoken in Republic of Tuva, in southern Siberia), for example, the past is always spoken of as ahead of one, and the future is behind one's back. It makes total sense if you think of it in a Tuvan sort of way: If the future were ahead of you, wouldn't it be in plain view? When language disappears so does significant aspects of cultural diversity. "The disappearance of a language deprives us of knowledge no less valuable than some future miracle drug that may be lost when a species goes extinct. Small languages, more than large ones, provide keys to unlock the secrets of nature, because their speakers tend to live in proximity to the animals and plants around them, and their talk reflects the distinctions they observe" (Rymer, 2012). Many Native American tribes are currently working to save their tribal languages, but they face enormous challenges. Yet it is their culture and identity that are at risk.

The languages we speak and the languages others think we should speak can create barriers in intercultural communication. Why might some U.S. Americans assume that someone whose ancestors came from China continues to speak Chinese, whereas someone whose ancestors came from Germany or Denmark is assumed to no longer speak German or Danish? Here, again, we can see how identity, language, and history create tensions between who we think we are and who others think we are.

Code Switching

Code switching is a technical term in communication that refers to the phenomenon of changing languages, dialects, or even accents. People code switch for several reasons, as shown in Point of View (p. 250).

code switching A technical term in communication that refers to the phenomenon of changing languages, dialects, or even accents.

Linguistics professor Jean-Louis Sauvage (2002) studied the complexity of code switching in Belgium, which involves not only dialects but languages as well. He explains the practical side of code switching:

> *For example, my house was built by a contractor who sometimes resorted to Flemish subcontractors. One of these subcontractors was the electrician. I spoke Dutch to him but had to use French words when I referred to technical notions that I did not completely understand even in French. This was not a problem for the electrician, who knew these terms in Dutch as well as in French but would have been unable to explain them to me in French. (p. 159)*

Given the complex language policies and politics in Belgium, code switching takes on particularly important political meaning. Who code switches and who does not is a frequent source of contestation.

In her work on code switching of Black women, communication scholar Karla Scott (2013) discusses how choice of language style is often strategic as Black women in predominantly white environments are called on to constantly "shift" between white and Black vernacular style, "changing outward behavior, attitude, and tone, and adopting an alternate pose or voice—without thinking" (p. 315). Through discussions in focus groups with 30 Black women, she found that their primary communicative goals were to dispel stereotypes and be seen as competent. This often involves code switching, as one participant describes it, "In communicating with people, I work very hard at using code switching. So I talk proper English that I learned in school, especially in the classroom or around people I attend school with. And I'm learning to avoid certain behaviors, such as resting my hand on my hip or roll my eyes, when in certain environments" (Scott, 2013, p. 320).

There are similar examples of code switching between English and Spanish, as increasing numbers of U.S. Americans speak both languages. Scholar Holly Cashman (2005) investigated how a group of bilingual women code switched during a game of *lotería* (Mexican bingo). She makes the point that code switching does not just demonstrate linguistic competence but, as in Scott's (2000) study, also communicates important information about ethnic identities and social position. Throughout the game, the women's choices to speak Spanish and/or English demonstrated various identifications and social places. When they preferred to speak Spanish, they were identifying inclusively with both English and Spanish speakers. In correcting other's language choices, they were also identifying as not just bilingual, but as arbiters of the spoken language. And in rejecting others' corrections of their language use, they were also asserting certain identifications, as when one woman in refusing another's correction of her Spanish "categorizes herself as 'Chicana,' bringing about a bilingual, oppositional social identity, and rejecting the social structures previously talked into being" (p. 313).

This discussion of code switching and language settings brings up the question of how does a bilingual person decide which language to speak in a setting where there are multiple languages spoken? Is it rude to switch between two languages when some people in the room only understand one language? As our student Liz describes (in the Student Voices box on the following page), this is not always an easy question to answer. A helpful theory here is communication accommodation theory (CAT), discussed in Chapter 2. As you might remember, this theory posits that in some situations individuals change their communication patterns to accommodate others—depending on the situation and the attitude of the speaker toward other people. So, for example, if the situation is a neutral one and the speaker feels positively toward others, they will more likely accommodate others. This seems to be the case in Liz's family. Her father instructed her to accommodate everyone in the situation. Liz's experience at a recent party was different. Here, the Serbian speakers did not want to accommodate Liz. At the Salsa party, she tried to accommodate everyone, but it was difficult and her friends did not follow her lead. What is important to remember is that the outcome of accommodation is usually a positive feeling. However, in some situations (like high threat) speakers may not want to accommodate, may even want to accentuate their linguistic differences, or perhaps, as in Liz's Salsa party experience, the effort of accommodating is too challenging.

