

The silent language

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**ASSIGN
BUSTER**

Edward T. Hall was born in Webster Groves, Missouri. He has taught at the University of Denver, Colorado, Bennington College in Vermont, Harvard Business School, Illinois Institute of Technology, Northwestern University in Illinois and others. The foundation for his lifelong research on cultural perceptions of space was laid during World War II when he served in the U. S. Army in Europe and the Philippines. From 1933 through 1937 Hall lived and worked with the Navajo and the Hopi on native American reservations in northwestern Arizona, the subject of his autobiographical *West of the Thirties*.

He received his Ph. D. from Columbia University in 1942 and continued field work and direct experience throughout Europe, the Middle East, and Asia. During the 1950s he worked for the United States State Department, at the Foreign Service Institute (FSI), teaching inter-cultural communications skills to foreign service personnel, developed the concept of " High context culture" and " low context culture", and wrote several popular practical books on dealing with cross-cultural issues. He is considered a founding father of intercultural communication as an academic area of study.

Hall first created the concept of proxemics, or personal spaces. In his book, *The Hidden Dimension*, he describes the subjective dimensions that surround each of us and the physical distances one tries to keep from other people, according to subtle cultural rules. In *The Silent Language* (1959), Hall coined the term polychronic to describe the ability to attend to multiple events simultaneously, as opposed to " monochronic" individuals and cultures who tend to handle events sequentially.

In 1976, he released his third book, *Beyond Culture*, which is notable for having developed the idea of extension transference; that is, that humanity's rate of evolution has and does increase as a consequence of its creations, that we evolve as much through our "extensions" as through our biology. However; with extensions such as the wheel, cultural values, and warfare being technology based, they are capable of much faster adaptation than genetics. Admirers of Hall's style of grounding anthropological theorizing in concrete examples would probably also like the work of sociologist Stanislaw Andreski.

Robert Shuter, a well-known intercultural and cross-cultural communication researcher, commented: "Edward Hall's research reflects the regimen and passion of an anthropologist: a deep regard for culture explored principally by descriptive, qualitative methods.... The challenge for intercultural communication... is to develop a research direction and teaching agenda that returns culture to preeminence and reflects the roots of the field as represented in Edward Hall's early research." He died at his home on July 20, 2009 in Santa Fe, New Mexico. [1]

The book *Silent language* is a book of intercultural communication between people. The book isn't a translation of one language to another, but is some kind of analysis of nonverbal communication. Nonverbal behavior of different cultures is very different and complex and in successful communication with other cultures isn't enough just to know the language of people, also is very important to know their nonverbal cultural behavior. While writing this book Hall was informed about Americans who was working in foreign countries. All these people were selected by their effectiveness.

First they need to speak and read the language of the foreigners and then to be informed of that foreign culture. So all Americans who are working in government and business in foreign countries have trainings for foreign language, history, foreign government and most important the nonverbal communication of that culture. Otherwise there would be misunderstandings where one side always blames the other side of the intercultural communicating. Like Americans and Greek people. They had misunderstandings about their meetings. Americans strictly respect the schedule of the meetings, but Greeks didn't.

They thought that the meetings should be held as long as it needs to be held. That was just one unspoken different rule of Americans and Greeks that made their misunderstandings'. So it is very important to understand how others read our behavior. In *The Silent language* Edward T. Hall develops a theory of culture based on communications model collaboration of George L. Trager, anthropology trained linguist. The voices of time In the first chapter of the book Hall explains how time is important subject in intercultural communicating.

For example different parts of the day are very significant because time sometimes indicates the importance of the occasion and also the level of interaction between persons. Hall gives example for Americans which are very similar to Macedonian time behaviors: if your telephone rings in the early morning than person that is calling must have something very important to say. Same happens in evening hours when people are sleeping: the call must be matter of life and death. Also here in Macedonia for example you are rude if you call at lunch time at peoples home (15: 00-17: 00).

Some cultures don't have this time behaviors that people in this cultures are used to (South Pacific for example). The author also gives another very interesting example about time handling. Some of his friends went to Latin America and he had meeting with minister. The American waited the minister outside his office for 45 minutes and felt very insulted for that long wait. So he told minister secretary that he is " sick and tired for waiting" and that " he is cooling his heels". Minister didn't understand the waiting reaction of the American and consider it unreasonable.

Why? Simply, because in Latin America long waiting is not considerate like insult of a person. If this situation happened in United States the reaction of the American who waited would be totally normal. Further, Hall explains how Americans tend to think about time: " People of the Western world, particularly Americans, tend to think of time as something around us and from which we can't escape, an ever-present part of environment, just like the air we breathe...As a rule Americans think of time as a road or a ribbon stretching into the future, along which one progresses.

People who cannot schedule time are looked down upon as impractical. " In Latin America for difference people treat time rather cavalierly. There for example in business life you can see ten people in one office at the same time. Hall also explains how American view of future is limited and their perspective is very short. When Americans say " long time" they think of five weeks or three months period. In South Asia region " long time" is centuries or an endless period. Promptness is very important to Americans too. When people are not prompt they are considerate not responsible and that they are insulting the other person.

