

- A prominent taxonomy of diverse culture patterns that explains both perceptual and communication differences is Hofstede's Values Dimension, which includes (1) individualism and collectivism, (2) uncertainty avoidance, (3) power distance, (4) masculinity and femininity, and (5) long-term and short-term orientation.
- The Kluckhohn, Kluckhohn, and Strodtbeck Value Orientation taxonomy includes (1) human nature, (2) the perception of nature, (3) time, (4) activity, and (5) relationships.
- In Hall's Context Orientation, *high context* and *low context* describe the degree to which individuals rely on internalized information.
- For Ting-Toomey, face and facework take different forms and are valued differently across cultures. Face is a function of group affiliation in collectivistic cultures and is self-derived in individualistic cultures. In conflict situations, collectivistic cultures focus on other-face and mutual face, while individualistic cultures focus on self-face.

ACTIVITIES

1. In small groups, list the American cultural values mentioned in this chapter. Try to think of other values that are not included in the text. Then find examples from American advertising campaigns that illustrate these values. For example, the advertising slogan from an athletic-shoe manufacturer, "Just do it," reflects the American value of accomplishment.
2. Working with others in a small group and using Hofstede's value dimensions, make a list of behaviors found in American culture that reflect individualism, uncertainty avoidance, and femininity.
3. Working in a small group, make a list of typical American behaviors that relate to evil, good and evil, and good. How widespread are these behaviors within the culture?
4. Examine your behavior and determine how well you fit into the various degrees of time orientation.
5. Think about a recent conflict situation in which you participated (e.g., an argument with your significant other, your parents, or a stranger). What communication strategies did you use to give, maintain, or take face?

DISCUSSION IDEAS

1. How does learning about one's culture help in understanding other cultures?
2. What differences in behavior are exhibited by people who come from cultures that have different activity orientations?
3. Examine the concept of high- and low-context cultures. What problems can you anticipate when you are communicating with someone who holds a different context orientation?
4. How does cultural diversity in social perception affect the intercultural communication process?
5. What cultural values help explain why face is more important in Asian societies than in the United States?

Language and Culture: The Essential Partnership

Language shapes the way we think and determines what we think about.

BENJAMIN LEE WHORF

If we spoke a different language, we would perceive a somewhat different world.

LODWIG WITGENSTEIN

Language is the roadmap of a culture. It tells you where its people came from and where they are going.

RITA MAE BROWN

Obviously, language is at the core of human interaction. It enables us to exchange abstract ideas, setting us apart from other animal species by allowing us to say or write down abstract ideas. As we noted in Chapter 1, this allows us to pass culture from one generation to the next. It was largely through language that you learned your cultural values and behaviors. Additionally, your name is integral to your personal identity and your first language is the cornerstone of your national identity.¹ Language is a particularly important aspect of studying intercultural communication. By definition, in practically every intercultural communication interaction at least one person will be speaking their second language. The exception is when you are communicating with members of some co-cultures, such as the African-American, gay, or disabled communities. Even then, you will likely encounter unfamiliar, specialized English language usage such as argot and slang.

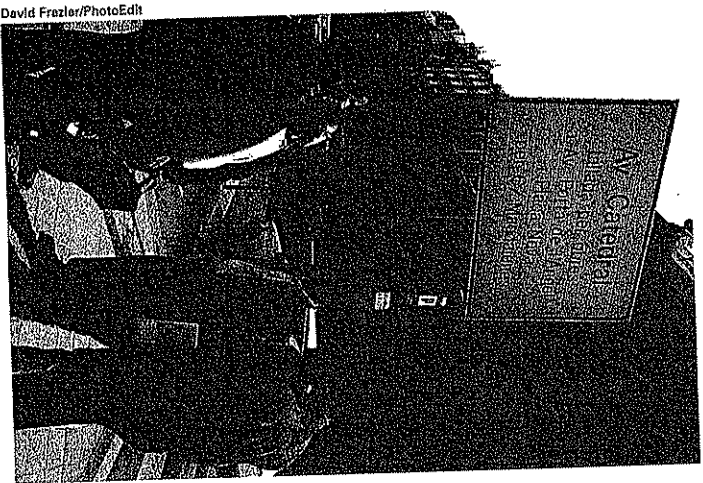
The importance of language in contemporary society is increasing as a result of globalization and immigration, which continue to bring people from different cultures together on an unprecedented scale. And these people very often speak different languages, which gives rise to broad changes in societal requirements. The results of current language diversity in both the United States and internationally are illustrated in the following examples:

- In addition to English, California's elementary schools must deal with over three hundred languages.²

- California's basic driver's license test is administered in thirty-two languages, ranging from Amharic to Vietnamese.³
- Because of increased numbers of immigrants who do not speak English, U.S. hospitals are employing videoconferencing systems to connect with translators in distant locations. One interpreting service, Language Access Network, provides 24/7 access to 150 languages.⁴
- For some 5.5 million U.S. students, English is a second language.⁵
- The perceived need to learn English is causing large numbers of Korean mothers and children to relocate so the children can attend schools in English-speaking countries, while the fathers remain in Korea.⁶
- In response to China's increased international prominence, there are around forty million people in the world currently studying Mandarin Chinese. In U.S. universities, the number of students studying Mandarin rose to over 51,600 in 2006, an increase of 51 percent from 2002. In 2007, over three thousand U.S. high school students participated in Chinese-language Advanced Placement tests. Approximately five hundred U.S. primary and secondary schools were offering Mandarin in 2008, a twofold increase from 2004.⁷

With these few examples, we hope we have convinced you of the growing number of people from different cultures speaking different languages, who are interacting with

People in many cultures derive a great deal of pleasure from the art of conversation.



David Frazier/PhotoEdIt

each other. For this reason, it is important to understand how culture and language complement each other. In this chapter we will examine what language is, what it does, and how it reflects cultural values. We will also look at the role of language in different intercultural communication venues, including the Internet.

SOCIAL AND CULTURAL FUNCTIONS OF LANGUAGE

Communicative Exchange

Using a language of one kind or another is a daily occurrence for nearly everyone in the world. You chat with friends, respond to questions in class, use a cell phone to call home, talk with coworkers, listen to music on your iPod, or tune in to a TV show. Reading advertisements, perusing study material, surfing the Internet, taking lecture notes, sending text messages, and many other seemingly mundane activities are all important parts of your daily schedule. In order to accomplish any of these activities, you must use language. Without language, you would be unable to speak, read, write, listen to others, or even talk to yourself—that is, to think. In effect, you would be unable to communicate without language.

