

A Study of Nonverbal Communication in China-U.S. Business Negotiations

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Abstract

In the context of the rapid development of the global economy, business trades between countries are experiencing a sustained growth. So, international business trades between China and the United States increase continuously, for the reason that China is the biggest developing country in the world and the United States has the world's most advanced economy. Business negotiations are necessary in global trade, in which the benefit between two sides can reach to the climax. In the process of business negotiation, nonverbal communication stays an important situation because of rich content and incomparable advantages, which is a significant part. This thesis tries to analyze the different cultural backgrounds between China and the United States. Then, focusing on the different aspects of the nonverbal communication such as expression, body languages and paralanguages. In that way, this thesis can help to understand the crucial position of nonverbal communication in international business negotiations and master the main methods of nonverbal communication between China and the United States.

Keywords: business negotiation, nonverbal communication, China and the United States, culture difference

1. Introduction

1.1 International Business Negotiation

1.1.1 Definition

In the international economic integration, international business negotiation has a crucial position. In the process of the international business negotiation, both sides of the trade coordinate their own economic interest and political interest, accordingly, reaching an agreement of their two sides' common interest. The objective of negotiation is to coordinate the advantages and disadvantages, then serving the common benefits. In the external trade, it is undeniable that international business negotiations are widespread. It is a necessary way to solve the conflicts between the different countries. To sum up, the international business negotiation is an important component of the international commercial activity and the main content of the international theory.

1.1.2 The Particularity of the International Business Negotiation

As a result of unpredictable global market change and fierce business competition, we should pay more attention to the research of the economy and market abroad. Different countries should have a different strategy. In addition, international business negotiation should be based on international law and business trade must conform to international practices. Next, policy is significant. In the case of international business negotiations, we should keep an eye on foreign policy, nation-state policies, and other relevant policies. Finally, because negotiators hail from different countries, which have different cultural backgrounds, economic structures, values, thinking modes, and customs. This results in a significant increase in the difficulty of international business negotiations. The path to success is easy if you use it well, on the other hand, you will fail.

1.2 Nonverbal Communication

1.2.1 Definition

Nonverbal communication indicates that when communicating without words, communicators use their bodies, expressions, eye contact, and so on to convey their thoughts and ideas. Communication by aural means plays a crucial role in our lives as well as in international business negotiations. Lots of experts suppose that there are only 35% of the information in social contact is language, others are nonverbal communication. Actually, nonverbal communication is a significant part of the international business communication, often more important than verbal communication sometimes.

1.2.2 Functions

Nonverbal communication has an irreplaceable function during the communication. It works with language to achieve a common goal. In comparison with verbal communication, nonverbal communication conveys information more accurately and expresses emotion more directly. Since communicators always try their best to understand the real intention by observing the nonverbal information. Secondly, nonverbal communication has a function—the function of emphasizing or clarifying the verbal language which has been said. Thirdly, complementing. It allows people to add context to their information. For example, people just can tell you are sad from your upset eyes. Last but not least, nonverbal communication is a good method for judging if your opponent is lying. When they say that they are satisfied with your project, but you can see their eyebrows knit in a frown and do not have any eye contact with you. Do you think they are really satisfied with you?

1.3 The Importance of Nonverbal Communication

In international business negotiations, understanding the culture and customs between two opposing sides is crucial. As a negotiator, the deeper you know on different culture, the better you get in the end of the negotiation. We can learn nonverbal communication in order to understand the inner world of the negotiator, which is a direct element of successful negotiation.

In fact, different countries have their unique culture, and each culture definitely has some advantages and disadvantages. We do not need to judge which is better. We just need to learn the advantages of other cultures to move toward international. A great number of people from different countries often misunderstand each other. Only when we understand the different culture can we master the intercultural communication competence. Nonverbal communication is an important section in international business negotiation as it is a crucial form of manifestation. For the sake of reaching win-win cooperation, we would better know the cultural difference and the method of nonverbal communication. Positive nonverbal communication can promote the negotiation proceeding smoothly.

