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Nonverbal Communication

Teacher:

I've been a teacher for ten years and I can always tell when students don't know an answer in class discussion. They either look down at their notes, stare out the window, or fix their shoelaces — but they never look

me in the eye.

College Student:

Mary says she likes me, but I don't know how she really feels about me. We've gone out three times and she rarely laughs at my jokes or smiles at me. She always looks bored when I talk to her.

Customer:

Jane was at the store trying to decide which television set to buy. A loud, overeager salesman approached her, waved his hands in her face, and nearly stood on her feet. She became so uncomfortable that she left the shop.

[A] Language studies traditionally have *emphasized* verbal and written language, but recently have begun to consider communication that takes place without words. In some types of communication people express more nonverbally than verbally. If you ask an obviously depressed person, "What's wrong?", and he answers, "Nothing, I'm fine," you probably won't believe him. When an angry person says, "Let's forget this subject, I don't want to talk about it any more!" you know that he hasn't stopped communicating. His silence and *withdrawal* continue to convey emotional meaning.

[B] One study done in the United States showed that in the communication of attitudes, 93 percent of the message was *transmitted by* the tone of the voice and by facial expressions, whereas only 7 percent of the speaker's attitude was transmitted by words.¹ Apparently, we express our emotions and attitudes more nonverbally than verbally.

Cultural Differences in Nonverbal Communication

[C] Nonverbal communication expresses meaning or feeling without words. *Universal* emotions, such as happiness, fear, and sadness, are expressed in a similar nonverbal way throughout the world. There are, however, nonverbal differences across cultures that may be a source of 5 *confusion* for foreigners. For example, feelings of friendship exist every-, where but their expression varies. It may be acceptable in some countries for men to embrace each other and for women to hold hands; in other countries these displays of *affection* may be *shocking*.

[D] What is acceptable in one culture may be completely unacceptable in another. One culture may determine that *snapping* fingers to call a waiter is appropriate; another may consider this *gesture* rude. We are often not aware of how gestures, facial expressions, eye contact, and the use of 5 space affect communication. In order to correctly interpret another culture's style of communication, it is necessary to study the "silent language" of that culture.