But language also serves important communicative functions other than directly expressing and exchanging ideas and thoughts with another person or persons. For example, language allows you to verbally convey your emotions and relieve stress by simply uttering a phrase (*lang it*) or a swear word (*damn*). You use language to express pain (*ouch*), elation (*great!*), disappointment (*oh no!*), and surprise (*what the...?*).⁸ Often, you use these or similar expressions almost involuntarily and even when no one is around. Language is also used to invoke assistance from the supernatural. A Jewish rabbi praying at the Wailing (or Western) Wall in Jerusalem, a Buddhist priest chanting in Kiyomizu-dera temple in Kyoto, Japan, a Mongolian shaman mumbling incantations while in a trance at a remote location on the vast Mongolian steppe, the Pope blessing the crowd gathered in St. Peter's Square, a Muslim attending Friday prayers at the Al-Masjid al-Haram (Holy Mosque) in Mecca, Saudi Arabia, and a child quietly reciting the Lord's Prayer during Sunday school at a small Protestant church in western Wyoming are all using language in an appeal to a greater power.

Language and Identity

We discussed identity in Chapter 4 and briefly mentioned its relation to language at the beginning of this chapter. Language, however, plays a much greater role in forming and expressing identity than you might realize. Remember the heated controversy a few years ago over making English the official language of the United States, which many consider a response to the rising tide of illegal immigrants. During General Franco's autocratic rule of Spain (1939–1979), Spanish was made the country's official language and other languages were prohibited. However, after Franco's death and the restoration of democracy, regional languages such as Catalan, in Catalonia, and Basque, in the Basque region, began to be spoken again. Today, approximately 17 percent of the population speaks Catalan and 2 percent use Basque.⁹ While they represent only 22 percent of the Canadian population,¹⁰ French speakers have made French “the official language of Québec.”¹¹ In Wales, part of the United Kingdom, identity is closely

CONSIDER THIS

To see how language can vary with age group, watch a video of a movie from the 1940s, '50s or '60s. Listen to the dialogue, especially the slang, and compare it with the terminology you use today. Is it understandable? Does it sound strange?

ity. Think for a minute about the stereotypical southern drawl, the variety of accents encountered in metropolitan areas of Boston and New York City, or the surfer's lingo heard in southern California. Each of these different linguistic conventions contributes to the user's regional identity.

Language usage also serves to organize people into groups according to factors such as age, gender, and even socio-income level. The terminology one uses can easily mark one as young or old. Older adults may use "service station" to refer to what younger people call a "gas station" or "filling station." Recall how some of the words your grandparents used seemed "old fashioned." Additionally, language is part of your gender identity. Women and men use language differently, both in word choice and behaviorally. Among English speakers, women tend to ask more questions, listen more, and use supportive speech behaviors. Men, on the other hand, are more prone to interrupt and to assert their opinion, and are poor listeners.¹⁴ In Japan, the difference between men's and women's language is even more pronounced. Women employ more honorific terms and the two genders often use a different word to say the same thing. Language has also been found to characterize people into varying social and economic levels. As Finegan reports, a series of studies examining the speaking habits of people in the United States, England, Canada, and Argentina found variations based on "different socioeconomic status."¹⁵

Language and Unity

A common language lets individuals form groups and engage in cooperative efforts on both large and small scales. A shared vocabulary allows a group to record and preserve past events, albeit often with a selective interpretation. These recordings provide the group with a communal history which, when passed on to new generations, becomes a unifying force. The deeds of previous generations become an important means to socialize and enculturate children with the group's enduring values and normative behaviors. In other words, language helps us to maintain a record of traditional expectations, which binds us together. We must add, unfortunately, that the unity created by a shared language can also become a divisive force when people start to identify too strongly with their native tongue and feel threatened by others speaking a different language. The maintenance of social relations also relies on language for more than

tied to Welsh, the ancestral tongue.¹² Language can also be used to construct a new national identity, as was done with Hebrew in Israel in 1948, when there was an urgent need to unify extremely diverse groups from many different nations who spoke a variety of languages.¹³

Ethnic identity is also derived, in part, from language. Black English Vernacular (BEV), or Ebonics, helps create and reinforce a sense of mutual identity among African Americans. Dialects or accents can also be a part of one's identity.

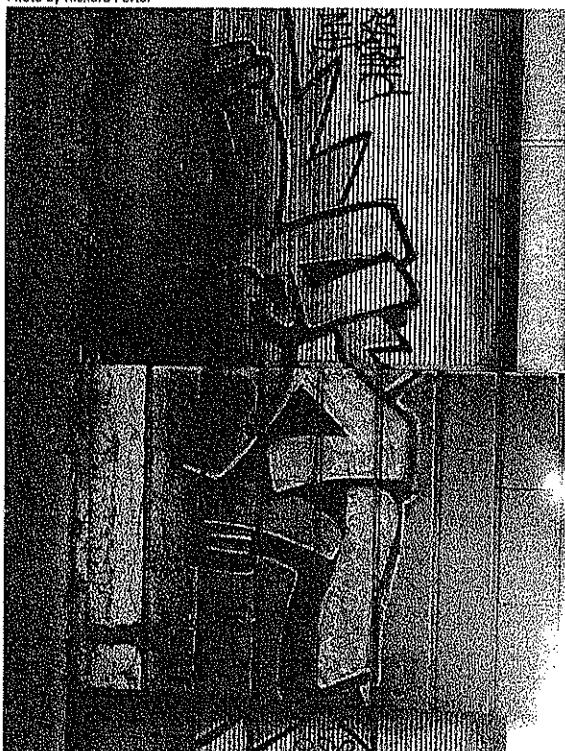
communicating messages. For example, the type of language used to express intimacy, respect, affiliation, formality, distance, and many other conditions can help you sustain a relationship or disengage from one.¹⁶

LANGUAGE AND CULTURE

What Is Language?

At the most basic level, language is merely a set of shared symbols or signs that a cooperative group of people has mutually agreed to use to create meaning. The relationship between the selected sign and the agreed meaning is quite often arbitrary.¹⁷ We can easily illustrate this concept by looking at some of the varied symbols used by different cultures to identify a familiar household pet. In Finland, they have settled on *kissa*, but in Germany, *katze* has been chosen, and Swahili speakers use *paka*. The Japanese decided on *neko* (猫), Tagalog speakers in the Philippines prefer *pusa*, and in Spanish-speaking countries, *gato* has been selected. In the English language, cat is the term used. As you can see, none of the words has any relation to the actual characteristics of a cat. They are simply arbitrary symbols that each language group uses to call to mind the common domestic pet, or sometimes a larger wild animal such as a tiger, lion, or leopard. These differences in symbols also extend to how people of a cultural group hear natural sounds.¹⁸ For instance, in the United States, pigs are heard to make an "ink, oink" sound, but for the Japanese the sound is heard as "bu-bu-". The noise made when someone is walking in beach sandals is "flip-flop" in the United States but "petu-petu"

Photo by Richard Porter



Symbol systems can take a variety of forms.

