3 BODY LANGUAGE AND PROXEMICS

INTRODUCTION

1. Have you felt any discomfort when communicating with strangers or even foreigners or with someone you know? If so, can you identify the reasons? What is typical about the body language of South Europeans as opposed to North Europeans?

2. Think about how different people in your life (friends, relatives, classmates, teachers..) use gestures, personal space, facial expressions, touch and eye contact. Have you noticed anything unusual? Share your experience in groups of four.

3. How can your body language influence your credibility and help you win someone’s trust?

4. Now read the text and compare your answers with Dr. Collett’s findings and underline the key concepts.

Foreign bodies

Understanding the 'body language' of different nationalities - the way they use gestures, eye-contact and touching to communicate without words - is an important part of communicating across cultures. In his book Foreign Bodies, research psychologist Dr. Peter Collett examines some of the differences among Europeans.

Gesture
Dr. Collett suggests that with regard to the way different European nations use gestures, they fall into three groups: 1) the Nordic nations - the Swedes, Finns, Norwegians and Danes use gestures very little; 2) nations such as the British, Germans, Dutch, Belgians and Russians use some gestures when they are excited, or want to communicate over long distances, or to insult each other; 3) the Italians, Greeks, French, Spanish and Portuguese use gestures a lot to emphasize what they are saying and to hold the other person's attention.

Personal space
What feels right for one nationality may feel uncomfortable for another. British zoologist Desmond Morris has identified three 'personal space' zones in Europe. In countries such as Spain, France, Italy and Greece, people stand close enough to touch each other easily. Morris calls this the 'elbow zone'. In East European countries such as Poland, Hungary and Romania, people stand a little more distant. Morris calls this the 'wrist zone' because they are close enough to touch wrists. In Britain, Holland, Belgium, Germany and the Scandinavian countries, people prefer to stand further away from each other and they do not generally touch. This he calls 'fingertips zone'.

Eye-contact
In countries where people stand close to each other eye-contact is more frequent and lasts longer. Mediterranean countries, says Dr. Collet, are 'high-look' cultures whereas north European countries are 'low-look' cultures. Children who grow up in a low-look culture learn that it is rude to look too long at another person. In a high-look culture, eye-contact, like physical contact and gestures, is a natural way of expressing your feelings and relating to others. This explains why, for example, North Europeans visiting South European countries may feel uncomfortable at the way people look at them.

Do these observations agree with your own experience?
5. First, name the gestures you are familiar with. Then watch the video Gestures across cultures and finish the sentences.

a) The essential feature of handshaking is that it is an ______________________________ act.

b) In Japan, if you want to signal that someone is crazy, or has a s_______ l______________, you have to____________________


c) When people mean “no” in most European countries, they typically __________________ while in the south,


d) While a ring made by the index finger and the thumb is an “OK” gesture in Britain, in other parts of the world it may have a completely different meaning. For example,


territoriality and proxemics

Our primary identities are closely linked with our claimed territories. When our territories are invaded, we perceive this as a threat and experience emotional vulnerability. This “sacred space” satisfies our needs for security, trust, connection and stability. The term proxemics was coined in 1963 by Edward T. Hall, cultural anthropologist, who emphasized the impact of proxemic behavior (the use of space) on interpersonal communication.

Discuss the following questions in groups or pairs: How do you organize, use and indicate your personal space? Are there any differences between members of one culture/men and women/different generations? Read the text and compare your observations.

social distances

The size of our personal “space bubbles” depends on where we are, what message we are giving and to whom we are giving it. E. Hall has identified four distances or zones: intimate, personal, social, and public.

Note that the closer someone is to you, the warmer they are thinking of you. They probably like you or are very comfortable around/by you. It is worth noting, however, that personal space is fluid; what is considered close by some is considered far away by others.

1 intimate zone (0 to 18 inches)

Only those who are emotionally close to us are allowed into this space – lovers, parents, spouses, children, close friends and relatives. The presence of others may be overwhelming because of the increased sensory input and involvement with another body. In the close phase, physical contact - lovemaking, comforting, protecting but also wrestling - is present or highly probable. Voice plays a minor part and communication is carried mainly by other channels.

Although crowded buses may bring strangers into intimate spatial relations, passengers use various defensive tactics such as being as immobile as possible or withdrawing when part of the body touches another person.