STUDENT VOICES

Is it rude to code switch between languages when someone in the room only understands one of the languages?

Growing up in a household that predominately spoke Spanish was challenging when I brought friends over. Not everyone in my family spoke English and not all of my friends spoke Spanish. For as long as I can remember, my father expected me to translate everything that my friends and I said when family members were around us, even if they were not a part of the conversation. My father instilled the importance of respecting people around me by ensuring that everyone was included in the conversation, and to be sensitive to those around me who do not understand the language by giving them a general idea of what was being said.

The first time that I really thought about this was when I attended a dinner at a friend's house. All of the people, excluding myself, were from Serbia. When one of the guests realized that I did not speak Serbian, she said, "Oh, so we will have to speak English all night?" My immediate reaction was that I did not think that everyone had to adjust to my needs. After all, this was their time to share food and conversations in their language.

However, I recently went Salsa dancing with a friend who did not speak Spanish. Knowing that most of the people around us were bilingual, I asked people if they could speak in English so that we did not exclude my friend. Most people would start speaking in English, but then break out into conversations in Spanish, which frustrated me. I ended up interpreting conversations for him and felt bad that he was excluded from the conversation. As I apologized to him, my friend said, "Don't feel bad. It is my fault that I do not speak Spanish."

Reflecting on these situations, I wondered when is it appropriate to code switch between languages when someone in the room only understands one of the languages? Why did I not think it was offensive in a situation where I was the one who did not understand and offensive when it was a friend of mine who did not?

—Liz

LANGUAGE POLITICS AND POLICIES

Nations can enact laws recognizing an official language, such as French in France or Irish in Ireland (despite the fact that more Irish speak English than Irish). Some nations have multiple official languages. For instance, Canada has declared English and French to be the official languages. Here in the United States, there is no official national language, although English is the de facto national language. Yet the state of Hawai'i has two official languages, English and Hawaiian. Other U.S. entities have also declared official languages, such as Guam (Chamorro and English), New Mexico (English and Spanish), and Samoa (English and Samoan). Laws or customs that determine which

language policies
Laws or customs that determine when and where which language will be spoken.

language is spoken where and when are referred to as **language policies.** These policies often emerge from the politics of language use. As mentioned previously, the court of Catherine the Great of Russia used not Russian but French, which was closely tied to the politics of social and economic class. The history of colonialism also influences language policies. Thus, Portuguese is the official national language of Mozambique, and English and French are the official national languages of Cameroon (see Figure 6-4).

Language policies are embedded in the politics of class, culture, ethnicity, and economics. They do not develop as a result of any supposed quality of the language itself. There are different motivations behind the establishment of language policies that guide the status of different languages in a place. Sometimes nations decide on a national language as part of a process of driving people to assimilate into the national culture. If the state wishes to promote assimilation, language policies that encourage everyone to speak the official language and conduct business in that language are promoted. One such group, U.S. English, Inc., has been advocating for the establishment of English as the official language of the United States.

Sometimes nations develop language policies as a way of protecting minority languages so these languages do not disappear. Welsh in Wales is one example, but Irish in Ireland and Frisian in Germany and the Netherlands are legally protected languages. Some language policies recognize the language rights of its citizens wherever they are in the nation. One example of this is Canada (English and

FIGURE 6-4 Tensions between English and French speakers—shown by this photo taken near Montreal's Olympic Stadium—have led to the creation of language policies in Quebec. Some U.S. states have attempted to implement language policies as "English-only" laws. Do these language policies reduce or exacerbate intercultural communication problems? Why do some languages face more difficulty in their survival than others? (*T. K. Nakayama*)

French). Another is Kenya (Swahili and English). Government services are available in either language throughout the nation.