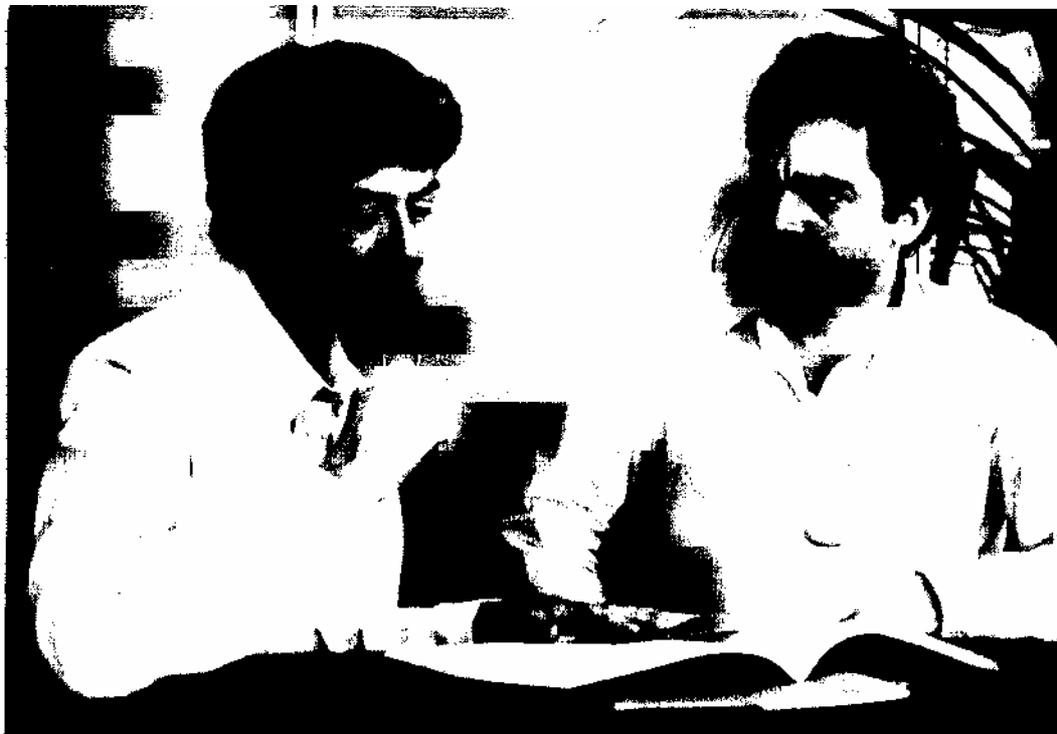
Gestures

[E] Gestures refer to specific body movements that carry meaning. Hands can form shapes that convey many meanings: "That's expensive," "Come here," "Go away," and "It's OK" can be expressed nonverbally using only hands. The gestures for these phrases may differ among languages. 5 As children we *imitate* and learn these nonverbal movements and often use them to *accompany* or replace words. When traveling to another country, foreign visitors soon learn that not all gestures are universal.



The "OK" gesture in the American culture is a symbol for money in Japan. The same gesture is *obscene* in some Latin American countries.

- 10 (This is why the editors of a Latin American newspaper enjoyed publishing a picture of former President Nixon giving the OK symbol with both hands!)



Facial Expressions

[F] Facial expressions carry meaning determined by contexts and relationships. For instance, the smile, which is typically an expression of pleasure, has many functions. A woman's smile at a policeman who is about to give her a ticket does not carry the same meaning as the smile she gives to a young child. A smile may show affection, convey politeness, or *disguise* true feelings. Pain is conveyed by a *grimace*, which also signifies disgust or disapproval. Surprise, shock, or disbelief can be shown by raising the eyebrows. A wink given to a friend may mean "You and I have a secret" or "I'm just kidding." Between a man and a woman, a wink can be *flirtatious*. Our faces easily reveal emotions and attitudes.

- [G] The degree of facial expressiveness also varies among individuals and cultures. The fact that members of one culture do not express their

emotions as openly as members of another does not mean they do not experience emotions. Rather, there are cultural *restraints* on the amount of nonverbal expressiveness permitted. Given individual differences, it is difficult to make generalizations about a cultural style of communication. Americans express themselves facially in varying degrees. People from certain *ethnic backgrounds* in the United States may use their hands, bodies, and faces more than other Americans. There are no fixed rules, although it is considered negative or suspicious to have a "deadpan" expression or a "poker face." Some people can be "read like a book"; others are difficult to read.

Eye Contact

[H] Eye contact is important because *insufficient* or *excessive* eye contact may create communication *barriers*. It is important in relationships because it serves to show *intimacy*, attention, and influence. As with facial expressions, there are no specific rules governing eye behavior except 5 that it is considered rude to stare, especially at strangers. It is, however, common for two strangers to walk toward each other, make eye contact, smile and perhaps even say "Hi." The strangers may immediately look away and forget that they even had any contact. This type of glance does not mean much; it is simply a way of *acknowledging* another person's 10 presence. In a conversation too little eye contact may be seen negatively because it conveys lack of interest, inattention, or even *mistrust*. The relationship between mistrust and lack of eye contact is stated directly in the expression, "Never trust a person who can't look you in the eyes."

Space

[I] Unconsciously, we all carry with us what have been called "body bubbles." These bubbles are *like invisible* walls which define our personal space. The amount of space changes depending on the interpersonal relationship. For example, we are usually more comfortable 5 standing closer to family members than to strangers. Personality also determines the size of this space. *Introverts* often prefer to interact with others at a greater distance than *extroverts*. Cultural styles are important too. A Japanese employer and employee usually stand farther apart while talking than their American *counterparts*. Latin Americans and Arabs 10 tend to stand closer together than Americans when talking.



[J] For Americans, distance in social conversation is about an arm's length to four feet. Less space in the American culture may be *associated* with greater intimacy or aggressive behavior. The common practice of saying "Excuse me," or "Pardon me" for the slightest accidental touching of another person reveals an American attitude about personal space. Thus when a person's "space" is intruded upon by someone, he or she may feel *threatened and* react defensively. In cultures where close physical contact is acceptable and desirable, Americans may be perceived as cold and distant.

[K] Culture does not always determine the messages that our body movements convey. Contexts, personalities, and relationships also influence them. Therefore, no two people in any one society have the same nonverbal behavior. However, like verbal language, nonverbal communication cannot be completely separated from culture. Whether we emphasize differences or similarities, the "silent language" is much louder than it first appears.

