Nonverbal Intercultural Communication

Nonverbal codes present the ways that people communicate without words, including all forms of communication other than linguistic ones

CHARECTERISTICS OF NONVERBAL CODE

• Multichanneled - it means that nonverbal messages can occur in a variety of ways simultaneously.
• Multifunctional – it can fulfill several goals or communicative functions simultaneously.
• Spontaneously and subconsciously - they convey their meanings in covert ways

CULTURAL UNIVERSALS IN NONVERBAL COMMUNICATION

There are five characteristics of nonverbal communication that are universal across all cultures:

(1)   the same body parts are used for nonverbal expressions;
(2)   nonverbal channels are used to convey similar information, emotions, values, norms, and self-disclosing messages;
(3)   nonverbal messages accompany verbal communication and are used in art and ritual;
(4)   the motives for using the nonverbal channel, such as when speech is impossible, are similar across cultures; and
(5)   nonverbal messages are used to coordinate and control a range of contexts and relationships that are similar across cultures

Nonverbal code systems are the "silent language" of communication.

They are less precise and less consciously used and interpreted than verbal code systems, but they can have powerful effects on perceptions of and interpretations about others.

(Lustig 204)

Lustig, Myron W., Jolene Koester. *Intercultural Competence, 7th Edition. Pearson Learning Solutions, 07/2012. VitalBook file.*

CULTURAL VARIATIONS IN NONVERBAL COMMUNICATION

Cultures vary in their nonverbal behaviors in three ways.

First, cultures differ in the specific way of behaviors that are enacted (certain movements, body positions, postures, and even dances and ritualized actions are specific to a particular culture).

Second, all cultures have display rules that govern when and under what circumstances various nonverbal expressions are required, preferred, permitted, or prohibited.

The third way that cultures differ in their nonverbal behaviors is in the interpretations, or meanings, that are attributed to particular nonverbal behaviors.

(Lustig 183)

Lustig, Myron W., Jolene Koester. *Intercultural Competence, 7th Edition. Pearson Learning Solutions, 07/2012. VitalBook file.*

Three possible interpretations could be imposed
on a given instance of nonverbal behavior:

it is random,

it is idiosyncratic,

it is shared

(Lustig 183-184)
Lustig, Myron W., Jolene Koester. *Intercultural Competence, 7th Edition. Pearson Learning Solutions, 07/2012. VitalBook file.*

An interpretation that the behavior is   **random** means that it has no particular meaning to anyone.

An idiosyncratic interpretation suggests that the behaviors are unique to special individuals or relationships, and they therefore have particular meanings only to these people.

For example, family members often recognize that certain unique behaviors of a person signify a specific emotional state.

The third interpretation is that the behaviors **have shared meaning** and significance, as when a group of people jointly attribute the same meaning to a particular nonverbal act.

NONVERBAL FUNCTIONS IN INTERCULTURAL COMMUNICATION

•PROVIDING IMFROMATION

* MANAGING IMPRESSION

•EXPRESSING EMOTIONS

•REGULATING INTERACTION

* CONVEYING RELATIONSHIP MESSAGES

* PROVIDING IMFROMATION
Nonverbal codes are most useful to convey global meanings and emotional information; verbal codes are most useful to convey logical and factual information.

* MANAGING IMPRESSION (what we wear, how we move, how we stand)

•EXPRESSING EMOTIONS
Nonverbal facial expressions that convey feelings often occur spontaneously, without conscious or intentional control: a smile of happiness, and other facial expressions that display emotions such as pride, surprise, fear, anger

- REGULATING INTERACTION
Nonverbal codes help to maintain the back-and-forth sequencing of conversations

* CONVEYING RELATIONSHIP MESSAGES
Interpersonal relationships develop, and they are sustained, primarily through the exchange of nonverbal communication.

NONVERBAL MESSAGES IN INTERCULTURAL COMMUNICATION

Messages are transmitted between people over some sort of channel.

Unlike written or spoken words nonverbal communication can occur in multiple channels simultaneously.

Thus, several types of nonverbal messages can be generated by a single speaker or listener at any given instant.

Nonverbal codes that are dynamic and can change during interactions:

- body movements,
- personal space,
- touching, and
- the characteristics of the voice

The person's physical attributes or physical appearance.

Some aspects of a person's physical appearance are **relatively permanent** (one's body shape, body size, body type, facial features, height, weight, skin color, eye color, and various qualities that denote age and gender).

Other aspects of one's physical appearance involve body **modifications** such as piercings, tattoos, and cosmetic procedures that are also relatively permanent.

