

# **Different Aspects of Intercultural Nonverbal Communication**

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Nonverbal communication refers to all intentional and unintentional stimuli between communicating parties, other than spoken words. Successful interaction in intercultural settings requires not only the understanding of verbal messages but of nonverbal messages as well. Characteristic to nonverbal communication is that it is less systematized than verbal communication; it is culture-bound and ambiguous.

There is a popular saying, "actions speak louder than words." In reality, it highlights the significance of non-verbal communication. Non-verbal communication is especially noteworthy in intercultural situations. Doubtless non-verbal differences account for typical difficulties in communicating.

The importance of non-verbal communication in our global society is especially significant. "Intercultural non-verbal communication" refers to the unspoken word between communicating parties. Two-thirds of communication is transmitted non-verbally. The possibility for misunderstanding and disagreement regarding non-verbal communication is great because of cultural differences. So, successful interaction in intercultural situations entails just as much understanding of non-verbal messages as the verbal ones.

Non-verbal communication is one of the key aspects of communication. Its diverse functions include repeating, accentuating, complementing and contradicting a verbal message. This type of communication also normalizes relations, such as non-verbal cues conveying when a person should speak or not speak. Finally, non-verbal communication can even alter a verbal message through mimics, gestures and facial expressions, particularly when people do not speak the same language.

Nonverbal communication is hugely important in any interaction with others because people tend to look for nonverbal cues when verbal messages are unclear

or ambiguous (especially when *different* languages are being used). "Since nonverbal behavior arises from our cultural common sense (our ideas about what is appropriate, normal, and effective as communication in relationships), we use different systems of understanding gestures, posture, silence, emotional expression, touch, physical appearance, and other nonverbal cues" (LeBaron, 2003).

### **Intercultural Communication**

*Human beings draw close to one another by their common nature but habits and customs keep them apart (Confucius).*

Socrates described two worlds in PHAEDO: the first is a world of imperfection impeded by the inexpert medium of speech, and the second a better world of perfection where all things are communicated visually, without the need for words.

Widespread population migrations have changed the demographics of several nations and new intercultural identities and communities have been born. The growth of interdependence of people and cultures in the global society of the twenty-first century has forced us to pay even more attention to intercultural issues.

All civilizations depend on each other for different reasons. People of the world carry out communication through verbal and nonverbal means. The better our intercultural communication skills, the easier it will be for us to take our place in international society. Typically more interest is focused on verbal communication than nonverbal communication. Unfortunately, communicating sides make great efforts to find appropriate vocabulary but neglect nonverbal communication cues. It is important to raise responsiveness of the nonverbal communication in the process of intercultural communication. My paper deals with some of the means of nonverbal communication and ways of escaping those cultural disagreements and difficulties. The main purpose of my study is to examine the role of nonverbal behavior in the context of intercultural communication.

To overcome such difficulties requires integrating nonverbal communication skills in order to better communicate interculturally. I'll be very happy if my research plays any role in overcoming these obstacles to intercultural understanding.

Today the world does not look as huge as in the past. According to Wang, people are coerced to live in this global world. With the development of globalization, intercultural communication has become more significant than even before (2007).

Every day, whether we realize it or not, we observe nonverbal communication. We are able to understand more about the people we come into contact with because of this observation.

The term "intercultural communication" was first used in Edward T. Hall's (1959) book, *The Silent Language*, and Hall has been acknowledged to be the founder of the field of intercultural communication. Throughout the growth of intercultural communication study, Hall's work has remained influential (Rogers et al. 2002). *The Silent Language* placed a serious emphasis on "nonverbal" communication, and a significant contribution of the book to its readers was its discussion of unseen aspects of human communication, mainly *proxemics* (how space affects communication) and *chronemics* (how time affects communication).

The research of the field of nonverbal communications has grown swiftly over the last few decades, and it has functions in business, media, international relations, education, and indeed any field which notably involves interpersonal and group dynamics.

