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## INTERCULTURAL COMMUNICATION IN ENGLISH

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**Abstract:** Intercultural communication refers to the communication between people from two different cultures. Intercultural communication is a symbolic, interpretive, transactional, contextual process in which people from different cultures create shared meanings.

**Keywords:** communication, non-verbal communication, verbal communication

As David Glass is well aware, effective communicators have many tools at their disposal when they want to get across a message. Whether writing or speaking, they know how to put together the words that will convey their meaning. They reinforce their words with gestures and actions. They look you in the eye, listen to what you have to say, and think about your feelings and needs. At the same time, they study your reactions, picking up the nuances of your response by watching your face and body, listening to your tone of voice, and evaluating your words. They absorb information just as efficiently as they transmit it, relying on both non-verbal and verbal cues.

The most basic form of communication is non-verbal. Anthropologists theorize that long before human beings used words to talk things over, our ancestors communicated with one another by using their bodies. They gritted their teeth to show anger; they smiled and touched one another to indicate affection. Although we have come a long way since those primitive times, we still use non-verbal cues to express superiority, dependence, dislike, respect, love, and other feelings.

Non-verbal communication differs from verbal communication in fundamental ways. For one thing, it is less structured, which makes it more difficult to study. A person cannot pick up a book on non-verbal language and master the vocabulary of gestures, expressions, and inflections that are common in our culture. We don't really know how people learn non-verbal behavior. No one teaches a baby to cry or smile, yet these forms of self-expression are almost universal. Other types of non-verbal communication, such as the meaning of colors and certain gestures, vary from culture to culture.

Non-verbal communication also differs from verbal communication in terms of intent and spontaneity. We generally plan our words. When we say "please open the door," we have a conscious purpose. We think about the message, if only for a moment. But when we communicate non-verbally, we sometimes do so unconsciously. We don't mean to raise an eyebrow or blush. Those actions come naturally. Without our consent, our emotions are written all over our faces.

Although non-verbal communication is often unplanned, it has more impact than verbal communication. Non-verbal cues are especially important in conveying feelings; accounting for 93 percent of the emotional meaning that is exchanged in any interaction. One advantage of non-verbal communication is its reliability. Most people can deceive us much more easily with their words than they can with their bodies. Words are relatively easy to control; body language, facial expressions, and vocal characteristics are not. By paying attention to these non-verbal cues, we can detect deception or affirm a speaker's honesty. Not surprisingly, we have more faith in non-verbal cues than we do in verbal messages. If a person says one thing but transmits a conflicting message non-verbally, we almost invariably believe the non-verbal signal. To a great degree, then, an individual's credibility as a communicator depends on non-verbal messages.

Non-verbal communication is important for another reason as well: It can be efficient from both the sender's and the receiver's standpoint. You can transmit a non-verbal message without even thinking about it, and your audience can register the meaning unconsciously. By the same token, when you have a conscious purpose, you can often achieve it more economically with a gesture than you can with words. A wave of the hand, a pat on the back, a wink—all are streamlined expressions of thought.

Although you can express many things non-verbally, there are limits to what you can communicate without the help of language. If you want to discuss past events, ideas, or abstractions, you need words—symbols that stand for thoughts—arranged in meaningful patterns. In the English language, we have a 750,000, although most of us recognize only about 20,000 of them. To create a thought with these words, we arrange them according to the rules of grammar, putting the various parts of speech in the proper sequence.

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We then transmit the message in spoken or written form, hoping that someone will hear or read what we have to say. Figure 1.1 shows how much time business people devote to the various types of verbal communication. They use speaking and writing to send messages; they use listening and reading to receive them. Person may not realise it, but he belongs to several cultures. The most obvious is the culture he shares with all other people who live in the same country. But this person also belongs to other cultural groups, such as an ethnic group, a religious group, a fraternity or sorority, or perhaps a profession that has its own special language and customs.

So what exactly is culture? It is useful to define culture as a system of shared symbols, beliefs, attitudes, values, expectations, and norms for behaviour. Thus, all members of a culture have, and tend to act on, similar assumptions about how people should think, behave, and communicate. As you can see, cultures vary widely. It's no wonder that most of us need special training before we can become comfortable with a culture other than our own. When it comes to sending business messages, speaking is more common than writing. Giving instructions, conducting interviews, working in small groups, attending meetings, and making speeches are all important activities. Even though writing may be less common, it is important too. When you want to send a complex message of lasting significance, you will probably want to put it in writing. It's important to remember that effective communication is a two-way street. People in business spend more time obtaining information than transmitting it, so to do their jobs effectively, they need good listening and reading skills. Unfortunately, most of us are not very good listeners. Immediately after hearing a ten-minute speech, we typically remember only half of what was said. A few days later, we've forgotten three-quarters of the message. To some extent, our listening problems stem from our education, or lack of it. We spend years learning to express our ideas, but few of us ever take a course in listening.

When faced with the need (or desire) to learn about another culture, we have two main approaches to choose from. The first is to learn as much as possible—the language, cultural background and history, social rules, and so on—about the specific culture that you expect to deal with. The other is to develop general skills that will help to adapt in any culture.

The first approach, in-depth knowledge of a particular culture, certainly works. But there are two drawbacks. One is that you will never be able to understand another culture completely. No matter how much you study German culture, for example, you will never be a German or share the experiences of having grown up in Germany. Even if we could understand the culture completely, Germans might resent our assumption that we know everything there is to know about them. The other drawback to immersing yourself in a specific culture is the trap of overgeneralization, looking at people from a culture not as individuals with their own unique characteristics, but as instances of Germans or Japanese or black Americans. The trick is to learn useful general information but to be open to variations and individual differences. One survey of 100 companies engaged in international business revealed that between 95 and 99 percent of their business letters to other countries are written in English. Moreover, 59 percent of the respondents reported that the foreign letters they receive are usually written in English, although they also receive letters written in Spanish and French. Other languages are rare in international business correspondence.

Because many international business letters are written in English, North American firms do not always have to worry about translating their correspondence. However, even when both parties write in English, minor interpretation problems do exist because of different usage of technical terms. These problems do not usually pose a major barrier to communication, especially if correspondence between the two parties continues and each gradually learns the terminology of the other. More significant problems arise in other forms of written communication that require translation. Advertisements, for example, are almost always translated into the language of the country in which the products are being sold. Documents such as warranties, repair and maintenance manuals, and product labels also require translation. In addition, some multinational companies must translate policy and procedure manuals and benefit plans for use in overseas offices. Reports from foreign subsidiaries to the home office may also be written in one language and then translated into another. Sometimes the translations aren't very good. For example, the well-known slogan "Come alive with Pepsi" was translated literally for Asian markets as "Pepsi brings your ancestors back from the grave," with unfortunate results. Part of the message is almost inevitably lost during any translation process, sometimes with major consequences.

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