Comprehension Questions*

Choose the best answer for the following questions. You will find the answer stated either directly or indirectly in the reading passage.

1. The introductory examples (*Teacher, College Student, and Customer*) are meant to show:
 - a. How words don't mean anything at all.
 - b. How students, shy college students, and eager salesmen are poor communicators.
 - c. How people interpret nonverbal communication.
2. What would be a good alternative title for this reading?
 - a. The Speaking Hands
 - b. The Silent Language
 - c. Body Bubbles
3. Four categories of nonverbal communication mentioned are:
 - a. The face, the eyes, the body, and the fingers.
 - b. Behavior, intimacy, aggression, and attention.
 - c. Gestures, facial expression, eye contact, and space.
4. In paragraph E, it is stated that:
 - a. American nonverbal communication is superior to nonverbal communication in other cultures.
 - b. We cannot communicate with oral language.
 - c. Some gestures are not universal.
5. The picture of Nixon's "OK" gesture was published in a Latin American newspaper because: [E]
 - a. Nixon is obscene.
 - b. It humorously showed cultural differences in nonverbal communication.
 - c. Political leaders use nonverbal communication frequently.
6. A smile between a boyfriend and a girlfriend differs from a smile between an angry employee and his boss. This example, like the one in paragraph F, illustrates:
 - a. Multiple functions of facial expressions.
 - b. The universality of the smile.
 - c. Disharmony at work.

*The capital letter in brackets refers to the corresponding paragraph in the reading.

7. The expression, "You can read her face like a book," means: [G]
 - a. She is a difficult person to understand.
 - b. She speaks with words.
 - c. She shows her feelings and emotions.
8. Why might it be inappropriate to stare at strangers? [H]
 - a. Staring can be an invasion of psychological privacy.
 - b. Staring is rude in any situation all over the world.
 - c. Staring can give one person too much power over another.
9. Body bubbles: [I]
 - a. Are permanent.
 - b. Vary with personalities, relationships, and situations, c. Are influenced only by culture.
10. When an American accidentally touches or bumps into another person, he or she may say: [J]
 - a. "Pardon me" or "Excuse me."
 - b. "Excuse me for popping your body bubble."
 - c. "I'm sorry I did not see the invisible wall around you."
11. The authors imply throughout the reading that the "silent language":
 - a. Cannot be learned.
 - b. Is less important than the verbal language.
 - c. Should be a part of language training.

Vocabulary List

<i>Paragraph A</i>	<i>Paragraph B</i>	<i>Paragraph C</i>	<i>Paragraph D</i>
emphasized	transmitted	universal	snapping
			withdrawal-gesture
		confusion	
		embrace	
		affection	
		*shocking	
<i>Paragraph E</i>	<i>Paragraph E</i>	<i>Paragraph G</i>	<i>Paragraph H</i>
imitate	disguise	restraints	insufficient
accompany			
*ethnic			*grimace
obscene			excessive
			*acknowledging
			disgust
			mistrust
barriers			* background
	*wink		
	intimacy		
*flirtatious			

*See vocabulary exercise D.

<i>Paragraph I</i>	<i>Paragraph J</i>	<i>Paragraph K</i>
invisible	associated	(no new words)
introverts	accidental	
extroverts	intruded	
counterparts		
threatened		
defensively		

Phrases and Expressions

- I'm just kidding. [F]
- to have a deadpan expression [G]
- to have a poker face [G]
- to read someone's face like a book [G]
- Never trust a person who can't look you in the eye. [H]

Vocabulary Exercises*

A. Choose the appropriate synonym (or the word closest in meaning) from Synonyms the list and rewrite each sentence, replacing the italicized word. *Change tense, singular and plural, and part of speech when necessary.*

hug	love	backing away
went with	stressed	click
indecent	copied	global
• send		

1. The student *emphasized* his ideas by speaking more loudly. [A]
2. His *withdrawal* from the group showed his dislike of the members in it. [A]
3. The message was *transmitted* by radio. [B]
4. Handshaking is not a *universal* gesture in introductions. [C]
5. The two cousins *embraced* each other when they met at the air port. [C]
6. *Affection* can be shown emotionally and physically. [C]
7. The dancer was snapping her fingers while she swirled in the air. [D]
8. Children learn gestures when they *imitate* their parents' movements. [E]
9. Did you *accompany* your younger brother to the movies last night? [E]
10. The young boy was punished for collecting obscene pictures. [E]

*The capital letter in brackets refers to the corresponding paragraph in the reading.

