

# Data Analysis of Cultural Adaptation Cases of Nonverbal Communication for International Students in China\*

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**Abstract**—International students studying in China need cross-cultural communication. This paper takes international students of foundation in one university and CLS students of United States as targets, collects a large number of primary cases of international students' cultural adaptation, and conducts an analysis and study to clarify the importance of nonverbal communication for intercultural communication and cultural adaptation of foreign students. Three major ways to improve nonverbal communication skills are proposed: teacher guidance, language partner guidance and independent study of international students.

**Keywords**—nonverbal communication cases; cross-cultural communication; international students in China; cultural adaptation

## I. INTRODUCTION

This paper is based on the nonverbal communication cases of the foundation students from more than 40 countries and regions of the China Scholarship Council and the 412 international students of the US CSL program from 2014 to 2018. This paper collects non-verbal communication cases of two types of international students in teaching and communication, and conducts data analysis, then tries to find out the problems existing in non-verbal communication behavior of Chinese students, and analyzes their influence on Chinese teaching and cultural adaptation, and proposes strategies to improve the non-verbal communication ability of foreign students.

## II. THE INFLUENCE OF NONVERBAL COMMUNICATION ON THE ACADEMIC ADAPTATION OF INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS

“Nonverbal communication refers to all communicative behaviors outside the language domain,” [1] nonverbal communication occurs earlier than written language and spoken language. Nonverbal communication is an indispensable aid in international Chinese teaching. When

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students come to China, they will inevitably experience cross-cultural adaptation. “Cross-cultural adaptation is the standard by which people change their understanding or standardization of their own culture to adapt to new cultures.” [2] On case data response, more than 80% of international students have had nonverbal communication problems, showing that nonverbal communication behavior will have an important impact on the academic adaptation of international students in China.

### A. The Influence of Kinetics on the Academic Adaptation of International Students

“In the 700,000 kinds of kinetics of human beings, our face can make about 25,000 different expressions, accounting for 37.5% of the kinetics.” [3] Meaningful glance is an important part of facial expression. Different people use their eyes to convey emotions in different ways. In Chinese classes, Chinese students usually have modest eye contact with teachers, which is a kind of feedback to teachers. For students in some parts of Africa, their meaningful glance in the classroom will avoid contact with the teacher.

Here is a case of meaningful glance: Mullin is from Equatorial Guinea and he rarely answers questions actively. Many times, when the teacher watched him and wanted to ask him to answer questions, he always avoided the teacher's gaze and buried his head in the book. When the teacher sees his reaction, he will find another classmate to answer the question. Over time, he has fewer and fewer opportunities to speak in class. Later, after inquiry, the teacher learned that in the country of Mu Lin, it is impolite to not be able to contact the teacher's eyes when attending classes.

It can be seen that this international student has such a meaningful glance determined by the cultural circle in which he lives. In African countries, even though students avoid the teacher's eyes in the classroom, the teacher will ask the students to answer questions. However, teachers in China may feel that the students are not ready, so try to avoid asking students. The reason why the international student was affected in the classroom was due to the different ways

in which the meaningful glance was used in the two countries.

#### B. *The Influence of Temporal Perceptions on the Academic Adaptation of International Students*

Temporal perceptions also play a non-negligible role in nonverbal communication. "Temporal perceptions can be roughly classified into three types, namely, linear time view, flexible time view and reincarnation time view." [4] Chinese people mainly focus on flexible time view, but they follow the linear time view of formal activities such as class. International students in China often have problems of being late for class, and the reason is due to the interpretation of different cultures of temporal perceptions.

A case study of the US CSL project states that American students have a Tai Chi culture class every week, but every time they go to class, students are either late or leave early. The student's attendance is very difficult for the teacher to send the students to the dormitory. The teacher is very angry and asks why they are always late? The international students replied: "This is our time. I can arrange my own time. The Tai Chi class does not mean anything, so I don't want to go to class."

The foundation international students in African countries also have a late phenomenon. In one case, it was written that the phenomenon of late arrival of students occurred from time to time. After the bell rang, there were always students coming in and even some students sleeping in the room. So the teacher often asked when taking a roll call: "Why didn't someone come to class? Is it late? Is it sick or sleeping?" The answer is often: "No illness, he doesn't want to come to class, he is still sleeping..." The teacher had no choice but to find someone to call him.