1.4 The Structure of the Paper

This thesis consists of five chapters.

Chapter one is an introduction to international business negotiation and nonverbal communication, which tells the importance of nonverbal communication. The first chapter shows the definition of these two concepts. Specifically, the first chapter introduces the particularity of international business negotiation and the function of nonverbal communication.

Chapter two is a literature review, which composed of two parts. The first part is a review of nonverbal communication in international business negotiations abroad. The second part is a review of nonverbal communication in international business negotiations in China. These two parts review the history theory and research results of this subject.

Chapter three is the difference in cultural factors, which is composed of three parts. Part one explains the definition of culture. Part two and part three introduce the cultural background of China and the United States specifically. Culture is a main influencing factor of the nonverbal communication between China and the United States. So, analyzing the culture difference is a necessary step. Different culture backgrounds have totally different effects on one country. The main aspects are composed of manners and customs, religion, mode of thinking, sense of time and self-awareness.

Various aspects of nonverbal communication in international business negotiations are covered in chapter four of the paper. Standstill and keep silent are examples of silent language symbols. Listening encompasses positive and negative listening. Among the body languages are head, eye, gesture, eye brow, and facial expressions. Paralanguages composed of stress, laughter and intonation. And finally, the space-time language.

Chapter five is the conclusion of this thesis, which summarizes the key point.

2. Literature Review

2.1 A Review of International Business Negotiation and Nonverbal Communication Abroad

In Western countries, different scholars have different viewpoints about one subject. Faith claims that negotiation

at the workplace is not coextensive with speech or discourse but is a subset of it. Mintzberg asserted that negotiation was an imperative first step for a manager to manage a company. According to Neilenberg, a famous scholar, negotiation is a process in which two sides of a dispute change their positions to reach agreement. Rojer Fisher and William Ury are two prominent professors in America and they argue that negotiation is an activity in which people can associate with each other. In 1995, Ehlich and Wagner summarized four dimensions in the research of business negotiations, which are the practical, ethnographic, psychological, and nature.

The history of nonverbal communication could be considered longer than that of natural languages. After World War II, westerners began to study nonverbal communication scientifically. In the nineteenth century, Darwin wrote *The Expression of the Emotion in Man and Animals* which is considered to be a general description of how humans show emotions by facial expression and body language. During the twentieth century, there were two famous works: *The Variation of Human Physique* by Kretschmer and Efron's *Gesture and Environment*, which are useful for culture to shape the body movements. The 1960s marked an influential period in nonverbal communication. During this time, Ekman's and Friesen's essays on the causes of body language behaviors were published. The most crucial patterns are application and coding. Ray Birdwhistell published the book *kinesics* in 1970, which outlined how people communicate through body movement and gesture. There are two other famous works: *Body Language and Social Order* by Schefflen in 1972 and *Bodily Communication* by Hess in 1975. In the 1980s, nonverbal communication developed further. These works are more complicated at this time. Several experts pay more attention to the influence of the coordination of nonverbal communication and verbal communication. Brosnaha's *Chinese and English Gesture*, made a comparison of nonverbal communication in China and English-spoken counties. Since then, culture has become an important part of this study, and nonverbal communication has been studied in all parts of the world.

2.2 A Review of International Business Negotiation and Nonverbal Communication in China

The majority of scholars in China believed that negotiation is a process of consultation between people who have interests to protect. Win-win results are the goal of international business negotiations.

The study of nonverbal communication in China began in the 1980s. The first book written for nonverbal communication was Geng Er'ling's *An Introduction to Body Language* in 1988. Using body communication, the author explains how to analyze internal feelings. In 2002, the influential book written by Lie Jiequn named *An Introduction to Nonverbal Communication* was published by Peking University Press. This book introduces lots of symbols of nonverbal communication such as gestures, posture, touching, facial expression and spatial distance.

3. Difference in Cultural Factors

3.1 Definition of Culture

We find it difficult to define culture properly since it is a broader concept. Numerous scholars, philosophers, and sociologists have tried to define culture, but have been dissatisfied with people. Generally speaking, culture is a special value system in one country. People's behavior at work or in daily life is influenced by this idea in a profound way.

