

Students' Perception of Nonverbal Elements in Intercultural Communication

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Abstract

Nowadays, people communicate in an intercultural environment on daily bases using not just verbal language but nonverbal elements as well. Sometimes nonverbal elements, consciously and unconsciously, convey stronger meaning than the verbal part. For this reason, it is necessary to apprehend that this behaviour differs significantly from culture to culture and, therefore, its meaning and the message that it transmits must be studied.

In this paper, research conducted among members of different cultures is presented and discussed. Starting from the idea that the understanding and the awareness of body language are important in intercultural communication, this research aimed at identifying and highlighting some of the differences in the interpretation and use of these elements. The categories of proxemics, paralanguage showed a great diversity of their perception, while oculosics, gestures, facial expressions and mimicry indicated the differences in the frequency of their use. Since most of the participants belong to contact cultures, in the category of haptics and posture there are no significant deviations. The research also revealed that female and male participants understand differently certain nonverbal elements, which could be a good starting point for further research. In addition, it proved that nonverbal elements are as important as language knowledge to achieve effective intercultural communication.

Keywords: *gestures; haptics; proxemics; paralanguage; facial expressions; oculosics; posture.*

1. Introduction

Culture does not always determine the messages that our body movements convey. Context, personalities, and relationship also influence them. Therefore, no two people in any one society have the same nonverbal behaviour. 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. (Levine and Adelman, 1982:47)

In today's world, when contact with members of other cultures is our daily routine, intercultural communication competence is one of the most important skills. Insufficient awareness of nonverbal elements in such a context can lead to misunderstanding of the message which might result in a failed intercultural communication. Therefore, to communicate successfully in an intercultural environment, it is necessary to study and accept cultural differences on nonverbal level and learn how to apply them in interaction with members of different cultures.

This paper aims at highlighting the different interpretations of nonverbal elements by speakers from different cultures. It is divided into two sections: one defining the terms intercultural and nonverbal communication and the other reporting and discussing the research findings.

2. Defining terms

2.1. Intercultural communication

Intercultural communication, according to the scholars engaged in the field, is one that takes place among members of different cultures. Pavan (2009: 122) defines intercultural communication as a practice of exchanging content and unambiguous information across cultural boundaries to preserve mutual respect and reduce antagonism. It is a place where culture and interaction merge.

Balboni (2015:25) regards communication as the exchange of meaningful verbal and non-verbal messages. To achieve that goal in an intercultural environment, it is necessary to accept the fact that cultural models are different, to become aware of prejudices and stereotypes, to get to know others by studying their culture, to appreciate differences as different stories of different cultures if they do not present moral impediments, and to accept the fact that some other cultural models may be better than your own. Balboni explains that this is not merely a list, but rather a hierarchical, clear layout since each aspect follows the previous one and lays the foundation for the next one.

Intercultural communication occurs on two levels (Giaccardi, 2015): the level of the situation considers the exchange of messages and ways of behaving in specific daily contexts, while the level of cultural conditions affects the way of communicating and reacting.

Samovar et al (2013: 9) claim that intercultural communication occurs when a member of one culture creates a message intended for a member of another culture, and because of the different perceptions and symbolic systems of people involved in the interaction, the communication act changes.

Good knowledge of the language is not the only precondition for successful communication, but also the awareness of the cultural background of the interlocutor. Understanding a particular culture often involves a stereotypical image through which the members are observed, without considering that each person is unique. Age, gender, personal experiences are just some of the elements that shape one's attitudes and beliefs which may, therefore, differ from those of other members of the same culture.

2.2. Non-verbal communication

The definition of nonverbal communication as one effected by means other than words for Knapp et al. (2014:8) is just useful but not comprehensive since it does not encompass the complexity of the phenomenon. Authors argue that it is virtually impossible to separate

verbal and nonverbal behaviour as the latter is a set of encoded signals to which meaning will be attributed.

Gregersen (2007), similarly, defines nonverbal communication as messages people exchange without the use of words in the process, while Negi (2009), referring to Gregersen's definition, clarifies that it is a process in which one person stimulates meaning in the consciousness (mind) of other using non-linguistic signs.

Samovar et al. (2013: 271) suggest that "nonverbal communication involves those nonverbal stimuli in a communication setting that are generated by both the source [speaker] and his/her use of the environment and that have potential message value for the source or receiver [listener]". It involves intentional and unintentional behaviour and they claim that non-verbal messages are mostly sent unconsciously, while in verbal communication, words are consciously chosen. However, non-verbal communication cannot be separated from verbal, and as Hall (1977) implies, it must always be interpreted within the context of the verbal part.

