

Cross Cultural Nonverbal Communication

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Cross-cultural communication can be difficult in some countries because what is acceptable in one culture may be unacceptable in another. When people are immersed in an environment where facial expressions such as eye contact and body gestures are alien to their own experience, they may suffer from disorientation and frustration. Therefore, it is significant to learn the body language of different cultures. This essay focuses on the use of nonverbal communication in North America, Thailand, and some other parts of the world.

Facial expression is the most important source of nonverbal communication in all cultures. However, sometimes it can be hard to interpret the meaning through facial cues. Since there are many facial expressions, such as those for happiness, sadness, fear, and anger, it may be hard to distinguish which expression the person is trying to convey. According to Carey's report, "facial expressions [are the most] obvious ones [that] can be very misleading, because most [people] are pretty good at covering a lie" (350). In North America, people pay much attention to facial expressions during interactions because it helps them to understand what the other person is trying to convey.

Eye contact is a crucial aspect of communication, and it is a valuable source of information in many cultures. Levin and Adelman state, "[in] a conversation too little eye contact may be seen negatively because it conveys lack of interest, inattention, or even mistrust" (346). For instance, in the United States, eye contact is a basic and expected form of nonverbal communication as is a firm handshake. In France, people do not toast without eye contact because it is considered a symbol of politeness and respect. In contrast, this may not be true in some other parts of the world such as parts of Asia, Africa, and Latin America. People avoid direct eye contact as a sign of respect.

Body gesture is another method of nonverbal communication people use daily. Examples of body gestures include instinctively beckoning to a waiter, and initiating a business presentation with visual signals to greet people. In Thailand, people snap their fingers to call a waiter over to request their bill whereas Americans walk to the counter to receive their bill. McShane mentioned that Westerners tend to appreciate a firm handshake as a sign of strength and warmth in a friendship or business relationship (336). In contrast, Thais greet one another by putting their hands together just as we pay respect to the Lord Buddha. Moreover, in some cultures people say good-bye by waving their hands while the others embrace one another. In Bulgaria, when people nod their heads, it means "no," but in other parts of the world, nodding their heads means "yes."

In conclusion, during conversations, people use not only verbal communication but also nonverbal communication consciously or unconsciously to express their emotions. It is clear that nonverbal communications can be specific to a particular culture and may not have the same meaning in other cultures. Thus, nonverbal communication can lead to misunderstandings. Therefore, it is important to learn the nonverbal expressions of other cultures in order to smooth cross culture communication.

Works Cited

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