



A Study on the Positive Significance of Nonverbal Communication in Promoting Cross-cultural Interaction

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Abstract: Non-verbal communication is one of the important ways of human communication. It not only supports verbal communication to express emotion and convey information, but also is the carrier of culture like verbal language. American psychologist Albert Mehrabian found that in interpersonal communication, non-verbal behaviors accounted for 93%. However, in actual cross-cultural process, people tend to pay more attention to verbal communication. Therefore, this study mainly made an overview of non-verbal communication and discussed its positive role in cross-cultural interaction.

Keywords: cross-cultural communication, non-verbal communication, significance, culture

1. Introduction

With the continuous development of globalization, the exchanges and cooperation between different countries in politics, economy, art, education and other fields are increasing. Therefore, non-verbal behaviors and means complement and improve the function of verbal language, transmit emotions and information, and at the same time contribute to the establishment of more friendly interpersonal and diplomatic relations.

In addition, the study of non-verbal communication has attracted more and more attention from scholars at home and abroad, involving many disciplines such as education, psychology, artificial intelligence, linguistics and sociology. Researchers have provided new means and methods to explore the application of non-verbal communication in different cultural backgrounds.

Therefore, it is very necessary to study the positive significance of non-verbal communication on cross cultures, which is not only conducive to avoiding misunderstandings and conflicts in international communication, but also to promoting friendly and harmonious relations. The study of cross-cultural nonverbal communication also can reveal the similarities and differences of nonverbal factors in the cultures of different countries and nationalities, which helps to improve our sensitivity to cultural differences, so as to ensure the smooth progress of cross-cultural communication.

2. An overview of nonverbal communication

Different scholars defined non-verbal communication from the perspective of broad and specific meanings. The literal also the simple explanation is communication without words by Malandroetal in 1989 [1]“Nonverbal communication is communication without words”, all of which are similar to Chinese linguist Hu Wenzhong’s definition about it. He thinks that all communication activities without language-use are all as nonverbal communication. Here are a few examples about the specific explanations of non-verbal communication. [2] F.Poyatos (1983) explains nonverbal communication as in a particular culture the signals that people or individuals send mutually through all the physical, dress, and environmental perceptible signaling systems and other nonverbal behaviors or means, which may or may not constitute behavior or general personal communication. [3] Knapp and Hall (1997) describes non-verbal communication as “communication effected by means other than words (assuming words are the verbal element)”. According to Samovar, the factors other than linguistic elements have information value to the sender or receiver in a certain communicative environment. These factors can be created either artificially or by the environment. [4] Samovar and Porter (2004) defines that “nonverbal communication involves all those nonverbal stimuli in a communication setting that are generated by both the source and his or her use of the environment and that have potential message value for the source or receiver”. This explanation is widely accepted by academic community.

According to the above definitions, experts and scholars have divided the categories and functions of non-verbal communication from multiple perspectives in order to further study it.

By combing Chinese and western literature found there were many kinds of non-verbal communication. [5] Condon

came up with 24 categories of posture, facial expression, clothing, etc. Marjorie F. Vargas of the United States divides non-language into nine categories, including gestures, eyes, tones, silence, physical touch behavior, space, time, color and other content. [6] According to M. Knapp's study, there are seven categories, which are the human body's transmission behavior, touch behavior, paralinguistics, spatial factors, and environmental factors. There is a scholar in the United States who divides non-verbal communication into two categories: static and dynamic non-verbal communication and vocal non-verbal communication. In China, Bi Jiwan's divides them into four categories: body language, paralinguistics, object language and environmental language.

Above all, according to the above definitions, whether explained from a simple or complex perspective, non-verbal communication covers all means conducive to communication without words, such as facial expressions, postures, clothing, body distance and environment, etc. Although the classification of non-verbal communication varies, there will be the same parts between them, such as facial expression, posture, voice and so on.

Because each classification of non-verbal behaviors and means will have its own communicative function. [7] According to Ekman and Friesen's function on nonverbal behaviors, emblems, illustrative actions, regulators and adaptors. From the perspective of sociolinguistics, non-verbal communication has three social functions: relational marker, structural marker and content marker, which are beneficial to daily and international communication.

3. Positive significance of nonverbal communication in cross-cultural interaction

Firstly, non-verbal communication shows cultural characteristics. [8] Hall stated: "Culture is communication and communication is culture." Culture and communication complement and influence each other. Nonverbal communication is the important part of culture. Many nonverbal behaviors are influenced by culture.