Samovar et al (2013) argue that much of nonverbal behaviour is rooted in culture often revealing its basic characteristics. To communicate effectively and avoid misunderstandings or ambiguities in an intercultural environment, it is necessary to understand culturally based differences in non-verbal behaviour and to be able to assign messages to these elements.

2.2.1. The function of non-verbal communication

Although nonverbal communication implies the forms of interaction without the use of written or spoken words, it is often closely related to verbal messages and together they form a single entity called the communication process.

Knapp and Hall (2014: 17) agree with Ekman's classification which distinguishes six different ways of how the verbal and nonverbal behavior interrelate: repeating, when the nonverbal element communicates the same message as the verbal, reinforcing its meaning;

conflicting, when the nonverbal element transmits the contradictory message from the one expressed verbally; complementing, used to modify, or clarify the meaning of spoken words; substituting, when nonverbal elements independently convey a complete message without the need for the verbal content to complete its meaning; accentuating/moderating the use of nonverbal elements to amplify or tone down parts of the verbal message and regulating a function of managing communication using some form of non-verbal behavior. Samovar et al. (2013), along with regulating, repeating and substituting, introduce expressing internal states and creating an identity as important functions of nonverbal behaviour. Expressing the internal state is similar to both conflicting and complementing while creating an identity is related to judgments made based on skin colour, makeup used, facial expressions or a handshake offered.

Negi (2009) states that nonverbal behaviours are innate and universal, in other words, members of different cultures share a common understanding of nonverbal cues, but the final meaning of the conversation may be culturally determined and differ across cultures. Becoming aware of the functions of the nonverbal elements, as well as their culturally determined use, facilitates the transmission of the right message and enables effective communication.

2.2.2. Classification of non-verbal communication

There are several ways of classifying forms of non-verbal communication. Knapp et al. (2014) distinguish three main areas of non-verbal communication:

1. the communication environment: special and physical environment
2. the communicator's physical characteristics: hair, skin colour, body odour and clothing
3. body movements and position: gestures, touching, body posture, facial expression and voice behaviour.

The communication environment and the physical characteristics are culturally conditioned forms of non-verbal communication. Their understanding, as well as the understanding of the messages they

convey, is rooted in one's origin and in the image people have of "someone else", so these forms often cause stereotypical understanding of others (Knapp et al., 2014:10).

Furthermore, Samovar et al (2013: 274) believe that most classifications of non-verbal communication fall into two overall categories: messages produced by the body (appearance, movement, facial expression, gaze, touch, smell and body language) and those involving the environment (space, time and silence). Being of interest to this research, we will further discuss the messages produced by the body.

The most distinctive differences can be noticed in the areas of proxemics, haptics and oculosics. Proxemics, the distance at which a person sits from the interlocutors may convey a counterproductive message if she/he is not familiar with their cultural norms. Back in 1959, anthropologist Edward T. Hall conducted cross-cultural research and concluded that cultures can be categorized either as contact or non-contact. Members of contact cultures stand closer and touch each other more, while members of non-contact cultures do not allow anyone to enter the so-called personal space and they touch less.

Differences in haptics, the perception of touch as a means of communication, perhaps are best explained using the example of greetings. While in some countries touch is not an acceptable way of welcoming somebody, in others it is not only acceptable but also desirable.

Oculosics is another element that has different connotations among members of different cultures. Most cultures find that looking the interlocutor right in the eyes is a sign of honesty and interest in what is being discussed, but the length of the gaze varies greatly from culture to culture. Also, it is closely related to the gender issue.

Posture, studying the body position while sitting or standing, is also considered to be a culturally conditioned element. It is used to express respect, interest toward the interlocutor but sometimes even to offend somebody.

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Being culturally determined elements of non-verbal communication, their appropriateness depends on the cultural environment in which the communication takes place.

Salak and Carović (2013) report that most scholars consider facial expressions to be universal, while gestures are acquired and differ from culture to culture. Okon (2011) explains that universal signs, namely facial expressions, convey emotions common not only to the human race but also to some other primates. Further, Ekman and Freisen (2003) in their research proved that six emotions: happiness, sadness, fear, anger, disgust and surprise, are universal to all primates. This is true only to some extent because, although the emotions communicated by face are universal, the extent of their use still differs among members of different cultures.

Gestures communicate meaning by movements of the hands, fists, feet, or head. Knapp et al. (2014) classify them into two basic groups: speech-independent gestures that convey meaning without verbal elements and speech-related gestures that complement the meaning of verbal content. Samovar et al (2013) argue that there are several gestures whose meaning is characteristic of a particular culture, the so-called idiosyncratic gestures. Such gestures need to be learned and recognized because sometimes the same sign may express different messages in different cultures.