- B. Choose the word that *best* defines the italicized word.
- Multiple Choice**
- The sad clown tried to *disguise* his feelings by wearing a big smile. [F]
 - discover
 - expose
 - hide
 - resist
 - He showed his *disgust* for the movie by leaving in the middle. [F]
 - enchantment
 - approval
 - dislike
 - appreciation
 - The majority of citizens disagreed with the political *restraints* that the government placed on them. [G]
 - rights
 - limitations
 - elections
 - freedom
 - Insufficient* knowledge in his work caused him many problems on the job. [H]
 - not enough
 - incorrect
 - inappropriate
 - too much
 - Excessive* spending may result in a bank's closing your account. [H]
 - thrifty
 - exclusive
 - careful
 - extravagant
 - When there are *barriers* between two people, it is difficult for them to communicate. [H]
 - fights
 - points
 - obstacles
 - words
 - It takes time to build emotional *intimacy*. [H]
 - privacy
 - closeness
 - expression
 - sanity
 - She showed her *mistrust* of doctors by ignoring her physician's advice. [H]
 - love
 - disease
 - loyalty
 - distrust

C. First choose the correct word for the definitions. Then fill in the blanks in **Definitions** the sentences following the definitions. Note: *You may have to change the grammatical form of the word used in the sentence.*

- | | | |
|----------------|------------------|------------------|
| invisible [I] | counterparts [I] | intruded [J] |
| introverts [I] | associated [J] | . threatened [J] |
| extroverts [I] | accidental [I] | defensively [J] |

1. expressed an intention of hurting or punishing _____

The teacher's _____ didn't mean anything; he never did anything about them.

2. shy, inward people _____

The _____ young woman was not hired by the public relations firm.

3. connected _____

The retired professor was _____ with the university for twenty years.

4. forced oneself on others without being asked or welcome

The _____ sensed that he was not wanted at the party.

5. happening by chance _____

The car _____ hit the tree.

6. active and expressive people _____

Do you have to be an _____ to be a comedian?

7. unable to be seen _____

In some religious schools children are taught that God is

8. people or things that correspond to others in form and function;
equivalents _____

The dean of the sociology department felt that his _____ on other campuses were not doing their jobs well.

9. in a manner of feeling attacked and justifying quickly _____

It is difficult to communicate with people who have _____ attitudes.

D. Match the words on the left with their definitions on the right. Place the **Matching** letter of the definition in the space next to the word.

- | | |
|------------------|---|
| confusion ___ | a. scowl; look of disgust |
| shocking ____ | b. movement of the body or part of the body, especially the hands |
| gesture_____ | c. showing awareness or recognition of |
| grimace | d. showing sexual or romantic interest |
| wink | e. pertaining to a minority or national group that is part of a larger community (e.g., Blacks or Chinese Americans in the U. S.) |
| flirtatious ____ | f. disorder; chaos |
| ethnic _____ | g. appalling; very surprising |
| backgrounds _ | h. closing and opening of one eye |
| acknowledging_ | i. environments; surroundings; origins |

Conversational Activities

A. The following are some of the more common gestures in American **Gestures** English. These are specific movements that are made with hands, arms, and shoulders; each movement has a specific meaning. Demonstrate and practice them in class.

Form

Common Possible Meaning



OK

Form

Common Possible Meaning



Good luck; I hope it works out.



Don't ask me; I don't know.



I didn't hear you; I can't hear you



Cut; that's enough; stop or it's all over for me

Form

Common Possible Meaning



Oh, I forgot!
Don't tell me (surprised)



Wait a second;
Slow down;
Relax



Come here

Note: Ask your teacher to demonstrate gestures that convey boredom, excessive talking and money.

Follow-up: Which, if any, of these gestures are different from gestures in your language? In what situations do you use gestures? Are there some gestures you shouldn't use with certain people?

Activity: Act out the following situations, practicing the gestures listed above and those demonstrated by your teacher.

You can't hear your friend's voice.