2 personal zone (18 to 48 inches)

It is the distance we put between ourselves and others e.g. at office parties, social functions and friendly gatherings. At the close phase, one can hold another person. Where people stand signals their relationship or attitude. While a wife can stay inside the circle of her husband’s close phase, for another woman this is a different story.

The far phase extends from a point just outside easy touching distance to a point where two people can touch fingers if they extend both arms. Subjects of personal interest and involvement can be discussed at this distance.
3 SOCIAL ZONE (4-12 feet)

We stand at this distance from strangers and people we don’t know very well – or don’t like very much. Details of the face are not perceived, and nobody touches another person. Desks in the offices of important people are large enough to hold visitors at the far phase. During conversations it is more important to maintain visual contact.

At the far phase, the voice level is louder, and it can usually be heard easily in an adjoining room. The far phase enables people to continue to work silently in the presence of another person without appearing to be rude. If, for example, the receptionist in an office is less than 10 feet from another person, she will be virtually compelled to converse.

4 PUBLIC ZONE (Anything over 12 feet)

If we are talking to a large group, this is the distance at which we stand. At this distance, we make a careful choice of words and phrasing of sentences, which is termed the "formal style". 30 feet, or the far phase is the distance that is automatically set around important public figures. Most actors know that at 30 or more feet, not only the voice but everything else must be exaggerated or amplified. Nonverbal communication shifts to gestures and body stance.

1. Now think about how you would respond in the following situations and compare your responses with your partner's. Could you describe the underlying feelings?

   In a crowded library, there is only one table where you can sit. A member of the opposite sex is sitting in the chair marked with an x.

   A. First, assume that x is a very attractive person whom you’d like to get to know but have never met. Where would you sit? Why?
   B. Now assume that x is an unattractive person you would not like to get to know. Where would you sit?
   C. Where would you sit if x is an instructor you have had for a course and liked very much?
   D. Where would you sit if x is an instructor you have had for a course and disliked very much? The instructor gave you an unfair grade.

2. We are unaware of our sense of territoriality until "our space" is violated by another person. How would you react and feel in the following situations? Discuss your answers in groups.

   A. In an uncrowded bus, someone wants to sit next to you and occupy the seat where you have put some object that you must move when he/she attempts to sit down.
   B. When there is only one person in a lift, he/she stands right next to you.
   C. In a class that has been meeting for several weeks, someone attempts to sit down on the seat where you have sat every day.
   D. In a library that is not crowded, someone deliberately moves your books and sits down while you are away from the table.
   E. In your home, would you occupy someone else's "special" chair, desk, or even room?

   Face to face

3. It is generally accepted that certain basic expressions of human emotion are recognized around the world. The use and recognition of these expressions is genetically inherited rather than socially conditioned. Which do you think they are? How do they show in your face? Here are some of the letters to help you:
This theory, formulated by Darwin, was put to test by Californian psychologist Paul Eckman. Eckman’s work notably included isolated tribes not influenced by Western media and images.

Do you show your emotions openly or do you consider yourself reserved? How do these emotions show in your face?

IS BEAUTY ONLY SKIN DEEP?

4. Read the following statements and decide whether they are false or true.

1. In the U.S., attractive people are mostly viewed with suspicion and perceived as less competent or intelligent than unattractive people.  
   T  F

2. In the U.S., an attractive person appears as more sensitive, likable and interesting than an unattractive person.  
   T  F

3. The Japanese evaluate smiling faces as more intelligent than neutral faces.  
   T  F

4. The Japanese do not perceive smiling faces as being more attractive than neutral faces.  
   T  F

5. In some Asian cultures, influential people maintain restrained facial expressions and postural rigidity.  
   T  F

6. The same holds for the U.S. culture.  
   T  F

Look at the following photographs. What emotions or attitudes do they express?

1  2

3  4  5
Which of them do you consider likable? Why? Discuss your answers in pairs.

WHO IS WHO?

Which of them may be described as

a) stiff, combative, distant, aloof
b) energetic, natural, likable, believable, enthusiastic
c) chilly, intimidating, with a cold, analytical speech
d) passionate, articulate, persuasive, a bridge-builder
e) evasive, non-responsive, defensive, anxious?