As we all know, cultural difference is a crucial factor that leads to the different pattern of nonverbal communication between China and the United States. It is thus necessary to analyze the factors from different angles in order to conduct a study.

3.2 Culture Factors of China

Manners and customs: China is a country that has a long history of development. The manners and customs in China have a rich historical and cultural heritage and it develops in the special nature environment, economic program and social structure. The manners and customs in China have a great number of characteristics. Firstly, it is hereditary. Chinese customs mainly remain the same because of generation. Secondly, national features are one of the special features, which is different from other countries. China has 56 ethnics groups and everyone has their own culture and customs. For example, the Dai nationality living in Yunnan prefers to weave peacock and elephant on their cloths as they adore them. Thirdly, it has a long historical standing. Finally, it is extensive and profound.

Religion: As we all known, China is a multi-religious country. Before the foundation of new China, our country shaped the pattern with these five religions as the main part: Buddhism, Taoism, Islamism, Catholicism and Confucianism. There are other minority religions and various folk religions.

Mode of thinking: the Chinese thinking way has close connection with the 5000-year-long Chinese culture. There are three elements that affect the mode of thinking: Chinese hope to reach harmony; Chinese prefer to think about the whole situation; Chinese would like to use a middle ground to solve a problem. From the results of psychological research, Chinese people prefer to think in the associated and integral mode. At the same time, we lack the ability to distinguish the question from the whole view.

Sense of time: The people in China have a multidirectional sense of time. Lots of Chinese suppose that time is not

scarce. For this reason, Chinese people would like to work unhurriedly when they make a business decision and learn from the previous richly. Chinese people always live in a slow, peaceful life. However, this phenomenon has changed these days. A great number of people like to make time schedules and set a high value on their time.

Self-awareness: Chinese self-awareness often exists in the relationship with other people, society and nature. Chinese people believe in the theory that man is a principal part of nature. So, the self-awareness in China is weak.

3.3 Cultural Background of the United States

America is a nation of immigrants and its ancestors come from all over the world. For that reason, there are some diversities in this country. Even after a long time, America always has a tolerant attitude towards different customs and manners. Open-mindedness to different cultures is possible. Therefore, customs in America are broader than in other countries. Americans successfully maintain a balance between casualness and restraint. In their daily lives, they can criticize congress and the president, but at the same time they have an awe-struck attitude towards the Supreme Judicial Court.

Religion is an indispensable part of American culture and the number of people who practice it is constantly growing. The majority of people believe in Christianity. They want to be free and their hearts are full of hope. They aspire to love, freedom, justice and happiness. Based on a survey, nearly 90% of Americans believe in Christianity, with the remaining 10% believing in different religions.

Mode of thinking: American thinking differs greatly from Chinese thinking. Firstly, they are independent and love to be different. Specifically, they always agree to disagree opinions, because they suppose it is a normal phenomenon that everything has different opinions. Finally, everything is on the square.

Sense of time: Time thrift is a popular sense in the western world. American believe that saving time is a way to extend their life. American is a most strict group when it comes to schedules. A deadline always motivates them to work quickly. Thus, the word "deadline" appeared in America. In the business negotiation, the people in the United States are always against the clock. If the other side is unpunctual, Americans will be upset and lose heart.

Individualism: The culture of America places a high value on individualism and self-awareness. They would like to seek self-expression and self-actualization. American people always think highly of self-worth. So, the United States is a country with more self-awareness.

3.4 High-Context and Low-Context Culture

In international business communication, "cultural context" refers to the distance between speakers and their cultural backgrounds. In 1976, high-context culture and low-context culture are two terms presented by the anthropologist Edward T. Hall in his book *Beyond Culture*. Hall explains it as follows:

In a high-context culture, many things are left unsaid, letting the culture explain. Words and word choice become very important in a higher context communication, since a few words can communicate a complex message very effectively to an in-group (but less effectively outside that group), while in a lower context culture, the communicator needs to be more explicit and the value of a single word is less important.