According to Shi-Xu (2001), there are three significant positions that should contain a meaningful measurement of intercultural communication. First, intercultural communication should be judged at the level of social acts and not just language interpretation. Accordingly, it is not the accepting of words and sentences that is so essential, but the social dimension that is worthy of critical notice. Secondly, that intercultural communication is a socially structured action or message so the meaning of communication cannot be diminished by words. Thirdly, intercultural communication does not go on in a power vacuum, or equal-power dealings. Intercultural communication was situated in the context of imbalance of power and inequality in resources, between the east and the west, the north and the south, men and women, the majority and the minority.

According to Chen and Starosta (1996), the abilities of negotiating cultural meanings and executing appropriately effective communication behaviors allow people to become competent in intercultural communication. The correlated challenge is that people from different cultural backgrounds transmit different understandings and beliefs viewing group dynamics, management techniques, social norms and communication models.

### **Political aspects of NVC**

In the contemporary international world, great attention and care is taken to bridge cultural differences among world leaders when they meet. There are whole teams

of protocol and pre-event personnel who go over every detail of an interaction to ensure nothing is missed, mismanaged, or misunderstood.

Cultural differences have significant effects on diplomatic negotiations. Failure to understand and appreciate these differences can have serious consequences for negotiations. Successful leaders communicate efficiently—not only with their words, but just as important, through nonverbal actions. Some politicians understand the effect of body language on the public and may try to use it to their advantage, while some politicians may be able to influence people sensitive to body language.

Current American history is dominated by presidential politics and also by nonverbals.

A politician who stares out into the distance during another's speech is subconsciously telling the audience that he or she doesn't think the person speaking deserves his or her attention. Even a smile can give away a politician's true feelings.

The most effective leaders are those who transmit charisma and confidence. They connect with others and stimulate interest. They show emotion. They are labeled "visionaries." Nonverbal communication has been a critical component of American presidential debates from the very first televised forum. In 1960, Richard M. Nixon's five o'clock shadow helped make him look pale, sickly, and thin. Michael Dukakis was criticized in 1988 for his lack of emotion and stiff posture. George H.W. Bush looked at his watch during a 1992 debate, suggesting impatience, boredom, or lack of interest. In 2000, Al Gore's sighing and eye-rolling made him less likable.

Clinton's body language is one of the interesting fields for political researchers. His nonverbal communication style draws many researchers' attention. I can give some examples.

Both Clinton and his spouse Hillary were masters of nonverbal communication. When accusations were made in the media, the president and his wife were seen holding hands. When the fires of accusation were most intense, Mrs. Clinton was seen publicly leaning tightly against her husband's chest. The message was obvious: "Forget all these allegations; there is nothing wrong here." (Foster, 2000)

Former U.S. President Bill Clinton often bit his lip when trying to appear emotional, such as when he apologized for the affair with Monica Lewinsky. Did that small gesture win him the public's sympathy? (See: [www.bodylanguageexpert.co.uk/body-language-politicians.html](http://www.bodylanguageexpert.co.uk/body-language-politicians.html))

The gesture dubbed the "Clinton thumb" after one of its most famous users, Bill Clinton, is used by politicians to provide emphasis in speeches. This gesture has the thumb leaning against the thumb-side portion of the index finger, which is part of a closed fist, or slightly projecting from the fist. An emphatic, it does not exhibit the anger of the clenched fist or pointing finger, and so is thought to be less threatening. This gesture was likely adopted by Clinton from John F. Kennedy, who can be seen using it in many speeches and images from his political career (Mankiewicz, 2009).

The current president of the U.S., Barack Obama, also has very interesting nonverbal behavior. One of the politicians characterizes his body language as the following: "*Obama is a good speaker, but his stylistic range is pretty limited. His style lacks the common touch of Roosevelt, Truman, Johnson, Carter, and Clinton. That's a political problem for him.*" However, Obama's success in leadership is sometimes attributed to his use of appropriate body language, most notably, his brilliant smile.

Studies show that people prefer more attractive speakers to less attractive. The other facial gestures that work well for public speakers are three universally understood ones: opening the eyes, raising the eyebrows, and nodding the head. President Obama, for example, uses each of these gestures, but in particular he is a great 'nodder'. Watch any speech of his, and you will see him nod at the ends of phrases and sentences. This has the effect of affirming through body language what his content is saying. It's one reason why we find him so convincing as a speaker and president (Cost, 2008).

