

## A Review Of Non-Verbal Communication And Cultural Implications

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### Abstract

The emergence of globalisation has led to a growing significance of cross-cultural communication in the global context. Acquiring proficiency in cross-cultural communication skills is imperative for individuals seeking to secure a favourable position in international business negotiations and effectively manage foreign company operations. This paper aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of nonverbal cross-cultural factors through detailed analysis. The objective is to inspire individuals to approach and address cultural differences in an appropriate manner.

Key Words: nonverbal communication, cross-culture, social groups, effective communication.

### Introduction

Body language research can have significant cultural implications. Different cultures may interpret certain gestures or postures differently, leading to misunderstandings or miscommunications. It is critical to be conscious of these cultural differences and to adjust one's body language accordingly in order to successfully communicate and avoid unintentional offence. A form of communication known as cross-cultural communication is one that has as its primary goal the improvement of the flow of information between various social groups and cultural traditions. Communication on a worldwide scale has grown increasingly commonplace in recent years as a direct result of the spread of globalisation, in the realm of business. Undoubtedly, intercultural communication is significantly influenced by the understanding of diverse cultures. Human beings do not communicate solely through words, nor do they communicate solely through writing, speaking, and listening. In addition, communication encompasses nonverbal elements that do not involve the use of words. Depending on the context, it is imperative to exert a deliberate effort in selecting appropriate vocabulary. Conversely, nonverbal

communication is characterised by a lower degree of intentionality and consciousness. Nonverbal communication is a nuanced and informative form of communication that surpasses verbal communication. Furthermore, it constitutes a significant portion of the overall communication endeavours. This implies that individuals utilise nonverbal cues, like facial expressions, gestures, and eye contact, to strengthen, supplement, and imply meaning in conjunction with their verbal communication.

### **Review and Significance**

The investigation of nonverbal communication in foreign nations has its roots in the 1950s, a time marked by significant advancements in the field of body language. During this era, a few seminal works on the subject were published, including Hall's *The Silent Language* and Bode Whist's *Introduction to Body Language*. During the 1980s, advancements were made in the field of body language. The investigation of nonverbal communication in China has its origins in the 1980s. The study of non-verbal communication has received a lot of attention in China and has attracted the interest of numerous professionals and academics. Several books that examine the function of language and nonverbal conduct in cross-cultural contexts have been published as a result of this. Some notable publications in the field of language and culture include Liu Runqing's *Language and Culture* from the late 1980s, Hu Wenzhong's *Culture and Communication* from the mid-1990s, and *The Dictionary of British and American Culture*. These publications laid the groundwork for contemporary scholars to study linguistic and nonverbal communication in intercultural communication.

American psychologist, Albert Mehrabian, a pioneer researcher of body language in the 1950s, found that the total impact of a message is about 7% verbal (words only) and 38% vocal (including tone of voice, inflection, and other sounds) and 55% nonverbal (Mehrabian, 2007). Therefore, nonverbal communication holds great importance. Consequently, nonverbal communication demands significant cognitive processing. Nonverbal communication refers to the exchange of information between individuals through means other than written or spoken language. This pertains to the physical gestures, positioning, temporal aspects, vocal inflection and pitch, overall environmental characteristics, colour scheme, and layout or design, as well as any other visual or auditory cues utilised by the communicator. Because bodily movements, gestures, and so on are so crucial in communication, they are researched as a subfield of nonverbal communication. It is called 'Kinesics,' which means "body

movements." It depicts how the body communicates without using words, but rather via varied movements of its parts. Furthermore, it has deep cultural roots. Nonverbal communication is influenced by cultural norms and beliefs, which decide what type of nonverbal behaviour is acceptable. Nonverbal communication, on the other hand, acts as a mirror, reflecting many civilizations. This research attempts to emphasise a comparative approach to discussing numerous nonverbal elements that are commonly employed in daily life and might lead to misunderstanding and difficulty in cross-cultural communication among countries.

According to management consultant Nancy Austin, body language is extremely important. "When people are unsure whether to believe what they are hearing or seeing, they rely on body language - it tells the truth." It's lot easier to play fast and loose with words than it is with gestures." Paul Ekman, explains "We talk with our vocal cords, but we communicate with our facial expressions, tone of voice, and entire body." Understanding body language has numerous practical applications. You can handle difficulties at work and at home before they arise when you can consciously "read" what others are expressing inadvertently. Educational psychologist Marilyn Maple says. The predominant subject of nonverbal communication in the workplace appears to centre around power dynamics, which in turn influences one's awareness of status. We can tell who has the most status in a conference by looking around. Those in positions of power in all species and societies want to appear enormous, strong, and fearless. Excluded or powerless people present a range of physical cues.