China is a typical high-context country, whereas America is a low-context country. For the reason that, China is an agricultural country, Chinese people love their native land deeply and are unwilling to leave it. Chinese have a long-term coexistence. The United States is the opposite, it is an industrialized country, and migration is high. Americans have difficulty cultivating a common life background, so they always express themselves using language. In that way, America has a low-context culture. The following table aims to compare the high-context culture with low-context culture:

Table 1. High-context and low-context culture

High-context	Low-context
Preference to nonverbal communication	Preference to verbal communication
Preference to indirect words	Preference to direct words
Preference to collectivism	Preference to individualism
Preference to context and feelings	Preference to logic
Preference to subtle, roundabout style	Preference to frank, straightforward language

Do not require nor expect much in-depth background information.	Detailed background information is needed
People are very homogeneous with regard to experience, information networks, and the like	People are less homogeneous and therefore tends to compartmentalize interpersonal contacts

From this table, we can observe some differences between high-context and low-context culture. It is not difficult to understand that a high-context country and a low-context country have something to misunderstand in international business negotiations.

4. Different Aspects of Nonverbal Communication in International Business Negotiation Between China and the United States

4.1 Silent Language Symbols

4.1.1 Standstill

The main form of the silent language symbols is standstill. A negotiator uses this method to judge the information in a sentence gap. The standstill is a high-level nonverbal communication method used in international business negotiations, capable of transmitting enriching information. However, the exact meaning must combine with the actual business negotiation environment to understand. For example, when a negotiator finds that the people on the opposite side are tired, he can catch his attention by rhythmed standstill. When in bilateral communication, negotiators should be aware of the function of the standstill. In addition, standstill should take into account scale. If not, the opposite side will feel uncomfortable. Nevertheless, standstill has different meanings in China and America when it comes to international business negotiations. Standstill is identified as a deep deliberation in China. But majority of America feel uncomfortable during the standstill. Chinese will feel unhappy if Americans speak endlessly in an effort to avoid embarrassing situations. It is very easy for Chinese to say something useless, which can be considered overbearing for Americans. So, in that situation, the case may be failing. All in all, mastering the foreign cultural background is necessary in negotiation. An appropriate standstill is beneficial for negotiation. A prolonged standstill can make the atmosphere embarrassing.

4.1.2 Silence

Keeping silent is a nonverbal symbol which exists in all business communication. Keeping silent is a form of art. It has both positive and negative effects. When we listen to silence, we hear a lot of evocative information and special emotions. However, in different culture, silence has a totally different meaning. For instance, when you are in a western country, keeping silent is considered a negative behavior, similar to in the U.S. However, it is unwise to keep silent in eastern countries such as China and Korea. This is a typical case that an American company and a China company had a negotiation about a product quotation. The American company quoted price first, and then the Chinese negotiator kept silent for a minute as is customary. But during this one minute, the American company felt nervous and uneasy. They guessed that if the price is so high, it cannot be accepted. So, the communicator in America came up with decreasing the price actively. China company was happy but wondering. As can be seen, silence always has an unexpected influence in international business negotiations.

4.2 Body Language

4.2.1 Definition

Body language is information expressed by the negotiator's body, such as facial expression, posture, eye contact and action. In terms of a negotiator, he should control and adjust body language to coordinate verbal communication by himself on the one hand. On the other hand, he needs to know the real attitude and intention of the other side by observing their body language. Body language has extensive expressive ability, so it has high operating frequency.

In international business negotiations, negotiators always communicate with the opposite side by observing their body action, facial expression and posture. This is intended to transmit information, express opinions, and exchange ideas.

4.2.2 Head Language

Head language is a method to transmit information by head action. In international business negotiations, nodding and shaking of the head are the most important head gestures. A nod of the head means affirming something. When negotiators feel happy and agree with you, they often nod head. On the contrary, shake head means anger and disagreement with you. China and America have much in common in head language. Rise head means to call somebody and come here. Moving the forehead and the lower jaw mean giving direction. Left and right head movements indicate pause and ponder, sometimes indicating satisfaction. Oblique head always means

concentrating on one question.