In Macedonia time treating is very similar to Americans: promptness is appreciated, we save time, waste time, have schedule and long time is maybe one month or something like that. Many people criticize this obsession time handling that Americans have. Hall in the last part of this chapter tells few very interesting stories that make us understand some other concepts of time. He mentions the situation in one pueblo near Rio Grande, Navajo time, names of Navajo, Sioux Indians, inhabitants of Truk, the Tiv primitive people of Nigeria and stories of Iran and Afghanistan.

Of all these cases that really happened the readers could learn very different kind of people who treat time really differently from us. When I read this part I was very surprised how much differences could appear between cultures looking just the matter of treating the time. For example Hall had been in pueblo near Rio Grande and waited long time for Christmas dance. The people there started their dance in different hour different year. They didn't see the clock; they just started the dance when they were ready and prepared.

Apparently for the Pueblos events begin when the time is ripe and no sooner. Other cultures like Navajo Indians of Northern Arizona have new and old time. The new time is more realistic than old one which says that only the present moment is real and nothing else. The old time of Navajos don't allow thinking about benefits in a future. So if you want to give something to Navajo you need to give him the present in the same moment and don't talk about the benefits that he will have from that gift in the future. Hall also continues to write about Navajo names.

He was interested in one Indian who was called Little Sunday but it is not polite to ask Navajo his name or the reason why is he or she called that way so he asked others to tell him. So Navajos told Hall the reason for calling the man Little Sunday. The story begins when the Little Sunday decided to go to the store that was miles far away from where he was. But he was out of flavor so he travelled two days to that store. When he finally get there the store was closed because it was Sunday and European don't work on that day.

That was hard for Navajos to understand because they measure the time of the day by new moon and the old moon. The day always starts with new and ends with old moon. So Little Sunday didn't understand why the store was closed that day, he didn't understand the European dividing of time. He asked the trader to open the store, and he said to him that the store is closed because is Sunday. Little Sunday told him that he travelled from far away to get to the store because he is hungry and the trader open the store. By this cultural conflict Little Sunday got his name.

Another culture who measures time like Navajos are the Tiv the primitive people of Nigeria. They have five to seven day in a week and they are named by natural events like the thing that is most sold on that specific day for example cars. So if you are in different place the day will be called different. Hall continues with his experience with Sioux Indians who had difficulties adjusting because they didn't know the word for waiting or to be late because they don't understand our way of living by time and clock.

After that they used to it but they sure would never understand the other culture. Inhabitants of Truk for difference were treating some past situations

like they occurred in the present. They treated that situation like they just happened and like consequences of that there were attacks without any provocation of the other side. In the last part of this chapter dedicated of how different cultures treat the time in different ways the author mentions Iran and Afghanistan. In Iran people care more about the past. The present situation is less meaningful to them.

So if they have appointments it isn't a problem not to show at the speculated time and place. For Afghanistan Hall also tells a very interesting story about one man who had appeared in Kabul and looked for his brother but he was not there. Year after that the man again appeared in Kabul looking for his brother. When people asked him why is he coming every year asking for his brother and he is not there, he told them that he agreed with him to meet in Kabul but they didn't mention what year it should happen. These cases are very strange for us because they are from other cultures.

Because we are not familiar to their culture behavior in time treating there might be misunderstandings in the act of communicating with them. That's why learning the cultural behavior of other people we contact is very important. What is culture? Hall starts his second chapter with the idea of culture that anthropologists have had. He explains that in the beginning general anthropologic thinking of the culture was that culture is way of people life, behavior patterns, attitudes and material things. Many anthropologists disagree with this idea and they were trying to identify some same element that is found in every aspect of the culture.

Trying to understand the culture anthropologists at the very first beginning had classroom trainings where they went deeper to the life of the people

who were in that classroom group. Then it was realized that culture actually exist and it's not just something that theoreticians mention. This time anthropologist concluded that culture is very complex experience which cannot be understood by someone who did not live through the same experience. Further there were problems with Indians in America who had disagreed with dominant society that surrounded them.

Because of that American government organized the Indian Service. The people who were employees didn't know anything about Indians and the problems were not solved. Because of bureaucracy, anthropologist couldn't present the idea that Indians are very deeply different from European - Americans. In World War 2 anthropologists research Japanese and concluded that culture cannot be changed. Japanese had different life, different thinking, and different economic system of Americans but researchers' anthropologists including Hall didn't have anything specific to present because they didn't have basic information to relay on.

There was no way researchers to make some scientific difference between cultures except that one culture were farmers, the others were raising food or difference in part in organizing of societies. Because of that, in the case of Indians, people blamed their leaders for not taking the innovations in the country. But all others like anthropologists believed that " culture controls behavior of the individual in deep and persisting ways" and that culture cannot be learn as learning of language.