The concept has been effectively illustrated by Professor Albert Mehrabian through the utilisation of the officer-soldier dynamic within the military as an exemplar. According to the speaker, one's status can be conveyed through subtle cues such as a relaxed posture and manner of interaction. An iconic depiction involves military personnel maintaining a rigid stance while facing a superior ranking official. The individual's physical appearance displays a rigid and balanced structure, which suggests a submissive demeanour. When a subordinate staff member is required to present themselves before a higher-ranking executive or officer, the scenario is nearly indistinguishable from that of any other organisation. The conveyed information pertains to their position and role-relationship.

### **Thought, Feeling, and Position Reflection**

It is important to understand that our thoughts, feelings, and other factors have a significant influence on our bodily motions, postures, gestures, and other physical actions. Human communication involves a range of nonverbal cues such as nodding, blinking, waving, and shrugging, among others. Nonverbal cues such as gestures and messages can often convey more meaning than spoken language. The reason for the term "body language" to refer to this area of study is being highlighted. The human body can convey various messages, such as attitudes, status relationships, moods, and sentiments, both consciously and unconsciously. These messages can be compared to the way language uses symbols to communicate meaning. The process of interpreting these meanings requires us to derive them from observable physical cues. Eye contact, gestures, posture, facial expressions, and other physical characteristics are all symbols used in human communication. These symbols are utilised for different purposes.

### **Significance of Body Language**

The primary observable component of communication is nonverbal behaviour, specifically body language. Consequently, it facilitates the process of message decoding for the recipient. It serves as a complementary tool to enhance oral discourse. The presence of facial expressions and gestures is crucial in effectively conveying a message, particularly in interpersonal communication. Establishing rapport with the audience is facilitated by this practise. The utilisation of body language serves to enhance the efficacy of communication. The absence of gestures, alterations in posture, or appropriate eye contact can render any in-person communication lacklustre or uninteresting. Given that individuals place a significant value on nonverbal communication, enhancing the general ambiance and aesthetic of the institution can be facilitated through the improvement of body language. A resourceful manager can utilise it with great efficacy.

### **Differences and Cultural Implications**

This study examines the components that constitute a specific group or culture and the potential implications of these components on the group or culture. Several topics are addressed under the following section. The researcher has enumerated a range of nonverbal communication signals, comprising facial expressions, eye gaze, hand movements, head rotations, bodily contours, and stance. Nonverbal cues can communicate significant information regarding an individual's cognitive and

emotional states, as well as their objectives, thereby exerting a substantial influence on the efficacy of social interaction. Analysing and interpreting these nonverbal cues can help individuals better understand and respond to the messages being conveyed.

### **Facial Expression**

This is a common proverb. "This face is the heart's index." Whatever we are feeling deep down is immediately mirrored on our faces. It is essential in any face-to-face communication situation. We communicate so much without saying a single word. Consider the common facial emotions for happiness, surprise, fear, rage, grief, bewilderment, astonishment, and contentment. The topic being examined pertains to the facial expressions exhibited by individuals, with a specific focus on the diverse types of smiles and frowns. The facial expressions are distinguished by the placement of the lips, the direction of the eyebrows, the condition of the cheeks - whether raised, pulled back, or drooping - the shape of the jaw, the state of the nose and nostrils, and the condition of the chin. The facial cues transmitted by others and our own facial expressions can be readily discerned through the observation of specific facial regions, and using a mirror, respectively.

Positive or negative thoughts and feelings may be expressed through facial expression and that has different shades of meaning in different culture. These facial expressions vary in both frequency and context from culture to culture. For instance, in Asian culture, individuals tend to display frequent smiling behaviour, which serves as a means of conveying not only positive emotions but also negative ones such as remorse. In certain contexts, in China, the act of smiling may elicit discomfort among individuals from Western cultures. When the Chinese witness someone feeling embarrassed after committing an error, they tend to burst into laughter. It makes westerners believe that the Chinese are making fun of them, thereby increasing their humiliation. In this situation, a Chinese smile conveys the message of "it doesn't matter" and showcases their sense of humour to diffuse awkward situations. It is not intended to mock or ridicule others for their mistakes. Negotiators who lack awareness of this information may experience frustration and terminate business collaboration. Altering our inner nature can result in a modification of our behaviour and expression. However, it is not a straightforward matter. The degree of motivation and constructive efforts to maintain composure and emit positive

signals are crucial factors in optimising outcomes in any circumstance. Facial expressions vary across cultures in terms of their frequency, acceptable contexts, and emotional connotations, despite some similarities. Understanding the cultural significance and intended meaning of facial expressions is crucial in intercultural communication.