4.2.3 Eyebrow Language

An effective information source, the eyebrow has a high potential for nonverbal communication. Generally speaking, eyebrows always coordinate with eyes to express information, but eyebrows can reflect lots of emotions. Actually, in eyebrow language, Chinese and American are almost the same. For example, eyebrow raised means amused; the tip of brow group down indicates angry; eyebrow raise slightly means interesting; knitting our brows indicates we are in doubt and unhappy; relaxing the eyebrow means pleasurable; drooping the eyebrows means upset and loss. So, in international business negotiation, the negotiator should learn to understand the eyebrow language. "Beam" shows that the negotiation develops successfully. When you see a person put on a fierce look, the negotiator should change the spoken way timely to make the opposite side negotiator calm down, so as to achieve the best negotiation purpose.

4.2.4 Eyes Language

It is said that eyes reflect the inner life of a person, which is why they are called "the window to the soul". In our daily life, we always use our eyes to express emotion. However, in business negotiations, the negotiator can use eyes to emphasize the opinion and idea which cannot be expressed verbally.

During a business negotiation, the listener watching the opposite negotiator can indicate that you listen carefully, and the speaker has eye contact with the listener, which in the end means that "I have finished speaking, and it is your time to say something". In communication, staring at the opposite side continuously is an impolite behavior. However, if the opposite side is your old friend, staring at him is appropriate. The two opposite negotiators should have eye contact properly. Looking at each other friendly can express your good faith.

In addition, we should know that different countries have different understandings of eye language. In the western country like America, eye contact in the conversation is really important. They have an opinion that having eye contact with the opposite side means explicit, self-confident and genuine. If the eye always pays attention to other things, it indicates diffidence and does not have interest in it. On the contrary, Chinese get used to having short eye contact as far as possible during the communication, because Chinese think it means respecting others. Chinese consider that staring at others is aggressive. So, Chinese do not maintain eye contact as much as Americans. In addition, most negotiators in America, especially women, are habituated to looking sideways; some Chinese may think they are unsatisfied with the negotiation; Chinese are accustomed to drooping their eyes to show respect, but Americans do not understand this, they think Chinese are timid.

Eye contact is crucial in America, so when we have business negotiations with America, we should have eye contact with them. Do not blink continuously. Negotiations on the opposite side must not be skewed. Do not look around when you speak. Our vision should change along with the content. So, the negotiation will be successful.

4.2.5 Gesture Language

Gesture has the ability to help us to judge others' mind movements and mental condition, it can transmit information to opposite sides at the same time. People have different meanings for different gestures: making a fist indicates nervousness or a challenge to battle; using a finger to strike the table indicates disagreement or impatience; westerners always put their hand in front of their chest, which signifies confidence.

Sometimes a slight difference in the gesture can lead to a wide divergence in the meaning. Moreover, having a wrong understanding of one gesture can result in unexpected ending. For example, Americans used to extend index finger and bent the index finger to express "please come over". However, this gesture in China has bad meaning, Chinese think this gesture is to call a dog or any other animals. Making a circle with index finger and thumb means "ok" in America, which indicates go well. But this gesture means "zero" to Chinese.

So, in international business negotiations, the negotiator should have a strong understanding of the gesture in different cultures.

4.2.6 Facial Expression

There is a saying that facial expression is a mirror of the heart. Lots of emotion can easily stay in the featuring a business negotiation, the negotiator can try to observe the facial expression of the other party to understand their true emotions. At the same time, appropriate facial expression has the ability to promote verbal communication.

As a result of the different cultural backgrounds, Chinese and Americans express emotions differently. American people would like to show their inner world in their facial expressions, which include angry and some unhappy emotions. On the contrary, the Chinese prefer to hide their emotions, especially negative emotions. They think it is a method to show their politeness and wisdom. So, in transcultural business negotiation, negotiators would better understand customs to avoid embarrassing misunderstandings.

