

Who Controls Language?

AI, Power & Cultural Diversity

A 45-minute interactive workshop exploring how artificial intelligence shapes — and is shaped by — the languages and cultures of the world

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Language: Our Most Fundamental Bond

Interactive Warm-Up

Think for a moment — **what does language mean to you?** Is it just a tool for talking, or something deeper? Share one word in your mother tongue that has no direct translation in English.

Why Language Is Power

Language is far more than communication. It carries **culture, memory, identity** and — critically — **power**. The ability to name the world is the ability to shape it.

-  **Striking fact:** UNESCO estimates that by the end of this century, up to **90% of the world's languages** could disappear — taking irreplaceable knowledge and culture with them.



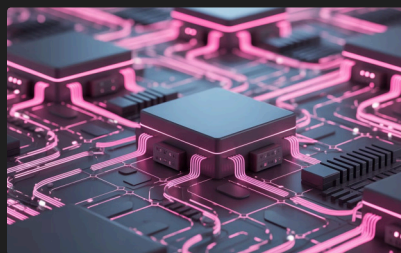
The AI Revolution: A Double-Edged Sword

Large Language Models (LLMs) such as GPT-4 and Gemini Pro are transforming how we create, access and process information at an unprecedented scale. But every revolution carries its contradictions.



The Promise

AI democratises access to knowledge, breaks language barriers, and enables billions to communicate across borders in real time.



The Problem

These models are overwhelmingly trained on **English-language data**, embedding cultural assumptions that disadvantage the majority of the world's speakers.



The Imbalance

Only a handful of cultures and languages drive AI development, leaving billions of speakers underrepresented or misrepresented entirely.

Cultural Bias in AI: An Undeniable Reality

Audience Question

"Has an AI ever misunderstood you, mispronounced your name, or given you a response that felt culturally 'off'?"

Raise your hand. You are not alone — and the reason is structural, not accidental.

Names & Pronunciation

AI systems routinely struggle with non-anglophone names, reinforcing a hierarchy of whose identity "counts."

Minority Languages

Speakers of indigenous or low-resource languages receive dramatically lower quality AI assistance than English speakers.

The Deeper Issue

AI technologies are **conceived and built within a narrow set of cultures**, and in doing so they encode those cultures' values, norms and blind spots into tools used by everyone.

According to research presented at the **AAAI Conference on Artificial Intelligence** and the paper *Cultural Incongruencies in Artificial Intelligence*, this isn't a minor glitch — it is a systemic design failure with real-world consequences for cultural representation and justice.

CultureLLM & CulturePark: Towards Culturally Intelligent AI

Researchers are actively building solutions. Two landmark frameworks show what culturally aware AI could look like in practice.

CultureLLM

Uses data from the **World Values Survey (WVS)** to generate culturally diverse training datasets. It fine-tunes LLMs to reflect diverse worldviews — and outperforms GPT-3.5 and Gemini Pro on culture-specific tasks. A cost-effective path to cultural inclusion.



CulturePark

A **multi-agent communication framework** powered by AI that simulates cross-cultural dialogue. It generates high-quality intercultural training data by having AI agents from different cultural backgrounds interact — producing richer, more nuanced datasets.



Why It Matters

Both frameworks demonstrate that **cultural diversity in AI is technically achievable**. The question is no longer "can we?" but "will we choose to?" — a question of priorities, funding, and political will.



The Power of Linguistic Diversity in AI



Local Language Assistants

Proposed research at AAAI outlines a framework combining **Natural Language Processing (NLP)** and **Reinforcement Learning (RL)** to build home assistants in local and indigenous languages.



Cultural Heritage Platforms

Interactive AI tools can enable real-time interactions in local languages — helping communities explore, teach and transmit their own history and cultural patrimony.

The Goal

Linguistic inclusion in AI is not just a technical challenge — it is a **matter of dignity**. Every language that an AI can understand and speak is a community whose knowledge is validated and preserved.

Regions with the greatest linguistic diversity are currently the **least represented** in AI development pipelines.

Governance & Ethics: Challenges and Opportunities

🤔 "Who should decide which cultures are 'represented' in AI — and who is currently making those decisions?"

This is not merely a technical question. It is a question of **politics, ethics, and power**. Current AI governance frameworks are largely designed in Silicon Valley, Brussels and Beijing — rarely in Nairobi, Lima or Dhaka.

1

The Risk of Western Universalism

Treating Western-centric AI as a global default can inadvertently marginalise non-Western epistemologies and reshape cultural production worldwide. (Global AI Cultures Workshop, ICLR 2024)

2

Inclusive Governance Models

We urgently need governance structures that are **culturally informed and geographically diverse** — ensuring communities most affected by AI have a seat at the table. (AI in Focus)

3

Accountability Mechanisms

From audits of training data to cultural impact assessments, accountability tools must be built into AI development pipelines — not bolted on as an afterthought.

The Future: AI That Empowers or Homogenises?

This is the central question of our time. The answer depends on the choices we make — as researchers, developers, policymakers, and everyday users.



Language Preservation

AI projects are already being used to **document and revitalise endangered languages** — creating spoken corpora, grammar tools and educational resources for communities at risk of losing their mother tongue.



Cultural Creation

When designed inclusively, AI becomes a **creative amplifier for diverse artists** — giving musicians, storytellers and visual artists from all cultures new tools to express and share their heritage globally.



Your Role

How can **you** become a more critical and conscious user — and creator — of AI? What questions will you ask about the tools you use every day?

Towards Culturally Conscious AI: An Interdisciplinary Call

Key Definition

"**Cultural Intelligence**" in AI refers to the capacity of a system to strategically adapt to diverse cultural contexts — generating responses that are genuinely respectful of local norms, values, and ways of knowing.

(Source: A Unified Framework to Quantify Cultural Intelligence of AI)

No Single Discipline Can Solve This

Computer science alone cannot address what is fundamentally a **human and social challenge**. We need linguists, anthropologists, sociologists, artists and ethicists at the design table.



→ **Computer Science** — technical architecture and model design

→ **Social Sciences** — understanding cultural values and bias

→ **Humanities** — language, history, and meaning-making

Questions, Reflection & Next Steps

Q&A Space

The floor is open. No question is too basic — the best critical thinking starts with genuine curiosity. What challenged you today? What do you want to explore further?

Further Reading

- [NeurIPS Poster: CultureLLM](#)
- [AAAI 2024: Cultural Incongruencies in AI](#)
- [ICLR 2024: Global AI Cultures Workshop](#)
- [UNESCO: Language Vitality & Endangerment](#)
- [Towards a Multidisciplinary Vision for Culturally Inclusive Generative AI](#)

Call to Action

01

Question your tools

Ask who built the AI you use and whose cultural assumptions it carries.

02

Support inclusive research

Advocate for funding and attention towards low-resource language AI projects.

03

Build bridges

If you work in tech, bring humanities and social science voices into the conversation.

The future of language — and of AI — will be shaped by those who engage with it critically. That means you.