### **Eye Contact**

Eye contact is crucial in interpersonal communication. When observing a person's face, our attention is drawn to their eyes as we attempt to interpret their nonverbal communication. Maintaining eye contact with others is a crucial aspect of interpersonal communication. In *Love's Labour's Lost*, Shakespeare expressed the notion that the individual's senses were confined to their eyes, akin to precious jewels encased in crystal, awaiting a royal purchaser. All these factors indicate the importance of eye communication. The eye organs serve as a metaphorical gateway to an individual's innermost being.

The eyes can convey our deepest emotions, including those related to the brows, eyelids, and pupil size. The facial expression characterised by raised eyebrows and eyelids, along with dilated pupils, is indicative of excitement, surprise, or fear. Brows with closed upper and lower eyelids and constricted pupils suggest anger or pain. These are the prevalent eye patterns. Eye contact and movements, along with associated patterns, hold considerable importance. Sustained eye contact signifies a high level of interest in an individual. Brief eye contact or averted gaze may indicate feelings of nervousness or embarrassment. Direct eye contact is commonly associated with honesty, while avoiding eye contact may indicate guilt. Squinting at people may be perceived as a manifestation of disdain. Eye contact and body language, when used in concert with other facial expressions, can convey a lot of information.

The utilisation of eye contact varies significantly across diverse nations and cultures. At times, they exhibit diametrically opposed connotations. When people from Western countries like the United States and the United Kingdom talk to each other across cultures, making direct eye contact is often seen as a sign of honesty and trustworthiness. Lack of direct eye contact may lead to the perception of an individual as being timid, lacking confidence, and impolite. In the cultural norms of England and France, it is customary for gentlemen to gaze upon women as a means of expressing admiration, a practise that is widely

acknowledged and accepted. Extended eye contact may suggest that the individual is engaging in communication with a heightened level of interest. Conversely, individuals in certain nations, including China, Japan, the Philippines, and Indonesia, tend to minimise prolonged direct eye contact. It is believed that maintaining direct eye contact is considered impolite and may be interpreted as a sign of offence. In Japanese communication, it is common for individuals to direct their gaze towards the neck region of their interlocutors, rather than making direct eye contact with their face. Regarding their cultural norms, direct eye contact is considered a sign of disrespect. In Chinese culture, it is customary for individuals to exhibit modesty and respect by avoiding eye contact with one another. This behaviour is observed by both parties involved. In certain contexts, a downward gaze may indicate a display of respect or submission towards a person of higher authority. The impact of "a sense of shame" is significant among individuals, particularly in Muslim culture where it is prohibited for men and women to engage in eye contact.

The variances among individuals from diverse cultural backgrounds may result in communication breakdowns within the workplace that can impede productivity and efficiency. Cultivating an awareness of diverse cultures and demonstrating respect by acknowledging the varying implications of eye contact within different cultural contexts can foster amicable relationships and confer advantages to one's own person.

### **Gestures**

Apart from facial expressions and eye contact, other body parts also exhibit significant movements. Gestures refer to bodily movements involving the arms, legs, hands, torso, and head. Nonverbal cues are crucial for conveying meaning. Gestures such as pounding a fist on a table, holding a forefinger high above the head, and forming a circle with a forefinger and thumb are commonly used to convey emotions or meanings, such as anger, the number one, and approval, respectively. Body language can convey various meanings. Extended arms suggest 'broad', weight transfer between legs conveys 'anxiety', and a vertical torso with slight inclination forward may imply 'intensity'. Moreover, the gesture commonly referred to as the "OK" sign is widely regarded as a positive gesture indicating that all is well. The manual gesture entails flexing the index finger over the thumb and extending the other fingers above them. Nonetheless, in the countries of Australia, Belgium, and France, the term denotes a numerical value of "zero" or "nothing." In the context of a business

negotiation, it has been observed that the use of the "OK" hand gesture by American negotiators in the presence of their Japanese counterparts may lead to misinterpretation and potentially escalate the situation to the point of jeopardising the business transaction. The term "OK" holds a connotation of satisfaction for Americans when it comes to the successful completion of a business transaction. The Japanese associate the term "OK" with the shape of a coin, which could imply a solicitation for a bribe. The term in question is rarely used in Arab nations and is usually used to intimidate or as a profanity. Similarly, as commonly understood, the gesture of a raised thumb conveys a positive evaluation of a task or action, serving as a means of expressing commendation and motivation. However, in certain Islamic and Asian nations, the gesture is construed as impolite and disrespectful. In the Australian context, the gesture conveys a sense of affirmation or agreement, whereas a vertical movement of the same gesture is perceived as a highly offensive act. In the context of Thailand, the sign is interpreted as a symbol of derision and censure. The two categories of gestures are commonly utilised in everyday situations. Numerous nonverbal cues are utilised in the process of communication. Inadequate consideration of cross-cultural communication disparities can result in unintentional offences towards our collaborators, potentially leading to the breakdown of current and future business partnerships.