It is also an important embodiment of different cultures. Non-verbal communication can also convey cultural information and help people better understand the values, beliefs, customs and so on in different cultural backgrounds. By understanding and adapting to these non-verbal communication modes, cross-cultural communicators can better understand and respect each other's cultures and avoid misunderstandings and conflicts. People can transmit culture through postures, gestures, environmental language and other non-linguistic forms. After obtaining cultural information, people's values, behaviors, thinking mode and beliefs are affected so as to promote the understanding between different cultures and cultural diversity. For example, religious hand gestures in the United States and China reflect the different cultural characteristics and values. Because religion is an explicit expression of human culture. It embodies the cultural background of a country and symbolically expresses the spiritual culture. As an important form of non-verbal expression, religious hand gestures also have a certain impact on cross-cultural communication activities. So this study made a comparative analysis of Chinese and American religious hand gestures to show cultural differences.

Secondly, our world is changing at a faster rate, and globalization has also led to more and more cross-cultural relationships. Due to regional, political, economic and other factors, from a global perspective, non-verbal communication is conducive to seeking cultural identity. Because the human cultural system presents different cultural characteristics and huge differences. In the process of international interaction, there will be conflict and civilization confrontation, which is a matter of life and death of a nation and a race. Therefore, it can become a tool to maintain the survival of national culture, promote mutual exchanges, and eliminate crises and challenges. Today, people are also promoting broader cultural consensus in different ways, such as: peace, protection of the ecological environment and cultural heritage. In short, globalization has provided unprecedented opportunities for human cultures to communicate in time and space, such as facial expressions, gestures and voices, which are the main ways to express and understand emotions. These ways may have different forms of expression in different cultures, but they can help people convey and receive emotional information, promote the understanding and integration of human culture, and contribute to the formation of a more common cultural identity. Therefore, the study of non-verbal communication is a phenomenon that cannot be ignored in the development of human culture in the process of globalization. It is precisely because of human efforts to seek more common cultural consensus that the confrontation of human cultural identity brought about by globalization has been adjusted to a certain extent.

In the context of global consensus, taking the steady development of China-US relations as an example, non-verbal communication plays a vital role in the construction of harmony in the political, economic, cultural and other fields between the two countries and the world. Eyes, handshakes, smiles, tone of voice and gestures can all show respect and friendliness towards each other. These behaviors help to break down cultural barriers and promote communication and identification between Chinese and American cultural groups. It is of great significance to promote mutual respect and tolerance, consensus and cooperation between the two countries, the integration of human civilizations, and the joint response to global challenges.

Thirdly, non-verbal communication makes up for language barrier in cross-cultural process. When language cannot fully

express emotions or becomes a barrier to communication, non-verbal communication can complement and strengthen verbal communication, making communication more smooth and effective. For example, when people from different countries are communicating, non-verbal signals such as facial expressions and body language may convey their emotions, intentions, attitudes, and interest in what is being said. It can help people better understand each other's emotions and intentions, thus establishing more in-depth and effective communication. Therefore, in cross-cultural communication, it is very important to understand and respect the differences in non-verbal communication between different cultures. By paying attention to and understanding mutual non-verbal signals, people can better compensate for language barriers, enhance the fluency and effectiveness of communication, and promote understanding and cooperation between different cultures.

4. Conclusion

4.1 Research results

According to the above analysis, non-verbal communication plays an important role and is an indispensable part of human communication in cross-cultural process. Its positive significance to cross-cultural interaction is reflected in three aspects: revealing different cultural values, making up for and strengthening language functions, and promoting global human cultural identity. In cross-cultural communication, due to cultural differences and different values, the importance of non-verbal communication is more prominent. With the accelerated pace of internationalization, nonverbal communication has played an important role in many fields such as international business negotiation, art and education, etc. Non-verbal behaviors and means such as environmental language, paralinguistic language and body language are undoubtedly one of the important factors contributing to cross-cultural success. By observing and interpreting each other's non-verbal signals, we can deepen our understanding of culture and psychological state, thereby enhancing mutual trust. It can provide clues for understanding emotional state and attitude, and help to better grasp the atmosphere and direction of communication.

4.2 The limitations of this research

This study only discussed the positive significance of non-verbal communication to cross-cultural interaction at the macro level. Therefore, in future research, more attention should be paid to the comparison of non-verbal communication between specific countries. The application as well as the cultural meanings of non-verbal signals in different countries should be interpreted in more details from the micro perspective, so as to provide more research materials for other scholars.

4.3 Suggestions for future research

According to the above limitations, the future research will focus on the comparative study of non-verbal communication under different cultural backgrounds, such as discussing the similarities and differences, the causes and solutions. In addition, the specific application of non-verbal behaviors and means in different disciplines. For example, in teaching, how the teachers use non-verbal ways such as hand gestures, voices and facial expressions to better teach language, enhance teaching effect and narrow the distance between teachers and students. It can also explore how teachers use non-verbal ways to stimulate students' learning interest, adjust teaching styles to better resonate with students, and bridge the gap brought by cultural differences. The combination and application of non-verbal communication with different disciplines and fields has the great effect on better serving our life.

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