

Nonverbal Communication in Javanese and Australian Culture

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Abstract

Non-verbal communication (NVC) is very common in social interactions, and the use of NVC is specified by social conventions. There are some universal nonverbal signals used by people across cultures such as laughing and crying, but there also some nonverbal acts which are culturally specific. This paper aims to discuss NVC in Javanese and Australian cultures. The data used in this study were taken from Javanese people living in Central Java and Australian people in Canberra. The respondents were chosen randomly. The results show that Australians and Javanese have similarities and differences in their types of nonverbal communication as handshakes, waving, kissing, hand holding, hugging and hand clapping. The styles of communication of these expressive movements are directly linked to cultural or social values within the two separate cultures

Keywords: *nonverbal communication; Javanese; Australian*

Abstrak

Komunikasi non-verbal (KNV) sangat sering digunakan dalam interaksi sosial, dan penggunaan KNV ditentukan oleh konvensi sosial masyarakat penggunanya. Ada bentuk-bentuk KNV yang bersifat universal dalam komunikasi lintas budaya, seperti tertawa dan menangis, tetapi ada juga tindak KNV yang secara kultural bersifat spesifik. Tulisan ini bertujuan untuk membahas KNV dalam budaya Jawa dan Australia. Data yang digunakan dalam penelitian ini diambil dari orang Jawa yang tinggal di Jawa Tengah dan orang Australia di Canberra. Para responden dipilih secara acak. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa orang Australia dan orang Jawa memiliki persamaan dan perbedaan dalam hal jenis KNV, seperti jabat tangan, melambaikan tangan, berciuman, berpegangan tangan, berpelukan dan tepukan tangan. Gaya komunikasi yang berupa gerakan ekspresif ini secara langsung terkait dengan nilai-nilai budaya atau sosial dalam dua budaya masyarakat yang berbeda.

Kata kunci: *komunikasi non-verbal; Jawa; Australia,*

1. Introduction

Nonverbal communication (NVC) is important in social interaction between humans. It is used to express emotion, to convey feelings, to support verbal communication or speech and also to replace verbal communication (see Argyle in Hinde, 1972:251; Mehrabian, 1972). NVC is considered to be important because it is so frequently used in social interaction between humans as stipulated by Argyle in Hinde (1972:259) who said that most human social interaction involves verbal as well as nonverbal communication. Throughout our daily life, it can be seen that people use gestures, kisses and waves very often in their social interaction.

The use of NVC is specified by social conventions and is organized grammatically in some way like human speech (Leach in Hinde, 1972:319). There are some universal nonverbal signals that

transcend cultural barriers, especially in basic expressive movements such as smiling, laughing, crying, and facial expression of anger (Eibesfeldt in Hinde, 1972:299). However, some cultures use nonverbal signals which are different from other cultures. The eyebrow flash, for example, is considered to be an indecent gesture in Japanese culture, whereas in Samoa this expressive movement is regularly used in greeting one another. It is also used as a general sign of approval or agreement, when seeking confirmation and when beginning a statement in dialogue (Eibesfeldt in Hinde, 1972:299). This shows that the meaning of certain non-verbal signals may vary, depending on the culture of the people (see Beattie, 1983; Knapp, 1980;)

There are some types of NVC such as facial expressions, gestures, body language and posture, proxemics, eye gaze, and appearance. Of these types, handshaking is probably the most common form of NVC, which is often used for greeting. The use of handshaking varies among cultures. Some cultures like Swedish consider handshaking very formal, and it is used only for new introductions (Andersson et.al., 2017). However, in many cultures such as Javanese, handshaking is very frequently used, not only for introductions but also for other purposes. The forms of handshaking also vary depending on the distance and the relation of the participants

This paper aims to analyse the NVC of these actions - handshakes, kisses the wave (to call somebody over), hand holding, hugging and hand claps in Javanese and Australian culture. As well as this, a comparison of the two cultures will be made between the differences in these expressive movements. The comparison will be based on the styles of the communication and the cultural values that motivate them.

2. Research Method

Role plays, interview and participatory observations were used to collect the data. The participants /respondents of this study were four Australians and four Javanese. In pairs, they were asked to do a role play to show how they shake hands and how they wave. After that, I interviewed them by asking the type of situation they would normally use each movement or gesture and the reasons why they use them. The results can be seen as follows.