Paralanguage implies the way something is said without considering the meaning of spoken words. Samovar et al. (2013: 290) categorize such behaviour into three groups: vocal qualities (volume, rate, pitch, tempo, resonance, pronunciation, tone), vocal characteristics (laughing, crying, moaning, whining, yawning) and vocal segregations (mumbling or sighing). Such cues reveal a lot about the speaker's emotional state, education, age, social class or personality.

Apparently, the nonverbal behaviour used in everyday interaction is not unique and differs more or less from culture to culture. To avoid possible misunderstandings and to communicate successfully in an intercultural environment, it is necessary to perceive and recognize the patterns used.

3. Research

3.1. Aims and hypothesis

In order to show different perceptions of nonverbal elements among members of different cultures a survey was conducted among participants of different cultural backgrounds, but approximately same age and social status. All the participants used the English language, as a lingua franca, in their communication for a certain period of their formal education and most of them encountered some challenges and difficulties when communicating, despite their intermediate (B2) and advance (C1/C2) level of competence. Prior to the survey, results of an informal interview suggested that all the participants encountered some obstacles raised by the perception and interpretation of paralinguistic elements and gestures. Their comments offered a better insight into the participants' knowledge and awareness of nonverbal communication and pointed to the forms of nonverbal behaviour that should be studied representing the guidelines for the questionnaire.

The diversity of student responses was expected in the categories which depend more on cultural background and less in the categories that are considered universal. The answers were not expected to vary greatly in the categories of haptics and proxemics as all the participants are members of contact cultures, but not for gestures since some cultures are idiosyncratic. Although posture is culturally conditioned, some of its elements are considered universal so diversity was expected to some extent. Regarded as universal, the category of facial expressions and mimicry category was not presumed to show major differences, unlike oculosics which was supposed to differ greatly in duration and the form. The paralinguistic category, being not just culturally but individually conditioned as well, was not anticipated to show greater distinctions since the sampling was of similar age and social status.

3.2. Sampling

Seventy-six individuals, 34 men and 42 women, belonging to fourteen different nationalities, were asked to fill in an anonymous questionnaire. The only personal information that the participants had to indicate was their gender and nationality (Table 1.).

The participants were six students of the Faculty of Electrical Engineering, Mechanical Engineering and Naval Architecture in Split, who spent at least one semester abroad, fifty-one students who came for a semester or more in Split through the Erasmus plus program, and nineteen foreigners living in Croatia and attending a Croatian language course at the Centre for Croatian Studies Croaticum.

Table 1. Table of participants' nationality and gender

Nationality	Male	Female
Argentinian	2	2
Austrian	3	4
Belgian	2	2
Brazilian	2	3
Korean	1	1
Croatian	3	3
Italian	3	4
Polish	2	2
Portuguese	3	4
Spanish	4	4
Romanian	2	3
Russian	2	3
Swiss	2	3
Turkish	3	4

The sampling was similar regarding individual characteristics like age (21 to 27) and social status (students) so that the focus could be more on differences in cultural background.

3.3. Research tool - questionnaire

The questionnaire, compiled using Google Forms, was conducted in English so that it could be easily completed by all participants since they belong to different cultures and speak different languages. It consisted of seventy closed-ended questions. The questions were classified into seven categories according to the forms of nonverbal communication, each category consisting of two groups of questions: the first with answers rated on a scale from 1 to 4 (where 1- never, 2 - sometimes, 3 - often and 4 - always) looked into the frequency of the participants' personal use of some nonverbal behaviour patterns, while the second with true-false statements examined how participants, as members of their own cultures, regard certain forms of nonverbal communication (Appendix). The results of the questionnaire are shown in the tables by the number of students classified in categories F for female and M for male for each answer.

3.4. Research results and analysis

3.4.1. Haptics

The first group of questions refers to the category of haptics (Tables 2. and 3.). Significant differences are noticed in how friendly touching, usually at short distances, is perceived among members of different cultures while formal touching, when the interlocutor stands outside the personal space, showed more regularities in answers.

Questions (Table 2.) that address the participants personally show that closer contacts, such as kissing and hugging, are practiced mostly with close friends and family (questions 1. and 5.). Being members of non-contact cultures, Korean and Russian participants all declare to use these behaviour patterns "sometimes" and female participants of these two cultures along with the Turkish claim never to use hugging as a sign of affection. There is a significant diversity of answers to questions 2., 3. and 4. when a formal type of haptics is involved. Turkish and Korean participants state never to kiss, tap or pat someone while the Belgian and the Russian do it rarely. Argentinian,

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Brazilian, Spanish and Portuguese participants show most similarities in the use of these forms.