You want a child to come to your side.

Your friend has just walked into the class to take an important examination. Wish him or her good luck.

Somebody has asked you a question and you don't know the answer. You want to tell your friend that the lecture is boring.

You signal to your friend that the person on the phone is talking too much.

You are ready to enter the restaurant when you notice that a simple dinner costs almost \$25.00.

B. **Charades** Pantomime ideas and emotions to the rest of the class. Think of sentences or phrases to illustrate nonverbally. For example:

I'm mad! This is delicious!

Your baby is beautiful!

Please leave.

Write down your ideas, feelings, and expressions and give them to other class members to act out, or act them out yourself. Do not use any words. See if the other class members can guess the meanings.

C. Nonverbal cues or behavior can carry negative meaning in certain Nonverbal situations and in others, positive meaning. For instance, when a father Cues stares at his son who has just received an F (fail) on an exam, the father's stare conveys something negative. However, when a painter stares at a model who is about to be painted, the painter's stare does not have a negative meaning. In this exercise, indicate whether you feel the nonverbal cues listed are negative or positive. There are four possible relationships given for each one.

Directions: Place a (+) in the blanks in which the nonverbal cue is positive and a (—) in the blanks in which the cue is negative. Place a (+)

and a (—) if you feel the cue can be either. Leave empty if you have no reaction or feel that the cue is neutral.

+ = positive	— = negative	At a party (first meeting)	
In the classroom			
<i>student</i>		<i>man</i>	<i>woman</i>
<i>teacher</i>	<i>teacher</i>	4	4
Example: yawning			
no eye contact hands on hips	<i>student</i>	<i>woman</i>	<i>man</i>
prolonged silence nodding			
leaning forward impassive fare			
leaning away crossing arms			
sitting close smiling			

Discuss: Compare your responses with those of the other class members. Were any cues positive in one situation and negative in another? Were any neutral? Did you disagree with the other class members? If so, why?

- D. In pairs (if possible, with two people from the same culture*) write a **Role-Plays** dialogue *in your own language* and in English using the following situation. First perform the dialogue in front of the class in your own language. Then perform the same scene in English. The class members will comment on the nonverbal behavior they observe in both scenes.

*Note: If class members are from one culture, role-play different situations (e.g., meeting a friend at a party, making a date, returning a bad product to a store manager).

In an office:

student	desk two
teacher	chairs

The student is entering his or her professor's office to discuss a problem. After a short conversation, the student leaves the office.

Discuss: Did you feel or observe any nonverbal differences when languages were changed? Were you more comfortable in one language than in another? Do your body movements change when you are speaking a foreign language? If so, how?

- E.** The purpose of this activity is to develop observational skills and to discuss nonverbal communication.

Observation Task

Directions: Work in pairs or in groups of three or four. Observe people's gestures, touching, eye contact, and their use of space. Record your observations in the spaces provided. After the observation, meet with class members and discuss the follow-up questions.

Some recommended areas where you can make observations are:

school cafeteria	coffee shops
outdoor seating areas	book store
bus stops	classrooms
library	elevators

Space:

during greetings and farewells:

between men and women (sitting and standing):

between men and women (sitting and standing):

between members of the same sex (sitting and standing):

between friends; between strangers:

Eye Contact and Touching:

during greetings and farewells:

between men and women engaged in conversations:

between members of the same sex:

between strangers approaching each other (specifically eye contact):

Gestures: (hand and facial)

during greetings and farewells:

between men and women:

between members of the same sex:

between strangers:

Follow-up:

1. How close to each other do people stand or sit?
2. How much touching takes place?
3. What do you notice about eye behavior?
4. What gestures do people use?

5. Can you tell when a conversation is going to end? How?
6. What are the feelings between two people talking? How does each show interest in the other person?
7. Can you interpret the social relationships between two people talking (e.g., close friends, students, teacher-student, boyfriend-girlfriend)?

F. There are several ways of making observations. One way is simply to **Nonverbal** describe what you see. Another way is to give an opinion **Communi-** or make a judgment about your observation. For example:

cation: Men do not maintain frequent eye contact with each other.
Description and Opinion (*Description*)

Men do not seem to feel close to each other. (*Opinion*)

After each one of the following statements, check either *description* or *opinion* depending on the type of observation made.