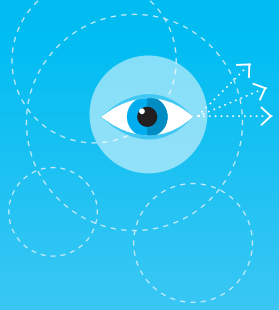
Other language policies are governed by location. In Belgium, Dutch (Flemish) is the official language in Flanders in the north part of the country. French is the official language in Wallonia in the South, and German is the official language in the Eastern Cantons bordering Germany. Thus, if you are boarding a train to go from Antwerp to Liège, you would need to look for "Luik" in the Antwerp train station. When you returned to the train station in Liège to go back, you would look for the train to "Anvers." The signs would not be posted in both languages, except in the Brussels-capital region (the only bilingual part of the nation).

In Quebec, Canada, Law 101—passed in the early 1980s—required all Quebec students to attend French-speaking schools (unless their parents went to an English-speaking school in Quebec). Years later, these former students talked about this experience and how this law is changing Quebec. It's creating a more multicultural identity in contrast to previous years when most immigrants would choose English, leaving French to be spoken only by a small, relatively isolated group (Roy, 2007).

Similarly, while there were some complaints that the "language police" (OQLF -Office québécois de la langue française) went too far when Air Canada was fined because signs and instructions were not provided in French on a recent flight (Air Canada fined, 2019), most citizens agreed with their list of English words that are acceptable to use (e.g., grilled cheese, which is so universally understood, why require *sandwich au fromage fondant* on menus?). There is also some support for their translations for English words that don't exist in French (e.g., hashtag = *mot-clic*), thus providing French speaking Quebeckers (especially unilingual ones) with a reality of words they actually understand (Yakabuski, 2017).

Sometimes language policies are developed with language parity, but the implementation is not equal. In Cameroon, for example, English and French are both official languages, although 247 indigenous languages are also spoken. Although Germany was the initial colonizer of Cameroon, Britain and France took over in 1916—with most of the territory going to France—and these "new colonial masters then sought to impose their languages in the newly acquired territory" (Echu, 2003, p. 34). At independence in 1960, French Cameroon established French as its official language and English became the official language in the former British Cameroon areas once they joined together to form Cameroon. Once united in 1961, Cameroon established both languages as official languages. Because French speakers are far more numerous than English speakers, "French has a de facto dominance over English in the areas of administration, education and the media. In fact, it is not an exaggeration to say that French influence as expressed in language, culture and political policy prevails in all domains" (p. 39). So although Cameroon is officially bilingual, French dominates in nearly all domains because most of the people are French speakers. Thus, "what appears to be a language policy for the country is hardly clearly defined, in spite of the expressed desire to promote English-French bilingualism and protect the indigenous languages" (p. 44). European colonialism has left its mark in this African nation, and the language policy and language realities remain to be worked out.

We can view the development of language policies as reflecting the dialectical tensions between the nation's history and its future, between the various language



POINT *of* VIEW

National Public Radio recently conducted an informal survey, asking people about their experiences in code switching. The survey revealed five primary motivations for code switching:

1. *Lizard brains* take over. Sometimes people just switch to another language or accent without thinking about it. One young Japanese American woman described an experience she had while visiting relatives in Japan. They all went to a popular Japanese horror house and she got so frightened, she dropped her fluent Japanese and started screaming in English (much to the amusement of staff and her relatives).
2. To fit in. People often code switch to talk and act more like those around them. A Spanish teacher in Nashville who picked up the Southern, African American English dialect of his students forgot to switch to standard English when his boss asked him if he had forgotten to return a book and the teacher replied, "Nah, you flaugin' bruh, I put that on your desk yesterday."
3. To get something. People in the service industry report that a Southern accent is a "surefire way to get tips," and almost everyone working in their restaurant starts using "you'all" from day one. Also, an American woman living in Ireland discovered she got better prices as a shopper if she talked in the local Irish accent.
4. To say something in secret. A U.S. woman reported that she and a friend would speak French to each other on their train commute in Chicago if they wanted to comment on other passengers. One day they commented on how good looking a fellow commuter was and he answered in perfect French, "Merci."
5. To help convey a thought. Sometimes only a particular word in a particular language will get the point across. An example was given of staff at a bilingual school. Since nonprofit fundraising is a very American idea, the French speakers tend to switch to English when that's the topic. Similarly, when discussing technology topics—if they learn about a particular software product in English, it's hard to discuss it in the other language.

