

## WHAT YOU'RE SAYING WITHOUT SAYING A WORD

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Research shows that clues in the nonverbal "channels" of communication (how something is said) are often more important than words alone (what is said). Nonverbal communication is usually understood as the process of communication through sending and receiving wordless (mostly visual) messages between people. There are many different "channels" of nonverbal communication: facial expressions (smiling is an expression of happiness in most cultures, it can also signify other emotions. Some Chinese, for example may smile when they are discussing something sad or uncomfortable), the clues in our voices ("vocal paralanguage"), hand gestures, body movements ("kinesics") (In Argentina and Spain to hold up crossed fingers is made to ward away bad luck. In China, it signifies the number ten), touch ("haptics") (In some cultures, light touching of the arm or a light kiss to the cheek is very common, even among people who have just met. People from Latin America and Eastern Europe may be very comfortable with this kind of touching, whereas people from many Asian cultures may prefer less physical contact with acquaintances), and personal space (To many Indians, it is considered rather offensive to (even accidentally) step on someone's foot. Apologies should be made immediately).

Why is non-verbal communication important? Basically, it is one of the key aspects of communication. It has multiple functions: 1)Used to repeat the verbal message (e.g. point in a direction while stating directions) 2)Often used to accent a verbal message (e.g. verbal tone indicates the actual meaning of the specific words) 3)Often complement the verbal message but also may contradict (e.g. a "wink" may contradict a stated positive message 4) Regulate interactions (non-verbal cues convey when the other person should speak or not speak) 5)May substitute for the verbal message: gestures (finger to lips to indicate need for quiet), facial expressions (nod instead of a yes).

Note the implications of the proverb: "Actions speak louder than words." In essence, this underscores the importance of non-verbal communication. Non-verbal communication is especially significant in intercultural situations. Probably non-verbal differences account for typical difficulties in communicating.

Linked by common origins and similar paths of development, visual and verbal communication are both defined by the culture from which they were created. When one first learns to speak a second language, they may be deterred from fluency by their nonverbal signs. Changing with each culture is the translated definition of body language. When at first exposed to a new environment where attitudes, language and behavior are all unfamiliar, people may often suffer from culture shock. With these varying meanings from country to country it is easy to see how misunderstanding may occur.

Culture gives meaning to manners, different hand gestures, how close we may stand when conversing, our patience, and even handshakes and greetings; and thus, culture influences every aspect of nonverbal communication. Equally as vital to convey a message or an image, it is important to understand how performing smooth interactions requires eloquence with not only spoken language but visual as well. Just as Socrates described in PHAEDO, there are two worlds: the first is a world of imperfection impeded by its inept medium of speech, and the better second world of perfection where all things are communicated visually, without the need for words.

Tips for providers: Follow the person's lead. If the person moves closer or touches you in a casual manner, you may do the same. Use hand and arm gestures with great caution. Gestures can mean very different things in different cultures. Be careful in interpreting facial expressions. They may lead you to misinterpret the person's feelings. This is also true of the presence or absence crying and other expressions of pain, which are closely tied to a person's culture. Don't force a person to make eye contact with you. He/she may be treating you with greater respect by not making eye contact.

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