

Ways of Improving Intercultural Nonverbal Communication between China and America

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Abstract: In our daily communication, we communicate both verbally and non-verbally. Nonverbal communication is an indispensable and inseparable part of human interaction and communication. Nonverbal communication system is the result of a certain social culture. It has its own cultural specific features. Nonverbal behavior may convey different meanings in different cultures. Nonverbal differences may influence the effects of cross-cultural communication. This paper intends to give an introduction of the functions and characteristics of nonverbal communication and propose some strategies to improve the efficiency of cross-cultural communication.

Keywords: Cross-cultural communication, Nonverbal communication, Cultural differences.

1. The Significance of Nonverbal Communication

Nonverbal communication plays an important role in human's daily communication. Language communication is a common way of communication but nonverbal communication is often ignored by many people. In fact, people's daily communication can't make sense without nonverbal communication. Today, the world economy and communication technology are developing rapidly. Intercultural communication becomes more and more frequent. Therefore, understanding the differences of nonverbal communication between China and the United States becomes more and more important. Also, knowing the differences of nonverbal communication between China and the United States can enable people to understand some different connotations of nonverbal communication and make their intercultural communication become more effective.

2. The Definition of Nonverbal Communication

Nonverbal communication is a kind of language communication and it belongs to the category of language communication. Then what is nonverbal communication?

Different experts or scholars have different views about the definition of nonverbal communication. Some people think that nonverbal communication is only a sign of information transmission, and some scholars believe that nonverbal communication is the process of human social activities, and it is the inevitable product of society. And other scholars think that nonverbal communication is a process of communication which does not convey information through language. Some experts think that nonverbal communication is the process by which individuals are likely to produce meaningful nonverbal cues in other people's brains. Nonverbal communication involves all those nonverbal stimulus in a communication setting that are generated by both the source and his or her use of environment and that have potential message value for the source or receiver. But in general, nonverbal communication is a process of communication which is carried out by human beings except in the process of language communication. This process is difficult to detect, and often is a spontaneous

process.

Along with the development of society, the communication between the politics, economy and culture is increasingly frequent, and the communication between people from different countries and different cultures is called cross cultural communication. Intercultural communication includes verbal communication and nonverbal communication. But in intercultural communication, people often pay more attention to the language used in the process of communication. It is believed that communication is the exchange of language, but it neglects the non verbal communication. Non verbal communication plays a vital role in the communication between people and people. It is a direct impact on the effect of using and understanding the non linguistic information in cross cultural communication. A US study shows that: in the speaker's opinion, attitude, mood, 93% of the information is transmitted through the facial expressions, and only 7% is transmitted through the discourse. This shows that language and non language communication influence mutually. Therefore, we cannot ignore the important role of nonverbal communication in intercultural communication. Language and non language communication is the product of a particular social culture, which is closely related to the history, culture and development of the society. Different cultures have different ways of communication. The same nonverbal behavior may convey different meanings in different cultures. This may lead to cultural barriers to communication. Therefore, we must strengthen the understanding and application of non linguistic communication, so as to better carry out cross cultural communication.

3. The Relationship Between Nonverbal Communication and Culture

Nonverbal communication is a very important way of communication. In the process of intercultural communication, people often pay attention to the language communication and neglect the meaning of non-linguistic behavior in the process of communication. In cross cultural communication, we must clearly understand the meaning and culture of nonverbal communication, and culture plays an

irreplaceable role in nonverbal communication. "Culture is a complex, which includes knowledge, belief, art, law, morality, customs and other abilities and habits that are acquired by the members of the community," Taylor, British anthropologists, said.

In different cultures, the meaning of nonverbal communication is different. Many examples show that nonverbal communication changes with the change of culture. The same behavior may have different meanings in different cultures. For example, in China, it is very common to see two young men who are walking hand in hand on the road. They will only be considered as good friends. This is not abnormal. In western countries, however, they are considered to be gay. In Japan, nodding the head only means you are listening instead of understanding.