Source: From M. Thompson, "Five reasons why people code-switch." *NPR Blog—CodeSwitch: Race and Identity* Remixed, April 13, 2013. From http://www.npr.org/sections/codeswitch/2013/04/13/177126294/five-reasons-why-people-code-switch.

communities, and between economic and political relations inside and outside the nation. Language policies can help resolve or exacerbate these tensions.

LANGUAGE AND GLOBALIZATION

In a world in which people, products, and ideas can move easily around the globe, rapid changes are being made in the languages spoken and learned. Globalization has sparked increased interest in some languages while leaving others to disappear,

and with increasing language hybridity, has called into question stability, purity, and authenticity of language (Kramsch, 2014). In addition, communication technologies, along with globalization, have tremendous impact on how languages are used (and misused). Let's look more closely now at these impacts.

Linguists estimate that half of the world's 6,000 languages of today will be gone within the next century. Some language loss, like species loss, is natural and predictable. No language exists forever. Languages are disappearing more quickly today for various reasons. Sometimes, small, unindustrialized communities are forced to choose between their language and participation in the larger world—due to global economic pressures. East Africans speak Swahili; many feel they need to speak English. On the other hand, disappearing languages can make a comeback. Cornish (a language spoken in southwestern England) disappeared in 1777 when the last speaker died. Recently, working from old written documents, descendents of Cornish speakers began to learn the language and speak it; now there are more than 2,000 Cornish speakers. Modern Hebrew is another example. For centuries, it was a religious and scholarly language; in the late 19th century, it was revived in Palestine and is now taught in the schools and is the common language of Israeli citizens.

Global forces can sometimes produce changes in language use, like producing a new dialect—the *multicultural London English,* which is emerging among the young in England and replacing the traditional cockney. Or Colonial powers developing a new dialect to communicate with the indigenous people they conquered, a dialect eventually transformed by its speakers into a symbol of resistance (see Point of View, p. 265).

The dream of a common international language has long marked Western ways of thinking. Ancient Greeks viewed the world as filled with Greek speakers or those who were *barbaroi* (barbarians). The Romans attempted to establish Latin and Greek, which led to the subsequent establishment of Latin as the learned language of Europe. Latin was eventually replaced by French, which became the **lingua franca** of Europe. More recently, English has become the lingua franca of international communication.

lingua franca A commonly shared language that is used as a medium of communication between people of different languages.

Having a common language also facilitates intercultural communication, but it can also create animosity among those who must learn the other's language. Dominique Noguez (1998) explains:

> *In these language affairs, as in many other moral or political affairs—tolerance, for example—is the major criteria for reciprocity. Between comparable languages and equal countries, this must be: I speak and learn your language and you speak and learn mine. Otherwise, it's sadomasochism and company—the sadist being simply the one with the gall to say to another: "I am not speaking your language, therefore speak mine!" This is what Anglo-Saxons have been happily doing since at least 1918. (p. 234)*
>
> *(En ces affaires de langue, comme en bien d'autres affaires morales ou politiques—la tolérance, par exemple—le critère majeur, c'est la réciprocité. Entre langues comparables et pays égaux, ce devrait être: je parle et enseigne votre langue et vous parlez et enseignez la mienne. Autrement, c'est sadomasochisme et compagnie—le sadique étant tout simplement celui qui*

l'aplomb de declarer à l'autre: "Je ne parle pas votre langue, parlez donc la mienne!" C'est ce que font, avec assez de bonheur, les Anglo-Saxons depuis au moins 1918.)

What is the relationship between our four touchstones and this contemporary linguistic situation? That is, how do culture, communication, power, and context play out in the domination of English? First, the intimate connections between language and culture mean that the diffusion of English is tied to the spread of U.S. American culture around the world. Is this a new form of colonialism? If we consider issues of power, what role does the United States play in the domination of English on the world scene? How does this marginalize or disempower those who are not fluent in English in intercultural communication? What kinds of resentment might be fostered by forcing people to recognize their disempowerment?

