

Critical Reflection on a Specific Teaching Context–Explicit Instruction of Non-Verbal Communication

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Abstract:

Non-verbal communication has played a vital role in English learning and teaching. The essay includes both-sides debates, complicated issues in different cultures and countries and constructive recommendations related to the specific learning and teaching contexts. Although non-verbal communication has some problems to apply, there are still more constructive recommendations to benefit language learning greatly in the future.

Keywords:

Non-verbal communication; Both-sides debates; Teaching issues; Multi-cultural background

1. Introduction

Once upon a time, in the world there is no language communication, human beings can understand each other through the non-verbal communication methods. As different cultures develop, different non-verbal language has different understandings and meanings. Nowadays, more and more people from different countries and different cultures plan to study abroad or work abroad. To go abroad, they need to learn English as a foreign language or an additional language. And in English learning context, non-verbal language account for a vital part to some extent. Non-verbal communication have a great effect on learning and teaching.[1] The essay consists of both-sides debates, complicated issues in different cultures and countries and constructive recommendations related to the teaching and learning contexts. Thus, the essay will argue that even though non-verbal communication has some problems to apply, there are still more constructive recommendations to benefit the students' learning and the teachers' teaching greatly in the future.

2. Debates

Non-verbal communication can always promote interaction and understanding in certain context even though in different cultures. Bambaerero and Shokrpour (2017) suggest that non-verbal communication is equal to sign language, or the language of silence. According to Dinica (2014), Through non-verbal language, people can perceive over 55% effective information. Meanwhile, Varner and Beamer (2005) demonstrate that almost 93% of spoken information is obtained by non-verbal communication. In daily life, everyone will use non-verbal language. According to Islam(2016), in the nursing contexts, the patient may not speak English, and non-verbal communication is the only method to interact. For example, the patient want to a wheelchair to sit in, he can make a wheel gesture and sitting action, then the nurse understand what he wants. In the nursing or hospital contexts, the cultural difference is becoming little and non-verbal communication is like universal. Especially in a surgery, non-verbal communication plays an extremely important role (Moore et al. 2010). According to Frankel et al. (2016), there are usually highly professional problems which are necessary to interact effectively with patients.[2] Face to face communication such as mutual eye contact, body language, voice tone, has a more effective interaction (Frankel et al. 2016). For instance, a patient can obtain the negative feelings and information by the doctor's eyes and voice, in the same time, the doctor gets the attitudes and emotions by the facial expression or gestures like smiling, frowning. Even in different cultural background, the foreign patient can make an effective communication like the domestic patient. In regards of learning English context, non-verbal

communication is also play a significant role. For example, if the student cannot speak English, the communication with teachers will depend on the non-verbal language, without verbal language, the communication still can exist and continue. There is an extreme close relationship between teachers' non-verbal language and students learning results (Bambaeeroo & Shokrpour 2017) Thus, non-verbal communication can always promote interaction in certain context even though different cultures.

However, in most contexts, non-verbal communication like gestures need to depend on the cultural context and then will be helpful for English learning. According to Constantin B. and Constantin (2014), the appropriate context should connect to the non-verbal communication and it will make a successful interpretation.[3] For instance, non-verbal communication includes eye contact, gestures, facial expressions and so on. In different cultures, different gesture has different meaning. A lower head gesture usually means an acceptance of the hierarchy in Japanese culture, but in Western cultures, that often means uncertain feelings and aggressive attitudes (Varner & Beamer 2005). According to Varner and Beamer (2005), non-verbal communication is influenced by cultural background. Here is another example supporting the opinion. In Western cultures, eye contact means honesty, sincere. But in many Asian cultures, eye contact means rude. Therefore, non-verbal communication has distinct meanings in different cultural background.

Without non-verbal communication, some learning courses will not take place. Dinica (2014) believes that non-verbal communication's role is underestimated. Non-verbal language are key component for some course such as music, dance and drama(Zalar, Kordes & Kafol 2015). Body language, gestures are very essential for these subjects. Learners practice some professional gestures in each class. According to Constantin B. and Constantin (2014), verbal communication is based on non-verbal communication. If there is no non-verbal communication, learners cannot obtain language knowledge and skills. For instance, in music class, musical language and practice is a part of non-verbal communication, like playing fingering. Music learning practice means to use body, fingers to play instruments sometimes. Teachers' non-verbal ability can determine and influence the level of students' music expressivity (Rahim 2014). Dancing learning use non-verbal communication to make each gesture and complete the whole performance.

Non-verbal communication is a part of learning process, but in the same time, verbal communication is also important. Without verbal communication, the non-verbal communication cannot be meaningful. Dinica (2014) demonstrates that non-verbal communication is only a component of language communication. Society gives the non-verbal communication like 'Thumb up' the language meanings and functions, to some extent, non-verbal is a kind of special language. Gestures like facial expression could express many different meanings and can promote language communications. For example, when a teacher says to the students 'You need to study harder', if the teacher is smiling, he maybe means the student is studying hard now, he is praising the students; if the teacher is frowning, he maybe means that the students play too much game, he is criticizing the students. That's the different meanings in the same language contexts. In the classroom, teachers can encourage and motivate students to take active part in the learning interaction by eye contact. The facial expressions, eye contact, gestures and so forth are dispensable part for the verbal communication.