Table 2. The category of haptics (frequency)

Question \ Answer	1-never	2-sometimes	3-often	4-always
1. I shake hands when I meet somebody for the first time.	F 0 M 0	F 12 M 7	F 13 M 29	F 17 M 22
2. I kiss somebody to congratulate her/him on something.	F 4 M 6	F 20 M 12	F 10 M 16	F 8 M 0
3. When I want to draw someone's attention to something, I tap her/him on the shoulder.	F 12 M 9	F 23 M 12	F 7 M 11	F 0 M 2
4. I pat someone on her/his shoulder as a sign of encouragement.	F 4 M 3	F 21 M 20	F 16 M 11	F 1 M 0
5. I hug people to show I like them.	F 5 M 0	F 7 M 13	F 22 M 10	F 8 M 11

Questions (Table 3.) referring to participants' culture, in general, show that most of the participants do not avoid touching when a person is being introduced or when greeting somebody, which is not surprising since most of the participants involved in this research are the members of contact cultures, especially Argentinian, Brazilian, Spanish, Portuguese and Italian. Still, shaking hands covered by question 2., for female participants is mostly the sign of agreement (86%), while for male participants it can be considered a form of politeness (38%), not just agreement (62%). Turkish, Russian and Swiss participants do not find shaking hands a nonverbal element used for agreement, but all of them find holding hands as a sign of intimate relationship.

Table 3. The category of haptics (perception)

Question	Answer	True	False
1. Holding someone's hand is a sign of an intimate relationship.		F 35 M 28	F 7 M 6
2. Shaking hands at the end of a meeting always means agreement.		F 8 M 13	F 34 M 21
3. Hugging somebody, even if you don't know him/her well, is a sign of acceptance.		F 30 M 21	F 12 M 7
4. When a man and a woman meet, they always kiss and hug.		F 8 M 4	F 34 M 30
5. When two women (good friends) meet, they always kiss.		F 25 M 14	F 17 M 20

3.4.2. Oculesics

The second category of questions about oculesics (Tables 4. and 5.) displays very similar answers. Most participants (Table 4.) find eye contact to be a desirable pattern of nonverbal behaviour that shows respect, involvement and honesty, while looking away often implies uncertainty and insincerity. Koreans show greater divergence from other participants since such behaviour is culturally rooted. Differences occur only in the frequency of use of these nonverbal elements, as answers within the categories "always" (4) and "often" (3) are almost evenly distributed across categories.

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Table 4. The category of oculusics (frequency)

Question \ Answer	1- never	2- sometimes	3- often	4- always
1. When I talk to another person face-to-face, I look her/his in the eyes.	F 0 M 0	F 1 M 5	F 31 M 18	F 10 M 11
2. When I am embarrassed by what somebody is saying, I look aside.	F 8 M 1	F 17 M 17	F 13 M 15	F 2 M 1
3. If I know the answer to the teacher's question, I look her/him in the eyes.	F 0 M 0	F 8 M 8	F 16 M 13	F 18 M 13
4. If I don't know the answer to the teacher's question, I look aside.	F 5 M 1	F 15 M 15	F 17 M 12	F 5 M 9
5. If I am attracted to another person, I look her/him in the eyes.	F 0 M 1	F 9 M 2	F 20 M 15	F 13 M 16

In the group of questions related to the participant's culture in general (Table 5.), the differences are also negligible. Question 5., about consciously controlled gaze in confusing situations, shows more diversity, but still participants of similar cultural background, Argentinian, Brazilian, Spanish and Portuguese, find this statement true. Interestingly, almost all female participants (93%) find the first statement to be true, which means that women tend to pay more attention to eye contact. Korean participants and some of the Turkish, do not find this behaviour impolite.

Table 5. The category of oculusics (perception)

Question	Answer	True	False
1. It is impolite not to look at someone's eyes when talking to him /her.		F 39 M 27	F 3 M 7
2. Looking directly in a man's eyes means you are challenging him or stating your position.		F 4 M 6	F 38 M 28
3. Staring at somebody whom you do not know well is considered impolite.		F 24 M 25	F 18 M 9
4. Looking at somebody with your eyes wide open is a sign of surprise.		F 35 M 32	F 7 M 2
5. When you do not understand what the other is talking about, you look aside.		F 15 M 18	F 27 M 16

3.4.3. Proxemics

Questions in the third category, proxemics (Tables 6. and 7.) show that sitting distances vary greatly from culture to culture. The Argentinian, Brazilian, Spanish, Portuguese, Italian and Romanian sit closer and are more relaxed about the distance of less than a meter, even in a formal situation, while the Belgians and the Swiss mind the distance a lot. Still, those differences decrease when the interaction takes place in public spaces. Likewise, the answers to the group of questions referring to the participant personally (Table 6.) show no major differences in the answers to the questions 1., 2. and 3. which refer to the public space with more people around. For questions 4. and 5., it is obvious that the personal space, closer than a meter, is mostly reserved to people whom the participants know well, while formal conversations usually require a distance of more than a meter.