3. Nonverbal Communication in Javanese and Australian Cultures

3.1. The Handshake

In Australian culture, people usually shake hands firmly. Particularly between men, a firm handshake has connotations of strength and masculinity. Nowadays women who want to show that they have equal status as men also use a firm handshake. A weak handshake generally indicates that a person is very young, not confident, insecure, weak, or possibly homosexual. In Javanese culture, on the other hand, the style of handshake does not reflect one's character and a firm or weak handshake

makes no difference. In fact, a weak handshake is the usual style of handshake in Javanese culture.

Australians shake hands as a general sign of agreement in a business deal, for a departure and for greeting others. In these last two situations, the handshake is given as token of friendship. Handshakes in Australian can be given to anybody and there are no norms regulating how they should shake hand. Javanese, on the other hand, shake hands much more often than Australians for situations such as greetings, departures or leave-taking, for business, as an apology, for requesting a blessing or even for completing a collective Moslem prayer.

Javanese shake hands when greeting guests, friends, and other people in a meeting. The handshake is used to accompany verbal greetings as well as to replace them, particularly in a situation where there are many people in a room. An example is a collective prayer meeting for a relative who has died. In this situation, a person who has just come to the meeting gives a handshake to the people who arrived earlier - usually the person will shake hand with all the people who have come to the meeting before him. This happens when there are less than about twenty five people in a room. The use of the handshake in the greeting situation above is to convey a friendliness or to indicate that the person who gave the handshake likes being friends with you.

Another use for the handshake is for departures. It is used to accompany farewell speeches to friends, or relatives who are going away. By shaking hands, they want to show that they have good feelings towards each other. Hand shaking for departure, however, does not happen in situations between children and parents. In this situation, children usually take their parents' hand and ask for a blessing. To ask for a blessing from their parents is very normal for Javanese. It is common in many situations, for example, when children are going to school, when a person is going away, when a person is getting married and also when children are celebrating *Iedul Fitr* (the day celebrated by Moslems after completing a fasting month). Javanese think that parents are a great determinant in the children's life. A child (no matter what age) will feel that he will achieve success more easily if he or she has been blessed by his parents. When parents do not give blessings, however, because they do not support their children's ideas or because they are angry, Javanese believe it will be hard for the children to get successful. This kind of belief relates with the Javanese belief in religion (commonly Islam) where if the parents think that you are making a mistake then you are committing a sin. If children do not ask for an apology from their parents and the parents do not give a blessing, they can be categorized as cursed children. A cursed person will find it very hard to get blessings from God, and consequently he or she will face many difficulties in his or her life. Because of this reason, Javanese have to keep a good relationship with their parents. The style of handshake for requesting a blessing is different from the usual handshake. That is, a person who asks for blessing usually puts his or his nose close to the parents' hand and kisses it, straight after they have shaken hands.

Asking for an apology is another situation where a handshake is used. This behavior is used to accompany the verbal apology. It usually takes place between friends and between a person and an

older person. Javanese think that saying sorry accompanied by a handshake is a very acceptable way of asking for an apology. This situation usually occurs between people with the same status or age and between a younger person and an older person however not the other way around, where if an older person asks for an apology then this verbal apology is not accompanied by a handshake. Yet another situation where Javanese shake hands is in a collective Moslem prayer at a mosque. In this instance, a handshake is used to replace the verbal blessing *assalamu' alaikum* (I hope you are saved) after they have finished a collective prayer. This handshake is common, especially between those who are sitting near to each other.

3.2. The Wave

There are various kinds of waves: a greeting wave, a farewell wave, a wave to attract attention and a wave to call somebody. The type of wave that I am going to discuss is the wave to call somebody to come over. This type of wave is more specific and more active because it deals with asking someone to do something for the person waving at them.

In Australian culture, the usual style of the wave to call somebody over is by using the palm, of hand upwards. The use of this wave is universal, that is, between friends, between a younger and an older person, without considering the social status of the people involved. In other words, there is no special rule or norm for using this wave as long as the person uses it in a correct way, that is, by accompanying it with polite speech. Australian calling somebody over using a wave is for a pragmatic reason that is when speech acts do not work well because the distance between the person who is waving and the person being waved at is too far for them to use speech acts only, and so the wave is used to help the speech acts.

The wave in Javanese culture may be more typical, both in the style and the use. The style of the wave to call somebody to come over is by making an upside down wave to the Australian wave. The wave with the palm upwards is considered to be impolite or rude because Javanese think that the person who is being waved in such a way may feel that he is being looked down upon by the person waving at him. This is vice versa in Australian culture.

