

Study of the Role of Body Language in Intercultural Communication Etiquette

—Emotional Metaphor, Communication Alternative, Supplementary Reinforcement

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Abstract: The purpose of this paper is to explore the role of body language in intercultural communication etiquette on the basis of body language analysis, so as to put forward suggestions for China in the practice of intercultural communication etiquette and strengthen the friendly exchanges between China and other countries in the world. In this paper, it adopts the methods of literature analysis and investigation and research to explore the study of body language at home and abroad, analyze the study value and concept definition of situation language, discuss the role of body language in intercultural communication etiquette, and finally explore the important significance of body language communication etiquette in intercultural communication. The result is that body language plays a role of emotional metaphor, communication alternative and supplementary reinforcement in intercultural communication etiquette. Therefore, in the process of intercultural communication, it plays a decisive role that how to use body language and what kind of intercultural communication attitude should be adopted by both parties in the intercultural communication.

1. Introduction

Global integration makes the culture of different countries present the development trend of communication and mutual learning. In the current period, we need to learn the cultural differences of different countries, and actively explore the various behaviors differences of communication parties caused by different cultural backgrounds in various environments. Therefore, in that case, it is necessary to learn the cultural characteristics of different countries firstly, because the differences in cultural background, people in different countries have great differences in the use of language behaviors and body language behaviors, and these differences also form obstacles in the path of intercultural communication in different countries¹. The culture influences the behavior of body language, which reflected thoughts and connotations are closely related to the background cultures of various countries. Therefore, in order to further promote the process of global integration, it is necessary to strengthen the specific role of body language in intercultural communication etiquette.

2. Overview of Body Language Study At Home and Abroad

The study on body language in foreign countries can be traced back to the 1950s, during which period, breakthrough progress on body language was made, and several influential books on body language were published, such as, *The Silent Language* by Hall and *The Introduction to Body Language* by Bode Whist. By the 1980s, the body language had got further development².

The study on the body language in China can be traced back to the 1980s. With the extensive attention paid to the study on non-verbal communication in China, some experts and scholars have also devoted themselves to the research in this field, during which period, books discussing the role of language and non-verbal behavior in cross-cultural contexts were published in succession, such as *Language and Culture* by Liu Runqing in the late 1980s, *Culture and Communication* by Hu Wenzhong in the mid-1990s, and *The Dictionary of British and American Culture*, laying a good foundation for contemporary scholars to study the role of language and non-language communication in intercultural communication.

3. Study Value and Concept Definition of Body Language

3.1 Definition of Body Language

With the advent of the economic globalization era, China's market economy has developed rapidly, during which period, China has strengthened its cooperation with overseas countries, so the intercultural communication and etiquette have also become an indispensable part of diplomacy. The meaning of intercultural communication can be defined within the scope of linguistic behavior that the communicators in different cultural backgrounds use the same language to communicate in a specific cultural communication environment, apart from that, it also includes another form of communication, namely non-verbal communication, also known as body language communication, which includes not only communication through verbal behaviors, but also other body language such as kissing, shaking hands and hugging³.

3.2 Characteristics of Body Language

In the book *Intercultural Nonverbal Communication*, Hu Wenzhong and Bi Jiwan divide nonverbal communication into four parts: body language, paralanguage, object language and environment language⁴. Relevant documents show that body language communication accounts for 70% of the whole communication process. Verbal communication focuses on the transmission of ideas, while non-verbal communication usually reflects external manifestations, therefore, for the intercultural communication, attention should be paid to the expression of language as well as the understanding of cultural customs and other knowledge. The language communication reflects human consciousness and subjective control, while the body language mostly reflects the display of subconscious behavior.

3.3 Role of Body Language Communication

With the mutual promotion and continuous development of modern economy and culture, the scientific and reasonable use of etiquette in intercultural communication can effectively improve the civilization accomplishment of both parties, improve the relationship between communication parties, and thus promote the harmonious development of the whole society, therefore, the application of body language in intercultural etiquette attracts more and more attention from the society. Nonverbal communication also has very extensive ways and it becomes an important means of intercultural communication. For the intercultural communication, if we can make a corresponding culture-acceptable physical contact or behavior according to the different social culture attribute, the embarrassment and conflict in communication can be effectively avoided and also it will be easy to understand and respect the culture, finally, better promote the smooth progress of intercultural communication.