It can be seen that the conflict between teachers and students is mainly due to the different temporal perceptions of the two. American international students feel that their time should be dominated by themselves, while African international students are influenced by the traditional perception of Africa. That is, "they determine the reference point of the calculation time according to the importance of an event or activity, so time is a quality, not an abstract, precise quantity." [5]

### III. THE INFLUENCE OF NONVERBAL COMMUNICATION ON THE DAILY CROSS-CULTURAL COMMUNICATION OF INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS

The communication between language partners is the main form of daily cross-cultural communication for international students in China. In the process of communication, international students have some nonverbal communication behaviors with their own cultural characteristics, which will have certain influence on intercultural communication between language partners.

#### A. *The Influence of Kinetics on the Communication of International Students*

1) *Gesture*: Gestures are an important part of kinetics, even though the same gesture has different meanings in various cultures. Chinese people use fewer gestures and have a smaller range of motion. In contrast, Latin American and African countries use gestures at a higher frequency and have a larger range of motion. The international student groups all have their own specific kinetics, and the use of gestures in the process of communication is a reflection of the tacit understanding of both parties.

A foundation student's language partner recalled: During a consultation with Zimbabwe's international students, Camus, I asked Commas a difficult Chinese question. Unexpectedly, he actually answered the question. I was very surprised and very happy, so I applauded him. But at this time, Commas extended a fist to me. I thought that Commas wanted to hit me, so she subconsciously avoided. He seemed to understand my misunderstanding and immediately explained to me: "When we are happy in my country, we will make a fist collision." The African students in the case, although maintaining their own national characteristics, have improved their awareness of cross-cultural communication in the process of communication with the Chinese. He has keenly captured the negative reaction of the Chinese to his kinetics and explained it in time. The effective communication between international students and Chinese language partners will enhance his understanding of the cultural differences of kinetics, thus making the daily communication with Chinese people more harmonious.

2) *Courtesy kinetics*: Etiquette is the most intuitive expression of a country's culture, and the etiquette varies from country to country. Nonverbal communication in courtesy is unique to the cultural group. If the use of the etiquette representing their own culture in different countries will also cause certain cultural conflicts.

A Chinese woman's language partner of foundation described in the case that: Mockbee, a male student in Guinea, is also a burly figure. After a tutoring, I politely said goodbye to Mockbee, but a move by Mockbee scared me! He opened his hands to make a hug, so I subconsciously blocked my hand and refused Mockbee's hug. He looked at me sadly and asked, "Why?" I didn't know what to do at the moment. I could only say goodbye to them and then ran away. Later I learned that in Guinea, embracing is a kind of courtesy when it's time to leave.

The physical contact between men and women in China is measured. Even friendly kinetics, the Chinese cannot accept too intimate behavior. The misunderstandings in the case stem from differences in the degree of physical contact in courtesy kinetics in different countries. African students maintain the etiquette of African cultural characteristics and are not aware of his cultural conflicts in the process of communicating with Chinese. The Chinese in the case did not understand the etiquette characteristics of the foreign student country, so the communication between the two was not only invalid, but also had a negative impact on the communication between the two. Therefore, international

students can't force the Chinese to accept his culture, but must "do as the Romans do", be familiar with Chinese etiquette culture, and avoid unnecessary cultural conflicts.

#### *B. The Influence of Spatial Distance on the Communication of International Students*

Spatial distance is an important part of nonverbal communication. The spatial distance of Chinese people is closer than that of European and American countries. The normal spatial distance that Chinese people think is sometimes a kind of harassment for foreign students in Europe and America.

The language partner of a US CLS project has also been plagued by different spatial distances: Meng Lin is an American college student. In the weekly single tutoring class, students all get along very well. Many times I will unconsciously approach her, she will be away from me. At the beginning, I thought that Meng Lin didn't like me very much, so I did this. Later, I observed that many Americans and friends with friends, especially same-sex friends, will maintain a certain physical distance.

It can be seen that the space distance of Chinese people is significantly smaller than that of Americans, especially among same-sex friends. Close distance in China is a kind of intimacy, but for American students, this will make her feel uncomfortable and even feel that her private space has been encroached.

Contrary to Americans, the distance between international students in some countries is closer than that of China. In the process of communicating with Syrian students, a language partner described: Hagay came from Syria, and on the first day I introduced his roommate to him. Hagay is happy to chat with new friends, but he is getting closer and closer to Chinese friends during the chat, which makes my roommates very uncomfortable and subconsciously distances him. Afterwards, Hagay asked me sadly: "Does your friend dislike me, why is he always so far away from me?"

