

*Our most basic common link is that we all inhabit this planet.*

*— John F. Kennedy*





consists of traditional ideas and especially their attached values.” (Kroeber and Kluckhohn, 1952)

“Culture is man’s medium; there is not one aspect of human life that is not touched and altered by culture. This means personality, how people express themselves (including shows of emotion), the way they think, how they move, how problems are solved, how their cities are planned and laid out, how transportation systems function and are organized, as well as how economic and government systems are put together and function.” (Edward T. Hall, 1959)

“By ‘culture’, anthropology means the total life way of a people, the social legacy the individual acquires from his group. Or culture can be regarded as that part of the environment that is the creation of man.” (Clyde Kluckhohn, 1965)

“Culture is a system of shared beliefs, values, customs, behaviours and artefacts that are transmitted from generation to generation through learning.” (Bates and Plog, 1976)

“A culture is a collection of beliefs, habits, living patterns, and behaviors which are held more or less in common by people who occupy particular geographic areas.” (D. Brown, 1978)

“...Culture refers to the total way of life of particular groups of people. It includes everything that a group of people thinks, says, does, and makes.” (R. Kohls, 1979)

“The culture of every society is unique, containing combinations of norms and values that are found nowhere else.” (I. Robertson, 1981)

“Culture is the systems of knowledge shared by a relatively large group of people.” (Gudykunst and Kim, 1992)

“Culture refers to the cumulative deposit of knowledge, experience, beliefs, values, attitudes, meanings, hierarchies, religion, notions of time, roles, spatial relations, concepts of the universe, and material objects and possessions acquired by a group of people in the course of generations through individual and group striving.” (Samovar and Porter, 1994)

“I treat culture as the collective programming of the mind that distinguishes the members of one group or category of people from another. The ‘mind’ stands for the head, heart, and hands – that is, for thinking, feeling, and acting, with consequences for beliefs, attitudes, and skills.” (G. Hofstede, 2001)



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material needs. As we learn to communicate better, we begin to achieve some measure of control over events that affect us and those around us.

There are three basic aspects to communication: our individual personality, the culture we operate in, and the physical environment that surrounds us. Each of these aspects has influence on what and how we communicate.

Communication is transactional. Each person encodes and sends messages, and in turn receives and decodes messages. The coding and decoding process is primarily culture-based and involves a diverse set of elements, including words, gestures, symbols, etc. Whether a communication is successful or not depends greatly on the circumstances. The key is whether the participants have some similar cultural background, knowledge and experiences. In cross-cultural situations, this shared area is very small.

## What is the relationship between culture and communication?

It is widely recognized that one of the characteristics separating humans from other animals is our development of culture. The development of human culture is made possible through communication, and it is through communication that culture is transmitted from one generation to another. Culture and communication are so closely related to each other that Hall maintains that “culture is communication” and “communication is culture.” In other words, we communicate the way we do because we are raised in a particular culture and learn its language, rules, and norms. Because we learn the language, rules, and norms of our culture by a very early age (between five and ten years old), we are generally unaware of how culture influences our behavior in general and our communication in particular.

## What is intercultural communication?

Generally speaking, intercultural communication refers to communication between people whose cultural backgrounds are distinct enough to alter their communication.

Intercultural communication as a field of study first emerged in the U.S.



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Economic globalization and widespread migrations also make intercultural communication absolutely necessary. It is said that the United States is no longer the dominant economic force in the world in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. For example, according to Harris and Moran, there are now more than 37,000 transnational corporations with 207,000 foreign affiliates. This expansion in globalization has resulted in multinational corporations participating in joint ventures, licensing agreements and other international business arrangements. At the same time, people all over the world are faced with the same environmental issues, such as pollution. It has become clear that pollution does not observe geographic and cultural boundaries. Nations are beginning to realize that we must work together to solve these problems or face common disaster. So in a world of international interdependence, no nation, group or culture can remain aloof or autonomous. If you touch one part of the world, you touch all parts. So intercultural communication in the 21<sup>st</sup> century is really inevitable.

When we communicate with people from other cultures, we are often confronted with languages, rules and norms different from our own. So we find intercultural communication different from communication within our own cultural group. Even if we overcome the natural barriers of language difference, we may fail to understand or to be understood. Misunderstanding may even become the rule rather than the exception. If we are unaware of the significant role culture plays in communication, we may place the blame for communication failure on those other people.

In order to minimize misunderstandings when we communicate with people from other cultures, we need to understand the process of intercultural communication, and we need to understand people of other cultures and their patterns of communication. This is important not only to determine where misunderstandings occur, but also determine how these misunderstandings can be minimized in future interactions.



