

## **tercultural CommunicaA study of Intion between China and Japan**

**Huizhou university zhang ping\***

**Huizhou university guo yaqin**

**Huizhou university kang chuanjin**

### **【Abstract】**

Nowadays, people from different cultures encounter each other during travel, study and business interaction, so people are getting tightly connected with each other and the intercultural communication becomes more and more essential. However, the communication may be hindered by the different cultures, for example the languages, communication styles, behavioral expression, perceptions and backgrounds. Even the environment we live in and our personality can become the barriers of communication. If we can understand those elements that affect intercultural communication better, learn more about other countries' cultures and try our best to strengthen intercultural training, we may become successful communicators.

**【Key Words】** intercultural communication; cultural difference; intercultural training

Intercultural communication refers to communication that takes place between people of different cultural backgrounds, whose cultural perceptions and systems are distinct enough to alter the communication events. Since people come from different culture, different place, or environment, there must be a lot of elements preventing people from understanding each other. Obviously, culture plays an important role in our communication, for culture permeates every aspect of our life. Culture consists of the learned patterns of behavior common to members of a given society—the unique lifestyle of a particular group of people. So we can know that culture is around us and has been affecting all the time. We may misunderstand each other because of different nationality, religion, briefly, or some kind of organization. To study the differences between cultures is very useful and important, for culture may become an obstacle between the intercultural communications. However, how does the culture affect people's communication in different cultural aspect?

### **1. Verbal communication—language**

Language is one of the main elements that clearly distinguished one culture from another, but it is also the key barrier in the process of cultural communication. Language is one of the most prominent aspect in the cultural influence, because it affects the way we think, our attitudes and behaviors. When you don't know the language well, it is very difficult to handle conflict effectively. So knowing each

other's language or at least having a common language is of the first consideration.

However, language is a complex element. It is not only concerning with vocabulary or dialects, but concerning with cultural traditions. Sometimes, even though you have studied the language for many years, it's still difficult for you to fully understand the language. Take me for an example. Last time I went to a beauty salon to have a part time job and the boss is a Japanese. When I saw the guest had just finished a cup of coffee, I'm wondering whether to make another pot of coffee. At this moment, the boss came to me and said, 'うん、いいよ', almost without hesitation, I went into the kitchen and made another pot of coffee at once! Yes...actually, I was wrong because what he was meant was that I didn't need to make another pot of coffee! At that time, I had been studying Japanese almost about two years, but it was my misunderstanding of the meaning of conversational tone that I made a mistake eventually. In this case, if I could understand the tone, which based on the Japanese thinking patterns even the local language custom, the mistake could even have been avoided.

Maybe all of the foreigners could feel confused with the complex Japanese appellation when they go to Japan for the first time. There are lots of greetings in called "あいさつ言葉". Compared with the study of language, the study of Japanese greetings is more of the culture of Japan. Japanese greetings have presented a standard feature—people living in the same situation will use the same and fixed greetings. For example, according to Japan's national institute of statistics, just before dinner, 98% of the Japanese people will say "いただきます", even if the dining alone. When they get home, almost about 90% of Japanese people will say "ただいま" to their families. And about 80% of Japanese people regard the 'こんにちは' as the greetings during the day. This kind of uniform way of greeting is rare in other countries. Evident both inside and outside of the points is also one of the characteristics of the Japanese people. In Japan, people of the same family and the same social groups are regarded as own side just like family member, relatives, friends even colleagues and classmates. The opposite is outside. So it's important to pay attention to the inside and outside when greeting. For example, Japanese only say 「さようなら」 to outsides, if they said 「さようなら」 to their couples and lovers, that is to say they had no fate at all.

## **2. Nonverbal communication—body language**

Yes, we often use verbal language in our daily life, thus nonverbal communication is neglected. In fact, nonverbal communication is a useful tool for communication, especially body language because it is the most common way to transfer more information. Whether we are conscious of it or not, we express ourselves when we speak, but we can also convey our opinions and attitude when our mouths are not open. We can employ eye contact, gesture, facial expressions and other nonverbal behaviors to communicate. However, different countries have different cultures which form different understanding of body language. Different nonverbal behaviors may have the same meaning in different countries. Or they may have different meanings for different people. And the reason lies in that people live in different areas are influenced by their convention, customs, and values, even modes of thinking. Sometimes it will cause conflict between people especially in intercultural communication.

## 2.1 Eye Contact

As saying goes ‘The eyes are the windows of the soul’. That is to say, we can read one’s mind through his or her eyes. Eye language can express complicated feelings and it is an important way to judge the intimacy of communicators. Chinese

have more eye contact when we are in conversation. According to Chinese tradition, communicators must have an eye contact each other to express politeness and respect. But there are many rules about eye language: whether to look at the other communicators or not; when it is the time to look at them; how long we can look at; who we can look at and who we can’t. They all imply different meanings in communication.

In China, when two strangers meet with in public, the usual response is to behave in a friendly and natural manner, glancing at the other person, perhaps saying 'hello' and exchanging small talk or remaining silent. But if you try hard to avoid the other's glance or you look out of the window as if nobody sat nearby, you would appear so uneasy and so unnatural that you might lay yourself open to suspicion! To gaze intently may show your attentiveness, but is not that necessary. The best way is to look at him or her as naturally as he or she looks at you. While Japanese often look at the other communicator’s neck when they are in conversation. They believe eye contact is impolite. When it’s your turn to speak, they often look at their feet or knees. Japanese people rarely make eye contact, when they are under the strong staring, most of them feel embarrassed and uncomfortable, even want to escape. From what is mentioned above we

can conclude that different cultural background has a great influence on body language. And eye language also reflects different cultures and beliefs. So we need to observe and compare and contrast carefully so as to improve cultural exchange and to blend well.

