



# Research on the Application of Nonverbal Communication in Teaching Chinese as a Foreign Language

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## Abstract

When it comes to communication, people first think of verbal communication, but in fact, human communication has two aspects: verbal communication and nonverbal communication. Nonverbal communication, literally understood, refers to communicative activities conducted without the use of language. Teaching Chinese as a foreign language is actually a communicative process between teachers and students, and nonverbal communication inevitably occurs in every teaching stage. This article will analyze and elaborate on the importance of nonverbal communication in teaching Chinese as a foreign language, the application of nonverbal communication in Chinese language classrooms, and the issues that should be noted when using it. The purpose of this article is to explore the application of nonverbal communication in teaching Chinese as a foreign language, in order to closely integrate nonverbal communication with teaching Chinese as a foreign language and make its use more reasonable. I hope to provide some help and reference for teachers of Chinese as a foreign language when engaging in nonverbal communication.

## Subject Areas

Linguistics

## Keywords

Nonverbal Communication, Nonverbal Behavior, Teaching Chinese as a Foreign Language

## 1. Introduction

Nonverbal communication and verbal communication together constitute the main content of teaching Chinese as a foreign language. In teaching Chinese as a

foreign language, teachers and students always consciously or unconsciously use some nonverbal means to communicate when using language expression. At the same time, in order to avoid using their mother tongue, teachers will also try to use various nonverbal behaviors for teaching and communication. However, for a long time, the focus of teaching Chinese as a foreign language in China has mostly been on verbal communication, without a clear awareness of the important communicative function of nonverbal communication behaviors in the classroom. In fact, the role of nonverbal communication in teaching Chinese as a foreign language cannot be underestimated. Nonverbal communication plays many roles in teaching Chinese as a foreign language, sometimes even more important than verbal communication, as it can convey meanings and information that cannot be expressed through verbal communication. Therefore, it is necessary for us to conduct research on nonverbal communication.

## **2. Literature Review**

### **2.1. Research on Nonverbal Communication**

#### **2.1.1. Current Research Status in China**

In recent years, research on nonverbal communication has attracted attention from the teaching and cross-cultural communication communities both domestically and internationally. Many foreign scholars have also conducted extensive research and exploration of nonverbal communication. Overall, research in this area in China is not comprehensive and profound, and there is a significant gap compared to foreign research and investment in this area.

With the increasing comprehensive national strength and foreign exchanges of our country, many scholars and educators in China have begun to study nonverbal communication behaviors in cross-cultural communication. For example, “Nonverbal Communication-The Art of Interpersonal Communication” co-authored by Zhang Libin and Li Zhongxing, “Introduction to Nonverbal Communication” by Li Jiequn, and “Cross Cultural Communication and English Learning” and “Culture and Communication” written by Hu Wenzhong. The publication of these works and related research papers reflects Chinese characteristics and gradually forms our own research system, which has had a profound impact on the study of nonverbal communication in China.

#### **2.1.2. Current Research Status Abroad**

According to research, it is widely believed that nonverbal communication began after World War II, when humans initially expressed their thoughts and emotions through body language such as posture, movements, and expressions. [1] The book “Silent Language” written by Hall in 1959 mainly focuses on the study of nonverbal communication, systematically summarizing the nonverbal communication behaviors of different ethnic groups, and pointing out that culture has a significant impact on nonverbal behavior in communication. [2] Starting from a particular ethnic culture can make many communication behaviors understandable. The 1970s was a period of summarizing and synthesizing a large number of

published works and research achievements. The most famous is Foster's "Body Language".

Western sociologist Erwin Goffman is an important representative in the field of nonverbal communication, and his works such as "The Display of Behavior" and "Interactive Ritual" are considered classic works in the study of nonverbal communication.

## **2.2. Research on Nonverbal Communication in Teaching Chinese as a Foreign Language**

The research on nonverbal communication in teaching Chinese as a foreign language mainly focuses on its role and application in cross-cultural communication. Nonverbal communication, including body language, para-language, object language, environmental language, etc., is of great significance in teaching Chinese as a foreign language. [3] It can help teachers convey teaching intentions more accurately, improve classroom efficiency, and optimize teaching effectiveness. Research has shown that there are significant cultural differences in nonverbal communication between China and the UK, mainly attributed to differences in values, high and low context cultures, and ways of thinking. Therefore, in teaching Chinese as a foreign language, teachers need to fully understand and adapt to these cultural differences, and use nonverbal communication methods reasonably to improve the quality of teaching. At the same time, the study also emphasizes the practical application of nonverbal communication behavior in teaching Chinese as a foreign language in classrooms, as well as how to cultivate students' cross-cultural communication skills through nonverbal communication.

