

# Language & Power

*Language Bias in the Age of AI*

# Language is a technology that has two simultaneous functions:

transferring  
[REDACTED]  
information to  
[REDACTED]  
one another



signaling our  
[REDACTED]  
identities to  
[REDACTED]  
one another

# discussion

- Think about your communication style: in what ways does your communication style reveal your identity?
- Think about miscommunications you've had at work: in what ways were these miscommunications caused by the intersection of *Information Transfer* and *Identity Signaling*?
- Now think about successful communication at work: how has your unique communication style allowed you to shape relationships and culture, or enables empathy and trust?



## Human Communication

## AI Language Models (LLMs)

**Where does language come from?**

from lived experience, emotion, and conscious thought

from patterns in written text - no direct experience or awareness

**What does language represent?**

real, felt experiences, identity

patterns of probability – it reflects what’s commonly said, not what’s uniquely felt

**What is the role of language?**

shapes relationships, identity, and culture; enables empathy and trust. Not scalable.

produces coherent text; useful for scale and efficiency, but lacks relational capacity

**How does bias creep in?**

through personal experience, cultural norms, and unconscious assumptions

through inherited data, reflecting historical inequities, stereotypes, and dominant narratives

**What metaphor can we use?**

“a lens into the soul” - revealing values, identity, and intention

“a lens into pattern and probability” - clear, focused, but not grounded in lived truth. Emotionally opaque.

# discussion

- What have you learned about language so far? How are you starting to think about language and its role in work, society, and relationships differently?
- In your opinion, how much AI is too much?
- Which factors should we consider when deciding between a “machine voice” and a “human voice” on different HR tasks?
- What kinds of HR AI technologies do you think work well and like? Asses them based on Relational Risk, Safety/Integrity Risk, Ethical/Bias Risk, and Organizational Risk.

# Language Bias and Inclusive Language are **ALL ABOUT POWER**, but people have tried to make it about what is **RIGHT**.

## HOT TAKE #1

Bias is a fact, not a flaw.

We don't erase language bias; our biases change over time.

Bias needs to be understood, not removed.

## HOT TAKE #2

“Correctness” is just power in disguise.

Every dialect has rules, but only some get crowned as “standard.”

Language bias is simply the politics of grammar.

## HOT TAKE #3

Neutral language doesn't exist.

Every word carries identity, history, and perspective.

To speak at all is to take a stand.

## HOT TAKE #4

Inclusive language isn't self-censorship.

It's the art of being yourself while leaving room for others.

Inclusive language is a commitment to shared dignity, not selective acceptance.

# The Four Qualities of Inclusive Language



1. Inclusive language is **HUMBLE**
  - a. Listen first.
2. Inclusive language is **HONEST**
  - a. Tell the truth, even when it's uncomfortable.
  - b. Do not lie or withhold the truth.
3. Inclusive language is **CURIOUS**
  - a. Ask people about their background, experiences, and beliefs; Regularly share about your own background, experience, and beliefs.
4. Inclusive language is **RESILIENT**
  - a. Keep the conversation going.
  - b. Do not silence yourself or others.

# discussion

- What are some of your language biases?
- In what circumstances do you tend to think language is about “correctness” instead of about power?
- What has been your experience with workplace inclusive language initiatives in the past? Be honest.
- Which of the four “hot takes” bothers you or resonates with you the most? Why?
- Which of the four “qualities of inclusive language” is most challenging for you at work? Why?



# Recognizing Your Linguistic Patterns

Some people are more like this:

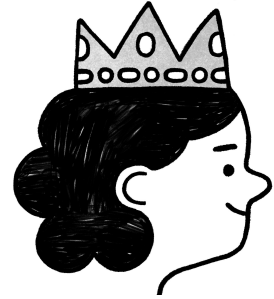
- Collaborative
- Cooperative
- Supportive
- Involved
- Polite
- Indirect



They prioritize interpersonal communication over authoritative communication.