REMEMBER THIS

A language is a set of symbols that a cultural group has agreed to use to create meaning. The symbols and their meanings are often arbitrary.

In Japan. When you applaud an outstanding performance in the United States, the sound is "clap-clap," but in Japan, it's "pachi-pachi."

It is also common to find significant differences within a major language group. You have probably noticed that the people from various regions of the United States may refer to things that are unfamiliar to you. Many people

in the southern United States eat "grits" (coarsely ground cornmeal) for breakfast, while someone in Rhode Island may cook off in the afternoon with a "cabine" (milk shake), and at a luau in Hawaii, people may eat "lomi-lomi" salmon (a salad made of raw salmon, tomatoes, and onions). Many regional expressions, especially along the eastern seaboard of the United States, are a reflection of the different early groups of English-speaking immigrants who colonized the United States.¹⁹ While English can vary within national boundaries, more prominent differences, such as pronunciation, spelling, and terminology, can be found when comparing English-speaking countries such as Australia, England, and the United States. For example, an Australian may refer to a cup of tea as a "cuppa," and the United States also pronounce the "ay" sound as "ai." This can lead to confusion, as well as consternation, when someone from Sidney asks his friend in Los Angeles how she will celebrate "Mother's Day." A comparison of common terms used in the United States and Australia is presented in Table 6.1.

Pronunciation differences, or accents, between the English-speaking countries are a product of early immigration and the natural evolution of the language. Rubenstein provides a clear explanation of this process:

Again, geographic concepts help explain the reason for the differences. From the time of their arrival in North America, colonists began to pronounce words differently from the British. Such divergence is normal, for interaction between the two groups was largely confined to exchange of letters and other printed matter rather than direct speech.²⁰

TABLE 6.1 U.S. English and Australian English Comparative Terms

AMERICAN ENGLISH	AUSTRALIAN ENGLISH
Ranch	Station
Heard (of cattle)	Mob
Round up (of cattle)	Muster
Pasture	Paddock
Cowboy/Ranch hand	Sockman/jackaroo
(Baby) pacifier	Dummy
Garbage dump	Tip
Trash can	Bin
Case of beer	Slab of beer
Shopping cart	Shopping trolley
Jelly-O	Jelly
Diapers	Nappies
(Car) trunk	Boot
(Car) hood	Bonnet

However, variations in spelling between American English and that used in England were the result of a calculated effort to create a new national identity and distance the new colonies from ties with England. When Noah Webster sat down to write his early American dictionary, the underlying objective was to "create a uniquely American dialect of English."²¹

Of course, English is not the only language to have significant deviations across international borders. There are numerous differences in spelling between the Portuguese used in Portugal and that used in Brazil and the former Portuguese colonies in Africa. However, in a move to eliminate disparities and standardize the language, in 2008 Portugal's parliament "adopted a widely contested standardization that requires hundreds of words to be spelled the Brazilian way."²²

Language Variations

In addition to the differences discussed above, cultures are also characterized by a number of other language variations, some of which are discussed below.

ACCENT

As we mentioned earlier, accents are simply variations in pronunciation that occur when people are speaking the same language. These are often a result of geographical or historical differences, such as those among English speakers, which we discussed above. In the United States, you often hear regional accents characterized as "Southern," "New England," or "New York." Additionally, someone using English as a second language may have a noticeable accent, and it can sometimes be associated with a specific country, such as Germany or India.

DIALECT

In addition to pronunciation variations that characterize accents, dialects are distinguished by differences in vocabulary, grammar, and even punctuation.²³ Black English Vernacular, which we referred to earlier, represents a very distinct dialect in the United States. The Japanese, often considered a homogeneous culture, have a number of dialects, and some, like Kago-shima-ben and Okinawa-ben in the south, are extremely difficult for outsiders to understand. Chinese is usually considered to have eight separate major dialects (Cantonese, Mandarin, Hakka, etc.), which are bound by a common writing system but are mutually unintelligible when spoken. Indeed, some scholars consider the dialects as separate languages.²⁴

CONSIDER THIS

Unfortunately, cultures sometimes ascribe behavioral or intellectual characteristics to different accents. For example, what characteristics do you associate with a slow Southern drawl or a rapid Brooklyn accent? What mental images come to mind when you hear someone speaking English with an obvious Spanish or Italian accent? How have media stereotypes influenced your perception of accents?

ARGOT

Argot is a private vocabulary peculiar to a co-culture or group. In the United States, many individuals employ a specialized vocabulary that identifies them as a member of a particular co-culture or group, such as prisoners or those engaged in criminal activities, gay men, street gangs, and professional or sporting groups. Members of these groups may employ a specialized vocabulary to obscure the real meaning, or to create a sense of identity. While technically an argot, professional terminology is often referred to as *jargon*.²⁵ Workers in vocational fields such as medicine, engineering, or computer science make extensive use of professional jargon. The sports world is also filled with jargon specific to each particular type of athletic activity.

SLANG

Slang designates those terms, used in instances of extreme informality, which serve as a "means of marking social or linguistic identity."²⁶ Slang can be regionally based, associated with a co-culture, or used by groups engaged in a specific endeavor. Young Japanese provide us an example of regional slang. In the Tokyo area, McDonald's (*Maku Donarudo*) is referred to as *Maku*, but further to the west, in Osaka, it becomes *Makudo*. And in both locations, Starbucks is *Sutaba*. The word "dude" can help us understand slang in both locations, Starbucks is *Sutaba*. Originally, "dude" was a derogatory term used by identifiable with a particular endeavor. Later, it became popular among the rural inhabitants to refer to someone from the city. Later, it became popular among the early Southern California surfing community and then spread to the general population, where it is now commonly used to address or refer to another person.

BRANDING

Corporate marketing has created a phenomenon, referred to as *branding*, that frequently transcends language differences. Branding is the use of a corporate name or symbol (i.e., a logo) to prominently identify a product or create a widely recognized image. Globalization has resulted in many major "brands" being recognized around the world. Symbols such as McDonald's golden arches, Nike's "swoosh," the Starbucks mermaid, or the distinctive Mercedes-Benz three-pointed star in a circle, along with numerous other logos like those of Yahoo!, Google, or Coca Cola, are immediately recognized by millions of people around the world, irrespective of the language they speak.