	Description	Opinion
1. The woman was aggressive because she stood close to the man.		
2. The two men embraced each other two times before leaving.		
3. The woman stood three feet from the man.		
4. They are superficial because they smile at each other even though they are strangers.		
5. Their farewell was cold because they didn't touch each other.		
6. The two women walked arm-in-arm for an hour.		
7. Because fathers and sons do not hug, they do not love each other.		
8. The teacher did not stand near the children.		

Questions to think about:

In the *Observation Task* activity (E), what kind of observations did you make: descriptive or judgmental (i.e. based on opinion)? What, if any, might be the problem with opinionated or judgmental observations in a foreign culture? Is it possible to make purely descriptive observations?

G.
Multiple
Choice
Questionnaire

The following questions are intended to stimulate cross-cultural discussion and to help you become familiar with American customs and responses. On the multiple choice questions try to guess what an American would do. *More than one answer may be correct.*

1. Signaling a waiter is done by:

In your country: _____

In the United States:

- a. Snapping the fingers.
- b. Whistling.
- c. Raising one hand briefly.
- d. Saying, "Waiter" and signaling to him.

2. How do people politely end conversations nonverbally?

In your country: _____

In the United States:

- a. They look at their watches.
- b. They look away from the speaker.
- c. They backup slowly.
- d. They stop talking abruptly.

3. The best way to get a teacher's attention is to:

In your country: _____

In the United States:

- a. Snap your fingers.
- b. Raise your hand until the teacher calls on you.
- c. Raise a hand and lower it when the teacher notices that you have a question.
- d. Call out the teacher's name.

4. Nonverbally, how would you get the attention of a busy secretary in an office?

In your country: _____

In the United States:

- a. Stand by the door and wait until the secretary looks at you.
- b. Stand close to the secretary until you are noticed.
- c. Sit down near the secretary and remain silent until you are noticed.
- d. Tap the secretary on the shoulder.

5. If a student does not understand a point that a teacher makes in class, it is best to:

In your country: _____

In the United States:

- a. Raise a hand and ask for clarification.
- b. Look confused.
- c. Remain silent and ask the teacher after class.
- d. Leave the class.

6. How do you motion to a person nonverbally to come to you?

In your country: _____

In the United States:

- a. Extend both arms in front of you and wave the person over with your palms up.
- b. Roll your eyes in the direction you want the person to come.
- c. Extend one arm in front of you and wave the person over with your palm up.
- d. Extend one arm in front of you and wave the person over with your palm down.

H. Answer the following questions about your own culture and then discuss intercultural similarities and differences. **Cultural Questions** 1. Do you recall from your childhood how you learned aspects of non-verbal language (space, gestures, etc.)?

2. Are there any expressions or proverbs in your language that say something about nonverbal communication?
3. What kind of impressions do people form of one another based on nonverbal behavior (e.g., "I don't trust him because he stares at people.")?
4. What should a foreigner learn about nonverbal communication in your country before going there?

Cultural Notes

1. Because the United States is a nation of many minority groups (Blacks, Mexicans, Chinese, Italians, Jews, Japanese, Koreans, Arabs, Vietnamese, etc.), it is difficult to make generalizations about American nonverbal communication. For example, touching behavior among Mexican-Americans differs from that of Anglo-Americans. For the Anglo-American, touching is more restricted. The Anglo-American male rarely touches or embraces other males. Distance is usually greater between men in the Anglo-American culture than between men in the Mexican-American culture.

2. Edward Hall, in his book *The Hidden Dimension*, discusses four categories of informal use of space among white professional-class Americans:²

<i>For intimate friends</i>	From actual physical contact to 18 inches
<i>For friends and personal conversation</i>	18 inches to 4 feet
<i>For impersonal conversation</i>	4 feet to 12 feet
<i>For public speaking</i>	12 feet or more

3. During the "farewell" stage of a conversation Americans will often move gradually away from each other and decrease eye contact. This, of course, is not a rule but it does happen.

For example:

"It was nice meeting you." (at 1 foot apart) "Hope to see you again sometime." (at 6 feet apart) "Take care." (at 15 feet apart)

Supplementary Vocabulary

to move	to whistle	to retreat
to make contact	to mumble	to withdraw
to back away	to recline	attraction
to yawn	to advance	posture
to sigh		