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Table 6. The category of proxemics (frequency)

Answer Question	1- never	2- sometimes	3- often	4- always
1. When a stranger comes to me on the street asking for direction, I let him come very close.	F 11 M 15	F 17 M 12	F 14 M 6	F 0 M 1
2. In a bar, I sit on the same side as my friend facing the door.	F 12 M 13	F 20 M 17	F 8 M 4	F 0 M 0
3. In a bar, I sit on the opposite side of my business colleague.	F 22 M 0	F 18 M 8	F 2 M 17	F 0 M 9
4. When standing and talking to my teacher, I keep a distance of more than 1 meter	F 3 M 1	F 15 M 12	F 20 M 13	F 2 M 8
5. When talking to someone I know well, I like come as close as possible to her/him.	F 0 M 7	F 17 M 13	F 15 M 11	F 10 M 1

Questions (Table 7.) related to the cultural understanding of proxemics in general present larger irregularity in the answers to question 3., about distance and space in the interaction among interlocutors of different sex, which leads to the conclusion that even if one applies her/his own rules on how to communicate on a personal level, cultural background influences greatly our understanding of some nonverbal elements, like distance and space. All Turkish, Croatian, Russian, Polish and Romanian participants answer the same way to these questions, proving the strong influence of the cultural background.

Table 7. The category of proxemics (perception)

Question	Answer	True	False
1. In a restaurant, people sit on the same side of the table.		F 3 M 5	F 39 M 29
2. In a restaurant, people sit on the opposite side when talking business.		F 36 M 30	F 6 M 4
3. When a man and a woman are talking business, they sit not more than 1 meter away.		F 22 M 18	F 20 M 14
4. When two men are talking business, they should sit more than 1 meter away.		F 14 M 9	F 28 M 25
5. People who do not keep the distance of at least 1 meter are assertive.		F 9 M 14	F 33 M 28

3.4.4. Paralanguage

The fourth category of paralanguage (Tables 8. and 9.) displays most differences in terms of vocal segregation, sighs and murmurs, while most participants affirm to use vocal qualifiers, pitch and volume to attract attention or show anger. Italians, Croats, Spanish and Portuguese are more aware of the paralanguage elements and therefore use them more, while the Austrian, Swiss and Belgian do not use segregations, just qualifiers.

Unexpectedly, the answers vary equally among both male and female participants, leading to the conclusion that women do not use para-lingual cues more than men of the same cultural background in order to express emotions.

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Table 8. The category of paralanguage (frequency)

Question \ Answer	1- never	2- sometimes	3- often	4- always
1. When I disagree with the teacher, I mutter.	F 22 M 7	F 18 M 20	F 2 M 7	F 0 M 0
2. I use the same voice pitch when I speak to a man or a woman.	F 0 M 0	F 11 M 6	F 10 M 19	F 23 M 9
3. When I am tired, I sigh (Ah! / Uh! Uf!).	F 9 M 3	F 7 M 15	F 17 M 14	F 5 M 2
4. When I like the taste of the food, I mumble (Mmmm!).	F 9 M 2	F 11 M 10	F 13 M 17	F 9 M 5
5. I can easily say by the tone of someone's voice if she /he is angry.	F 1 M 0	F 8 M 13	F 20 M 14	F 13 M 7

Some differences are noticed in the answers referring to the understanding of paralanguage elements in general, but the most surprising is the difference in perception for questions 2., 3. and 4. within the group of male participants while the answers of female participants do not differ significantly, proving that they are better at recognizing para-lingual elements. For questions 1. and 5. about the volume the diversity of answers is noticed within both groups, which proves that individual and cultural differences play an important role in understanding these elements. Argentinian, Brazilian, Italian, Croat and Spanish participants all believe to speak loudly, while the Belgian, Swiss, Austrian and Korean do not even use volume for attracting someone's attention.