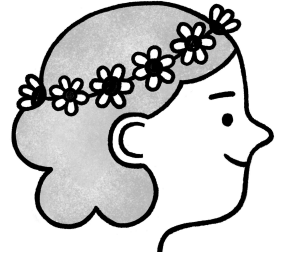
Others are more like this:

- Autonomous
- Task-focused
- Self-reliant
- Hands-off
- Bold
- Direct



They prioritize authoritative communication over interpersonal communication.

# If you are more interpersonal...



**...you are more likely to struggle with these inclusive qualities:**

- HONEST (telling the truth, even when it's uncomfortable)
- RESILIENT (keeping the conversation going)

**...you are more vulnerable to these AI Risks:**

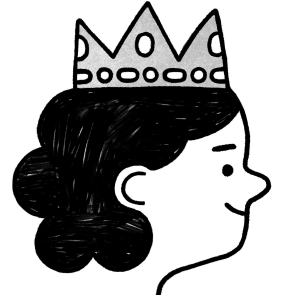
- Ethical/Bias
- Safety/Integrity
- Organizational

**...you are more likely to be drawn to outsourcing decision-oriented tasks to AI:**

- recruiting
- assessment
- screening
- analytics

(Think: HireVue, HiredScore, Eightfold AI)

# If you are more authoritative...



**...you are more likely to struggle with these inclusive qualities:**

- HUMBLE (listen first)
- CURIOUS (asking about others' beliefs; readily sharing your own)

**...you are more vulnerable to these AI Risks:**

- Relational
- Organizational
- Safety/Integrity

**...you are more likely to be drawn to outsourcing relationship-oriented tasks to AI:**

- Onboarding
- Support
- Engagement
- Development

(Think: Leena AI, Lattice, and Docebo)

# Cultivating Humility

The fastest way to humble yourself is simple: **give something away.**

In communication, that “something” is your words.

You cultivate humility by practicing deliberate generosity  
- always listening first.



In a rushed, overloaded workplace, attention is the scarcest resource.

Listening is generosity in action  
— the choice to give your attention instead of guarding it.

When HR leads with listening, their AI decisions become wiser, and fairer.

# Cultivating Honesty

The fastest way to become more honest is simple:  
**reject anonymity.**

In communication, honesty grows through real, relational exchanges, not faceless comments or gossip.

You cultivate honesty by attaching your name, your story, and your humanity to your words.



Honesty is courage in action — the choice to tell the truth instead of protecting your comfort.

When HR leads with truth-telling, their AI decisions become clearer and cleaner.

# Cultivating Curiosity

The fastest way to cultivate curiosity is simple: **pursue the truth with others.**

In communication, that pursuit happens through frequent, vulnerable conversations.

You pursue truth by practicing deliberate vulnerability: unlocking yourself so others feel free to turn their own keys.



Curiosity is exposure in action — the willingness to reveal who you are so others feel free to reveal who they are.

When HR leads with that kind of open, exposed inquiry, their AI decisions become more aligned with real human needs.

# Cultivating Resilience

The fastest way to cultivate resilience is simple: **keep talking.**

In communication, resilience grows through ongoing, exchanges, not silence or withdrawal.

You cultivate resilience by staying in the conversation, especially when you want to walk away. Trust is like water: every honest exchange adds another drop to the bucket. Keep talking, and the bucket fills; close the spigot and trust evaporates.



Resilience is endurance in action  
— the choice to stay in the  
conversation, especially when  
you want to walk away.  
When HR leads with that kind of  
steady, stay-in-the-room  
presence, their AI decisions more  
trustworthy.

# discussion

- Diagnose yourself! Are you more inclined toward interpersonal communication or toward authoritative communication?
- Which inclusive language quality do you think you need to practice most?
- Which HR tasks are you personally most eager to automate with AI? How could these be related to your own language biases?
- What types of AI decisions does your organization lean toward? Outsourcing relational work? Decision work?