***Study the Iceberg Model of Culture; get prepared for the learning of the next unit.***

As Edward T. Hall points out, “culture hides much more than it reveals. Culture controls behavior in deep and persisting ways, many of which are outside of

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awareness and therefore beyond conscious control of the individual.”

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Therefore, culture can be viewed as an iceberg. Nine-tenths of an iceberg is out of sight (below the water line). Likewise, nine-tenths of culture is outside of conscious awareness. The part of the cultural iceberg that is above the water is easy to be noticed.

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The out-of-awareness part is sometimes called “deep culture”. This part of the cultural iceberg is hidden below the water and is thus below the level of consciousness. People learn this part of culture through imitating models. Once these behaviors and attitudes are learned, they are automatic and taken for granted.

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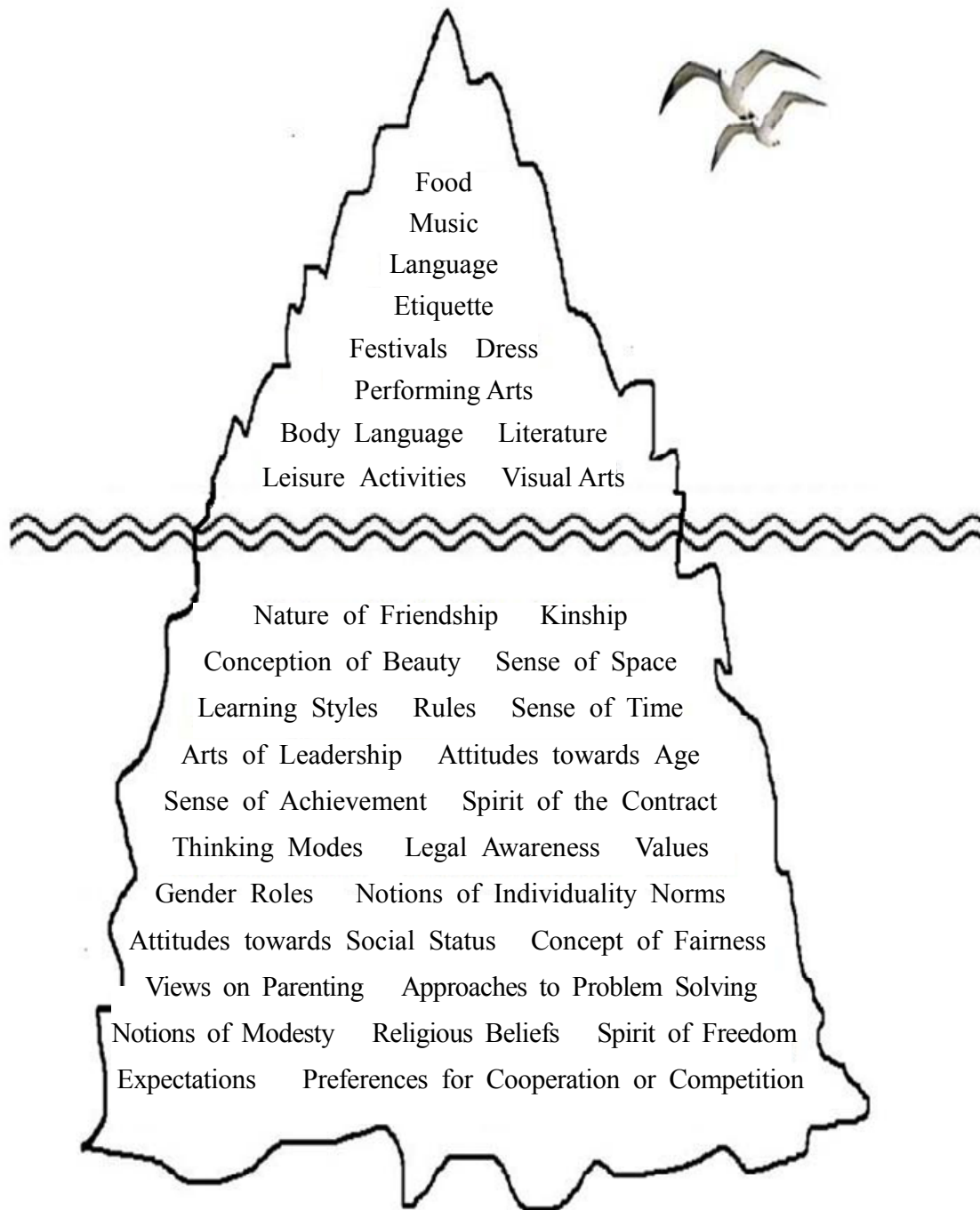
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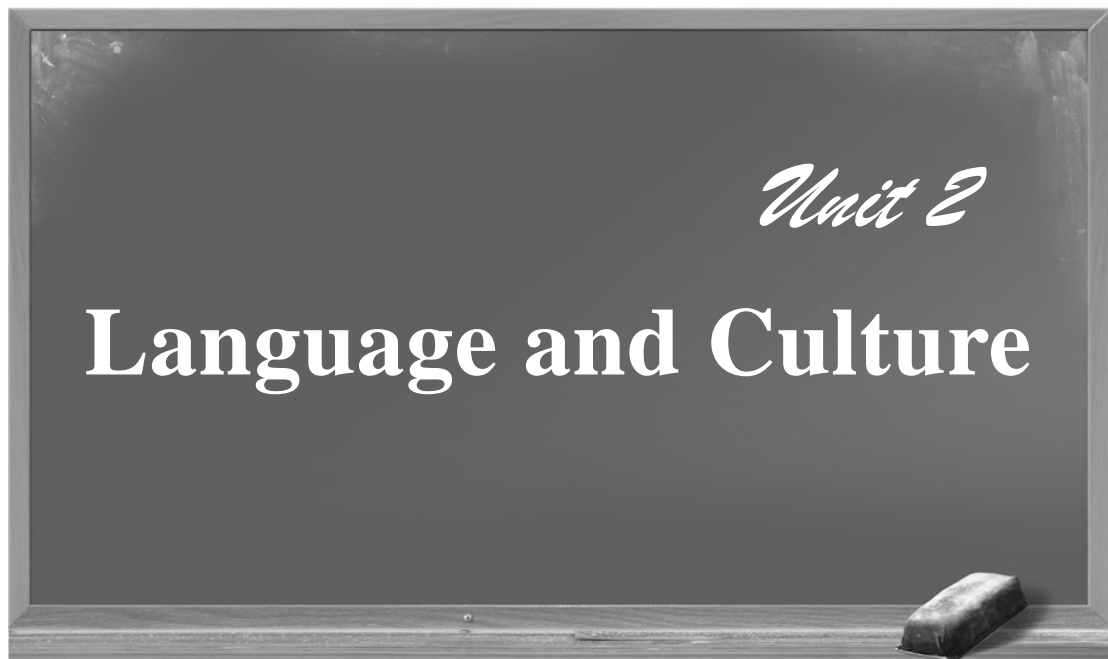
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**The Iceberg Model of Culture**



