

## NATIONAL FEATURES OF NON-VERBAL BEHAVIOR

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### Abstract

This article analyzes the national and cultural characteristics of non-verbal behavior, focusing on how gestures, facial expressions, eye contact, body language, and spatial distance differ across various cultures. It emphasizes the importance of understanding these differences in cross-cultural communication and highlights how non-verbal signals can carry different meanings depending on cultural context. The study shows that while non-verbal behavior is a universal part of human communication, its interpretation is deeply shaped by national traditions, social norms, and historical experience. Awareness of these features is crucial for avoiding misunderstandings and fostering mutual respect in international interactions.

**Keywords:** Non-verbal communication, body language, gestures, facial expressions, cultural differences, intercultural communication, national identity.

### Introduction

In any act of human interaction, communication extends far beyond spoken or written language. Non-verbal behavior-such as facial expressions, hand gestures, posture, eye contact, touch, and the use of space-plays a crucial role in conveying emotions, intentions, and social attitudes. In fact, researchers have found that a significant portion of communication is non-verbal, and it often reveals more than words themselves.

However, while non-verbal communication is a universal human phenomenon, its forms and interpretations are strongly influenced by national and cultural factors. What is considered a sign of respect in one culture may be interpreted as rude or inappropriate in another. For example, direct eye contact is seen as a sign of confidence in many Western cultures, but in some Asian cultures, it may be considered disrespectful or confrontational. Similarly, the acceptable physical distance between individuals, the meaning of specific hand gestures, or the use of silence can differ widely across nations.

Understanding these national features of non-verbal behavior is especially important in today's globalized world, where people from different cultural backgrounds interact more frequently in education, business, diplomacy, tourism, and everyday life. Misinterpreting non-verbal cues can lead to confusion, discomfort, or even conflict. Therefore, developing an awareness of culturally specific non-verbal norms is essential for successful intercultural communication. This paper aims to explore the national characteristics of non-verbal behavior by analyzing its most common forms and the cultural meanings they convey. It also highlights the importance of cultural sensitivity and adaptability in interpreting body language within diverse social contexts.

According to the Poles and Hungarians, positive emotions are appropriate among "friends", and negative ones should not be demonstrated. Showing negative emotions is more appropriate «among strangers.» In other words, the subjects from Eastern Europe showed a desire not to



upset the members of their group with a bad mood and little concern for strangers. Based on these results, Polish and Hungarian cultures are more collectivist than American cultures. American subjects found it more acceptable to display anger, disgust, or fear of relatives or friends, rather than strangers, in the presence of which a person in the United States is supposed to always demonstrate optimism and joy in life. Another type of expressive human behavior is gestures or expressive hand movements. In everyday consciousness, there is a belief that with their help - «on the fingers» - representatives of different cultures, even without knowing each other's language, can explain themselves to each other, indeed, foreigners can agree on many things with residents using gestures that imitate actions: depicting smoking a cigar, lighting a match, etc. But even in this case, gestures may not be understood everywhere since they imply familiarity with certain objects. A fist with a retracted index finger, intended to display a pistol, does not provide a basis for identification in a primitive culture unfamiliar with firearms. In our time, many works have appeared that describe and systematize gestures. As a result, it becomes more and more obvious that most gestures are culturally specific and not only do not contribute to intercultural communication, but also make it difficult. There are many stories of stranded travelers using familiar gestures that turn out to have very different meanings in other countries. G. Triandis gives an example of how the American President R. Nixon, unwillingly, offended the Brazilians. He folded his thumb and forefinger into a ring, a gesture that meant «okay» in the US but obscene in Brazil. Gestures of the same technique can be interpreted differently even in different regions of the country. Thus, regional differences in the meaning of nodding and shaking the head from side to side as agreement or disagreement are noted in Greece and Turkey. When preparing a person for interaction in a foreign cultural environment, psychologists usually recommend using gestures as little as possible to avoid misunderstandings. The same point of view is shared by specialists in regional studies, believing that at the first stage of learning a foreign language, students should exclude non-verbal means of their national culture, since it is more difficult to learn and correctly use the system of gestures than to learn a language. Gradually, they should become familiar with the most characteristic gestures of the culture of the language being studied, but there is no need to strive to use all the gestures: in some cases, what seems normal for a native speaker becomes inappropriate for a representative of another culture<sup>1</sup>. Different types of gestures are culturally related to varying degrees. Adapters (scratching the nose, biting the lips) help our body adapt to the environment, but over time they may lose this function. Although they are poorly used in interpersonal communication, it is the culture that determines which of them is decent or indecent to use in a given situation. words, the rules of their use are learned through upbringing. Illustrators are directly related to the content of speech, visually emphasize, or illustrate what words are trying to express symbolic differences between cultures consist in the frequency and rules for using certain gestures. Some cultures encourage their members to express in gestures during a conversation. These include Jewish and Italian cultures, but the manner of gestures in each of them has its own national flavor. In other cultures, people are taught from childhood to be restrained when using gestures as illustrators of speech: in Japan, moderation and restraint in movement are considered commendable yah, the gestures of the Japanese are barely