Table 9. The category of paralanguage (perception)

Question	Answer	True	False
1. In my country, people speak loudly.		F 28 M 24	F 14 M 10
2. Making sounds like (a:) when discussing some topics conveys a message of being insecure.		F 38 M 24	F 4 M 12
3. People usually use volume to attract someone's attention.		F 35 M 21	F 7 M 13
4. If a person speaks quietly, it means she/he is insecure.		F 5 M 10	F 37 M 22
5. If a person speaks loudly, it means she/he is assertive.		F 15 M 14	F 27 M 20

3.4.5. Posture

The fifth category of questions related to body posture during an interaction (Tables 10. and 11.) shows minor differences within the first group of questions with most of the answers "sometimes" (2), possibly because participants personally are not aware of this type of communication and they are not aware of its use in everyday situations. Only Korean participants use a bow often as a way to greet someone (question 3.), Brazilians and Argentinians often stand with their hands on their hips to express anger (question 5.) and Croats often sit with crossed legs when they are relaxed (question 2.).

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Table 10. The category of posture (frequency)

Question \ Answer	1- never	2- sometimes	3- often	4- always
1. I lean forward when talking to someone I like.	F 6 M 0	F 12 M 20	F 24 M 12	F 0 M 2
2. When I am relaxed, I sit with my legs crossed.	F 0 M 3	F 20 M 21	F 16 M 6	F 6 M 2
3. I bow to greet somebody.	F 24 M 11	F 17 M 22	F 1 M 1	F 0 M 0
4. I sit with the foot resting on the opposite knee.	F 18 M 5	F 18 M 26	F 6 M 3	F 0 M 0
5. I stand with my hands on my hips when I am angry.	F 19 M 9	F 18 M 21	F 5 M 4	F 0 M 0

The answers to the questions of the other group (Table 11.) about the position of the body and hands, in general, are rather uneven, which proves that this form of nonverbal communication is not innate, but culturally conditioned. Again, some major differences can be noticed in how female and male participants observe and understand these behaviour patterns. Croats, Russians, Polish and Romanians find impolite the behaviours described in 1. and 2., while the Belgian and Austrian do not agree with statements 3., 4. and 5.

Table 11. The category of posture (perception)

Question \ Answer	True	False
1. Talking with your hands in yours pockets is impolite.	F 20 M 25	F 22 M 9

2. Slouching (leaning back and sprawling your legs) while sitting is a lack of good manners	F 25 M 26	F 17 M 8
3. Self-confident people stand straight while talking to others.	F 32 M 29	F 10 M 3
4. Standing with your hands on your hips suggests power and pride.	F 16 M 16	F 26 M 16
5. Crossing the arms is a sign of defensive behaviour.	F 17 M 26	F 25 M 8

3.4.6. Facial expressions and mimicry

The sixth category of questions studies facial expressions and mimicry (Tables 12. and 13.) which are thought to be universal since the emotions they express are inherent to all humans. Nevertheless, the research shows that the number of expression of such emotions varies among members of different cultures since Italians, Spanish and Croats seem to use these elements more often.

Table 12. The category of facial expressions and mimicry (frequency)

Question \ Answer	1- never	2- sometimes	3- often	4- always
1. When I greet someone, I raise my eyebrows.	F 19 M 8	F 20 M 24	F 3 M 2	F 0 M 0
2. When I laugh, I am happy.	F 0 M 2	F 19 M 8	F 25 M 18	F 8 M 6
3. When I roll my eyes, I am bored.	F 6 M 8	F 24 M 10	F 5 M 16	F 7 M 0
4. If my mouth is wide open, I am shocked.	F 0 M 0	F 22 M 14	F 12 M 18	F 8 M 2

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5. When I yawn, I am tired.	F 2 M 14	F 10 M 12	F 18 M 8	F 12 M 0
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This category showed no significant differences in how the participants personally understand these innate and universal signs. Yet, the frequency of their use differs slightly since it is based on the cultural background.

Interestingly, yawning (question 5. in Table 12 and question 2. in Table 13) is not interpreted only as a sign of boredom, but also fatigue by all participants of Austrian, Croatian and Polish cultural background. Similarly, laughter and crying (question 2. in Table 12 and question 5. in Table 13) are not entirely related to happiness and sadness, respectively, but can refer to other emotions as well, especially for Korean and Russian participants.

Table 13. The category of facial expressions and mimicry (perception)

Question	Answer	
	True	False
1. The wrinkling of the nose is a sign of disgust.	F 36 M 27	F 6 M 7
2. Yawning means that a person is bored.	F 13 M 18	F 29 M 16
3. Winking indicates that something is a joke or a secret.	F 30 M 26	F 12 M 8
4. The eyebrows meeting in the middle communicate surprise.	F 14 M 14	F 28 M 20
5. When a person cries, she/he is sad.	F 21 M 20	F 21 M 14

3.4.7. Gestures

The last category of gestures (Tables 14. and 15.) shows larger deviations than expected, but only in the first group of questions regarding the frequency of their use (Table 14.). Significantly, gestures concerning the disclosure of the speaker's emotional states, such as thoughtfulness or anger, show greater differences in their use. Koreans, Austrians and Belgians claim almost not to use gestures at all, while Croats hold to use them often or always, proving that how one expresses emotions depends almost exclusively on their cultural origin.

