

# [Nonverbal communication, as a universally understood and recognized](https://assignbuster.com/nonverbal-communication-as-a-universally-understood-and-recognized/)

Nonverbal Communication Across Cultures

Samir BOUCHALKHA

Supervised by:

Dr. Joseph Eric Massey

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Aim of the Literature Review

The main purpose of choosing the topic of nonverbal
communication across cultures is to gain an understanding of the relationship
between the nonverbal communication, as a universally understood and recognized
mean of communication, and cultural differences.

This literature review sought
also to grasp the likeness and dissimilarities in nonverbal commutation and
demonstrate how culture influences nonverbal communication.

In order to achieve these aims, the
paper will summarize the studies conducted by Peter A. Andersen and other
authors on the impact of cultural differences on nonverbal communication, and
the linking between cultures and nonverbal communication.

As a human being, we need to communicate with each other in order to
share information, ask questions, express ourselves and so forth. So people
communicate verbally by using words and sounds, they communicate also
nonverbally by sending visible messages produced by some means other than
words.

Nonverbal communication serves not only to complement
verbal communication, but it's used to legalize meaning and reinforce
information. The main difference between verbal and nonverbal communication is
the interpretation, because verbal communication is understood in the same way
despite geographic or cultural change. However, nonverbal communication is
interpreted differently, affected by the differences in cultural backgrounds
and societal norms.

Achieving the literature review's aim, which is the
understanding of the relationship between nonverbal communication and cultures,
Goes firstly through, a definition of nonverbal communication, determining its
key functions and its types.  Secondly,
through the study of the influence of cultural interpretation of nonverbal
communication.

Nonverbal Communication Defined

Various and many studies had been conducted on the field of communication and especially nonverbal communication. Many definitions are given to nonverbal communication by different authors and specialists: such as Matsumoto and Poyatos. Matsumoto defined the nonverbal communication as " the transfer and exchange of messages in any and all modalities that do not involve words" (Matsumoto et al., 2013).

Nonverbal
communication is considered as a key component which makes the discussion of
communication complete, so its plays the role of the complement to the verbal
communication, or could simply accent a particular part of a spoken verbal
communication. Nonverbal communication can be used also as a regulator for
verbal communication, its helps to keep the verbal communication organized and
the conversation efficient.

According to Poyatos (2002, p. xvii),  nonverbal communication is defined as " the emission of signs by all the nonlexical, artifactual and environmental sensible sign systems contained in the realm of culture, whether individually or in mutual co-structuration, and whether or not those emissions constitute behavior or generate interaction."               According to Payatos' studies and other researches made in the field of nonverbal communication, culture plays a major role in guiding and modifying nonverbal communication. Functions of Nonverbal Communication

Determining the
nonverbal communication's functions might help us ruling out the doubt of the
misunderstanding. In this field, many researches and studies had been conducted
in order to determine the functions of nonverbal communication. Among them
Jandt who distinguishes the major functions of nonverbal communication:

Substituting for verbal messages: Nonverbal
communication can be used to substitute or replace the spoken communication by
utilizing emblems, this function plays a key role when verbal communication is
not effective because of language barriers.
This function is commonly used in our daily lives especially while
expressing some specific feeling like sorrow for losing someone, or when
nonverbal cues are universally understood.

Sending uncomfortable messages: Some messages are not
easy to express verbally, but they can be expressed comfortably in nonverbal
ways. This function is commonly used in our personal and professional lives
when verbal communication would be disturbing. ( eg: Getting someone's
attention could be smoothly and politely expressed by a hand gesture rather
than verbally.

Assisting in making relationships clear: Nonverbal messages we
send and receive in our daily life could influence and affect our relationships
positively or negatively, depending of our skills on encoding and decoding
nonverbal communication.

