

Communication Between Cultures

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Chapter 7 Overview

Nonverbal Communication:

The messages of action, space, time, silence

- **Nonverbal expression and impression**
- **Definition of nonverbal behavior**
- **Nonverbal communication and culture**
- **Classifications of nonverbal behavior**

Nonverbal communication is a basic means of expression that:

Judges internal states

Important judgments and decisions based on observations of nonverbal behavior

Emotions reflected in posture, face, eyes, tone of voice, proximity, and touch

Creates impressions

People draw a mental picture of you based on appearance

Manages impressions

Posturing, body movements provide clues about conversation

Leaning forward, pointing a finger, pausing, looking away can direct conversation.

Nonverbal behavior defined

All nonverbal stimuli in a communication setting generated by both the source and his/her use of the environment *and* that have potential message value for the source or receiver.

Intentional, unintentional messages

Actions, without intention, can send messages. Expressiveness of individual involves two kinds of sign activity:

- (1) Expression (that communicator gives) involves verbal symbols used admittedly and solely to convey information that communicator and others are known to attach to the symbols.*
- (2) Impression (that communicator gives off) involves wide range of action performed for reasons other than the information conveyed.*

Multiple factors influence nonverbal communication

- (1) Cultural and socioeconomic background, education, gender, age, personal preference, idiosyncracies*
- (2) Ambiguity of context: affects meaning and interpretation
We can never be sure others understand intent or interpret correctly.*

Nonverbal communication and culture

- **Emotions and how they are expressed *and* understood are matters of culture**
- **Understanding differences in nonverbal communication will improve intercultural exchanges**
- **Much of nonverbal, like verbal language, is learned: how, when, and with what consequences will expression be exhibited**

Classifications of nonverbal communication:

Body behavior

- **Appearance**

Others approach, move away based on how we appear; since Upper Paleolithic period, self-decoration used to enhance attractiveness.

- **Judgments of beauty**

Attractiveness, body image satisfaction are implicit cultural ideals and standards.

Ethnocentrism and beauty linked.

Increased contact between cultures may alter ideals, perceptions.

- **Messages of skin color, attire**

Skin color draws attention to idea of difference.

Clothing conveys socioeconomic status, education, moral standards, athletic ability, interests, belief system, sophistication.

- *group identification through uniform dress*

- *co-culture identification*

- *support, reinforcement, communication of cultural values, cultural/ethnic identity*

Classifications of nonverbal communication:

Body behavior, continued

- **Kinesics: study of how body movement communicates**

Body shifts and movements (kinesic cues) convey attitude, emotional state, desire to control environment; meanings are culture bound

- *posture (standing, sitting)*
- *gestures (placement/movement of hands, arms, fingers)*
- *pointing*
- *idiosyncratic gestures (feature and property of particular cultures)*
- *beckoning*
- *acceptance and understanding (head movements, gestures)*
- *frequency and intensity (animated versus restrained)*

Classifications of nonverbal communication:

Facial expressions

- **Three faces**

- (1) *“Assigned” face, the one you’re born with, your face at rest*

- (2) *Face you’re able to manipulate at will (smile, wink, frown, etc.)*

- (3) *Face that is changed by your surroundings and received messages*

- **Facial expressions and culture**

- Six universal facial expressions have similar meanings across cultures:*

- *happiness*

- *anger*

- *sadness*

- *disgust*

- *fear*

- *surprise*

- Cultural norms dictate when, where, how, and to whom expressions are displayed.*

Classifications of nonverbal communication:

Eye contact and gaze

- **Communication functions of the eyes:**

- *express emotion*
- *monitor feedback*
- *indicate degrees of attentiveness*
- *influence changes in attitude*
- *define power and status relationships*
- *manage impressions*

- **Eye contact and the dominant culture**

In U.S., looking a person directly in the eye highly valued; gaze avoidance interpreted as lack of interest, dishonesty, slyness, negative.

Many cultures consider eye contact/gaze rude, taboo, disrespectful, or insulting.

Cultural value related to gender roles: eye contact/gaze perceived as interest, assertiveness, aggression, sexual suggestion.

Classifications of nonverbal communication:

Touch

Culture teaches rules of touching -- whom to touch, where to touch, when to touch

In U.S., five categories of touch behavior:

- professional (doctors, nurses, hairdressers, etc.)*
- social politeness (greeting, showing appreciation)*
- friendship (demonstration of concern/caring between family/friends)*
- love-intimacy (caressing, hugging, embracing, kissing)*
- sexual touching (intimacy, sexual arousal)*

Every culture has well-defined meanings connected with touching, including gender rules; need for respecting rules when interacting across cultures.

Classifications of nonverbal communication:

Paralanguage

Definition: features that accompany speech and contribute to meaning

Paralanguage cues infer emotional state, socioeconomic status, height, weight, ethnicity, age, intelligence, race, regional background, education.

- **Vocal qualifiers - volume, pitch, tempo, resonance, tone**

Cultural difference most apparent in use of volume

- **Vocal characterizers - laughing, crying, moaning, whining, yawning**

Convey a learned meaning according to culture

- **Vocal segregates - uh-huh, shh, uh, oooh, mmh, hmmm**

“Pause-fillers” can take on special meanings in a particular culture

Classifications of nonverbal communication:

Space and distance

Proxemics = study of distance (flow, shift) between communicators

- Use of personal space, cultural differences (e.g. individualism v. collectivism, gender)

In North America:

intimate = contact to 18 inches

social = 4' to 12'

casual-personal = 18 inches - 4'

public = beyond 12'

Women use space differently than men

Physical challenges can alter (e.g. signing for the deaf)

- Seating: cultural differences tied to social norms

Configuration of communicators, order of seats (importance of hierarchy)

- Furniture arrangement

Importance of setting arrangement (living with versus against environment)

Reflection of cultural values (e.g. privacy, hierarchy)

Classifications of nonverbal communication:

Time

Time connected to culture, each with its own norms

- **Informal time**

- *Punctuality rules implicit; status, face-saving considerations*
- *Pace reveals culture's attitude toward time; worldviews strongly influence*
- *Past-oriented cultures honor history, ancestors, elders*
- *Present-oriented cultures value spontaneity, flexibility*
- *Future-oriented cultures value change, optimism, youth (e.g. Americans)*

- **Monochronic time (M-time)**

- *Time is linear, segmented, scarce; to be rationed, controlled through schedules*
- *Perceived as tangible (spent, saved, wasted, lost); punctuality, organization valued*
- *Germany, Austria, Switzerland, U.S. examples of M-time cultures*

- **Polychronic time (P-time)**

- *People, not schedules at center of P-time cultures; flexibility in use of time toward end of premium placed on relationships*
- *Concentration on different people, things simultaneously*

Notes about M-time and P-time cultures

- *The two classifications better perceived as points on a continuum*

Many cultures contain degrees of both M-time and P-time

- *Context (different settings) can determine which orientation, M- or P-, a person utilizes*

Classifications of nonverbal communication:

Silence

Silence provides intervals to think, check, suppress, encode

Helps generate feedback

Used to avoid conflict

In cultures where talk highly valued (e.g. Americans), silence can be misinterpreted, uncomfortable

Understanding where and when to be silent valuable in intercultural exchanges

Next ...

Chapter 8

**Cultural influences on context:
the business setting**

