

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

Nonverbal Communication Across Cultures

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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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