

Abstract

The current paper provides a careful consideration of different communication customs in regard to verbal and non-verbal communication. The non-verbal communication is considered to be more vital in socializing among people, thus, hand, vocal and facial gestures, personal space, and emotions are supposed to be crucial for interaction among people. The goal of the paper is to trace differences and similarities of the communication traditions and customs in the USA, Japan, Indonesia which represent three different mentalities.

Language Communication

Introduction

Language is a rather specific topic for any kind of writing. This fact can be explained by a number of reasons, and one can not single out which one is of greater importance, and which one is less important. Language is of vital importance for the existence of the society as it is, because it is the phenomenon that differentiates human beings from other animal species on our planet. Language was the factor that united human beings in their striving to live in a society and became the basis on which the society was created. Without language it is impossible to imagine the existence of people on the Earth, because human beings are social beings and communication is their vital need. Needless to say, throughout the history of the mankind people have invented a lot more means of communication apart from the verbal one, i. e. the communication carried out by language means.

Communication in Different Countries

It goes without saying that different countries of the world have different communication customs and traditions. Usually, these traditions are based on the history of this or that country. Sometimes, they can be based on the religion of a certain country, or on the traditions of social and family life that are considered to be appropriate and polite in this or that area. For instance, in some Asian countries it is considered to be impolite to shake hand at meeting or touch your partner in a conversation in some other way because it is thought to hurt the dignity of that very person. At the same time, as we all know, in the countries of Europe and America shaking hands is a sign of good relationships between people – in this way they express their respect to each other (Pease, 1990). Another instance is Muslim countries, where men can easily go along the street keeping hands of each other

and this will be interpreted as those men are close friends. While in the countries of the Western civilization, this gesture will be seen exclusively as those men belonging to sexual minorities. The world is full with the examples of the differences in cultures and communication traditions of various nations and the United States of America also possess its own traditions and customs in communication, verbal and non-verbal.

The USA

General. According to the works of different scientists in the field of language and communication, people spent over 60% of their communication time communicating in a non-verbal way (Pease, 1990). Thus, the non-verbal communication seems to be even more important than the verbal one. The main components of the non-verbal communication are gestures, touches and proxemics. With respect to the American people, they are considered to be rather sociable, but such component as touches is not typical for Americans. It is traditional for Americans to be well aware of their proxemics, i. e. pay attention to the distance at which people can approach them and the distance that is considered to be the “private/comfort zone”. In spite of the fact that the Americans are rather talkative and sociable, their comfort zone is approximately 30 cm. Another important peculiarity of non-verbal communication that can be noticed in American nation is that these people are “forward people”. This means that Americans choose to face the difficult situation, especially the crowd of people. If some other nations can resort to going through the crowd of people putting one of their sides forward, Americans are considered to do it with their faces directed into the crowd (Axtell, 1993, p. 63).

Gestures. Among the hand gestures that are typical of American people the following ones can be singled out. Americans typically shake hands when meeting a

familiar person and it is always very solid grip of the hand of another person. Another component of non-verbal communication for Americans while greeting each other is the eye-contact. It is considered to be strange when a person does not look at the eyes of another while talking. In this case, he or she is considered to be either shy or weak as a personality and not ready for communication and social life. Some other hand and fingers gestures typical of Americans are the circle made of a thumb and a forefinger while other fingers are raised upward to express that everything is good, i. e. OK; a thumb upwards and the fist is closed, which is used to indicate that you support or approve of something, as well to manifest that everything is good with you and you feel nice (Axtell, 1991).

Vocal or Facial Gestures. There are also other non-verbal signs that express certain meanings which is different in other cultures. Americans whistle in the situations that will not allow whistling Japanese or Indonesians. For example, it is typical of Americans to whistle when seeing a pretty woman and express thus their emotion, usually it is positive. There is also a trend to point a finger at some person when seeing him or her in some distance in order to attract his/her or somebody's other attention. Waving head is also used by Americans widely to express their agreement or disagreement with something or somebody. Winking an eye is used by Americans to express that this or that information is to be kept in secret. On the whole, the usage of non-verbal communication means is more common for the American society than for the societies with which the USA will be compared below. Americans, probably due to the wide spread and influence of their pop-culture and entertainment industry, are less conservative as for the gestures they use and less reserved in communication than the above mentioned Asian people (Pease, 1990).

Verbal Communication. As for the verbal communication that Americans use, it is rather active and numerous in its ways and means. Americans are generally considered to be a very sociable nation; they easily make friends and communicate with unfamiliar people. Americans are rather talkative. They like to talk about any subject their partners offer and always have their own point of view as for those topics. It is typical of Americans to take an active part in conversation, but at the same time they tend to never interrupt the person who is currently talking and, due to this, are considered to be attentive listeners and pleasant partners in communication (Axtell, 1993).

Japan

General. Japan is considered to be a very conservative country in respect of its culture, traditions and customs. This can be explained by the fact that for a long time the islands where Japan is situated were isolated from the rest of the world and Japanese civilization developed without any influence from the outside world. Probably due to this fact, Japanese traditions in all aspects, and particularly in communication, are very special and have no analogies in the world. A significant place in Japanese culture is taken by the concepts of personal dignity, family love, children's respect to parents and young people's respect towards elderly members of the society. These basic features predetermined the following peculiarities of Japanese verbal and non-verbal communication (DeMente, 1987).