In Javanese culture, the use of the wave to call somebody over is not universal. It is used to call a friend of the same age, or to call the person who is much younger than them. Javanese will not use the wave to call somebody who is much older than them because this is considered to be very impolite. In such a situation, the younger person has to come to the older one instead of calling him over by waving.

There are two reasons for Javanese to use the wave. Firstly, they want to convey superiority, especially when a person waves at a younger person or a person who he thinks has a lower social status. This is also due to the fact that Javanese people consider social status as an important aspect in their life (see Errington, 1988). Secondly, it deals with pragmatic reasons, where by using the

wave, communication can be quicker and more immediate in comparison to verbal communication.

3.3. Kisses

In Australian culture, there are two types of kisses: the peck, that is short and affectionate kiss, and the long passionate kiss. The peck, which is given on the cheek, forehead, the top of head and on the lips, is usually between mother and child, father and daughter, occasionally father and son and between friends (a man and a woman). The long passionate kiss, on the other hand, is only done between a man and a woman. This kiss is only given on the lips.

Affectionate kisses are given in various situations, for example: for greeting a close friend, for a departure (to accompany a farewell speech) and to show affection to somebody. A long passionate kiss, on the other hand, is usually given only to show close affection or love.

In Javanese society, the only type of kiss that can be given in public is a kiss on the forehead. This is usually given by parents to their child as an expression of affection or giving a blessing. It usually happens when the younger person or the child has finished requesting a blessing from his or her parents, before he or she leaves to go somewhere else. A kiss between a man and a woman, however, is considered to be a taboo and is culturally prohibited because Javanese society is mostly composed of Moslems. According to Islam, kissing in public is a sin and thus, it is very impolite.

3.4. Hugging

In Australian culture, hugging usually occurs between a mother and her child, between a man and a woman, between women and occasionally between a father and his son. Here are some situations where Australians hug each other: when they are very sad and need comfort, when they feel happy for each other and when they love or care about each other. Hugging can be an expression of happiness, sympathy as well as being an expression of care for someone else.

Hugging also takes place in Javanese culture, especially between women, occasionally between men and occasionally between a man and a woman. Common situations where Javanese usually hug are when they feel extremely sad (i.e. the death of a close friend or relative) or when they miss each other because of separation for a long period of time. Like Australians, hugging in Javanese culture is used to express sympathy someone else (when she or he is happy or sad). It is, however, generally more common in Australia.

3.5. Hand clapping

In Australian culture, hand clapping is used as an expression of praise at sporting events, concert performances or speeches. In most situations, people will put their hands together to applaud a performance, regardless of whether it was good or bad. Therefore, hand clapping is either a sign of appreciation or politeness. The louder the hand clapping, however, the greater the appreciation.

In Javanese culture, on the other hand, people clap hands more often than Australians, that is, when they want to attract attention, when they are calling somebody over, which is usually accompanied with a wave, and in events or performances to give praise and a social politeness as in Australian culture.

Hand clapping to attract and call somebody is usually done between friends, between an older person to a younger person or a person of a higher social status to a person of a lower social status. The main purpose of hand clapping is to make immediate communication and to grab attention. If, on the other hand, a person with low social status tries to attract attention of someone with a higher status, .via hand clapping, it is considered rude.

4. Conclusions

Nonverbal communication is used to accompany speech, to replace speech and also to express feelings such as happiness, love, affection friendliness and even to convey social status. The use of nonverbal communication relates to the cultural values of the people involved in the social interaction. In other words, nonverbal communication can reflect the cultural or social values of different people.

Australians and Javanese have similarities in their types of nonverbal communication. Handshakes, waving, kissing, hand holding, hugging and hand clapping are all of these examples. The styles of communication of these expressive movements are directly linked to cultural or social values within the two separate cultures. These differences have been explained and show that the Australian and Javanese cultures differ greatly from each other.

The differences between Australian and Javanese culture can be explained as follows:

- (1) Australian people like their privacy. They do not like other people to interfere with or inquire into their business, and this is shown in their daily behaviour. This aspect of Australian culture is very different from Javanese culture where there are a lot of cultural and social norms regulating their behaviour. Australians prefer to be more independent from each other whereas Javanese tend to be interdependent on each other.
- (2) Compared to Javanese, Australians are more open; they show close affection to each other in public, whereas Javanese tend to be affectionate only in private.
- (3) Unlike Australians, Javanese show respect toward their elders or a person of a higher status using the appropriate behaviour. These characteristics are culturally rooted, and greatly influence their way of life.

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