



 Research Article

NONVERBAL COMMUNICATION AND CULTURAL INTERPRETATION

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ABSTRACT

This article describes the importance of learning culture and language simultaneously and explains the role of Nonverbal communication and cultural interpretation. The author tries to give detailed information about the types of Nonverbal communication.

KEYWORDS

Communication, verbal and nonverbal, interpretation, culture, nations, body language, understanding, cross-culture.

INTRODUCTION

Because of globalization today nations around the world are becoming closer and closer to each other. This intercultural relation makes us to communicate with different members of different culture. Yet the process of understanding two people is not easy. Communication is said to be the production of meaning, through verbal words or non-verbal

gestures (Allen 1999), hence, nonverbal communication sends meaning through some means other than words, such as eye contact, body language, and space and time usage. As it is understood that nonverbal communication does not only serve as a crucial complementary role to verbal



communication, it is also used to regularize meaning, to accentuate and reinforce information.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

The characterized culturally diverse interpretation of a particular nonverbal communication is a factor that makes consideration of cultural differences when sending or receiving nonverbal messages a necessity, because of a situation whereby a message that has a particular meaning in one society can have a completely different meaning in another society (Matsumoto, 2006). This misinterpretation or misunderstanding can cause some problems between two people or two nations. While learning a certain language learners should learn the culture of the country. Cultural differences in Non-verbal communication as enumerated and highlighted by the Vermont Department of Health are categorized by the particular nonverbal communication and the exhibited diverse interpretation.

There are different types of non-verbal communication which include but are not restricted to:

- Body language
- Physical characteristics and appearance
- Personal space
- Environment

Body language describes the method of communicating using body movements or gestures instead of, or in addition to, verbal language. The interpretation of body languages, such as facial expressions and gestures, is formally called kinesics. Body language includes subtle, unconscious movements, including winking and slight movements of the eyebrows and other facial expressions.

The unfortunate reality is that a lot of people judge us by our physical appearance. Our body shape and size, hair, clothing, hygiene, how we hold ourselves, and our persona all communicate something about us. These factors will all influence how people communicate with us. Think about it for a moment - how might you talk to someone who is homeless and living on the streets in ragged clothes?

Personal space refers to the distance that you put between yourself and another person when you are talking to them. Generally, one of two messages are being sent, either 'I want you to be close to me' or 'I want you to keep your distance.' There are four settings where personal space can influence the communication that can take place.

- * public - the distance in a public meeting.
- * social - distance when speaking to strangers including work colleagues.
- * personal - distance when speaking to someone of equal status.
- * intimate - distance when allowing personal contact and closeness.

It is referred to the spaces we live, learn or work in or use daily for sport or other activities. The environment can affect the way communication is taken or understood. The way a room is organized, the color, temperature, ventilation and smells all affect communication. The environment can have both a positive and negative effect on you.

Non-verbal communication in diverse cultures

Body Language



Only as little as 15% is expressed with words. That means more than 50% is expressed through your body.

Eyes

Eye contacts: confidence in America, Canada, Europe, most Asian countries, and Africa. But in Asian countries it means rudeness to stare someone's eyes.

Raising eyebrows: "Yes" in Thailand and some Asian countries; "Hello" in the Philippines.

Winking eye - sharing secret in America and Europe; flirtatious gesture in other countries.

Head

Nodding the head: "yes" in most societies; "no" in some parts of Greece, Yugoslavia, Bulgaria, and Turkey.

Tossing the head backward: "yes" in Thailand, the Philippines, India, Laos. Rocking head slowly, back and forth: "yes, I'm listening" in India and Thailand.

Closed eyes: bored or sleepy in America; "I'm listening and concentrating." in Japan, Thailand, China

Ears

Ear grasp: "I'm sorry." in India.

Cupping the ear: "I can't hear you." in all societies.

Pulling ear: "You are in my heart" for Navajo Indians.

Nose

Holding the nose: "Something smells bad." universal.