Finally, some aspects of one's physical appearance can and usually do **change from one situation to another**, but they usually don't change within a specific interaction.

These body adornments may include one's clothing, makeup, jewelry, glasses, hair characteristics, and body scents both natural (such as from sweat) and artificial (such as from perfumes and colognes).

Nonverbal code that does not change during a specific interaction is the **environment,** which encompasses the physical features or characteristics of our surroundings.

The environment might be a home, a classroom, a store, or a specific outdoor location.

Environments differ in their:

- formality,
- warmth,
- privacy,
- familiarity,
- constraint, and
- distance

Formality refers to the heightened sense of decorum and politeness that some environments seem to require.

Informal environments allow you to have a more relaxed and casual demeanor.

Warmth refers not to the physical temperature of the setting but to the emotional tone conveyed by the environment. A warm environment feels comfortable and seems to invite you in; it is appealing and welcoming.

Privacy refers to the degree to which the environment allows you to be surrounded by others or isolated from those who might learn what you are saying and doing.

The dimension of familiarity describes the degree to which the environment is well known and therefore predictable to you, or strange and unpredictable to you. In familiar environments within your own culture, you are more likely to be relaxed and to feel at ease.

Constraint refers to your perception of the extent to which you feel "stuck" in a particular environment or free to leave it.

Distance refers to the spatial arrangements of the environment.

Does the space seem to "fit" the number of people in it, or does it feel too large or small?

Perceptions of spaciousness or crowding are often related to these spatial arrangements, and cultures differ widely in what they regard as typical or unusual.

Body Movements

Body movements are nonverbal messages that change in an interaction,

The study of body movements, often inaccurately called body language, is known as **kinesics.**

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Paul Ekman and Wallace Friesen have suggested that there *are five categories of kinesic behaviors:*

- *emblems,*
- *illustrators,*
- *affect displays,*
- *regulators, and*
- *adaptors*

Emblems
Emblems are nonverbal behaviors that have a direct verbal counterpart

Emblems, like all verbal languages, are symbols that have been arbitrarily selected by the members of a culture to convey their intended meanings.

For example, there is nothing peacelike in the peace symbol, which is a nonverbal emblem that can be displayed by extending the index and middle fingers upward from a clenched fist. Indeed, in other cultures the peace symbol has other meanings: Winston Churchill used the same symbol to indicate victory, but to many people in South American countries, it is regarded as an obscene gesture

Illustrators

Illustrators are nonverbal behaviors that are directly tied to, or accompany, the verbal message.

They are used to emphasize, explain, and support a word or phrase.

They literally illustrate and provide a visual representation of the verbal message.

In saying "the huge mountain," for example, you may simultaneously lift your arms and move them in a large half-circle.

Affect displays are facial and body movements that show feelings and emotions.

Expressions of happiness or surprise, for instance, are displayed by the face and convey a person's inner feelings.

The primary emotional states include happiness, sadness, anger, fear, surprise, disgust, contempt, interest – **primary affect displays**

Affect blends – combinations of the primary emotions

Regulators are nonverbal behaviors that help to synchronize the back-and-forth nature of conversations.

This class of kinesic behaviors helps to control the flow and sequencing of communication and may include head nods, eye contact, postural shifts, back-channel signals (such as "Uh-huhm" or "Mmm-mmm"), and other turn-taking cues.

Adaptors are personal body movements that occur as a reaction to an individual's physical or psychological state. Scratching an itch, fidgeting, tapping a pencil, and smoothing one's hair are all behaviors that fulfill some individualized need.

Personal space

Two **features** of the way cultures use the space around them are:

•the different needs for personal space and
•the messages that are used to indicate territoriality.

Personal space "bubble."
Edward Hall coined the term **proxemics** to refer to the study of how people differ in their use of personal space

Example p193

Cultural Differences in Territoriality

Do you have a favorite chair or classroom seat that you think "belongs" to you?
Or do you have a room, or perhaps just a portion of a room, that you consider to be off limits to others?

The need to protect and defend a particular spatial area is known as **territoriality,**

Territoriality is a set of behaviors that people display to show that they "own" or have the right to control the use of a particular geographic area.

Cultural differences in territoriality can be exhibited in three ways.

First, cultures can differ in the *general degree of territoriality* that its members tend to exhibit.

Some cultures are far more territorial than others.

People like the Germans are highly territorial; they barricade themselves behind heavy doors and soundproof walls to try to seal themselves from others in order to concentrate on their work.