Smile has a deep meaning in China. Chinese not only can use smiles to express their happiness, but also to conceal

anger, awkwardness, and discomfort. Smiles are also an excellent method to change topics in business negotiations. However, for Americans, the main function of smiles is to express happy emotions, and they hardly ever smile to show other emotions. In international business negotiations, the Chinese smile is an excellent method to defuse quarrels.

4.2.7 Other Body Languages

This part will introduce some of the different body languages which have a common meaning and the same body language with different meanings between China and America.

Table 2. Different body language with the same meaning

Meaning	Body language in China	Body language in America
Angry or lose hope	Hands rested on hips or put arm behind back	Same as American
Shame	Keep arms straight and overlap, put face to other side at the same	Hands cover the face and lower head
Myself	Index finger point to chest	Index finger point to nose
Prohibited noise	Put index finger close to the lip	Put index finger in front of the lip

Table 3. Different meaning with the same body language

Body language	Meaning in China	Meaning in America
Crossing arms	Refuse to communicate or arrogant	Relaxed and free
Pat on head	Pat head of children to show affection	Give comfort or encourage
stare	Surprise or courous	impolite

4.3 Paralanguages

Paralanguage is a language that has a voice but does not have a fixed meaning. The main patterns of paralanguages are stress, intonation, and laughter. It is imperative to note that negotiators use different intonations and can convey different meanings. Intonation always divides rising and falling tones. Generally speaking, a rising tone shows surprise and discontent; a falling tone shows regret and discouragement; fluctuated intonation indicates that the negotiator is thinking something; stable intonation indicates confidence. The negotiator wants to emphasize certain words and sentences during business negotiations. We can know the key point by means of stress. When negotiating, we must also be able to guess the real intention by the manner in which we laugh.

4.4 Space-Time Languages

4.4.1 Time Language

American people who prefer monochrome time have monochrome lives. They prefer to make schedules and detailed arrangements. Thus, Americans are always punctual and plan their time well. By contrast, the Chinese have polychromic time. Chinese are conditioned to deal with many different things at the same time and pay attention to accomplishment, not the schedule. For that reason, the Chinese would like to make an outline, which may be changed casually. So American businessmen may believe that the Chinese do not value time and appointment, but Chinese negotiants may believe they are flexible arrangements. In a nutshell, monochromic time in America is a benefit for business negotiations, as it helps both sides of the negotiation to be punctual and things to move smoothly.

4.4.2 Space Languages

Everyone has their own field. A field is a space in which we feel comfortable and private. Keeping distance is an international question. There are still different opinions on the proper distance between people conversing. Social interaction table is as follows:

Table 4. Social interaction distance

Classes	Distance/ mile	Scope of application
Intimate distance	0~0.5	Family member or lover
Personal distance	0.5~1.5	Personal conferences with friends
Social distance	1.5~3	Acquaintance, colleague and stranger
Public distance	>3	Make a speech

In Chinese, adults love to stroke and kiss children, which is a fond behavior. But women in America always complain that the Chinese fondle their children. They think this behavior is impolite. American women cannot understand this behavior. They feel inexplicable and crazy.

So, in business negotiations, the negotiator should pay attention to the distance, which has an important influence on international business negotiations.

5. Conclusion

This paper mainly introduces the nonverbal communication between China and America. As we all know, nonverbal communication is a crucial pattern in intercultural business negotiations, since it can convey a great deal of complex and abundant information. In order to achieve the intended result, the communicator must understand the culture and the differences in nonverbal behavior. Improving the negotiator's sensitivity is an important way to foster nonverbal communication ability. In this way, the negotiator can change different negotiation styles in intercultural business communication.

From this paper, we can conclude that there are quite a few differences in nonverbal communication between China and America. Due to the era of economic globalization, today's negotiators must be more aware of cultural differences. That is to say, every negotiator should take into account the manners, religion, thinking mode, and self-awareness of the opposite side. Every negotiator would better have the ability to adjust the communication project on the basis of nonverbal symbols.

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