The Symbiosis of Language and Culture

We are in agreement with Salaman's statement that "human culture in its great complexity could not have developed and is unthinkable without the aid of language."²⁷ The reason they are linked is simple: they work together in a symbiotic relationship that ensures the existence and continuation of each. In order to have a culture, language is needed so group members can share knowledge of beliefs, values, and behaviors and engage in communal endeavors. In turn, culture is needed to organize disparate individuals into a cohesive group so those beliefs, values, behaviors, and communal activities can develop. Thus, it is readily apparent that language and culture are inseparable. Without both, you would almost certainly not be enjoying the lifestyle you have today. Take

A. Ramey/PhotoEdit



Language diversity is an important matter of concern in the United States.

CONSIDER THIS

There are a variety of Japanese words used to describe rice, which many Japanese people eat two or three times each day. Here are just a few of the terms:

me—rice growing in the field	moni—rice with the husk still on
genmai—unpolished (brown) rice	home—uncooked white rice (e.g. at the store)
shumai—rice harvested after year	komai—rice ready to eat last year
gohan—steamed glutinous rice	okayu—rice gruel
okoge—scorched rice	

Try to think of some things in your own culture that can be referred to by a wide selection of different words or phrases. (Hint: start with automobile.)

in Munich can use more than seventy words to talk about beer; the Aymara Indians of Bolivia have over two hundred words to refer to potatoes, their primary source of food; and the Nuer tribe in southern Sudan has over four hundred words for discussing cattle, which provide their livelihood.²⁹ And it is easy to imagine that Arabic has few words to describe the characteristics of a reindeer, while Sami, the language of the traditional reindeer-herding culture in the northern parts of Norway, Finland, and Sweden, probably has an extremely limited vocabulary for discussing caribou.

This concept of the symbiotic relationship between culture and language was ably summed up by Carroll when he said, "Insofar as languages differ in the ways they encode objective experience, language users tend to sort out and distinguish experiences differently according to the categories provided by their respective languages."³⁰ In the next section we draw on Carroll's insight in an effort to demonstrate how language can reflect the broader traits that characterize a cultural group.

LANGUAGE AS A REFLECTION OF CULTURAL VALUES

In the previous chapter, we discussed in detail what are interchangeably called *value dimensions*, *cultural patterns*, *cultural orientations*, or *cultural characteristics*. Regardless of which of these terms you decide to use, they all refer to the interrelated orientations that help us understand the beliefs, values, and behaviors of a culture. These orientations can also be reflected in the content and use of a culture's language. In this section, we will contrast American English and Japanese in an attempt to demonstrate some selected value dimensions. There are several reasons for comparing American English and Japanese. The two nations' economies are intertwined, U.S.-Japan security cooperation is the linchpin of peacekeeping in the Pacific, and the two languages are those most studied by your authors. We contend, however, that an examination of other languages would reveal similar findings to those discussed below, and in some instances we will include examples from other languages.

High and Low Context

In Chapter 5, we discussed Edward T. Hall's concept of high- and low-context cultures and told you that Japan was considered to be a high-context culture and the United States was low-context. This classification becomes readily apparent in the Japanese language, which contains many words having identical pronunciation but quite different meanings. For example, *kita* can have two distinct meanings: One is "to hear or listen" (i.e., *minusan kite kudasai* = everyone please listen), and the other meaning is "to ask" (i.e., *senset ni kite kudasai* = please ask the teacher). Both are pronounced the same way and written with the same ideograph. In conversation, the listener must determine the meaning from the context. *Sumimasen* is even more context dependent, as it can mean "excuse me," "sorry," or "thank you," or can be used to attract someone's attention. Moreover, it is always written the same way. *Orai* is yet another word that has dual meanings ("slow" or "late") but is written and pronounced identically.

This high context nature of the Japanese language is, according to Takemoto, a result of the nation's early history:

Japanese is a language which was formed and developed by a people who had lived self-sufficiently in a closed society since prehistoric times. Being generally isolated from the

other groups of inhabitants of Japan, the members of each small triangular community knew one another exceedingly well in every respect. Family life as well as social life, in such a small secluded society, was more or less routine, and the smallest amount of language must have been required for mutual understanding. That is why in Japan there has been a persistent tendency to believe that verbal language is not necessarily the best medium for enhancing human understanding, and preference has always been given to non-verbal communication.³¹

We do not mean to imply that there are no English language words that are written and pronounced in the same way, requiring the receiver to use the context to determine the intended meaning. The word "lead," for example, can be interpreted as a metal or an act of leading someone or something. "Magazine" can be interpreted as something you read or a place where explosives are stored. There are other examples, of course, but the number is small in comparison to the Japanese language. The high-context character of Japanese was best summed up by a native-speaking Japanese language instructor: "We are always listening to what was said before and what was said after."³²

As we explained in the previous chapter, a high-context culture, such as Japan, will often place more emphasis on how something is said rather than what is said. For example, during a business dinner in the United States, the host may suggest, "Shall we have some wine with dinner?" In Japan, however, the suggestion may be vague and imbedded in a statement or question like "Sake goes well with many Japanese dishes," or "Do they have Japanese sake in America?"

High and Low Power Distance

Power distance, or how a culture accepts status differentials among the population, can also be exhibited in a country's language. As you will recall, the United States is a low-power distance culture and organizational hierarchy is normally rather flat. Workers consider each other more or less as equals, regardless of the position held. For

example, titles are usually not widely used, especially after first meetings, except for high government officials, medical doctors, and religious figures. The relationship between U.S. corporate employees is usually conducted on a first-name basis, and referring to someone by their position (e.g., President Smith, General Manager Jones, etc.) is simply not done.

Japan, on the other hand, is a high-power distance culture and titles are a part of daily life, even among close friends and immediate family members. The company president is referred to as *Shachō san* (Mr. President), and much further down the corporate hierarchy, the person in the first level of management is called *Kachō san* (Mr. Section

IMAGINE THIS

Among Japanese students, when an underclassman addresses an upperclassman, they ordinarily use the term *sempai*. This identifies the individuals' respective status and marks one as a superior and the other as a subordinate. Thus, Ms. Yamada, a sophomore, would address Mr. Ito, a junior, as *Ito sempai*. Think for a moment about how you could use English to show your status when addressing freshmen and sophomores, and juniors and seniors, in a U.S. university.