Match the photographs with the descriptions.

a) The lead singer of U2
b) The former CBS Evening News anchor man
c) The former professional baseball player and current hitting coach
d) The former American football player in the National Football League, the head coach and former color commentator for NFL telecasts.
e) The former U. S. Secretary of Homeland Security under President George W. Bush

BODY LANGUAGE AND PROXEMICS – LANGUAGE WORK I

1. Complete each of the following phrases with one of the expressions from the box in a singular or plural form.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>mouth</th>
<th>face (2x)</th>
<th>chest</th>
<th>cheek</th>
<th>leg</th>
<th>neck</th>
<th>skin</th>
<th>back</th>
<th>arm</th>
<th>finger</th>
<th>ear</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1 to ______ difficulties</td>
<td>7 to pull someone’s _______</td>
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<tr>
<td>2 to ______ the new proposal</td>
<td>8 to be a pain in the _______</td>
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<tr>
<td>3 to have the _______ to do something</td>
<td>9 to be only ______ deep</td>
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<tr>
<td>4 to take something at a ______ value</td>
<td>10 to keep one’s ______ crossed</td>
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<tr>
<td>5 to put your money where your _______ is</td>
<td>11. to keep/hold somebody at ______’s length</td>
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<td>6 to be all ______</td>
<td>12. to get it off your ________</td>
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Now match the above expressions to their explanations. Make any necessary changes.

a) If you are ___________________________ , it means you are making a joke of someone by telling them something that is not true.
b) If someone ___________________________ , it means he or she supports it.
c) If someone tells you ___________________________ , he wants you to support your words with actions.
d) If you ___________________________ for someone, you hope that something will happen the way he/she wants.
e) Someone who is ___________________________ is annoying.
f) to ___________________________ means to tell something that has been worrying you for a long time.
g) Someone who ___________________________ behaves rudely or disrespectfully.
h) If something ___________________________ it seems to be important or real when in fact it is not.
i) ___________________________ means to have to deal with them.
j) ___________________________ means to accept what someone says, without thinking that there may be a hidden meaning.
k) to ___________________________ means to be very attentive; to listen closely.
l) If you ___________________________ , you avoid developing a relationship with them.
2. On the left are some adjectives often used to describe a particular part of the face or head. Complete the right-hand side.

1. high, lined    2. rosy, hollow  3. double, pointed  4. bushy, pencil-thin  5. snub, hook (Roman)  
6. cauliflower, pierced  7. piercing, hazel  8. thick, cherry  9. square, upper

3. On the left are some definitions of parts of the face. Write what they are.
   a) openings in the nose – N_________
   b) the soft lower parts of the ears – L_________
   c) flat parts on the side of the face above the cheekbones – T_________
   d) the bony part that protects the brain – S_________
   e) The moveable skin that covers the eyes – L_________

4. Which parts of your body do you use to do the following: pat, lick, hug, clap, tickle, pinch, kick, punch, stroke, crunch, poke?

5. When do you: tiptoe, pace up and down, stroll, shuffle, limp?

**Eyes**

1. Fill in the words based on their descriptions.
   the round, coloured part of your eye that surrounds its central black part – I_________
   the small black round area in the middle of your eye – P_________
   a piece of skin that covers your eye when it is closed – E_________
   the line of hair above your eye – E_________________

2. When do you wink, roll your eyes, knit your brows?

3. Can you read someone’s eyes? What do they tell you about your partner? Discuss this in groups of four.
   Normal the top eyelid rests midway between the pupil and the iris. If it is raised much above the pupil, this indicates extreme interest or surprise. However, if your partner’s eyelid drops below this midpoint, they are bored, uninterested or falling asleep! If the bottom eyelid rises slightly, they are evaluating what you have said, often critically.

   People who look to the sides are nervous, lying, or distracted. However, this could also be a discomfort display. Looking askance generally means the person is distrustful or unconvinced.

   If someone looks down a lot, they are probably shy or timid. People also tend to look down when they are trying to hide something emotional or feeling unpleasant emotions.

   Some cultures believe that looking someone in the eyes is a sign of disrespect, or it is only done with intimate friends or family, so this could explain why someone is avoiding eye contact with you.

**DIRECTION OF GAZE**

Ask your partner to remember an event or to make up a situation. Compare the direction of their gaze. Try to guess which story was genuine and which was made up. What have you noticed?
Describe the following pictures. Which of them may reveal that your partner is making something up?

Posture

Divide the following expressions into two groups: those expressing or associating straightness and those expressing or associating curviness.

Stooped, upright, hunched, arched, stiff, stern, arched, slumped, rigid

STRAIGHT:

CURVED:

There are a few basic positions that your body may assume: standing, sitting, crouching, squatting, kneeling and lying. What do you usually do in these positions?