Nose tap: "It's confidential." England; "Watch out. Be careful." Italy

Cheeks

Cheek screw: a gesture of praise in Italy; "That's crazy." in Germany;

Cheek stroke: "pretty, attractive, success" in most Europe

Lips and mouth

Kiss: In parts of Asia, kissing is considered an intimate sexual activity and not permissible in public, even as a social greeting.

Pointing to the nose: "It's me." in Japan

Blowing nose: In Japan and many Asian countries, blowing the nose at a social gathering is very impolite.

Spitting: Spitting in public is considered rude and crude in most Western cultures. In the PRC and some other Asian countries, spitting in public is very common.

The lip pointing

Lip pointing: (a substitute for pointing with the hand or finger) is common among Filipinos, Native Americans, Puerto Ricans, and many Latin Americans.

Open mouth: Any display of open mouth is considered very rude in most countries.

Arms

Some cultures, like the Italians, use the arms freely. Others, like the Japanese, are more reserved; it is considered impolite to gesticulate with broad movements of the arms. Folding arms are interpreted by some social observers as a form of excluding self, "I am taking a defensive posture," or "I disagree with what I am hearing."



Arms in front Hands grasped: a common practice in most Asian countries, is a sign of mutual respect for others.

Arms behind back Hands grasped: a sign of ease and control.

Hands

Of all the body parts, the hands are probably used most for communicating non-verbally. Hand waves are used for greetings, beckoning, or farewells.

The American "good-bye" wave can be interpreted in many parts of Europe and Latin America as the signal for "no."

The Italian "good-bye" wave can be interpreted by Americans as the gesture of "come here."

Beckoning: to get attention, Americans raise a hand with the index finger raised above the head. The Japanese beckon with a waving motion with the palm down and the hand flapping up and down at the wrist. These both gestures could be considered rude in each other's country. The American "come here" gesture could be seen as an insult in most Asian countries. In China, to beckon a waiter to refill your tea, simply turn your empty cup upside down.

Handshake

A handshake is a short ritual in which two people grasp one of each other, in most cases accompanied by a brief up and down movement of the grasped hands.

Hands

In casual non-business situations, men are more likely to shake hands than women. It is considered to be in poor taste to show dominance with too strong a

handshake; conversely, too weak a handshake could also be considered unseemly due to people perceiving it as a sign of weakness. In Continental European countries, people shake hands almost every time upon meeting in business situations and also in casual non-business situations

In Belgium, it is expected that everyone in the group shakes hands upon meeting and also when leaving a meeting. In Switzerland, it is expected to shake the women's hands first. Otherwise, shaking hands in order of rank is regarded as appropriate. Austrians shake hands when meeting, including with children. In Sudan, people who know each other have a good pat on the shoulder of the other before shaking hands. In China, where a weak handshake is also preferred, people shaking hands will often hold on to each other, for an extended period after the initial handshake.

In Japan, it is appropriate to let the Japanese initiate the handshake, and a weak handshake is preferred. In South Korea, a senior person will initiate a handshake, where it is preferred to be weak. It is a sign of respect to grasping the right arm with the left hand when shaking hands. In the Middle East, a gentle grip is appropriate. In most Asian cultures, a gentle grip and an avoidance of direct eye contact are appropriate. Hand-holding among the same sex is a custom of special friendship and respect in several Middle Eastern and Asian countries.

CONCLUSION

Cross-cultural communication occurs when a person from one culture sends a message to a person from another culture. Cross-cultural miscommunication occurs when the person from the second culture does not receive the sender's intended message. The greater the differences between the sender's and the receiver's cultures, the greater the chance for cross-



cultural miscommunication. Communication does not necessarily result in understanding. Cross-cultural communication continually involves misunderstanding caused by misperception, misinterpretation, and misevaluation. When the sender of a message comes from one culture and the receiver from another, the chances of accurately transmitting a message are low. Foreigners see, interpret, evaluate things differently, and consequently act upon them differently. In approaching cross-cultural situations, one should therefore assume difference until similarity is proven.

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