TABLE 6.2 Japanese Suffix Terms Used with an Individual's Name

TERM	USE	EXAMPLE
Last name plus <i>sensei</i>	Used by students to address their teacher. Also used with doctors and political figures	Yamada <i>sensei</i>
Last name plus <i>sanmu</i>	Used by a junior to address someone much higher in status or a customer.	Yamada <i>sanmu</i>
Last name plus <i>san</i>	Most commonly used title to show respect.	Yamada <i>san</i>
First or last name plus <i>kun</i>	Used by a senior to address a junior.	Yuki <i>kun</i>
First or last name plus <i>chan</i>	Also used among close friends	Yamada <i>kun</i>
	Used to address girls and small children	Yuki <i>chan</i>
		Yamada <i>chan</i>

Note: All but the last of these suffixes are gender neutral; *san* can be translated as "Mr." or "Ms." as required by the situation.

Chief). First names are not normally used, as the Japanese prefer to use last names followed by a suffix term that is determined by the type or level of the relationship. Professor Hiroshi Suzuki, for example, would be called *Suzuki sensei* by his students. Table 6.2 sorts these suffix terms most often used among the Japanese.

When talking to a third person, Japanese children refer to their parents with the terms *chichi* (father) and *haha* (mother). However, when addressing their parents directly, the more formal terms *otōsan* (father) and *okaasan* (mother) are used. Status difference is also marked by the use of reference terms that designate the individual's birth order position within the family. For example, *ichiji* is used to refer to one's older brother, and the younger brother is *otōto*. Likewise, older (ane) and younger (imōto) sisters have their respective terms of address. But when Japanese directly address one of their siblings, they often use more respectful language—*otōsan* (older brother) and *oneesan* (older sister). The oldest son in a family is *chōdan* and the second son is *jiñan*. Subsequent sons are assigned a number with the term *otōto*. Thus, the fifth son would be *go otōto* (fifth male). These terms demonstrate that hierarchy plays a role even within the intimacy of the Japanese family. As illustrated by the examples in this section, the complex use of Japanese honorifics attests to the importance of status in Japan. According to Kindachi, "The complicated language of respect of *keigo* is related to the natural disposition of the Japanese to strictly observe different levels of social standings."⁵³ But, Japanese is not the only language that demonstrates a culture's emphasis on hierarchy and formality. The German language has an informal "you" (*du*) and a formal "you" (*Sie*). Looking at German socio-economic classes, the formal "Sie" is common among the middle and upper classes. In their places of employment, German working class people tend to use "du" when interacting with cohorts they perceive to be of the same class background, but "Sie" when addressing a supervisor. Terms of respect are also common in the languages of Korea, China, and Thailand.⁵⁴ In Chapter 8 we will discuss the Spanish formal and informal terms to use when addressing someone.

Individualism and Collectivism

Whether a culture emphasizes individuals or social relations can also be examined through the language they use. Gao and Ting-Toomey note that "Traditionally, the Chinese self involves multiple layers of relationships with others."⁵⁵ With this collective

orientation, it is not surprising that in the Chinese language, the word closest in meaning to "individualism" (*ge ren zhu yi*) often carries a negative connotation and "implies selfishness."⁵⁶ Nisbett tells us that in the Japanese and Korean languages, words for self-reference take different forms depending on the context. This, he reports, is a result of the "Eastern conviction that one is a different person when interacting with different people."⁵⁷ The value placed on relationships among the Japanese is seen in the extensive vocabulary related to emotions.⁵⁸ The Japanese will also use the word *uchi* (inside), commonly translated as "home" or "family," to refer to their place of employment, which demonstrates the value placed on group relationships.⁵⁹

In contrast, American English is replete with words and phrases that promote the individual. In the United States, children are continually told they need to be "independent" and "self-reliant," and hear phrases like "stand on your own two feet" and "don't depend on others." Americans are taught to make independent decisions and freely voice their opinions, even when differing from others. As a result, terms that link a person to a group are often considered negative. For example, "group-think" is used to characterize what is considered an inefficient way to make decisions. However, in Japan, where consensual decision making is the norm, the term can take on a very different connotation. In the United States, the word "family" usually connotes a nuclear family consisting of parents and their children. However, in Mexico, the word *familia* carries a much larger meaning and "transcends individuals and generations. The family brings together the past, present, and future through kinship ties and the transmission of member identity."⁶⁰

The objective of the previous sections was to acquaint you with the interrelatedness of language and culture. In the remainder of the chapter, our intent is to help you to recognize some of the difficulties resulting from language differences in intercultural communication situations and deal with those problems.

LANGUAGE IN INTERCULTURAL COMMUNICATION INTERACTIONS

As we started at the beginning of this chapter, almost every intercultural communication interaction involves one or more individuals who are using a second language. Thus, it is quite impossible to discuss all of the many scenarios where language is a factor in creating a mutual understanding between all involved parties. Later in

IMAGINE THIS

An example of the role of group affiliation in Japan is the protocol used in a business or official phone call. When the phone is answered, the caller will first state his or her company's name followed by their family name. This helps the person receiving the call to determine the status and potential importance of the call. Thus, Ms. Suzuki who works for Chubu University would say, "Chubu daigaku no Suzuki desu" (literally: Chubu University of Suzuki).

Recall how businesspeople in the United States identify themselves on the phone. Is it different from the Japanese way? If so, can you think of cultural reasons for the difference?

the book, we devote entire chapters to intercultural communication interactions in business, health care, and education contexts, and attempt to discuss a broad spectrum of factors that influence understanding. But here, we want to acquaint you with three different settings where language is a particularly important issue: (1) interpersonal interactions, (2) interpretation and translation, and (3) intercultural marriage.

Interpersonal Interactions

When individuals from different cultures engage in communication, it is very likely that one or more will not be using their native language. Unless those speaking a second language are fluent or near fluent, there is an extremely high potential for miscommunication. Therefore, if you are using your own language while interacting with a non-native speaker, there are several considerations you should attend to in order to reduce the potential for miscommunication.

MINDFULNESS

In any intercultural communication interaction, it is especially important that you be *mindful*. This is defined by Langer as creating new categories, being receptive to new information, and realizing that other people may not share your perspective.⁴¹ Creating new categories means moving beyond those broad, general classifications you may have been relying on for many years. As an example, instead of categorizing someone as Asian, you should attempt to move to more specific classifications that factor in gender, age, national and regional identity, occupation, etc. (e.g., "a young Chinese male college student from Beijing"). Being receptive to new information may mean something as simple as learning that some people consider dog meat a delicacy or do not wear shoes inside their homes. Learning about different perspectives can be as complicated as trying to understand why another culture sees nothing wrong in bribing government officials or giving preference to family members.