We should keep in mind that gestures only have meaning when used in context with another person. That moment may occur at the outset, during, or conclusion of a social interaction involving two or more people having a conversation. There appears to be an inseparable connection between speech and body language. It has been shown that the magnitude of a gesture corresponds to the passion with which words are conveyed. As volume increases, so does the size of the motion. Communicating effectively requires synchronisation between words and body language. Discord between words and actions causes misunderstanding and awkwardness.

### **Physical Form, Posture and Head**

Proper head posture is essential for effective interpersonal communication, as well as during meetings and interviews. The phrase "Hold your head high" is a well-known adage. Demonstrating respect, self-esteem, confidence, integrity, and interest towards individuals in our presence is essential. A lowered head can indicate modesty, politeness, or diffidence, depending on the context. Excessive backward or upright positioning of the



head signifies arrogance or conceit. Head jerks can convey different meanings such as arrogance, rejection, or agreement, depending on the context and personality of the person. Nonverbal cues such as lateral or horizontal head movements are more efficient in conveying intended messages than verbal language. Researchers in the field of behavioural science have categorised human body shapes into three broad types.

(a) Ectomorph: thin, youthful, and tall.

(b) Mesomorph: athletic, strong, bony, and muscular.

(c) Endomorph: fat, round and soft.

Postures refer to the act of communicating through body movement. People's communication postures can reveal their social status, religious beliefs, desires, and intentions, among other things. The popularity of one posture over another and the emotion communicated by a given posture appear to be primarily culturally determined (Samovar et al., 2004).

While body shape is largely predetermined, it can be utilised to benefit individuals. Body shape and posture affect self-perception, interpersonal relationships, and the perception and response to movement. Human behaviour is often characterised by spontaneity, whether it involves socialising with acquaintances or participating in professional gatherings. Self-consciousness arises during interviews or presentations. During such events, our aim is to create a favourable impression. Exertion may result in an awkward posture. Posture can significantly impact the initial impression formed by an observer. This involves a person's posture, whether they are hunched over, standing tall, sitting up straight, slouching, or bending at the waist.

It is possible that individuals may inadvertently position their feet towards others and cross one leg while engaged in conversation. Crossing legs is considered disrespectful in Thailand and Saudi Arabia, but informal or relaxed in the United States. In Japan, the act of sitting quietly is regarded as a manifestation of mental and spiritual equilibrium. It has been observed that individuals from the United States of America also exhibit the nonverbal behaviour of shrugging their shoulders. This statement suggests a lack of guilt or concealment. The Chinese government characterises the lack of attention and knowledge as indifference and ignorance. The act of leaning forward during a negotiation is commonly interpreted as a

nonverbal cue of curiosity and attentiveness. If an individual averts their gaze, it may indicate a lack of attentiveness. There are individuals who hold the belief that communication postures lack significance. Certain body positions may not cause physical discomfort, but they have the potential to negatively impact one's professional persona.

### **Appearance**

Appearance encompasses attire, hairstyle, accessories, cosmetics, and related factors. This may seem irrelevant to nonverbal communication. However, upon closer inspection, we discover that they are inextricably linked to our face, eyes, posture, gestures, and so on. A famous author says men are recognised by their "dress and address." "Dress" requires no explanation. He refers to address as the way a person addresses others. Every occasion requires a different type of attire. It can be formal or casual. Organisations typically mandate formal attire, such as a suit or jacket and trousers, for employee work hours. Some organisations mandate uniform attire for all employees. Transitioning from formal to casual attire can be a noticeable indicator of one's attitude towards work, colleagues, and personal feelings. Formal invitation cards for events such as cocktail parties, receptions, and dinners typically provide dress code instructions for guests. Apart from clothing, nonverbal signals like footwear, hairstyle, and fragrance hold importance for any event.