## **3. Definition and Its Importance in Teaching Chinese as a Foreign Language**

### **3.1. Definition and Origin of Nonverbal Communication**

Nonverbal communication refers to external activities such as different eye contact, facial expressions, gestures, body movements, spatial distance, and appearance that are influenced by one's own and the communication partner's thoughts, emotions, attitudes, information to be conveyed, environment, and other factors in a certain communication context. Nonverbal communication is the carrier of all other forms of information transmission, as opposed to verbal communication. [4] Nonverbal communication occurs in people's daily lives and is usually expressed or received unconsciously, as people cannot always express their intentions before answering each communication.

The origin of the definition of nonverbal communication can be traced back to ancient philosophical and biological research. Nonverbal communication, as an important means of human expression, can be traced back to Aristotle's analysis of behavioral expression in his *Nicomachean Ethics* (330 BC). Darwin also studied the relationship between the facial expressions of humans and animals and their inner emotions in "The Expressions of Humans and Animals" (1872). These early

studies essentially belonged to the study of the meaning of nonverbal symbols or nonverbal communication.

With the development of disciplines, the definition of nonverbal communication has gradually become clear. It refers to those factors in a certain communication environment that contain information value to the sender or receiver, in addition to language factors. These factors can be artificially generated or created by the environment. The study of nonverbal communication has involved multiple disciplines such as psychology, linguistics, anthropology, psychiatry, sociology, and education. [5]

### **3.2. The Importance of Nonverbal Communication**

Research shows that nonverbal communication is 43 times more effective than verbal communication. Nonverbal communication is an indispensable part of the process of teaching Chinese as a foreign language and a key factor for the smooth progress of the entire teaching activity. In the field of communication studies, scholars have conducted extensive research on linguistic communication, but there is relatively little and incomplete research on nonverbal communication. Some even believe that language is the only means of communication for people. Most teachers often fail to recognize the communicative function of nonverbal behavior reflected in their classroom teaching, and people rarely discuss or talk about nonverbal communication. Therefore, teachers and students cannot realize the importance of nonverbal communication. In many communication situations, nonverbal communication is much more common than verbal communication. Language, as a means of exchanging information, is in a closed state when not in use. People can choose not to engage in verbal communication, but it is difficult to suppress nonverbal communication. [6] The content of language communication can become ambiguous due to different contexts, while nonverbal communication can enrich and accurately reflect the psychological activities of communicators.

With the gradual deepening of economic globalization, cultural factors have risen to a more important position. For international Chinese language education majors, cultural teaching exists not only in language teaching but also in silent language - nonverbal communication. The use of appropriate nonverbal communication by teachers in classroom teaching has a multiplier effect on teaching effectiveness, which is beneficial for improving the overall efficiency of the classroom. Therefore, the use of nonverbal communication in teaching Chinese as a foreign language is increasingly valued by the academic community.

## **4. Problems to Be Solved and Teaching Suggestions**

### **4.1. Problem to Be Solved**

#### **4.1.1. Teachers Lack Awareness of Reflection and Optimization of Teaching Behavior**

Many teachers use nonverbal communication in the classroom, but they only

consider it a habit, a habitual response based on the situation and students' state at that time. [7] Moreover, few teachers will deeply reflect on their nonverbal behavior and correctly attribute it, let alone optimize it. Some teachers even exhibit negative nonverbal reinforcement in classroom teaching, and a small number of teachers also realize whether they have the same nonverbal behavior while observing the teaching process of other teachers.

Teachers can only optimize their teaching by reflecting on their teaching outside of class. In reality, few teachers can reflect on each lesson, and when it comes to optimizing teaching behavior, only a few teachers actively search for relevant books and materials to improve their nonverbal behavior in teaching. It can be seen that teachers' awareness of optimizing nonverbal behavior in the classroom is weak, and there is a lack of optimization methods.

#### **4.1.2. Nonverbal Communication Varies in Different Cultures**

There are also differences in nonverbal behaviors between the East and the West in cross-cultural communication. All ethnic groups use gestures to express certain meanings, but the meaning expressed by the same gesture varies in different cultures. For example, when the thumb and index finger are closed and the other three fingers are extended, this gesture in the British and American cultural circles means "very good, no problem". In China, it used to mean the number "three", but in some Latin American countries, it means "obscene". Due to the particularity of teaching Chinese as a foreign language, teachers have to deal with foreign students from different countries, ethnic groups, and cultural backgrounds. During the teaching process, teachers should pay special attention to their nonverbal behavior. When interacting with people from countries with religious beliefs, one should be more careful. For example, in Muslim countries, there is a strict division of labor between left and right hands in their culture. When dealing with them, one should respect their customs and culture, and when giving things to others, one must use their right hand.