We would add to this list that being *mindful* also involves being aware that using a second language is much more physically and cognitively demanding than speaking one's native language. When trying to assign meaning, an individual using a second language to communicate must be more alert to what the other person is saying and how it is being said. Concurrently, they must be thinking about how to respond. Depending on the degree of fluency, this may require the second-language speaker to mentally translate the received message into his or her native language, prepare a response in the native language, and then cognitively translate that response into the second language. If the second-language vocabulary is limited, the cognitive demands are even greater. This difficulty is increased if the second-language speaker is unfamiliar with the native speaker's accent. For example, if the second-language speaker was taught Australian English but is trying to interact with an American English speaker from New York who speaks rapidly and incorporates colloquialisms and slang, the problem of understanding will be significantly compounded.

As you can see, the second-language speaker is confronted with a much greater mental task than the native speaker. This cognitive process can produce both mental and physical fatigue. Thus, the native speaker must be alert to signs that the second-language speaker is growing tired. There are, however, some steps that you can take to help lessen

the cognitive demand placed on the second-language speaker and reduce the possibility of miscommunication.

SPEECH RATE

One of the problems encountered by second-language speakers is that native speakers often seem to talk quite fast. For example, if you are interacting with someone who is using English as a second language, you cannot automatically assume that he or she is completely fluent. Therefore, until you can ascertain the other person's level of language competence, you should speak a bit more slowly and distinctly than you normally do. By closely monitoring feedback from the second-language speaker, you can adjust your speech rate accordingly. It is also important that you try to look in the direction of the other person, as this can aid in understanding the second language.

VOCABULARY

Determining the second-language speaker's vocabulary level is also important. Until you are sure that the other person has the requisite second-language ability, you should avoid professional vocabulary, technical words, and acronyms. Metaphors, slang, and colloquialisms can also impede understanding and should not be used. Additionally, recall that earlier we warned that humor does not travel across cultures. What you may consider as a funny joke could be viewed as offensive in another culture.

MONITOR NONVERBAL FEEDBACK

When interacting with someone using a second language, you need to be alert to the individual's nonverbal responses to your messages. This can give you cues about your speech rate and type of vocabulary, as well as whether the individual understands what you are saying. Moreover, in an intercultural situation, you need to be aware of cultural differences in nonverbal cues. For instance, if your Japanese counterpart is giggling at something you said, which you know is not humorous, it might be a signal that he or she does not fully understand your message. At the same time, you should not expect a second-language speaker to exhibit the nonverbal cues to which you are accustomed. If they stand farther away than you are accustomed to, are less demonstrative, refrain from smiling, or avoid direct eye contact, these may be normal nonverbal behaviors in their culture.

CHECKING

By "checking," we mean that you should include measures to help you ensure your intercultural partner understands your messages. If you feel the second-language speaker is having difficulty comprehending something you said, simply say, "Let me say that another way," and rephrase your statement. Also, if you actively check for understanding, try to do so from a subordinate position. That is, instead of asking, "Do you understand?" which places the burden on the other person, ask, "Am I being clear?" In this manner, you take responsibility for the conversation and avoid any potential for embarrassing the other person. This can be of considerable importance when interacting with someone from a culture that places a high value on face. Another means of checking is to write a few words of the message you are trying to convey. Some people's reading skills may be greater than their listening ability.

- An interpreter works with spoken or signed language.
- A translator works with written text.

Interpretation and Translation

In the globalized world, there is an increasing need to interpret or translate from one language to another. As an illustration, the United Nations uses six official languages—Arabic, Chinese, English, French, Russian, and Spanish—for all meetings and documents.⁴³ On a far greater scale, in order to manage communication in twenty-three different languages, the administrative body of the European Union (EU), the European Commission, has a Directorate General for Interpretation and a Directorate General for Translation.⁴⁴

The term “translating” is quite often used in a broad sense to refer to changing messages, either written, oral, or signed, from one language to another. However, when working in a professional context, such as international relations or business, “translation” is taken to mean working with written messages. “Interpretation,” on the other hand, indicates changing oral or signed messages from one language to another.⁴⁴ An awareness of this distinction becomes somewhat important when working with international organizations that must continually manage information flows in two or more languages.

INTERPRETATION

In contemporary society, the presence of interpreters is becoming ever more commonplace. Within the United States, translation services are now the norm in our health care centers, courtrooms, business conferences, and even classrooms. Television news clips of international meetings often show participants with headsets or earphones. Almost any unposed photo of the U.S. president conversing with a foreign government leader will show one or two individuals standing behind the participants translating their conversation. The presence of either earphones or an interpreter indicates what type of translation is being done—*consecutive* or *simultaneous*.

Consecutive translation is most often used in business meetings or small, informal gatherings. In this method, the speaker will talk for a short time and then stop to allow the interpreter to convey the message to the other party. *Simultaneous* translation is done using audio equipment, with the translator located in a soundproof booth. This method is a much more demanding process because the speaker does not pause, which requires the translator to listen and speak simultaneously.⁴⁵ In each method, a high level of fluency in both of the languages being used is obviously necessary, as well as the ability to discern any emotional fluctuations in the speaker's voice, which can vary between cultures.

TRANSLATION

As we mentioned above, a translator's task is to convert written text from one language into another. Types of texts can vary widely, including official government documents, international contracts, scientific papers, and even novels and poetry. Although translators are not subjected to the time constraints that interpreters face, they are often required

to be knowledgeable in, and possess a comprehensive vocabulary of, a specific subject area. These subject areas can be highly technical, e.g., when translating scientific documents. Some translation tasks also require an extensive awareness of cultural nuances in both behaviors and languages. As an illustration, if translating a Japanese novel into English, the translator would need to be aware of contemporary colloquialisms and slang. For example, if the novel mentions a large truck (*oki toraku*), it could become “eighteen-wheeler” or “semi” in American English, but in the United Kingdom, “articulated lorry” would be the proper term. Similarly, if the novel referred to an “American dog” (*Amerikan doggu*), the Australian version would use “Dagwood Dog,” and for the U.S. adaptation would use “corn dog.”

Interest in machine translation has been growing in the computer age. However, language variations in grammar, sentence structure, and culture make this a daunting task. Although machines have lessened the burden of some elementary, routine translations, according to Crystal, “It is unlikely that machines will replace human translators in the foreseeable future.”⁴⁶

Intercultural Marriage

As we discussed in Chapter 1, intercultural marriages are on the rise across the globe. The problems associated with any marriage are multiple, but when two people from different cultures wed, numerous additional problems are thrown into the mix. Some decisions may be relatively benign, such as what type of food to eat, where to live, or what holidays to celebrate. Other choices will be more problematic, as the couple grapples with cultural differences in gender-role expectations, conflict management, emotional display, values, social behaviors, child-rearing practices, extended family relations, and many, many more issues. As in any marriage, communication is the key to managing these challenges and finding mutually agreeable resolutions. But to achieve effective communication in a cross-cultural marriage, the couple must deal with the problem of multiple languages.