Table 14. The category of gestures (frequency)

Question \ Answer	1- never	2- sometimes	3- often	4- always
1. I point to something or somebody with my chin.	F 15 M 13	F 22 M 19	F 5 M 0	F 0 M 2
2. I nod my head when I agree with someone.	F 0 M 0	F 10 M 18	F 22 M 8	F 10 M 8
3. When I want to call somebody over, I move my forefinger back and forth with my palm down.	F 18 M 10	F 14 M 20	F 10 M 4	F 0 M 0
4. I scratch my head as a sign that I am thinking about what to do.	F 20 M 6	F 16 M 17	F 6 M 11	F 0 M 0
5. I clench my fist with the thumb over the other fingers when I want to show that I am angry.	F 20 M 12	F 15 M 14	F 5 M 8	F 0 M 0

Questions of the second group (Table 15.) referring to the participant's culture in general show only slight differences in answers probably because the gestures studied in this research are universal. Koreans and Belgians mostly find the statements to be false, which is

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quite comprehensible since they have already stated not to use gestures much.

Table 15. The category of gestures (perception)

Question	Answer	True	False
1. Putting your forefinger on your lips means "Be quiet!"		F 37 M 28	F 5 M 6
2. Tapping one's forehead with your forefinger means "You are crazy!"		F 26 M 25	F 16 M 9
3. Pointing to somebody with forefinger is impolite.		F 38 M 32	F 4 M 2
4. Moving the forefinger in a circular motion on the right side of the forehead means "You are intelligent!"		F 37 M 28	F 5 M 6
5. Thumb up toward the interlocutors means "O.K."		F 37 M 34	F 5 M 0

Conclusions

The results obtained by means of the questionnaire confirmed our assumptions about some diversity in the use of nonverbal elements in communication across cultures. The category of haptics, as expected, showed no significant differences in formal greetings and social contacts since the participants are members of contact cultures, but the difference was noticeable between male and female participants. The research showed that women are, generally, more careful about touching, and practice it often with close friends and relatives.

The category of oculosics differed slightly in duration, but most of the answers showed that women consider eye contact as an important element of communication showing honesty and involvement.

The category of proxemics showed great diversity in the category referring to participants' personal space, but unexpectedly no significant differences were noted when public spaces are involved. This can also be explained by the fact that the participants belong to contact cultures and therefore mind less about social distances.

Paralanguage elements like vocal segregation, sight or murmur proved not to be used equally by members of different cultures with the possibility of different interpretations. The research showed that women are more aware of this form of nonverbal behaviour as well.

People are rarely conscious of the position of their body for this behaviour is learnt by observing and imitating members of one's culture, therefore, it was not surprising that participants stated occasional use of nonverbal elements described in the category of posture. Female participants, once again, showed greater understanding of these elements.

The facial expressions and mimicry category revealed a variable number of emotions expressed while their understanding is almost universal. The same applied to the category of gestures where the oscillations in the frequency of their use showed indicative cultural influence, although the perception is ubiquitous.

The possible limitation of this research is that it was conducted in English, which is not the mother tongue of the participants and, therefore, the answers cannot be taken as fully reliable. Since most of the categories showed that women are more aware of nonverbal elements this can be a good starting point for further research addressing the gender differences between members of the same cultures. The differences in the questions of the first group, which relate to the participants personally, and those of the second group, which relate to the interaction with members of the same culture can also be studied more in order to prove that the behaviour of an individual does not always follow the assigned cultural norms.

With all this in mind, it becomes clear that nonverbal elements should be an integral part of teaching intercultural communication,

either through foreign language teaching or through communication skills courses. On the other hand, a teacher in an intercultural setting should be aware of the interpretation that students from different cultures give to certain nonverbal elements of communication or that sometimes the language they communicate by can influence their nonverbal behavior (see Gudykunst 2004).

In conclusion, this research proved that respondents interpreted nonverbal elements in communication differently depending on their cultural background and gender. Therefore, we believe that awareness of these differences is crucial for understanding and transmitting the right message in an intercultural communication setting.

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Students' Perception of Nonverbal Elements ...