Gestures. According to the Leadership Management Institute (1990), the main peculiarity of the Japanese communication, as well as any other activity, is that the form in which it is carried out has the same importance as the meaning of the activity, phrase or gesture. Traditions are very powerful in the Japanese society and they form the way of life and way of communication of the Japanese. In Japan, a lot

of significance is attributed to gestures. At the same time, it would be quite difficult for a European or American to follow them or at least understand them without some time spent for learning (LMI, 1990).

As contrasted to the American gestures, Japanese do not use handshaking as a means to greet a person. On the whole, Japanese people are considered to be reserved and those who do not like touching while talking with each other or with strangers. The traditional way of greeting in Japan is a bow that both people take at meeting. Japanese stay at the same distance as they were before the meeting and even the greeting ritual does not allow them to come closer because it will be considered impolite or even insulting. Even though with the expansion of the western civilization some Japanese adopt shaking hands as greeting, the grip of hands is quite slight and eyes are not in direct contact with the eyes of another person. Moreover, being introduced to the Japanese, one had better take a bow than try to shake hand with them (DeMente, 1987).

Emotions and Hand Gestures. The Japanese are a very reserved nation, so they prefer not to display their feelings and emotions in public. Even in a family circle the Japanese stay calm and show respect to the elderly members of their families. For a foreigner, it is not prohibited to act according to his or her own national communication traditions but if they contradict to the Japanese then it will cause a lot of controversy and the person will not be respected in the Japanese society. For instance, again in contrast to the United States of America, it is unacceptable in Japanese society to show one's affection or love in public. You can not imagine a Japanese who would embrace somebody for a long time or kiss in the street or another public place. It is also considered to be impolite and even rude to point a finger at some person. Instead of this gesture, the Japanese resort to using another

one – a palm turned down and fingers make scratching moves. Opening one's mouth in public is also a rude gesture for Japanese. To avoid this, the Japanese cover mouths with hands while talking very loudly, smiling or laughing (Axtell, 1993). To avoid being rude and impolite in Japan, one should also pay attention to the custom of using handkerchiefs as a means of wiping mouth or drying hands. Blowing your nose is also considered to be unacceptable, especially in public. Also, one should pay attention to the custom of taking off the shoes when entering a house or some building with the tatami floor (DeMente, 1987).

Verbal Communication. As for verbal communication, Japanese can also be contrasted to the Americans in the amounts of conversations, as well as in the intonations they use, the tone of the voice and the vocabulary. The Japanese society is considered to be a conservative one, thus, people tend to be reserved in their words. The Japanese try to express their opinions with as few words as possible because being too talkative is not respectable in this society. Another characteristic feature of the Japanese society is that expressing emotions in verbal communication is not welcomed. As well as in non-verbal communication, emotions are manifestation of impoliteness, so the Japanese do not shout or cry out loud to express their anger, disappointment or sadness. Even vice versa, it is the best standard for the Japanese to be silent and keep eyes closed while listening to somebody. Thus, the Japanese express their attentiveness and respect to their interlocutors (LMI, 1990).

Indonesia

General. Indonesian culture and ways of verbal and non-verbal communication are very specific due to the mixture of cultures and religion that is present in this country. Islam and Buddhism are interconnected in Indonesia due to

the historical reasons and this fact finds its reflection in the communication standards and norms. The Indonesian culture comprises the features that are typical of European, Muslim and Asian cultures, and this creates the main difficulty in learning and understanding this culture's communicational norms (LMI, 1990).

Non-Verbal Communication. First of all, smiling can be interpreted differently in the Indonesian society. If in the USA a smile is the expression of good mood and positive emotions, in Indonesia a smile can express both gladness and embarrassment or pity. For example, if a student is late for the class, it is typical to smile when entering the room to express the embarrassment because of this fact. At the same time, in the USA, it is typical of students to be late for classes and their smiles prove that lateness is not a problem at all. American students feel more relaxed when communicating with their teachers. The feature similar to the Japanese culture is that emotions like sorrow or anger are not expressed openly. As for gestures, the OK gesture that means that everything is good has a meaning of zero in Indonesia, while in Japan the same gesture is used to indicate somebody's need for money, especially small change. The US gesture of two fingers to indicate "victory" or "peace" is used in Indonesia to indicate the numeral "two" and nothing more. Another specific feature of Indonesian non-verbal communication is putting a fist under a chin to express disappointment, but whistling while seeing a pretty girl which is acceptable in the USA is impossible in Japan (LMI, 1990, p. 33).

Verbal Communication. Thus, the standards of non-verbal communication in Indonesia are specifically Indonesian in some aspects, while in other points they combine features that are typical of communication in the USA and Japan. Verbal communication is also rather specific in Indonesia. While it is impolite to touch your interlocutor while talking, as well as in Japan, Indonesians are characterized by large

amounts of talking that can be expressed by their connection to Islam traditions and with the US standards of communication (LMI, 1990).

Conclusion

To conclude, the essay was aimed at contrasting and comparing the communication traditions and customs of the USA, Japan and Indonesia. We focused on the main similarities and differences in these cultures in respect to verbal and non-verbal communication. We found out that the cultures are rather different, though have certain similar features as well. The differences and similarities can be explained by historical and cultural factors. The communication traditions in each of the considered countries are special and typical of these very cultures. There is a strong need to study all the above discussed peculiarities of communication for educational purposes, as far as students from different cultures can study together and they have to understand each other's verbal and non-verbal expressions. The use of knowledge about the communication peculiarities is also evident for the purpose of preserving partnership relations and avoiding all possible conflicts that misunderstanding may cause.

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