### **Guiding Principles for Mitigating Intercultural Communication Barriers**

Considering the significance of body language and kinesics, the query is how to utilise them effectively. The following suggestions may be beneficial in this context:

**Body-language:** In our everyday communication, we must pay close attention to our speech, gestures, and movements. When standing, the shoulders should be erect, the body should be open, and the weight should be distributed uniformly on both feet. Nevertheless, we must avoid the appearance of a rigid posture. A rigid posture indicates mental rigidity.

When people are under pressure, they tend to do strange things. It is a fun pastime for some people to fiddle with their hair or the pen they are holding. A psychologist has suggested that such actions dilute the significance of our words.

Confidence and authority can be conveyed simply by sitting in a chair with both feet flat on the floor and your shoulders back. Austin says, "Rest your forearms on the table". This implies staying put. Nonverbal cues such as slouching or fidgeting with one's feet may convey a sense of apathy, disinterest, or discomfort. If feasible, we may request a companion to record a video of us in order to gain a perspective of ourselves from an external viewpoint.

**Handshake:** Handshakes are essential in the business world. It communicates important information about our authority, prestige, and compassion for the individual we encounter. Confidence is conveyed by a firm, dry handshake with modest pressure. When the wrist is bent or merely the digits are utilised to grab an object, false signals are sent.

**Eye contact:** Austin says "The most remembered element in forming an impression of someone is eye contact." If you want to be regarded seriously, you must learn to maintain direct eye contact."

Nonetheless, it is essential to recall that a cautionary note has been issued in this regard. Another psychologist, Ekman, asserts, "The dominant person has the right to look and continue looking; the subordinate is expected to look away." If you maintain unnerving eye contact with your supervisor, he will interpret this as a challenge to his authority, even if this was not your intention.

**Communicate at audience's level:** It is important to consider the level of the individual with whom we are communicating. Nonverbal cues, such as body language, can provide insight into the power dynamic between individuals. The act of crossing one's arms over the chest or legs while engaged in conversation can impede effective communication. The act of tapping one's foot or feet is commonly associated with impatience. When interacting with young children, it is advisable to assume a lower physical position, such as kneeling or bending down, in order to establish eye contact with them. In order to convey an attitude of receptiveness towards the requirements of elderly individuals. It is preferable to stand with your back to a wall or table, weight on one foot, and arms in a neutral posture close to your torso. Maintaining an upright posture is indicative of exhibiting deference towards individuals occupying positions of power.

**Be ourselves:** Nonverbal cues, according to Maple, stem from a person's feeling of self-esteem. Improving body language necessitates inward effort. Self-assurance is a sign of comfort with oneself. Individuals with a strong sense of self exhibit a calm demeanour in their speech and actions. They consistently present themselves favourably. To reduce stress, individuals should prioritise relaxation and authenticity instead of adopting a false persona or engaging in showy behaviour.

**Graceful motions and self-assured posture:** We can appear good, convey the proper messages, invigorate the workers, and spark the curiosity of others with little effort.

### **Limitations**

The reliability of body language as a means of communication is limited due to its nonverbal nature, which is dependent on non-linguistic cues such as facial expressions and gestures. The written or spoken word is often regarded with greater gravity than body language, which may not always be deemed reliable. Individuals from diverse cultural backgrounds exhibit distinct nonverbal cues. Consequently, they are prone to misinterpretation. Consequently, it is imperative to exercise prudence when utilising and comprehending them. If the recipient is not actively engaged, nonverbal cues such as facial expressions, gestures, and postures may lose their efficacy. Consequently, it is imperative to exercise additional caution to ensure accurate transmission of the intended message. The utilisation of body language in sizable gatherings is deemed to be an ineffectual approach. The efficacy of the communication method is observed in situations where there are limited participants, typically two or a small group, engaging in direct interaction.

### **Conclusion**

This discussion illuminates cross-cultural nonverbal communication in business. Linguistic differences, nonverbal cues, cultural background, and internal communication in varied organisations make intercultural communication difficult. This does not mean people from different cultures think differently. To achieve effective communication, it is advisable to adapt communication styles to suit varying situations and interpersonal relationships encountered during communication. Initially, acquiring an understanding of various cultures is an undeniable prerequisite. Hence, the resolution of intercultural communication style-related cultural misunderstandings can be achieved through the implementation of suitable approaches.

Globalisation, especially in economics, has increased intercultural exchanges. To keep up with global trends, learning intercultural communication is crucial so that can help business people interact with people from other cultures and complete effective transactions. The research presented here aspires to improve our appreciation for and response to all international nonverbal cues, regardless of their origin or cultural setting.

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