Leaders in general will use different nonverbal behaviors and actions when addressing a crowd or making a speech than they would in a one-on-one situation. For example, Obama made good use of eye contact with individuals during his debates with John McCain. He was avoiding eye contact because he has a short temper and looking at Obama might provoke his anger. America may see his weakness; it was a good strategy for McCain (see, [www.businessweek.com/.../sep2008/ca20080929\\_440972.htm](http://www.businessweek.com/.../sep2008/ca20080929_440972.htm)).

No matter how poised he or she is while giving a speech, certain gestures can give away the true feelings about something despite what someone's mouth is saying.

The former British Prime Minister Tony Blair also is considered a leader with interesting nonverbal style. He would fiddle with his little finger when anxious while others note that he may touch his stomach when under verbal attack. Mr. Blair raises his eyebrows when he wants to appear non-threatening, a submissive gesture (see, [news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/.../5316916.stm](http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/.../5316916.stm) press conference).

Studies show nonverbal communication is the emotional meaning behind what is said. People react effectively to what they see, or to the tone of voice that is used to speak the words they hear. Everything including dress, the extent of physical space between the speaker and audience, hand gestures, body movement, mimics, and tone of voice can make or break a leader's message.

### **Gender Aspects of NVC**

How does our gender affect us in our intercultural interactions? Gender has a great influence on all sides of human communication and raises many profound social matters.

There is communication specialization between men and women, men being more accurate with vocal and women with visual communication. Research has shown that girls display more nurturance communication behavior than boys and this would account for a higher sensitivity to nonverbal cues (Bullis & Horn, 1995).

Do males and females interact according to different nonverbal agendas? Communication between men and women is considered to be cross-cultural communication and women and men are from different planets. They speak as if they have different dialects and sometimes don't understand each other completely. What does help you to understand the opposite sex? Certainly, nonverbal communication.

Some gender aspects of nonverbal communication are dependable across cultures. For example, research has shown that the emotions of enjoyment, anger, fear, sadness, disgust, and surprise are expressed in similar ways by people around the world. Differences surface with respect to which emotions are acceptable to display in various cultural settings, and by whom. For instance, it may be more socially acceptable in some settings in the United States for women to show fear, but not anger, and for men to display anger, but not fear.

In most Westernized countries it is considered normal for two men to shake hands. In some Asian and Islamic countries it is considered normal for men to kiss each other, either on the cheeks or on the lips. Some countries also consider men holding hands to be normal. In most westernized countries men kissing or holding hands in public would be viewed as homosexual behavior (see [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Body Language](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Body_Language)).

Islamic cultures generally don't approve of any touching between opposite genders (even handshakes), but consider such touching (including hand holding, hugs) between members of the same sex to be appropriate.

When traveling to other societies, it is important to understand that there are likely to be significant gender differences in paralanguage in addition to distinctions in clothes and adornment. In North America, for instance, men generally prefer face to face conversations and maintain direct eye contact longer. In contrast, women often converse standing side by side but closer together than is typical of men. Male handshakes tend to be firmer. North American women usually are more restrained in their use of bold gestures but use more facial expressions (especially smiles) and are more skilled in interpreting them.

In Japan, women most often speak with an artificially high pitch, especially when conversing with men in a business or official setting. This is part of the general deference traditionally shown to men. However, recent research indicates that the pitch of female voices has begun to lower. It has been suggested that this change is connected with the increased economic and political power of Japanese women.

Studies have been made concerning feminine and masculine pictures of the world, the differences between feminine and masculine values, and the distinctive features of speech that men and women use. Women in low-masculinity cultures show more synchrony in their movement than those in high-masculinity cultures.

It has been suggested women's lower status may negatively influence perceptions of power and therefore hinder credibility and persuasiveness. Although gender was not investigated in a study by Aguinis, Simonsen and Pierce (1998), it was found that nervous facial expressions and indirect eye contact hindered perceptions of power and credibility.