Appendix (questionnaire)

HAPTICS

Answer the following questions using numbers 1 to 4

(1-never 2- sometimes 3-often 4-always)

1. I shake hands when I meet somebody for the first time.
1 2 3 4
2. I kiss somebody to congratulate her/him on something.
1 2 3 4
3. When I want to draw someone's attention to something, I tap her/him on the shoulder.
1 2 3 4
4. I pat someone on her/his shoulder as a sign of encouragement.
1 2 3 4
5. I hug people to show I like them.
1 2 3 4

Circle T if the statement is true for your culture or F if it is false

1. Holding someone's hand is a sign of an intimate relationship.
T F
2. Shaking hands at the end of a meeting always means agreement.

T F
3. Hugging somebody, even if you don't know him/her well, is a sign of acceptance.
T F
4. When a man and a woman meet, they always kiss and hug.

T F
5. When two women (good friends) meet, they always kiss.

T F

OCULESICS

Answer the following questions using numbers 1 to 4

(1-never 2- sometimes 3-often 4-always)

1. When I talk to another person face-to-face, I look her/his in the eyes.
1 2 3 4
2. When I am embarrassed by what somebody is saying, I look aside.
1 2 3 4

3. If I know the answer to the teacher's question, I look her/him in the eyes.
1 2 3 4
4. If I **don't** know the answer to the teacher's question, I look aside.
1 2 3 4
5. If I am attracted to another person, I look her/him in the eyes.
1 2 3 4

Circle T if the statement is true for your culture or F if it is false

1. It is impolite **not** to look at someone's eyes when talking to him /her.
T F
2. Looking directly in a man's eyes means you are challenging him or stating your position.
T F
3. Staring at somebody whom you do **not** know well, is considered impolite.
T F
4. Looking at somebody with your eyes wide open is a sign of surprise.
T F
5. When you do **not** understand what the other is talking about, you look aside.
T F

PROXEMICS

Answer the following questions using numbers 1 to 4

(1-never 2- sometimes 3-often 4-always)

1. When a stranger comes to me on the street asking for direction, I let him come very close.
1 2 3 4
2. In a bar, I sit on the same side as my friend facing the door.
1 2 3 4
3. In a bar, I sit on the opposite side of my business colleague.
1 2 3 4
4. When standing and talking to my teacher, I keep a distance of more than 1 meter.
1 2 3 4
5. When talking to someone I know well, I like come as close as possible to her/him.
1 2 3 4

POSTURE

Answer the following questions using numbers 1 to 4

(1-never 2- sometimes 3-often 4-always)

1. I lean forward when talking to someone I like.
1 2 3 4
2. When I am relaxed, I sit with my legs crossed.
1 2 3 4
3. I bow to greet somebody.
1 2 3 4
4. I sit with the foot resting on the opposite knee.
1 2 3 4
5. I stand with my hands on my hips when I am angry.
1 2 3 4

Circle T if the statement is true for your culture or F if it is false

1. Talking with your hands in your pockets is impolite.
T F
2. Slouching (leaning back and sprawling your legs) while sitting is a lack of good manners. T F
3. Self-confident people stand straight while talking to others.
T F
4. Standing with your hands on your hips suggests power and pride.
T F
5. Crossing the arms is a sign of defensive behaviour.
T F

FACE

Answer the following questions using numbers 1 to 4

(1-never 2- sometimes 3-often 4-always)

1. When I greet someone, I raise my eyebrows.
1 2 3 4
2. When I laugh, I am happy.
1 2 3 4
3. When I roll my eyes, I am bored.
1 2 3 4
4. If my mouth is wide open, I am shocked.
1 2 3 4
5. When I yawn, I am tired.
1 2 3 4

Students' Perception of Nonverbal Elements ...

Circle T if the statement is true for your culture or F if it is false

1. The wrinkling of the nose is a sign of disgust.
T F
2. Yawning means that a person is bored.
T F
3. Winking the eye indicates that something is a joke or a secret.
T F
4. The eyebrows meeting in the middle communicate surprise.
T F
5. When a person cries, she/he is sad.
T F

GESTURES

Answer the following questions using numbers 1 to 4

(1-never 2- sometimes 3-often 4-always)

1. I point to something or somebody with my chin.
1 2 3 4
2. I nod my head when I agree with someone.
1 2 3 4
3. When I want to call somebody over, I move my forefinger back and forth with my palm down.
1 2 3 4
4. I scratch my head as a sign that I am thinking about what to do.
1 2 3 4
5. I clench my fist with the thumb over the other fingers when I want to show that I am angry.
1 2 3 4

Circle T if the statement is true for your culture or F if it is false

1. Putting your forefinger on your lips means "Be quiet!"
T F
2. Tapping one's forehead with a forefinger means "You are crazy!"
T F
3. Pointing to somebody with your forefinger is impolite.
T F
4. Moving the forefinger in a circular motion on the right side of the forehead means "You are intelligent!"
T F
5. Thumb up toward the interlocutors means "O.K."

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