*To know another's language and not his culture is a very way to make a fluent fool of one's self.*

— *Winston Brembeck*





Language is part of culture and plays a distinct role in it. Some social scientists consider it the keystone of culture. Without language, they maintain, culture would not be possible. On the other hand, language is influenced and shaped by culture; it reflects culture. In the broadest sense, language is the symbolic representation of a people, and it comprises their historical and cultural backgrounds as well as their approach to life and their ways of living and thinking. It provides a window to the culture in which it is used. To sum up, language is both a means of communication and a channel of culture.

It is obvious that to communicate with people from different backgrounds we have to use a language, native or foreign. But we may not be quite aware that language alone does not ensure effective communication. As a matter of fact, cultural competence is absolutely necessary for effective communication since language and culture are inseparable.



### How Is Language Related to Culture (I)

Culture and language are intertwined and shape each other. It is impossible to separate the two. Language is not a matter of neutral codes and grammatical rules.

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Each time we select words, form sentences, and send a message, either oral or written, we also make cultural choices. We all agree that language helps in communicating with people from different backgrounds. However, we may be less aware that *cultural literacy* is necessary to understand the language being used. If we select language without being aware of the cultural implications, we may at best not communicate well and at worst send the wrong message.

In our own environment we are aware of the implications of these choices. For example, if an American says “How are you?” other Americans register the phrase as *Hello*, the equivalent of *Guten Tag*, *Bonjour*, or *Ohayo Gozaimasu* rather than the literal meaning. A foreigner in the United States, knowing some English but not familiar with the culture and usage of English, may attribute a very different meaning to the phrase and interpret it much more literally.

All languages have social questions and information questions. A social question, even though it comes in question form, does not ask for information. It is simply a *lubricant* to move the conversation forward. In American English the question “How are you?” is a social question. In many other countries, such as Germany, Russia, and Poland, “How are you?” is an information question. The speaker actually wants to get an answer to the question. In Japan the question “Where are you going?” is a social question. The same question is an information question in American English. An American may feel that the Japanese question is *intrusive* and may not know what to answer. However, no answer is expected. A simple “Over there” will do. The point is that words in themselves do not carry the meaning. The meaning comes out of the context, the cultural usage.