As women's roles in society change and they move to higher positions of power in the work place, finding the most effective influential measures is needed. But Woods (1996) considers that women's nonverbal communication ability may be based on interpersonal cognitive complexity rather than status or value placed on learned nurturance.

According to Becky Michele Mulvaney it is useful to view gender communication as a form of intercultural communication. First, the author considers that gender is both an influence on and a product of communication. In short, Mulvaney highlights the primary role played by communication in gender issues.

Second, descriptions of some salient elements of intercultural communication Mulvaney maintains that gender communication is a form of intercultural communication. Finally, according to the author gender communication plays an important role in developing effective intercultural communication skills.

## Conclusion

The studies show that inappropriate nonverbal behaviors may cause potential conflicts in intercultural communication. Intercultural communication refers to the communication between people from different cultures. According to Samovar and Porter (1991) intercultural communication occurs whenever a message is produced by a member of one culture for consumption by a member of another culture, and the message must be understood. Because of cultural differences in these kinds of contacts, the potential for misunderstanding and disagreement is great. To reduce this risk, it is important to study intercultural communication.

A culturally-fluent approach to conflict means working over time to understand these and other ways communication varies across cultures, and applying these understandings in order to enhance relationships across different cultures.

Cultural communication research tends to focus on understanding communication within *one* culture from the insiders' points of view (Gudykunst and Mody 2002). Understanding cross-cultural communication should be a prerequisite to understanding intercultural communication because cross-cultural communication looks at how people from differing cultural backgrounds endeavor to communicate. Thus, the core of cross-cultural communication is to establish and understand how people from different cultures communicate with each other. A new challenge for cultural fluency as a guide to effective intercultural communication is to generate approaches of investigation on how people from different cultures and speaking different languages actually influence each other in specific intercultural contexts.

The role of the right strategy of intercultural communication is very important in avoiding misunderstanding. Globalization demands a greater need for intercultural contact and interdependence. People of this globalizing world are obliged to redesign intercultural communication to achieve effectual intercultural communication proficiency.

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*Summary***Different Aspects of Intercultural Nonverbal Communication****Kifayat Aghayeva**

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It is shown the ways how to manage nonverbal intercultural communication effectively and cultural, political and gender aspects of NVC are investigated in the article. Studies of nonverbal communication indicate that nonverbal communication is constantly used, whether or not people speak to each-other. Non-verbal communication can even alternate a verbal message through mimics, gestures and facial expressions, particularly when people do not speak the same language. A culturally-fluent approach to conflict means working over time to understand these and other ways communication varies across cultures, and applying these understandings in order to enhance relationships across differences. These features influences intercultural communication and can be responsible for increase of conflict when it leads to bad communication or misinterpretation or vice versa can be responsible for escaping of them.

Intercultural communication is a discipline that studies communication across different cultures and social groups, or how culture affects communication. It describes the wide range of communication processes and problems that naturally appear within an organization or social context made up of individuals from different religious, social, ethnic, and educational backgrounds. In this sense, it seeks to understand how people from different countries and cultures act, communicate and perceive the world. Although nonverbal communication is a universal phenomenon, meanings of nonverbal cues are not, in fact, universal. They vary tremendously across cultures and are often ambiguous. Nonverbal communication can take many forms. Effectiveness as an international professional often hinges on understanding what these forms might be and how their meanings may differ between countries. Below are samples of seven forms of nonverbal communication, as well as specific cultural variances.

**Eye contact.** Gestures can convey wildly different meanings. Individuals in the United States use the "OK" sign to convey that something is acceptable. In Japan, the same hand symbol means "money." Nonverbal Communication and Intercultural Competence. Nonverbal codes are important to an understanding of intercultural communication because virtually everything we say, do, create, and wear can communicate messages about our culture and ourselves. Indeed, as Peter A. Andersen suggests, "One of the most basic and obvious functions of nonverbal communication is to communicate one's culture." Some examples on nonverbal communication in intercultural communication:

**Cultural meanings of touch.** Touch means different things in different cultures. High contact cultures are the Middle east, latin am