

International Conversation Cafe

Lifestyle Topic: Body Language

In 1971, researcher Albert Mehrabian, published his findings about body language and communication which is still quoted today. (Mehrabian & Wiener, 1967 and Mehrabian & Ferris, 1967) Mehrabian said that 55% of communication is body language, 38% is the tone of voice, and 7% is the actual words spoken.

Think of it like this:

Words (the literal meaning) account for 7% of the overall message.

Tone of voice accounts for 38% of the overall message.

Body Language accounts for 55% of the overall message.

Therefore, in face-to-face communication, the nonverbal communication becomes the most powerful mode of communication when conveying feelings or attitudes – e.g. “I like this”, “I don’t like this”. It is much more likely, therefore, to be the primary indicator (of how the person feels).

<http://www.bodylanguageexpert.co.uk/communication-what-percentage-body-language.html>

For example, if you were out on a date and one asked the other if they were having a good time. Not wanting to be rude, the answer would be, “Yes, I am enjoying myself.”

But if that person was not really enjoying the time together, how might the other person know based on their tone of voice or attitude of their body?

In the following categories, discuss what feels normal and natural in your culture.

Distance between people in conversation.

Some cultures stand closely together, others keep a distance. Some touch and others do not. *Explain what is acceptable or common in a conversation with friends.*

Eye contact

When in conversation, is one expected to maintain eye contact or is it considered rude? Give some examples.

Volume of voice

How loudly or softly a person speaks varies depending on where you are from.

How loudly or softly do people speak when in conversation? What is considered rude or impolite?

Besides the subtle cues of body language, there are obvious meanings to hand gestures that are different in one country to another. Explain what these gestures mean in your culture.

1. Thumbs up
2. Thumbs down.
3. Crossing fingers
4. Raising the hand up with the palm facing the other person.
5. Pointing and shaking the first finger at someone.
6. With hand out, curling the first finger toward yourself to call someone toward you.
7. Snapping fingers, the middle finger against the thumb.
8. The "OK" sign: the forefinger touches the thumb and the other three fingers are spread out.
9. Looking at one's wrist to check the time.
10. A clenched fist.
11. Extending the forefinger and pinkie finger up while curling the middle two fingers inward.



What advice would you give to someone traveling to your country when it comes to good manners: in a restaurant, in the subway, or at a tourist attraction? What gestures or habits should be avoided?