The purpose of using non linguistic behavior for communication is to better convey information in cross culture communication, and to facilitate and promote cross-cultural communication. So we must understand different cultural differences, respect each other's culture to avoid cultural conflicts and make cross-cultural communication more effective.

4. Characteristics and Functions of Nonverbal Communication

When people communicate information or express feelings, if they only use the verbal language, sometimes it is not vivid. But if you only use non verbal behavior, the content of the expression will be limited to the surrounding environment, and easy to be misunderstood by others. In order to enhance the effectiveness of communication, people usually use verbal communication and nonverbal communication. Therefore, non language communication and language communication are complementary to each other. Both of them are equally important and indispensable. As the name implies, non-verbal communication is the exchange of other means except the language.

Both verbal communication and nonverbal communication are designed to convey a certain kind of information, which is restricted by the specific environment. Nonverbal communication refers to the communication through applying natural characteristic and instinct of the body to transmit information, to express the specific semantic of process. Non verbal communication and verbal communication coexist and complement each other. Non verbal communication behavior in the process of communication will also play some of its own functions, such as: repeat, replace, add, stress, etc..

5. How to Cultivate Intercultural Communication Competence Based On the Nonverbal Communication

The nonverbal communication methods used in the communication between people with different cultural backgrounds are not the same. The main obstacle of intercultural communication is to understand the culture of the object of communication, so as to produce some cultural conflicts. But it is impossible for people to understand cultures of all the countries in the world, which need to master some necessary methods and strategies in the process of communication.

5.1. Recognize the role

In the process of communication, people have to recognize their own identity. Any person who has his or her own special status in any speech situation is the role of language environment. People have to realize their own identity clearly and then talk and do something which is suitable for their role in certain social environment.

5.2. Dress appropriately

According to the survey, 84% of the first impression of a person depends on his appearance. The first few seconds of meeting between the two sides decides a person's impression. Dressing up can reflect a person's cultural background and culture. This will affect the effect of communication.

5.3. Facial expression

The facial expression is one of the major sources of nonverbal information. For most of the time, even if people have different cultural backgrounds, they tend to use the same facial expression instead of the same meaning. Because facial expression represents information about a feeling, attitude and belief system. So the facial expression is an important part of the nonverbal communication system. The expression of emotion is a vice language of expression. Smiling can pass a pleasant mood. People can get friendly, admissible, satisfying, and pleasant information from smile. In this way Americans and Chinese have the same view. Therefore people should know cultural attitudes towards facial expression. Understanding it can help them reduce the nervousness and ethnocentrism in intercultural communication.

5.4. Eye contact

People can send a messages with their eyes. This message is almost limitless. Eye contact is an important aspect of nonverbal communication, too. Good eye contact can make the information transmitter know that their listeners are listening or not. In addition, good eye contact can show respect, respond friendly, or ensure receiver feels comfortable in the process of communication. What's more, from receiver's opinion good eye contact reveals the speaker's good faith, confidence, and bluntness. People tend to size up everyone's authenticity through reactions of everyone's eye contact. Eye contact as a skill has been learned by us. Different countries have different cultures so that eye contacts have different rules and patterns in different countries.

5.5. Think twice before saying

Almost all of the errors in the process of communication are caused by the lack of serious consideration. Do not respond to certain behaviors or words that are met in the process of communication immediately. Sarnoff said: " 'I' is the smallest letter. Don't always say 'I think' in communication, but say, 'What do you think?' ".

Different countries have different cultural systems because they have different origins and development. Some of them complement of each other and also has their own characteristics. Communication in different countries becomes more frequent and faster with the global economic development and scientific and technological progress. In order to make nonverbal communication more and more effective in different countries, studying various cultures and the differences of nonverbal communication is becoming more and more important. In addition, studying various cultures and their differences can help people overcome

ethnocentrism so as to improve their competence of intercultural communication.

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