One of the first decisions will be which language the couple will use to communicate with each other. Unless each is fluent in the other's native tongue, this decision can create issues related to identity and power, as well as complicating daily communication. In some cases, the couple may resort to a third language they have in common.⁴⁷ If, for instance, in a mixed marriage the husband is from Germany and the wife is from Spain, and neither speaks the other's language, they may opt to use a third language, such as English or French. Power imbalances can arise from the ability of only one

CONSIDER THIS

The following examples demonstrate some of the cultural challenges of translating or interpreting languages.

- Pokan Sweat and Calpis are both well-known sports drinks in Japan.
- Kinki Kids is a popular “boy band” from the kinki region in central Japan, and Kinki University, located near Osaka, offers degrees in law, medicine, engineering, and business.
- Chicken without sexual life is a menu item in China.

spouse to speak the language of the couple's country of residence. In these situations, the non-speaker may be forced to become overly reliant on the mate,⁴⁸ which can affect self-esteem and identity.

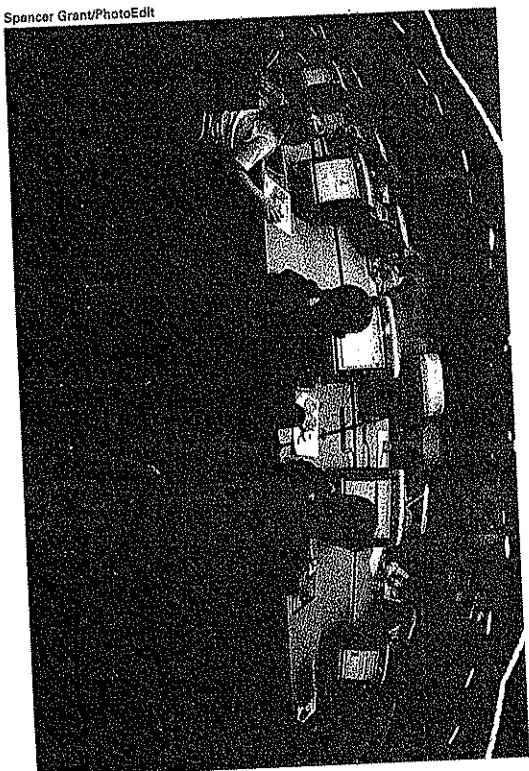
Another potential linguistic pitfall in a mixed marriage centers on determining which parent's language to use to raise the children. If only one parent's language is used, the culture of the other parent will be subordinated. In many cross-cultural marriages, this problem has been solved by using a "one parent, one language" strategy.⁴⁹ This involves each parent speaking his or her native language, or another selected language, to the children. Thus, the children are raised in two languages, becoming bilingual, and the cultures of both parents are recognized and passed on.

Our discussion has focused more on the potential difficulties of an intercultural marriage than the advantages. We hope you are not discouraged by this, because these problems are easily offset by the rewards. For instance, dealing with the many adversities can bring a cross-cultural couple closer together, resulting in greater intimacy. Additionally, sharing each other's cultures—becoming bicultural—will likely broaden perspectives and create a richness that is difficult to realize when living in a single culture.

COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY AND LANGUAGE

Modern communication technology has enabled people around the world to easily "connect" through both voice and text messages. The Internet enables people from different cultures to interact across vast distances, though they must find a common language. Internet communication is a topic of such scale that new books and articles are continually being produced. Thus, it is not our intention to provide you a comprehensive examination of the interaction between technology and culture. That endeavor is far beyond the scope of this book. Rather, we want to provide you a perspective on the variety of languages used across the Internet.

Spencer Grant/PhotoEdit



The Internet provides the opportunity for people from diverse cultures to learn about each other.

Currently, English is the most common language among Internet users, followed by Chinese and Spanish.⁵⁰ This had led to some concern about English becoming the dominant world language.⁵¹ Two important reasons for this current predominance of English on the Internet are (1) the system was conceived and implemented in the United States and was therefore designed for English speakers, and (2) English "is the lingua franca of scientific and academic publishing."⁵² However, there is growing evidence that other languages are gaining a greater Internet presence. Over 72 percent of the population of the United States uses the Internet, which means that more than 220 million U.S. Americans are going online.⁵³ In June 2008, China surpassed the United States as the leading nation for the number of Internet users, with some 253 million online users.⁵⁴ But that number represents only 19 percent of China's population.⁵⁵ This suggests that in the future, Chinese will become much more prevalent as an Internet language. And India, with only 5 percent of its population presently accessing the Internet,⁵⁶ could well become another factor in the linguistic future of the World Wide Web.

Just as previous Western mass media, such as television, music, and videos, increased the world's exposure to English, so has the Internet. But Danet and Herring tell us that "the possibility of a single language prevailing to the exclusion of all others seems remote."⁵⁷ What seems possible, however, is "an oligarchy of the world's largest languages—Chinese, Spanish, English, Arabic, Malay, Hindi, Russian—each of them dominating in its geographical region, where it also enjoys economic and cultural influences."⁵⁸ From this synopsis of languages on the Internet, we now offer several examples of problems that can arise when a multicultural group is interacting through computer-mediated communication (CMC).

There are a variety of available forms for Internet interaction—blogs, chat rooms, Skype, social-networking websites, and of course e-mail. The latter is a common feature in the corporate world, with employees sending messages to people in other countries or states, or even someone in the same room. One culturally related problem that can arise in e-mail exchanges is trying to determine the context of a message,⁵⁹ which can be a critical factor for people in high-context cultures. This may have been a factor in Foushee's findings that some Japanese felt that e-mail provided an anonymity that "encouraged people to use casual and blunt language."⁶⁰ On some occasions, the directness created interpersonal conflict among workers. The anonymity that the Internet can provide has also raised concerns that the "greater freedom available online to chat with young people of the opposite sex could potentially break down traditional Islamic barriers to mixed-sex interaction."⁶¹

Computer-mediated communication has increased both the ease and speed of communication, but this acceleration can create problems in organizations with a multicultural workforce whose first language varies. McDaniel tells us that problems can arise when multiple e-mails on a specific topic are exchanged among multinational employees. The messages must be in a common language, but first-language users will read, comprehend, and respond much faster than second-language users. As the exchange proliferates, understanding and responding by second-language users will continue to lag and begin to compound, and they may quickly find themselves excluded from the exchange.⁶²

These few illustrations demonstrate how language, culture, and technology can coalesce and influence intercultural communication. As communication technologies continue to expand and you become connected with more and more people from other cultures speaking other languages, effective use of the new capabilities will also depend on your intercultural competence.