4. Role of Body Language in Intercultural Communication Etiquette

4.1 Emotional Metaphor

Under the guidance of Socrates, Gorgia concludes that 'Persuasion is the whole and essence of rhetoric'. Aristotle, on the other hand, says, 'The object of rhetoric is to present persuasive facts in any case, not to persuade.' and he holds that 'persuasion is the ability to find persuasive methods available in any given fact'. Therefore, the rational use of appropriate body language can help people metaphor their inner feelings, make language and behavior complement each other, and make the two parties' thoughts and words to be expressed in the communication process be well displayed. Body language can not only convey people's subjective consciousness, real-time thoughts and emotions to the other party, but also understand the psychological dynamic changes of both parties in the communication process through the feedback of the other party's body language. Therefore, body language is a two-way transmission and communication way⁵.

4.2 Communication Alternative

According to relevant research, in human communication, most people pay attention to each

other's eyes, and then pay attention to each other's ears, thus, in the process of intercultural communication, the body language plays a crucial role in intercultural communication. Leonardo Da Vinci says, 'Everyman is blind, deaf, acts without thinking, and even speaks without thinking.' Therefore, in the process of cross-cultural communication, it is necessary to attract the attention of the other party in order to better express their own views. In the process of information transmission, body language spreads faster and more widely than verbal behaviors. When verbal behaviors cannot well express communicative content, people generally prefer to use body language to express, that is, to use body language to convey content. Therefore, the importance of body language to intercultural communication is self-evident.

4.3 Supplementary Reinforcement

Body language can only use facial expressions, actions and other body behavior to convey information, but also can assist language behavior to strengthen emotion. In terms of expressing feeling and emotion, it is hardly comparable for verbal expression to body language. The verbal behavior may say what one doesn't think, but body language is the expression of people's real feeling and emotion subconsciously. Liu Zongyuan, a Chinese literati in Tang Dynasty says that 'Intellectuals take virtue cultivation as the foundation, of which sincerity is the most important.' He holds that people with knowledge should first cultivate their own virtue, from which we can know that body language, as an important channel to show human's conduct, can support expression and amplify people's thoughts and intentions.

5. Important Significance of Body Language Communication Etiquette in Intercultural Communication

5.1 Make the Communication Etiquette Norms Explicit, Promote Cultural Communication

As the intercultural communication is conducted between two parties under different cultural backgrounds, some problems of cultural differences and personality differences often appear, which will also lead to etiquette differences in the process of intercultural communication. And these differences may affect the normal communication between intercultural communicators, thus form communication barriers and cause differences in opinion. Before cross-cultural communication, the understanding of the body language communication etiquette of the other culture can not only make the communication between people under different cultural backgrounds smooth, but also reduce the probability of the occurrence of differences in opinion, further guarantee the harmony and smooth of intercultural communication, and reflect the standardization of communication etiquette and behavior.

5.2 Effective Delivery of Information, Reflection of Cultural Communication Connotation

Nonverbal cultural communication behavior, namely, body language communication behavior, can effectively realize the delivery of information, and then clearly express the meaning of the specific content that communicators want to express, furthermore, in which process the expression of related emotions can also be strengthened. In the process of intercultural body language communication, not only the behavior between the two parties can be reflected, but also the emotional expression can also be reflected, besides, a series of body movements can not only express the subjective emotion attitude in time, also assist in the information delivery, finally strengthen the conversation understanding. In addition, under different cultural backgrounds, the differences in intercultural communication situation language and etiquette also reflect the cultural differences and connotations of different countries.

6. Conclusion

To sum up, the application scope of body language communication is relatively extensive. In order to strengthen international cooperation and communication, it is necessary to actively apply body language in intercultural etiquette communication. In this paper, it adopts the methods of

literature analysis and investigation etc. methods to explore the research process of body language at home and abroad, analyze its study value and concept definition, and discuss the role of body language in intercultural communication etiquette, finally, explore the significance of nonverbal communication etiquette in intercultural communication between Chinese speaking countries and English speaking countries, hoping to provide some theoretical basis for promoting the rapid development of China's economy and the further expansion of intercultural communication.

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