

A Study of Body Language in Non-verbal Communication

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Abstract: Language, as a tool of social communication, is an important part of culture, while body language, as an important part of non-verbal communication, refers to those non-verbal body signals including spatial distance, eye gaze, posture movements, facial expressions, etc. This article mainly discusses the application and function of body language. The application of body language is mainly manifested in its application in daily life. The role of body language is mainly manifested in the auxiliary function, the function of revealing and concealing people's inner state and mental state, the bond of communication between the two sides, and the role of deducing the conversational meaning of the speaker. The purpose of this article is to let people know more about body language and use it more widely, making our daily communication smoothly. In different cultures, the meaning of body language is not entirely the same. In order to understand some changes in body language, four types of body language are introduced, including facial expressions, posture, gestures, and clothing. And body language is constantly changing along with cultural changes, conflicts, and integration.

1. Introduction

Communication is the process of exchange of information between people. Communication is not conducted independently, but rather takes place within a certain social, historical, and cultural context. People often adopt two communication methods in communication activities, namely verbal communication and non-verbal communication. Although people rely on verbal communication for cultural exchange, expression of ideas, and transmission of information, this does not mean that non-verbal communication is not important. On the contrary, in many situations, verbal communication alone cannot fully express oneself, and it needs to be integrated with non-verbal communication to ensure smooth communication. As David Abercrombie said, "We speak with our vocal organs, but we speak with our entire body." People can express themselves through different parts of their bodies. At the same time, as countries around the world become increasingly interconnected, cross-cultural communication is also becoming more common ^[1]. In different cultural backgrounds, some non-verbal communication is innate, and there are also many non-verbal communication that are customary and unique to different cultures. Therefore, in order to avoid unnecessary mistakes and negative consequences in cross-cultural communication, people should also learn and understand the nonverbal communication of a country when studying its culture.

2. Non-verbal communication and body language

2.1 Non-verbal communication and body language

Non-verbal communication refers to communication that do not use language. It covers many aspects, such as information conveyed through physical movements, spatial relationships (communication through the use of space); Eye contact studies (including gaze, eye contact, and tactile sense) involve communication through physical contact, and body language is just one of them. Body language is a type of nonverbal communication that utilizes various body movements, including facial expressions, gestures, postures, smiles, clothing, body contact and use of space.

2.2 Previous studies

Some linguists estimate that 90% of human communication is nonverbal, while other scholars argue that this proportion is relatively low. In cross-cultural communication, both verbal and nonverbal information are presented simultaneously. Verbal communication represents the literal content of information, while non-verbal components convey the style or interpretation of information. Therefore, nonverbal code often supplements, emphasizes, replaces, repeats, and even contradicts linguistic information. For example, the speaker may supplement the verbal message with a smile and increased volume, saying "This meal is delicious!" Politicians often punch and emphasize their speeches on the podium. When asked how many minutes are left to complete an exam, the professor may only need to raise five fingers instead of "five minutes". People often nod affirmatively to repeat their verbal message "yes". Samovar (2000) believes that body language conveys information such as our attitude towards others, emotional state, and willingness to control the environment. Speech often accompanies different facial expressions, although many facial expressions have the same meaning in different cultural backgrounds, their frequency and intensity are not necessarily the same. He believes that the use of body movements in communication indicates how we perceive our relationship with the influence, authority, and identity of the person we communicate with. He believes that when communicating with people from other cultural backgrounds, it is important to follow them and adopt a posture that they recognize ^[2].

Gestures are used to emphasize or clarify verbal information. The best advice may be to minimize gestures when communicating with people from other cultures; Learn the words "good" or "yes" in the local language, rather than relying on gestures. The author notes that previous research did not address the changes in body language over time. In fact, body language can change due to many factors. It has two ways of change: horizontal changes brought about by culture and vertical changes brought about by chronological order. The reason for this situation is cultural change, conflict, and integration.

3. Body language types

3.1 Facial expressions

Facial expressions are the most expressive parts of all body languages. Overall, Westerners tend to have more facial expressions than Asians. Research has shown that men are more inclined to hide their emotions, while women are relatively more likely to express their emotions. In fact, Asian countries still have differences in facial expressions. For example, Japanese people have less facial expressions than Chinese people. Contrary to American culture, the cultural perspective of Chinese people is to expect people not to express emotions too openly. Otherwise, others will know what you are thinking. We even consider the ability to conceal one's true emotions as a respectable

quality. In traditional Chinese culture, Liu Bei in "Romance of the Three Kingdoms" is always a highly praised character, who is portrayed as someone, in whatever emotional state, cannot see anything on his face.

As the saying goes, the eyes are the windows of the soul. It is necessary for a listener to express concentration with one's gaze. In China, this kind of body language is also seen as an active participation during the conversation, expressing respect to the speaker, and reflecting the listener's upbringing. Eye contact has different interpretations in different cultures. For example, when two Arabs are talking, they often look at each other fervently, because in their eyes, the gaze is the basis to express their personal presence. But Americans believe that this fervent gaze is often a part of the nonverbal code used in the subculture of homosexuality and this is not suitable. When Chinese women see a stranger looking at them, they immediately turn round or turn their face towards other people, which is usually as same as British women. However, women from English countries sometimes look back longer than Chinese people. If Chinese men see English speaking women looking back, they should not assume that their gaze contains a favorable impression of themselves.