Language Considerations in Intercultural Competence

In a conversation discussing Belgium's three official languages, a Belgian businessman explained that one of the first questions asked during employment interviews is, "Do you speak languages?"⁶⁵ This priority is a product of Belgium being geographically quite small, which creates a need for international economic commerce. In many ways, Belgium's need to trade in the international market is a microcosm of globalization. As world society becomes more interconnected and more integrated, there is a corresponding need to speak more than one language. While bilingualism is official in only a small number of nations—such as Switzerland,



There are 331 languages spoken in the United States—162 indigenous languages and 149 immigrant languages.⁶⁶

Learning another language can be extremely difficult, demanding considerable time and effort, but the advantages are so numerous as to make the effort worthwhile. Pagel suggests that studying another language and culture has the potential to help you "think about the world in different dimensions."⁶⁶ As we said about intercultural marriages, living with two cultures can produce a much richer life. A second language can also help you to better understand the people of the other culture, and indeed gain a greater awareness of cultural influences in general. But more than that, it also tells the native speakers that you are interested in them, and that you value their language and their culture.⁶⁷ Using another language can also help you better express yourself or explain certain concepts or items. Lal, a native Hindi speaker, explained that English, his second language, had no "words for certain kinds of relationships and the cultural assumptions and understandings which go with them."⁶⁸ Wong, who speaks Chinese (Mandarin and Cantonese) and English tells us the same thing: "Relying only on English, I often cannot find words to convey important meanings found in Chinese."⁶⁹ Thus, learning a second language can provide greater insight into the emotions and values of another culture, which will increase your intercultural understanding and competence. However, just as we have continually said that no culture is better than another, the same holds true for language. Just like cultures, they all work for the people that speak them.

SUMMARY

- Language allows us to exchange abstract ideas, which sets us apart from other animal species.
- Language is an integral part of identity.

- Based on the language they use, people can be categorized into groups such as age, gender, and socio-income level.
- The use of a common language enables people to organize into groups and perform collective activities.
- Language is a set of shared symbols that people use to create meaning; the relationship between the sign and the meaning is often arbitrary.
- There are usually variations within language groups, such as accents, dialects, argot, and slang.
- Corporate brands and logos are often understood across cultures irrespective of language.
- Culture and language form a symbiotic relationship because without one, the other could not exist.
- Cultural values, or dimensions, can be reflected in the language used by a culture.
- In any intercultural communication interaction, it is probable that someone will be using a second language.
- Using a second language can be both physically and cognitively demanding.
- When speaking to someone who is using a second language, you should be mindful, monitor your speech rate, vocabulary, and nonverbal feedback, and check to ensure that the other person understands your message.
- Interpreters work with spoken or signed language; translators work with written messages.
- Consecutive translation is when you stop every minute or so to allow the translator to relay your message in the other language. *Simultaneous* translation occurs while the speaker talks in the original language.
- In a cross-cultural marriage, language plays a key role in communication and can also influence identity and power relationships.
- "One parent, one language" is an approach in which each parent uses a different language to interact with his or her children. The children grow up bilingual.
- English is the most common language used on the Internet at this time. However, the increasing number of Chinese users could alter this in the future.
- Some scholars have predicted an oligarchy of major world languages—Chinese, Spanish, English, Arabic, and Russian—in the future.
- Using computer-mediated communication (CMC) can affect the interaction between members of high-context cultures.
- One way of enhancing your intercultural communication competency is to learn another language.

1. Take four different English proper nouns (other than someone's name) and use online translation dictionaries to translate each noun into five different languages. Do some of the translated nouns have a resemblance to the English nouns? If so, can you think of a possible reason?
2. Try to find someone who is from a culture that uses an indirect communication style and who uses English as a second language. Ask that person how his or her native tongue is different from English when using language in an indirect manner.
3. Talk with two or three people over sixty years of age and ask them for some examples of the slang they used in their younger days (e.g., "groovy", "man"). Try to compare it with slang that is popular now.
4. Working with someone from another culture whose second language is English, compile a list of animals, terms are common to both of you then compare the sounds that each of you hears from those animals.
5. Meet with one or two non-native English speakers to identify the kinship terms they use in their family (e.g., mother, brother, etc.). Do they use the same terms when referring directly to a family member and in a third person situation? Do they have kinship terms that vary with age differences? What cultural values do you think their terms reflect?

DISCUSSION IDEAS

1. In a small group, discuss what images come to mind when you hear different types of accents. Try to decide why you form those images.
2. Some scholars think the world is moving toward an "oligarchy" of languages from the major economic powers. Do you think this would be a good or bad occurrence? Why? What will happen to minority languages, and what will be the result?
3. Discuss different ways that language differences could influence an intercultural marriage.
4. Some countries have an official language (or languages), but others do not. What are the advantages and disadvantages of a country having an official language? Should the United States have an official language? Why?

Nonverbal Communication: The Messages of Action, Space, Time, and Silence

There are times when silence has the loudest voice.

LEROY BROWNLOW

To know what people think pay regard to what they do, rather than what they say.

RENE DESCARTES

When American troops drove through the streets of Iraq, they thought they were being greeted by throngs of happy children. They observed hundreds of children lining the streets of Baghdad giving them the "thumbs-up" sign. However, as Woodward points out, the Americans "did not realize that in Iraq the thumbs-up sign traditionally was the equivalent of the American middle-finger salute." Misinterpreting the nonverbal actions of people from different cultures is rather commonplace. For example, in Mexico it is not unusual to see both men and women hugging each other in public. Yet in cultures such as China and Japan, these open displays of physical contact are normally excluded from interpersonal exchanges. Moving one's head from side to side in the United States is usually a sign of "no" and means disagreement, yet in India the same sign often represents agreement. In Western cultures, people normally greet by shaking hands. Arab men often greet by kissing on both cheeks. In Japan, men greet by exchanging bows. In Thailand, to signal another person to come near, one moves the fingers back and forth with the palm down. In the United States, you beckon someone to come by holding the palm up and moving the fingers toward your body. In Vietnam, that same motion is reserved for someone attempting to summon his or her dog. Crossing one's legs in the United States is often a sign of being relaxed; in Korea, it is a social taboo. In Japan, gifts are usually exchanged using both hands. Muslims consider the left hand unclean and do not eat or pass objects with it.