#### **4.1.3. The Differences in the Objects of Nonverbal Communication**

In the specific practice of teaching Chinese as a foreign language, if teachers do not understand the size of the class being taught, the cultural background and age of the students, the level of Chinese proficiency of the students, and the characteristics of the courses being taught, they will not be able to accurately explain the other party's information, leading to misunderstandings and obstacles in communication. Therefore, as a teacher of Chinese as a foreign language, one should not only possess professional academic literacy, but also cross-cultural awareness. [8] We should fundamentally improve our observation and evaluation abilities, as well as the ability to appropriately and effectively implement nonverbal behaviors, enhance cultural literacy, and deepen our understanding of other cultures through various means. Before formal classes, teachers should analyze the differences in teaching objects, flexibly use different teaching forms, and achieve the goal of "knowing oneself and one's enemy, and winning a hundred battles without defeat".

## 4.2. Teaching Suggestions

Teachers should make full use of nonverbal behaviors in teaching to improve teaching quality and students' learning outcomes. These nonverbal behaviors not only reflect teachers' understanding and emotional attitudes towards teaching content, but also directly affect students' learning experience and outcomes. Here are some specific suggestions:

1) Body language and facial expressions: Teachers should convey their understanding, comprehension, and mastery of the teaching content, as well as their personal feelings and attitudes, through rich body language and facial expressions when teaching. This helps students better understand the teaching content, while also stimulating their interest and curiosity in learning.

2) Voice intonation and rhythm: The teacher's intonation is full of emotional color and rhythm, which can attract students' attention and make them listen more attentively. In contrast, speaking quietly without changing one's expression can easily distract students.

3) Eye contact: Eye contact is an important way to establish teacher-student interaction, which can convey messages of care, encouragement, and support, enhance students' learning motivation and confidence.

4) Posture and gestures: Teachers' posture and gestures in the classroom are also important components of nonverbal behavior. The correct posture and appropriate gestures can help students better understand complex concepts, while also demonstrating the teacher's professional competence and serious attitude towards teaching.

5) Clothing style: Teachers' attire is also a part of nonverbal behavior, and appropriate attire can leave a good first impression on students, helping to enhance teachers' authority and the formality of the teaching environment.

6) Facing students of different grades using different nonverbal behaviors: Teachers should use different nonverbal behaviors reasonably for students of different grades. For example, for lower grade students, more vivid and specific nonverbal behaviors can be used to attract their attention; For senior students, they can use more abstract and logical nonverbal behaviors to promote their thinking and understanding.

7) Pay attention to reflection and adjustment of nonverbal behavior in the classroom: Teachers should regularly reflect on the effectiveness of their nonverbal behavior and make adjustments based on student feedback. By observing students' reactions and engagement, teachers can understand which nonverbal behaviors are more popular among students and which may need improvement. [9]

In summary, teachers should make full use of nonverbal behaviors in the teaching process, such as rich body language, appropriate facial expressions, suitable voice tone and rhythm, effective eye contact, appropriate posture and gestures, appropriate clothing, etc., as well as flexibly adjusting the use of nonverbal behaviors according to students' grades, in order to improve teaching quality and students' learning effectiveness.

## 5. Evaluation and Summary

Nonverbal communication is a natural process of human social activity and an inevitable product of social interaction. [10] In cross-cultural communication, understanding the cultural differences between the communicators is a prerequisite for truly clarifying the meaning of nonverbal communication behavior. Traditional language teaching only focuses on learning language knowledge and ignores the cultivation of nonverbal communication skills. However, in teaching Chinese as a second language to foreigners, Chinese should not only impart language knowledge to students, but also pay attention to cultivating their language communication ability and cultural communication ability to enhance their nonverbal communication ability. This article focuses on the close integration of nonverbal communication and teaching Chinese as a foreign language, hoping to draw attention to Chinese language teachers and educators through the expression of the connotation of nonverbal communication and its important role in teaching Chinese as a foreign language. I hope that teachers of Chinese as a foreign language can realize that nonverbal communication plays an important role in our lives and teaching. It affects people's daily interactions and communication effectiveness in various ways. It not only supplements and strengthens language information, making language communication more vivid and persuasive, but also conveys awareness and emotions that are difficult to express in language. Make full use of nonverbal communication methods in teaching, so that nonverbal communication can be used more reasonably in teaching Chinese as a foreign language, and achieve better teaching results.

## Conflicts of Interest

The author declares no conflicts of interest.

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