It can be seen that different countries have different requirements for spatial distance. In contrast, Americans are influenced by the individualistic culture and have farther requirements for intimate distances. Moreover, the Americans have a larger body during the process of communicating with others. The close intimacy will not only make Americans feel that their privacy has been violated, but also their own personality. While Syria is in the collectivist cultural circle, it attaches great importance to whether individuals can integrate into the collective, so the intimacy distance is relatively close. In the collectivist cultural environment, the close communication method is the embodiment of the individual's integration into the environment.

#### **IV. THE MAIN WAY TO IMPROVE NONVERBAL COMMUNICATION SKILLS**

International students in China should understand the characteristics of nonverbal communication in China and constantly improve their nonverbal communication skills to

better adapt to Chinese culture. International students can improve their nonverbal communication skills through the following ways.

#### *A. Teacher's Guidance*

Teachers play an important role in the daily life of international students. A TCSL teacher not only teaches students how to learn Chinese, but also teaches students how to adapt to Chinese culture.

First, teachers need to understand the characteristics of nonverbal communication in each country. For international students in the Asian cultural circle, their nonverbal communication behavior is less, and their communication is similar to China. For international students in the European and American cultural circles, due to different values, some of their nonverbal communication behaviors have individualistic characteristics. For international students in the African and Oceanian cultural circles, they have more nonverbal communication behaviors and a greater gap with Chinese culture.

Second, teachers should study the nonverbal communication behavior of international students. For example, students in the African and Oceanian cultural circles may be ignoring the teacher's gaze because of cultural factors. The absenteeism and lateness of students in the European and American cultural circles are caused by different values.

#### *B. Language Partner's Guidance*

In the process of learning Chinese by international students, the role of language partner can not be ignored. To learn a language better and faster, you need to learn how to use language knowledge, and the process of language communication is the process of using language knowledge by international students.

First of all, the language partners of international students should understand the corresponding intercultural communication knowledge, improve the sensitivity in daily cross-communication, record the nonverbal communication behaviors of students from different countries and different cultural circles, consult relevant data for comparative study, and summarize different cultures characteristics of nonverbal communication behavior in time.

Secondly, the language partners should try to establish friendly relations with foreign students, and carefully observe some non-verbal communication behaviors exhibited by foreign students in daily communication, and correct their mistakes in non-verbal communication in time. Language partners should inform the Chinese students of the characteristics of nonverbal communication, so as to help foreign students understand how Chinese people get along. Because of the long contact time and wide range of contacts with language partners, the professional guidance of language partners can play a role in a wider range of communication fields, and subtly enable foreign students to acquire cross-cultural communication knowledge and skills in communication.

### C. *Independent Study of International Students*

During their stay in China, international students are not only able to improve their non-verbal communication skills under the guidance of their teachers and language partner, but also rely on their own active observation and learning. But for international students with different values, the way to learn independently is different.

First of all, for international students with individualistic values in the European and American cultural circles, they tend to be personally centered, and speaking and doing things rarely consider other people's feelings. Such students often do not actively observe other people's nonverbal communication behavior, and it is difficult to change their nonverbal behavior. They can only get in touch with the outside world through various channels, and gain experience to understand the characteristics of Chinese nonverbal communication behavior and adapt to Chinese culture.

Secondly, for international students of the Asian cultural circle collectivism values, they are more concerned about whether they can integrate into the new collective new environment. Therefore, they are more adept at observing. They compare themselves with the characteristics of nonverbal communication behaviors of Chinese people, find out their inadequacies and correct them, and slowly integrate into new life.

In short, these three approaches must work together to make a difference. International students should understand the cultural characteristics of nonverbal communication in China through various means and in various ways, continuously improve their nonverbal communication skills, and minimize the negative impacts caused by cultural differences in the process of intercultural communication.

## V. CONCLUSION

Nonverbal communication behavior is an indispensable auxiliary tool in the process of communication and plays an important role in intercultural communication. It is necessary to pay attention to and study the non-verbal communication behavior of international students in intercultural communication, and to let students understand the cultural characteristics contained in Chinese nonverbal communication in various ways, and its role and influence in intercultural communication and cultural adaptation in China. It is necessary to continuously improve the nonverbal communication skills of international students and reduce the negative impacts caused by cultural differences, thus ensuring the successful and smooth intercultural communication.

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