<sup>1</sup> Birdwhistell, Ray. Introduction to Kinesics: an annotation system for analysis of body motion and gesture. 1979.-56-bet



perceptible<sup>2</sup>. A Chinese man raises his eyebrows when he is angry. Even such seemingly universal movements as a nod in agreement and a shake of the head in denial have exactly the opposite meaning in Bulgaria. The legend says that this paradox traces its history back to the deed of a folk hero. The conquering Turks persuaded him to renounce the faith of his fathers and to accept Islam. Under the threat of death, he had to verbally agree with them, but with a parallel gesture he simultaneously expressed denial. Since then, a nod in Bulgaria means «no», which often misleads visitors to this country. It is believed that the French sign language is the most expressive. When a Frenchman wants to say about something that this is the height of sophistication, refinement, he puts the tips of three fingers together, brings them to his lips and, raising his chin high, sends a gentle kiss into the air. And on the other hand, if a Frenchman rubs the base of his nose with his index finger, he warns: «something is unclear here», «be careful», «these people cannot be trusted.» This gesture is very close to the Italian tapping of the index finger on the nose, whether it is right or left. It means: «Beware. Danger ahead. Looks like they're up to something.» In the Netherlands, the same gesture has a different meaning - «I'm drunk» or «you're drunk»: in England - «conspiracy and secrecy.» Abusive gestures are different among peoples of different cultures. Outside the region, such a gesture can change the meaning of: a) stupidity among South Americans; b) among the Spaniards (the gesture depicts the motion sickness of a child); c) end of friendship quarrel; d) I'm tired of you being a bore (among many European peoples); e) talker yap (the brush depicts a mouth in continuous movement) - common in Latin America and among the Arabs; f) fed up - the gesture is widespread in different countries of Europe and in Russia, among the Spaniards and Latin Americans the palm raised above the head (and not at the throat) has the same meaning<sup>3</sup>.

In conclusion, non-verbal behavior is a vital component of human communication that carries significant cultural and national distinctions. While gestures, facial expressions, body language, and personal space are used by people across the globe, their meanings and acceptable use vary widely between cultures. These differences, if not understood, can lead to miscommunication or even offense in cross-cultural interactions. Recognizing and respecting national features of non-verbal communication is essential for building effective and respectful relationships in an increasingly interconnected world. Whether in international diplomacy, business, education, or everyday encounters, cultural awareness of non-verbal cues promotes empathy, reduces misunderstandings, and enhances mutual understanding. Therefore, the study and teaching of non-verbal communication should be an integral part of intercultural competence development. Being able to interpret and adapt to culturally specific body language is not only a sign of communication skill but also of respect and openness toward other cultures

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