## 2.2 Gesture

Hand gesture is one of the most common body language, owing to different custom and culture in nonverbal communication between China and Japan, even if the same gesture, maybe have great differences. Most people know the gesture of “ok”—thumb circle with forefinger means ok, the gesture of raising the thumb means all things go well, but which may have different meanings even opposite meaning in Japan. Yes, Japanese people think this kind of gesture as sign of money! So when businessmen deal with Japanese, you’d better not use the gesture “ok” to express agreement to sign contract, or Japanese man will think you want to bribe. Raising the big thumb also has different meaning in Japan, which means representing father, husband or male. But in China, this kind of gesture means perfect and excellent in general situation. On the other hand, when you putting up your little thumb to others, it means you look down upon others in China, but it represents girlfriend, lover in Japan.

As the global village continues to shrink and cultures collide, it is essential for all of us to become more sensitive, more aware, and more observant to all kinds of motions, gestures that surround us every day. And as many of cross over cultural borders, it would be fitting for us respect, learn, and understand more about the effective, yet powerful “silent language” of gestures. We may not have time to hear a language, but taking time to learn the “signals” is a powerful communicator.

## **2.3 Smile**

Smiles are an important facial expression. They show interest, excitement, empathy, concern, it creates an upbeat, positive environment. Smile indicates pleasure, either that you are generally happy or are enjoying the other person's company or that you are amused by something in particular, such as a joke. A full smile engages the whole face, particularly including the eyes, which crease and twinkle. When people talk about smile it means friendliness and happiness in most situations in China, but Japanese don't agree with expressing their joys and sorrows through exaggerated facial expressions. And they don't usually use facial expression to express any other important emotion or information in public. So people are most likely to see a calm, secretive expression or a bland smile. Japanese smile is elusive. It may express happy, friendly, or to conceal negative emotions, such as unhappiness, anger, embarrassment, etc. For the Japanese people, smile is just a part of social etiquette, which is used to help maintain harmony. Japanese people think it's unforgivable to trouble others because of ourselves' emotions. Avoiding the leakage of any other negative feelings is a sign of perseverance sacrifice, and the purpose is to avoid disturbing the social balance. This is the function of Japanese smile.

## **2.4 Body Distance**

Psychologists discover any person needs personal space, now let's talk about the culture difference about body distance. Maybe people in western countries like standing close to show friendliness. In their culture standing closely is the manner of the people when they converge. So they stand close as possible as they can as if they want to smell the smells of partner. But Chinese people conform with the principle of non-touching culture during the conversation and keep a moderate distance when talking with others. At the same time, Japanese people pay more attention to private space than Chinese, because Japanese people often show welcome by bowing.

With the further deepening of culture exchange and corporation of the world, the opportunities of corporation with foreign people are keeping increasing. We will learn to be on the other's shoes to think about things. The important things to keep in mind is that most Japanese people do not like people to be too close when communicating with others. However, being too far apart, of course, may be impolite, being too close makes people uncomfortable, so we should learn and distinguish how to use body distance according to different situation in intercultural communication.

# **3. Intercultural training**

## **3.1 Significance of study**

In modern society, most countries in the world communicate with each other frequently and at the same time, the people speaking different languages have different cultural background, way of living, faith of religion, personal values and so on, which take intervene to the communication of people coming from different country. When a Chinese meet a Japanese friend, would bowing each other be offensive for the Chinese? If two young friends of the same sex walk with their arms around each other's shoulders would Japanese people regard this as being proper? Does raising the big thumb means perfect and excellent, while putting up your little thumb means you look down upon others in all cultures? I'm afraid nobody can give a positive or negative answer about the above questions,

because the same behavior in different culture has different meanings. Language is one of the gifts of human being. It lets us share our experiences, helps us learn from others, and allows us to communicate across time, but language is only one of the ways we communicate. Gesture and other body language are as effectively as words, maybe even more effectively. We can use body language to gather information from our surroundings, too. The more you understand body language and the affect to others, the better you

will be in communicating with co-workers, bosses, clients, and others you encounter during the day. By making simple adjustments to your posture, facial expressions and mannerisms, you can improve the way others view you. In fact, in some respects our primary means of understanding each other are two things we have in common with the rest of the animal world: our eyes and our bodies. Without gestures, our world would be static and colorless. It's clear that without body language we can't finish our informational exchange. There is no doubt that body language, like verbal language, can express emotions, exchange ideas and deliver information. So we must learn to know the cultural differences of body language to achieve efficient communication.

### **3.2 The principles of intercultural communication**

Just as an old saying goes "When in Rome, do as the Romans do." It is the main principle in intercultural communication. This principle refers that communicators should respect and understand the culture of the other nations and eliminate the interference of their own cultures. According to this principle, we should learn to know the differences of their customs, believe and their connotations of body language.

The other principle indicates that we should conclude the rules by comparison and contrasts of different cultures and excludes the interferences of cultures to avoid cultural confliction. In the application of this principle, we should keep a tolerant attitude towards the differences of cultures, believes, customs and so on to avoid prejudice and superiority. So in intercultural communication, we can make full use of these principles, exclude fixed mode of culture and keep open and understanding, attitude towards cultural differences.

## **4. Conclusion**

This essay mainly talks about the intercultural differences between China and Japan. It also introduces some kinds of commonly used body language and their different uses in different cultural background. From the study of the intercultural communication above, we know how important of the intercultural communication and how complicated it is. I believe it can help the readers succeed in intercultural communication.

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