If you want to feel more powerful, adopt a powerful posture. Experts have found that when people stood or sat in powerful poses for one minute—those involving open limbs and expansive gestures—they not only felt more powerful but had increased their levels of testosterone. Powerful poses take up more space, so spread your body and open up the arms or legs.

People form impressions of us in the first few seconds of a meeting. Yet many people have posture habits that undermine trust. The good news is that you can improve your posture habits.

1. **Stand tall.** Stand with your shoulders back and your stomach in. Visualise a string rising from the centre of your scalp like a candle wick, pulling you upwards. Stand straight, but move naturally.
2. **Watch your lower body.** One common posture problem is going back on one hip. You actually lean away from your audience and communicate, “I don’t want to be here”.
3. **Get in the “ready” position.** This means basically lean forward. When you communicate from the self-assured stance, your energy is directed forward, towards your listener.
4. **Move.** To make emotional contact with your listeners, we need to convey excitement and enthusiasm when we speak. Movement and free gestures add energy and variety to your message.
Haptics

What is the usual purpose of touch? Discuss various forms of touching and situations in which touching occurs.

Haptics is a branch of study that investigates the perceptions, functions and meanings of touch. It also denotes any form of nonverbal communication involving touch.

Discuss the rules and behaviours related to touch in your family, between you and your friends and across cultures. When and what sort of touch is appropriate? What other situations (e.g. in public) are likely to induce touching? What are the rules for hand-holding?

Now read the text and compare your answers.

Touch is used to fulfill five communicative functions: ritualistic interaction (e.g. shaking hands), expressing affect (kissing or kicking), playfulness (flirtatious stroking or poking), control function (grabbing one’s hand), task-related function (a nurse taking a patient’s pulse).

Different cultures have different expectations as to who should touch whom and when. For example, while Chinese view opposite-sex handshakes as acceptable, Malays and Arabs view this as taboo. Also, different cultures have different gender norms for embracing and handholding.

The friendly embrace between males is much more acceptable in many Latin American cultures than in Britain or the U.S. The friendly handholding pattern between two females in many Asian cultures is also accepted non-verbal practice.

The tendency of North Americans to remain outside the haptic zone of Arabs is usually viewed as “insincere” and “cold”. Conversely, most North Americans tend to perceive the Arabs’ need for close contact as “aggressive”. However, note that the touch behaviour in both the Arab and the Latin American cultures is usually confined to same-sex touching. Furthermore, while Latin Americans and southern Europeans view kissing and hugging as spontaneous expressions of their positive feelings, many Asian cultures do not approve of such open display of affection. The French, for example, like to kiss acquaintances on both cheeks. In comparison, Britons prefer “vacuum kisses” to actual kisses.

(from Communicating Across Cultures by Stella Ting-Toomay)

BODY LANGUAGE AND PROXEMICS – LANGUAGE WORK II

1. Complete the sentences with a suitable verb.
   a) You should ______________ a distance of at least one meter from a person using a cash dispenser.
   b) I hate my aural space being __________ in restaurants or on public transport when someone is speaking too loudly over their mobile phone.
   c) I don't like people ______________ while I am talking to them.
   d) ______________, ______________, or ______________ without putting one’s hand over their mouth is considered bad manners.
   e) If you are looking down or aside while talking to someone, you may come ______________ (i.e., create an impression) as shifty.
   f) Your previous experience, a good track ______________ or credentials might not help you if you show a lack of self-confidence.

2. Put the words in brackets into the appropriate form by adding suffixes or prefixes.
   Your (vision) ______________ nervousness may (mine)____________ your message. Many people mistakenly that one’s personal impact comes (prime)____________ from an (appeal) ______________ face, (attract) ______________ physique or (style) ______________ clothes, but these are not the most important factors. Your speech has to be (passion)______________ and
While written communication goes to the analytical part of your brain, spoken communication goes straight to the emotional centre of the brain. Although some big accomplish or a title may buy you some credible, you still have to come across as believe to close a deal.

3. Do you consider the following situations acceptable?
   a) Giving a massage to a colleague of the opposite sex?
   b) Touching people when you talk to them or patting them on the back?
   c) Men helping women to take off and put on their coats?
   d) Men whistling at girls they find attractive?
   e) Kissing your child on the lips?

Which of the above
   a) could make someone feel awkward?
   b) is considered gentlemanly?
   c) is unhygienic?
   d) is sexist?
   e) could be misinterpreted?