

The Teaching of Nonverbal Communication to EFL Learners: in Taiwan

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ABSTRACT: *Nonverbal cues play a significant role in effective communication, particularly in cross-cultural contexts. Understanding and utilizing nonverbal communication in English can enhance Taiwanese learners' communicative competence and facilitate successful interactions with English speakers from diverse cultural backgrounds. This paper discusses practical strategies and pedagogical approaches to teach nonverbal communication, emphasizing the development of awareness, cultural sensitivity, body language, paralinguistic features, proxemics, and context-specific cues. Additionally, it addresses the relevance of nonverbal communication in digital media and the significance of authentic materials, cultural immersion, assessment, and provides a practical example of teaching nonverbal communication to English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learners. By incorporating these strategies, educators can empower Taiwanese EFL learners to navigate the globalized world and build meaningful connections across cultures.*

KEYWORDS: nonverbal communication, Taiwanese EFL learners, cross-cultural communication, pedagogy

INTRODUCTION

In today's interconnected world, effective communication extends beyond mere verbal exchanges. Nonverbal communication plays a vital role in conveying meaning, expressing emotions, and establishing rapport (Knapp & Hall, 2013). For (EFL) learners, understanding and utilizing nonverbal cues in English can significantly enhance their communicative competence (Gudykunst & Nishida, 2014).

Research consistently demonstrates that nonverbal communication accounts for a significant portion of overall communication (Gudykunst & Nishida, 2014; Matsumoto, 2016). In cross-cultural contexts, the ability to comprehend and use nonverbal cues becomes even more critical. As Taiwanese EFL learners interact with English speakers from diverse cultural backgrounds, proficiency in nonverbal communication can foster mutual understanding, reduce misunderstandings, and promote effective communication.

Theory of Nonverbal Communication

To effectively teach nonverbal communication, it is crucial to understand the theoretical underpinnings that shape our understanding of this complex phenomenon. Several prominent theories contribute to our knowledge of nonverbal communication. Proxemics is one such theory that explores how individuals use and perceive personal space and physical distance in communication. According to Hall (1966), proxemics provides insights into cultural variations in spatial preferences and the impact of physical proximity on communication dynamics. It examines how different cultures define and maintain boundaries of personal space, as well as the role of physical distance in conveying social cues and establishing relationships. By understanding proxemics, educators can help learners navigate cross-cultural interactions and develop an awareness of spatial dynamics in communication.

Birdwhistell's theory of Kinesics focuses on the study of body movements, facial expressions, and gestures as forms of nonverbal communication (Birdwhistell, 1970). Kinesics explores how these nonverbal cues convey meaning, emotions, and social dynamics. Educators can introduce learners to the various types of body movements, such as postures, gestures, and facial expressions, and help them understand the cultural variations and context-dependent nature of these cues. By studying kinesics, learners can gain insights into how body language shapes communication and develop the skills to interpret and use these cues effectively.

Goffman (1959) views social interactions as performances, where individuals use nonverbal cues to present desired identities and shape impressions. According to this perspective, individuals engage in impression management, strategically utilizing nonverbal cues to control how they are perceived by others. Educators can incorporate Goffman's ideas into classroom activities that explore self-presentation, role-playing, and the role of nonverbal communication in shaping social interactions. By understanding the dramaturgical perspective, learners can enhance their awareness of the performative aspects of communication and develop skills for effective self-presentation.

According to Ekman (1972) there are universal facial expressions that transcend cultural boundaries> This suggests that certain facial expressions are universally recognized and associated with specific emotions. However, Ting-Toomey (1988) proposed the Face-Negotiation Theory which examines how individuals manage face-saving and face-threatening acts in intercultural communication. This theory highlights the influence of cultural norms and values on nonverbal behaviors during conflicts or negotiations. Educators can integrate Ting-Toomey's theory into discussions and activities that explore cultural variations in managing conflict and saving face. By understanding face-negotiation theory, learners can develop cultural sensitivity and acquire skills for navigating intercultural conflicts while maintaining positive relationships.

By incorporating these theories into instructional strategies, educators can provide Taiwanese EFL learners with a solid theoretical foundation for understanding nonverbal communication and its cultural nuances. The integration of these theories in classroom activities and

discussions fosters critical thinking, cultural awareness, and the development of practical skills necessary for effective nonverbal communication.

Practical Strategies for Teaching Nonverbal Communication:

To effectively teach nonverbal communication to Taiwanese EFL learners, educators can adopt the following practical strategies:

Developing Awareness and Cultural Sensitivity:

Start by fostering awareness of nonverbal communication and its cultural variations (Hall & Hall, 1990). Engage learners in discussions and activities that highlight the diversity of nonverbal cues across cultures. Encourage learners to critically reflect on their own cultural biases and assumptions.

Example: Conduct a group discussion where learners share their observations and experiences regarding cultural differences in nonverbal communication. Show video clips or present case studies that illustrate the influence of culture on nonverbal cues (Hall & Hall, 1990; Ting-Toomey & Kurogi, 1998). Facilitate an open and respectful dialogue to promote cultural sensitivity and understanding.

Cultural Interpretation of Nonverbal Cues:

Explore cultural variations in nonverbal cues, focusing on specific aspects such as greetings, facial expressions, or gestures (Hall & Hall, 1990). Share relevant examples and video clips that illustrate these differences. Facilitate conversations where learners analyze and compare the cultural interpretations of these cues. Encourage respectful dialogue and the exploration of cultural nuances to foster cultural sensitivity.