3.2 Posture

We all have had the experience of judging a person. If a person always walks with his head down, people will feel that he is thoughtful and introverted; If someone sits upright and appears slightly relaxed, it indicates the person is rather confident; This is all the information that posture conveyed to us. Posture is about the way people sit and walk. Posture is often associated with social status. A person with a higher rank often stands upright, while his subordinates often droop their shoulders, showing humility. We often see bosses speaking to employees in the same way in the company, especially in countries where social hierarchy is more prominent. Men often sit comfortably, but women always appear conservative, as if they are not comfortable with the sitting area at all. This is related to the social hierarchy of how each gender should be appropriately presented. Women are often expected to show humility, kindness, timidity, and tranquility; And men are encouraged to become free, authoritative, brave and generous. The posture also shows interest, and students who concentrate in the classroom are actively leaning forward with their bodies; Students who are unwilling to take lessons often sit loosely.

3.3 Gestures

In the West, throughout history, extending one's hands indicates sincerity, loyalty, and obedience, while placing palms downward indicates suppression. There are some cultural differences in body language when people meet. For example, in China, people usually shake hands ceremoniously, and close friends only hug each other to express their emotions. Kissing in the public is not common, and even male and female friends or couples rarely kiss in public, which happens to be different from French culture. In France and some other Mediterranean coastal countries, hugging and kissing each other is a common body language used to express emotions. If someone does not understand the differences in body language expressions caused by cultural differences, it is easy to encounter disagreements and misunderstandings in cross-cultural communication.

For example, maintaining eye contact during conversations, smiling, and nodding indicates interest. If someone always look at your watch, or look outside the window or ceiling during conversations, he may feel bored. Gestures usually have cultural specificity. For example, in China, placing your hand under your neck means killing, while in English speaking countries, it means full stomach while eating. Even in a certain culture, subcultures have different interpretations of the same gesture. For example, in Guangdong Province, if the host pours wine for guests, the guests should tap the table with their index and middle fingers to show gratitude. But in the north of China,

the same gesture indicates that the person has lost patience. Americans on highways will give their thumbs up to passing cars to request a ride. People in English-speaking countries place their middle finger above their index finger to express their hope that things can proceed smoothly ^[3]. They will say, "Let's cross our fingers." Hitch-hikers stand on the roadside and extend their thumbs up to the driver, expressing their desire to take a taxi. Either they will place their hands behind their ears to indicate that they haven't heard very clearly.

The degree of making a gesture varies in different cultures. Most Americans use non-extreme gestures, Italians and Greeks use enthusiastic and powerful gestures, while Chinese and Japanese use less gestures. They often place their hands and arms close to their bodies when speaking.

3.4 Clothing and Dressing

Compared to eyes, tone, posture, and actions, language exists in a more explicit way. As non-verbal language, clothing is never to be underestimated. In terms of daily attire, Americans tend to dress more casually, while British people tend to be more dignified. British professors on the podium often wear suits, while American professors sometimes wear suits and sometimes denim T-shirts.

4. Changes in body language

Next, I will talk about the changes brought by inter-generational changes and exchanges with other cultures. Inter-generational transformation is due to scientific and social development, and on the other hand, internationalization often leads to the assimilation of somatology ^[5]. For example, in primitive times, people would constantly hunt for animals, so they would always carry sticks and weapons with them. If two strangers meet, they will put down their weapons, and one person will let the other one touch their palm to show their invincibility. Slowly, the initial form of handshake evolved into modern handshake etiquette. The Nazi salute originated from Romanesque salute to provide cover for socialism. Later, Mussolini used it to mock dictators, and later Hitler used it as a symbol of fascism. Americans also used this gesture between 1787 and 1934, but later Roosevelt declared it was illegal because fascists used it. Nowadays, except for fascists, most countries in the world consider Nazi salutes illegal. In a certain sacrificial ritual during the Shang Dynasty in China, the offerings were surrounded in a circular shape to express people's piety. Gradually, people express their greetings to each other by bowing down, which means using their own demeanor as a sacrificial ritual to show respect to the elderly. This is the Chinese-style bow. Due to the changes brought by internationalization, Chinese people have started to use gestures similar to those foreigners when speaking, and the requirements of bowing to the superiors become not so strict. In China, people widely use gestures such as "v" and "ok". In real life, the dual effects of internationalization and social changes have led to changes in body language.

5. Conclusion

Body language plays a complementary role in language. Especially as a supplement to spoken language, it is an important means of non-verbal communication. Some specific occasions are only suitable for using body language, in which case body language manifests its own value and practicality. The vivid characteristics of body language also achieve effects that oral communication cannot match, such as the auxiliary function of body language, which can help to deduce the meaning of the speaker. Even with so many benefits, people must pay attention to different cultural backgrounds when using the body language. If one does not understand the differences of body language between different cultural backgrounds, it can easily create barriers for people from

different cultures to communicate. Therefore, the study of body language is an important means of effective cross-cultural communication and it has great practical significance.

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