

Nonverbal
communication, as a
universally
understood and
recognized



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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 communication 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.

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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

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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
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acquaintance or a colleague...). (3) Proxemics: " is the study of how people use space to communicate, including their relative (dis)comfort 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 <https://assignbuster.com/nonverbal-communication-as-a-universally-understood-and-recognized/>

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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