Example: Share video clips that depict cross-cultural interactions and nonverbal cues. Ask learners to identify the differences in nonverbal communication between the cultures represented in the videos. Facilitate a discussion where learners can express their observations and interpretations. Guide learners to recognize the impact of cultural contexts on nonverbal communication.

Body Language and Gestures:

Introduce common nonverbal cues, such as facial expressions, body posture, hand gestures, and eye contact (Matsumoto, 2016). Provide explicit instruction on how these cues can convey emotions, attitudes, and intentions. Encourage learners to practice using appropriate body language and gestures in various communicative contexts through role-plays and group activities.

Example: Organize a role-play activity where learners are assigned different scenarios, such as a job interview or a social gathering. Instruct them to focus on using appropriate body language and gestures that align with the given context (Matsumoto, 2016). After the role-plays, facilitate a discussion to analyze the effectiveness of the nonverbal cues used and provide constructive

feedback. This activity allows learners to apply their knowledge of nonverbal communication in practical situations.

Paralinguistic Features:

Teach learners to recognize and utilize paralinguistic features, including tone of voice, pitch, volume, and intonation patterns (Gudykunst & Nishida, 2014). Help learners understand how these elements contribute to the overall meaning and impact of verbal communication. Engage in activities that involve listening to and imitating authentic English audio samples to develop their paralinguistic skills.

Example: Provide learners with audio recordings of different conversations or speeches. Ask them to identify the paralinguistic features present in the recordings, such as changes in tone, pitch, or volume (Gudykunst & Nishida, 2014). Discuss the significance of these features in conveying meaning and emotions. Encourage learners to practice imitating the paralinguistic features to enhance their communication skills.

Proxemics and Context-Specific Cues:

Introduce the concept of proxemics and the influence of personal space on communication dynamics (Hall, 1966). Discuss how cultural norms and interpersonal relationships shape proxemic behaviors. Explore context-specific cues, such as seating arrangements, physical contact, or spatial boundaries, and their impact on communication.

Example: Conduct a classroom activity where learners engage in different communication scenarios, such as a business meeting or a casual conversation (Hall, 1966). Guide learners to consider the appropriate use of personal space and seating arrangements based on the given context. Encourage reflection on the impact of proxemics and context-specific cues on communication dynamics.

Nonverbal Communication in Digital Media:

Recognize the role of nonverbal communication in digital platforms and digital media. Discuss the challenges and opportunities of conveying nonverbal cues in digital communication, such as video conferences, email, or instant messaging (Ting-Toomey & Kurogi, 1998). Explore the limitations and alternative methods of expressing nonverbal cues in online interactions.

Example: Engage learners in a discussion on the challenges of interpreting nonverbal cues in digital communication. Share examples of video conferencing scenarios and highlight how facial expressions, eye contact, and body language can impact virtual interactions (Ting-Toomey & Kurogi, 1998). Discuss alternative methods of conveying nonverbal cues in written communication, such as using emojis or punctuation to convey tone and emotions. Encourage learners to reflect on their own online interactions and suggest strategies for leveraging nonverbal cues effectively.

Authentic Materials and Cultural Immersion:

Incorporating authentic materials and cultural immersion experiences can enrich the teaching of nonverbal communication. Expose learners to authentic videos, interviews, or cultural events to enhance their understanding of nonverbal cues in real-life situations (Matsumoto, 2016). Encourage participation in cultural immersion programs or language exchanges to practice nonverbal communication in authentic contexts.

Example: Organize a cultural immersion activity where learners attend a local event or participate in a language exchange program with English speakers (Samovar, Porter, & McDaniel, 2016). Encourage them to observe and analyze nonverbal cues displayed by individuals from different cultural backgrounds. Provide a platform for learners to reflect on their experiences and share how cultural nuances impacted nonverbal communication. This activity promotes cultural awareness and provides authentic learning opportunities.

Assessment of Nonverbal Communication Skills:

Develop appropriate assessment methods to evaluate learners' nonverbal communication skills. Design assessments that reflect real-life scenarios and require the application of nonverbal cues. Provide constructive feedback and individualized guidance to help learners improve their nonverbal communication abilities.

Example: Create a performance-based assessment where learners participate in a simulated conversation or give a presentation (Knapp & Hall, 2013). Assess their use of nonverbal cues, such as body language, eye contact, and vocal expressions. Provide detailed feedback highlighting areas of improvement and suggestions for enhancing nonverbal communication skills. This formative assessment approach encourages continuous growth and development.

CONCLUSION

Teaching nonverbal communication to Taiwanese EFL learners requires a comprehensive approach that encompasses awareness, cultural sensitivity, body language, paralinguistic features, proxemics, context-specific cues, digital communication, authentic materials, cultural immersion, assessment, and practical examples (Gudykunst & Nishida, 2014; Samovar et al., 2016). By incorporating these strategies and theories into classroom instruction, educators can empower Taiwanese EFL learners to become proficient in nonverbal communication, enhance their cross-cultural interactions, and succeed in a globalized world (Hall, 1966; Ting-Toomey & Kurogi, 1998; Birdwhistell, 1970). By cultivating their understanding and application of nonverbal cues, Taiwanese EFL learners can build meaningful connections with English speakers from diverse cultural backgrounds, fostering mutual understanding and effective communication.

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