Types of Nonverbal Communication

Nonverbal communication, just
like language, is clustered into various types. John T. Warren and Deanna L.
Fassett , concluded that there are a variety of nonverbal communication types,
but according to theme there are five meaningful and useful aspects of
nonverbal communication which are :

(1) Chronemics: " is the study of how time functions are
part of communication (John T. Warren, & Deanna L. Fassett , 2015, 158). Peter
. A. Anderson classified time into various categories including, biological,
personal, physical and cultural time. (2) Haptics: " is the study of the
significance of touch". (John T. Warren, &  Deanna L. Fassett , 2015, p 158). The touch is
considered among the most efficient types on nonverbal communication, because
it has a different interpretation depending on the context and it varies cross
culturally as well: (touch a family member differs from touching a new
acquaintance or a colleague…). (3) Proxemics: " is the study of how
people use space to communicate, including their relative (dis)confort with
intrusions into their personal space". (John T. Warren, &  Deanna L. Fassett , 2015, p 159). Understanding
how proxemic functions in nonverbal communication, goes through an examination
of proxemic distances associated to personal space, which is deeply related to people's
cultural backgrounds.  (4) kinesics: " the study of kinesics addresses
our gestures, movements, and facial expressions(John T. Warren, &  Deanna L. Fassett , 2015, p 161). Its considered among the most keen forms on
nonverbal communication, because it encloses behaviors like: (shaking hands,
making eye contact, nodding, and so forth…). ( 5) Vocalics: " The
study of paralanguage, which includes the vocal qualities that go along with
verbal messages, such as pitch, volume, rate, vocal quality, and verbal
fillers".

Culture and Nonverbal Communication

Various
researches and studies were conducted in the field of communication to
determine the linking between culture and nonverbal communication. These
studies demonstrated a strong relationship and a clear influence of culture on
nonverbal communication.

Culture and  Non-Verbal Communication

According to Anderson, most nonverbal communications
reflect a clear imprint of culture. In his research he points out the role and
the position of culture in nonverbal communication. " Culture shapes the display
rules of when, how, what and with whom certain nonverbal expressions should be
revealed or suppressed and dictates which displays are appropriate in which
specific situations" (Samorav et al, 2012, p 293).

So, many researches and studies on the linking between
cultures and nonverbal communication. Civikly(1991)  reaffirm  that " culture influences non-verbal
communication significantly, and in the following ways: Firstly, people of a
particular culture act in a particular culturally acquired way in interpersonal
and social settings".  Anderson
demonstrates, by offering a synopsis of nonverbal communication and its
relevance to culture. He analyzes what he called " the eight basic codes of
nonverbal communication: physical appearance, space and distance, time, facial
expressions, movements, gestures, touch, eye contact and gaze, paralanguage,
and smell". His studies show a real influence of culture of the eight codes on
nonverbal communication, for instance, in physical appearance, which is
considered as the most externally obvious nonverbal code, and covers relatively
stable physical features of human being (gender, height, weight…). For example,
hairstyles vary generally across cultures and across time.

According to Anderson, people with different cultural
backgrounds use dissimilarly the distance and the personal space (proxemics).
This difference is clearly distinguished among people belonging to Latin and
Mediterranean cultures, who maintain close and short distance, and people from
European and north Asian cultures who keep greater distances.

Time, or the
perception of time, is another component of nonverbal communication which is
dramatically influenced by culture differences. The value that people give to
the perception of time and its interpretation changes and varies from one
culture to another. For instance, people with African culture backgrounds seems
to not care much about time and interpret it differently , compared to European
and north Asian cultures.

Finally, researches reveal that people who belong to
different cultures have various facial expressions and different manners of
expressing emotions. This difference is explained by the nonverbal " accent"
contained in facial expression, which could identify the culture or the
nationality of the expresser.

Conclusion

Nonverbal communication plays a key
role in complementing, accenting and regulation verbal communication. It has
many functions and types which makes it rich and challenging at the same
time.  The reason why people should be
aware of these challenges in order to communicate effectively.

The most challenging aspect of
understanding nonverbal communication across cultures is the interpretation,
because nonverbal cues are deeply affected by the differences in cultural
backgrounds and societal norms. Each culture has its proper rules that affect
the people's behavior, in general and nonverbal communication in a particular
way.

Personally, and despite the studies
made in the field of the influence of culture on nonverbal communication, I
think that nonverbal communication across cultures still be a challenging field
because it's deeply affected by culture which is in permanent change.

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