Language reflects the environment in which we live. We label the things that are around us. For example, in the Amazon area snow is not part of the environment; therefore, people in that region do not have a word for snow. It simply does not exist. In areas where it snows occasionally, people have a word for snow, but it may be just one word without any *differentiations*. Most Americans, for example, use terms such as *snow*, *powder snow*, *sleet*, *slush*, *blizzard*, and *ice*. That’s the extent of most people’s snow vocabulary. People who live in an environment where it snows most months of the year may have a much more differentiated terminology for snow. If you go to a pub in northern Germany and order wine, you may ask for “ein Glas

Weißwein, bitte” (a glass of white wine, please). You may specify *Moselwein* or *Rheinwein*, but that’s it. The north of the Germany is beer country, and the knowledge of wine is much more limited. In Baden, in southwestern Germany, in contrast, a waiter would just stare at you if you asked for a glass of white wine. Here you would specify the type of wine, the vineyard, and the year. Wine is important in this region, and you are expected to know about wine.

In addition to the environment, language reflects cultural values. Edward Hall, for example, points out that the *Navajo* do not have a word for *late*. Time, he tells us, does not play a role in Navajo life. There is a time to do everything, a natural time rather than the artificial clock time that industrial countries use. As a result, the Navajo do not have the differentiated vocabulary connected with time and clocks that Americans have. Time and the passing of time are things one can’t control; therefore, one should not worry about wasting time and setting schedules.

One of the problems in dealing with people from other cultures is that we translate concepts from a foreign language and culture with words that fit our priorities. For example, businesspeople in the United States typically are frustrated with the *manana* mentality of Spanish-speaking countries: “They said tomorrow, but they did not mean it.” For Americans *tomorrow* means midnight to midnight, a very precise time period. To Mexicans, *manana* means in the future, soon. A Mexican businessman speaking with an American may use the word *tomorrow* but not be aware of or not intend the precise meaning of the word. This vague terminology is not precise enough for the American emphasis on efficiency. The difficulties over the word *manana* are at least as much an American problem as a Mexican problem. Dictionaries do not help because they typically pretend that there are exact equivalents that have the same meanings. To communicate concepts effectively, cultural knowledge is as important as linguistic knowledge.

## Notes

1. literacy [ˈlɪtərəsi] *n.* 读写能力；熟练使用语言的能力  
cultural literacy: the ability to understand and participate fluently in a given culture
2. lubricant [ˈluːbrɪkənt] *n.* 润滑剂
3. intrusive [ɪnˈtruːsɪv] *adj.* 侵扰的，烦扰的





job that does not exist in the U.S. corporate structure. An understanding of the specific title would require a more detailed explanation of the job and its fit in the organizational structure.

Both French and Americans use the word *force majeure*, but the phrase carries very different meanings. Literally, the term means superior or irresistible force. In U.S. legal language it refers generally to forces of nature or possibly war. In European law the term has a broader meaning: it includes the changes in economic conditions or other circumstances that were not anticipated when the contract was drawn up. The implication is that when Americans make agreements with Europeans and discuss unforeseen circumstances and use the term *force majeure*, they need to clarify what they mean and spell out what that term covers.

As anyone who has been abroad for any length of time can attest, language lives; it changes over time. Words and phrases that are used commonly at one time may be discontinued or their meaning may change over time. For example, the word *gay* means happy, lighthearted. In recent decades, however, the word has taken on the meaning homosexual. As a result, English speakers in countries such as New Zealand, Canada, Australia, the United Kingdom, and the United States don't use the original meaning anymore, and young speakers of English may not even be familiar with the traditional meaning.

Countries such as France and Iceland try to keep their language pure. The French have the *Academie Francaise* to police the language and ensure that business use pure French. But even in France the language changes. The officials may *frown on Franglais*, but people in France eat a *sandwich*, go on a trip for *le weekend*, and go on *le jogging*, all pronounced in the French manner with the accent on the last syllable. To use English is "*chic*," and somehow the English terms seem to be more precise and descriptive. French Canadians make the Academie Francaise really nervous when they use *char* for car and many other English words in their French. French Canadians do not feel compelled to follow the rules of the Academie Francaise.

The example of Canadian French illustrates that a language, if spoken in different parts of the globe, ultimately will develop differently. The Academie Francaise may insist on certain rules, but other French-speaking groups may make