In what intercultural contexts is it appropriate to assume that others speak English? For English speakers, this is a particularly unique context. Latvians, for example, cannot attend international meetings and assume that others will speak Latvian, and Albanians will have difficulty transacting international trade if they assume that others know their language.

This brings up the question of what languages U.S. Americans should be studying in order to communicate better with others in global contexts. For many years, the most studied languages in high schools and colleges in the United States were French, Spanish, and German. However, some suggest that, in order for the United States to remain a key player on the global stage, its citizens should be studying Chinese and Arabic. Experts observe that China is very close to overtaking United States as the predominant actor in the major power system.

In his study of the developing use of English in Switzerland, Christof Demont-Heinrich (2005) focused on Switzerland in global and local contexts, cultural and national identity issues, power, and communication. The nation recognizes four national languages—French, German, Italian, and Romansh. Three of these are recognized as official languages—German, French, and Italian—which means that all national government materials are available in the three official languages. Some of the power differences among these language communities are reflected in the demographics from the 2000 Census in which "63.9% of respondents named German, 19.5% listed French, 6.6% claimed Italian, and 0.5% named Romansh as their first language" (p. 72). In this context, English has become more influential, not only among the banking and financial sectors but increasingly in "consumer and pop culture" (p. 74). Recently, at the initiation of the Zürich canton, a proposal was made to allow English to be the first foreign language taught in school (rather than one of the national languages), and eight other German-speaking cantons quickly aligned themselves with this idea. The Swiss Conference of Cantonal Ministers of Education decided that by 2012 all Swiss students must study two foreign languages, but only one must be a national language. Given the value of English in the global economy and the use of English to communicate with other Swiss, one can see why there would be support for the Zürich position. Given the importance of Swiss national identity and their multilingual identity that is shaped by the languages spoken by other Swiss, one can also see why some French-speaking politicians preferred a

POINT *of* VIEW

Colonial histories have influenced how people communicate. In Brazil, colonialists developed their own language to communicate across the many indigenous communities they colonized, but today this language is used as a tool of resistance. As you read the following, consider these questions: how can a language serve political ends? What are the politics of speaking English in the world today?

According to a New York Times report, there is one language, thriving today that was artificially constructed more than 500 years ago. That language is the "lingua geral" (general language), now spoken only in a remote Amazon region where Brazil, Colombia, and Venezuela intersect.

It was developed by the colonizing Portuguese when they arrived in Brazil in the 1500s, as a way to communicate with the indigenous people they had conquered—who spoke more than 700 different languages. With the help of educated Jesuits priests, they constructed a linguistic mixture of Indian, Portuguese, and African words and called it called "língua geral," or the "general language." They then mandated that (only) this language be spoken by all the colonized peoples.

Over the centuries, the language mostly died out except in one remote area where it not only survived but is actually making a comeback. It is now called Nheengatú and is spoken by almost 30,000 people. In fact, in one municipality, São Gabriel da Cachoeira, the local council voted to recognize it as one of the official languages, along with Portuguese and two local Indian languages. This means that Nheengatú can now be used in legal matters and taught in local schools.

While the language was originally the language of the colonizers, in modern times, the language acquired a very different significance. As the dominion of Portuguese advanced and those who originally imposed the language instead sought its extinction, Nheengatú became "a mechanism of ethnic, cultural and linguistic resistance," said Persida Miki, a professor of education at the Federal University of Amazonas.

Source: From L. Rohter, "Language born of colonialism thrives again in Amazon," *The New York Times*, August 28, 2005, p. A6.

policy where one of the other national languages would be the first foreign language. Zürich and other cantons are now proposing a ballot initiative that would "require just one foreign language to be taught, ideally English, at the primary school level" (p. 76), which would leave the other national language to be taught in secondary school. Demont-Heinrich concludes by noting that Romansh is likely headed for linguistic extinction, but what will happen to Switzerland? Can Swiss national identity be maintained with English? And what about the world? "Can such a colossal human social order sustain the diverse forms of human linguistic expression" (p. 81), or must humanity reduce its linguistic expression to a few dominant languages that facilitate economic trade? In the era of globalization, where economic growth is driven by external relations and trade, should we be studying Chinese?