The French have a close personal distance and are not as territorial. They are tied to people and thrive on constant interaction and high-information flow to provide them the context they need

Second, cultures can differ *in the range of possible places or spaces about which they are territorial*.

A comparison of European Americans with Germans, for example, reveals that both groups are highly territorial.

Both have a strong tendency to establish areas that they consider to be their own.

In Germany, however, this feeling of territoriality extends to "all possessions, including the automobile. If a German's car is touched, it is as though the individual himself has been touched

Finally, cultures can differ in the **typical reactions exhibited in response to invasions or contaminations of their territory.**

Members of some cultures prefer to react by withdrawing or avoiding confrontations whenever possible.

Others respond by insulating themselves from the possibility of territorial invasion, using barriers or other boundary markers.

Still others react forcefully and vigorously in an attempt to defend their "turf" and their honor.

The Meanings of Touch

Stanley E. Jones and A. Elaine Yarbrough have identified five meanings of touch.

Touch is often used to indicate **affect,** the expression of positive and negative feelings and emotions

Touch is also used as a sign of **playfulness.**

Touch is frequently used as a means of **control**

Touching for **ritual purposes** occurs mainly on occasions involving introductions or departures.

Shaking hands, clasping shoulders, hugging, and kissing the cheeks or lips are all forms of greeting rituals.

Touching is also used in **task-related activities.**
These touches may be as casual as a brief contact of hands when passing an object

Example p .196

Voice

Nonverbal messages are often used to accent or underscore the verbal message by adding emphasis to particular words or phrases.

Vocalics also include many nonspeech sounds, such as belching, laughing, and crying, and vocal "filler" sounds such as *uh, er, um, and uh-huh.*

Vocalic qualities include pitch (high to low), rate of talking (fast to slow), conversational rhythm (smooth to staccato), and volume (loud to soft).

The study of time—how people use it, structure it, and understand it—is called **chronemics.**

Past-oriented cultures regard previous experiences and events as most important (UK, China).

Present-oriented cultures. These cultures place a major emphasis on spontaneity and immediacy and on experiencing each moment as fully as possible. Present-oriented cultures believe that unseen and even unknown outside forces, such as fate or luck, control their lives (the Philippines and many Central and South American)

Future-oriented cultures believe that tomorrow—or some other moment in the future—is most important. Current activities are not accomplished and appreciated for their own sake but for the potential future benefits that might be obtained. (Europe)

Time Systems

Time systems are the implicit cultural rules that are used to arrange sets of experiences in some meaningful way.

There are three types of time systems:

•technical,

•formal

•informal.

Technical time systems are the precise, scientific measurements of time that are calculated in such units as nanoseconds.

Formal time systems refer to the ways in which the members of a culture describe and comprehend units of time.

Informal time systems refer to the assumptions cultures make about how time should be used or experienced.

How long should you wait for someone who will be ready soon, in a minute, in a while, or shortly? When is the proper time to arrive for a 9:00 a.m. appointment or an 8:00 p.m. party?

Time system

monochronic	polychronic
means that things should be done one at a time, and time is segmented into precise, small units. Time is viewed as a commodity; it is scheduled, managed, and arranged. *European Americans, like members of other monochronic cultures, are very time-driven. Similarly, within Swiss-German culture, people will often interpret tardiness as a personal insult*	means that several things are being done at the same time. *In Spain and among many Spanish-speaking cultures in Central and South America, for instance, relationships are far more important than schedules.*

CONCLUSION:

Although there is some evidence that certain nonverbal communication tendencies are common to all humans, cultures vary greatly in the repertoire of behaviors and circumstances in which nonverbal exchanges occur. A smile, a head nod, and eye contact may all have different meanings in different cultures.

The nonverbal code systems relates to:
- physical appearance,
- the environment,
- body movements,
- personal space, touch, the voice, and
- the use of time.

(Lustig 204) Lustig, Myron W., Jolene Koester. *Intercultural Competence, 7th Edition. Pearson Learning Solutions, 07/2012. VitalBook file.*

FOR DISCUSSION

1. What are some examples of cultural universals? Can you think of examples from your personal experiences that either confirm or contradict the idea of cultural universals?

2. It is widely believed by many that "a smile is universally understood." Do you agree with this statement? Why or why not?

3. Touch is one of the most fundamental parts of the human experience. But cultural differences in the norms for touching can cause problems in intercultural interactions. Provide examples of your touching norms that you believe differ for people from cultures other than your own.

4. We know that cultures use and value time differently. What kinds of judgments might be made of those who use time differently from the ways that your culture does?