INTERNET RESOURCES

https://www.newseum.org/todaysfrontpages/
This website provides a global view on news events, with links to the first pages of various newspapers from all over the world.

https://www.linguisticsociety.org/sites/default/files/lsa-stmt-language-rights.pdf
This website presents language rights information from the Linguistic Society of America. This information is not provided to counter English-only policies, but it is a strong advocate of a multilingual society.

https://www.babelfish.com/
This website is an example of one type of translation services. The "Babel" feature translates from a great number of languages to a great number of languages. What opportunities and challenges does automated translation present for intercultural communication?

SUMMARY

- The social science approach focuses on individual aspects of language. The interpretive approach focuses on contextual aspects of language. The critical approach emphasizes the role of power in language use.
- There are different positions on the relationship between language and our perceptions. The nominalist position feels that our perception is not shaped by the language we speak. The relativist position, represented by the Sapir–Whorf hypothesis, argues that our perception is determined by the language we speak. The qualified relativist position argues that language influences how we perceive.
- Communication styles can be high context or low context, more direct or indirect, or more elaborate or understated.
- Interactive media influences language use and communication style in several ways.
- Slang and humor are two additional variations in language use.
- Co-cultural groups may use one of three orientations to dealing with dominant groups—assimilation, accommodation, or separation. Within each of these approaches are nonassertive, assertive, and aggressive strategies. Each of these strategies comes with benefits and costs to the co-cultural individual.
- We use language from our social positions, and the power of our language use and labels comes from that social position.
- People have various reasons for learning or not learning new languages.
- People can be bilingual or multilingual, and they may engage in code switching or changing languages in different situations, depending on the contexts.

- Translation refers to expressing what was said in another language in a written text. Interpretation is the same process but is oral rather than written.
- Language policies are instituted with different goals. Sometimes language policies are meant to encourage assimilation into a language and national identity. Sometimes language policies are meant to provide protection to minority languages. Sometimes language policies regulate language use in different parts of a nation.
- Globalization, along with technology, has affected how languages are used or not used. Globalization has meant that English has not only become more important worldwide but also has created other intercultural communication conflicts.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Why is it important for intercultural communication scholars to study both language and discourse?
2. What is the relationship between our language and the way we perceive reality?
3. What are some cross-cultural variations in language use and communication style?
4. In what ways do social media and online communication affect language use and communication style?
5. What aspects of context influence the choice of communication style?
6. What does a translator or an interpreter need to know to be effective?
7. Why is it important to know the social positions of individuals and groups involved in intercultural communication?
8. Why do some people say that we should not use labels to refer to people but should treat everybody as individuals? Do you agree?
9. Why do people have such strong reactions to language policies, as in the "English-only" movement?
10. In what ways is the increasing and widespread use of English around the world both a positive and a negative change for U.S. Americans?

ACTIVITIES

1. *Regional Language Variations.* Meet in small groups with other class members and discuss variations in language use in different regions of the United States (accent, vocabulary, and so on). Identify perceptions that are associated with these variations.

2. *"Foreigner" Labels.* Meet in small groups with other class members and generate a list of labels used to refer to people from other countries who come to the United States—for example, "immigrants" and "aliens." For each label, identify a general connotation (positive, negative, mixed). Discuss how connotations of these words may influence our perceptions of people from other countries. Would it make a difference if we referred to them as "guests" or "visitors"?
3. *Values and Language.* Although computer-driven translations have improved dramatically over earlier attempts, translation is still intensely cultural. Communication always involves many layers of meaning, and when you move between languages, there are many more opportunities for misunderstanding. Try to express some important values that you have (e.g., freedom of the press) on this website, and see how they are retranslated in five different languages: www.tashian.com/multibabel/

KEY WORDS

bilingual (238)
co-cultural groups (229)
code switching (245)
communication style (221)
equivalency (240)
high-context communication (221)
interlanguage (239)
interpretation (240)
language acquisition (220)
language policies (248)
lingua franca (251)
low-context communication (221)
metamessage (221)
multilingual (238)
nominalist position (218)
qualified relativist position (220)
relativist position (218)
Sapir–Whorf hypothesis (218)
social positions (233)
source text (240)
target text (240)
translation (240)

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