3. Issues

In teaching process, non-verbal communication make a great effect on the process. In the video clip 4, it is about a no-language teaching and learning activity to tune the students in to mathematics. The teachers want to remove any confusion for EAL/D students, generated by language. Because of different cultural background, the students may not speak and understand what the teacher and classmates talked about. So the teacher just let the students use fingers to draw numbers and pictures to learn the math knowledge. Gestures, eye contact and facial expressions are also helpful for the math learning process. This no language activity focuses on language difference and makes all students silence to learn and share their opinions. It is a very good method to share and communicate knowledge for EAL/D. The teacher tries her best to minimize the cultural and linguistic confusion and problems.

In my teaching experience, non-verbal communication is often used to assist the learning process. Butt and Shafiq (2013) believe that non-verbal communication is a vital teaching method and strategy and can make a great impact on the new knowledge understanding and absorbing.[4] For example, one student from Japan cannot speak English fluently , when he

pronounced one word incorrectly, he would show a nervous expression and made an eye contact to me nervously. This non-verbal communication was obvious, and showed his unconfident about his pronunciation. Therefore, when he answered my questions, I would give him a smiling facial expression and encouraging eye contact. Gradually he relaxed and made a progress of pronunciation. Appearance can also send the different meanings. Students who once lives in America often dress casually and often wear slippers in the classroom. In Chinese high school, it is a limitation to wear slippers for students, this appearance usually shows disrespect. Therefore, I talked to the students in private, expressed my understanding and respect to his culture. I told him what the requirement of school is and asked him to change his slippers. It's a happy communication for us, he changed his appearance and adapted to the Chinese school culture.

As an English teacher, dressing up properly is necessary requirement from school and parents. Appearance can also be a way of interaction (Varner & Beamer 2005). The headmaster of school asked all teachers to wear properly, without heavy makeup, slippers, short skirts and so on. Some parents require teachers not to praying perfume. These requirements about teachers appearance demonstrate the importance of non-verbal language. When a teacher spray perfume or have a heavy makeup, most people think they will distract the students attention. Students who have an appropriate dressing usually take active part in the communication with teachers. But what is the appropriate dressing? It depends on different cultures and different countries. In China, the mainstream requirement for students' appearance is clean and simple. Even makeup is the sign of distraction from learning. It is a strict cultural background for teachers and students.

The factor which influence non-verbal communication is gender. In the classroom, most girls tend to be shy and be silence, boys are willing to express themselves and communicate with teachers. Due to traditional Chinese culture, also in most Asian countries, female students is usually required to behave quietly. If a girl has too much body-language, body movement, she may be criticized to the parents. The parents might say 'Be like a girl'. But what is like a girl? In the English classroom, teachers should encourage female students to talk more and behave actively. In the group learning activities, mix girls and boys into the same group, let them interact and learn each other.

Most Chinese students are silence, they are shy and not willing to answer the teacher's question. According to Varner and Beamer (2005), silence is varying from country to country, there are two level context culture to interpret silence. Moreover, in English class, students' silence has different, even opposite meanings. For instance, when he understands what the teacher is talking about, the student is silence with a direct eye contact with the teacher, or with smiling. As a teacher, I know he got the point by his smile. When I ask him a question, he is silence with frowning, or no eye contact with me. I know he didn't understand the learning content. So non-verbal facial expression is really helpful for teachers to identify students' situations.

The space language is also existing in the English classroom. According to Amaoka et al. (2011), the comfort feeling of a person need an appropriate space with others. In the English classroom, if the teacher wants to encourage the student, the distance between them should be close and have a relax smile. Moreover, the appropriate distance will make the students feel comfortable. When I taught English in a very big classroom, the distance between students and me is large. I thought the distance seemed the relationship of teacher-student is not good. After class, I'd like to go into the students, sitting in the middle of them and talking to them. We are sitting very close, gradually they are familiar with me, and often ask me the English question. However, I still kept an appropriate space with boys because of gender.

In regards of touching, different countries and cultures owns different, even opposite non-verbal communication. The teacher needs to learn some rigid rules such as touching. Albardiaz, Stokell and Gavriel (2015) suggest that touching is only taking place in families, lovers, hairdressers and health care professionals. Shaking hands in certain cultures such as French is soft, however, in Asian countries, it seems rude if you touch someone at first meeting. As an English teacher, touching the students should be avoided in China. In China especially a male teacher teaches a female student, the students' parents prefer changing a female teacher due to some negative new in the society.

In my past teaching experience, some teachers usually have some problems to use non-verbal communication. For instance, some teachers don't think body language is important, maybe don't realize his problem about itching and rubbing body. They think that only teaching methods and content is important, verbal communication is the key, non-verbal communication is

not necessary. Butt and Shafiq (2017) demonstrate that if teachers don't use non-verbal communication in the learning process, they will not encourage the students to study hard and effectively.[5] Non-verbal language cannot be separated from the English learning and teaching. In our school, the teachers were asked to make a meeting to talk about functions and influences of the body language and facial expression. The headmaster requires all teachers to change the wrong minds and practice the appropriate body language and facial expression. To make the non-verbal communication a helpful method to promote communication between students and teachers.

4. Recommendations

As an English teacher, to realize the importance of the non-verbal communication from different cultures is the first step to promote communication and interaction. Eastern and western cultural difference can reflect from the facial expression and body language (Tognetti et al. 2018). According to Butt and Shafiq (2017), teachers can change the surroundings of learning of the classroom through non-verbal language such as eye contact, facial expressions, body language, space and so on. Therefore, as an English teacher, to learn how to use the non-verbal communication is necessary. The school's headmaster should organize regular meetings and trainings about non-verbal communication to learn the professional non-verbal communication knowledge. Through these researches, the teachers can be gradually aware of importance of non-verbal communication.

Role play is a practical method to learn non-verbal communication. One teacher plays the student's role, the other teacher separately use smile, frown, arms in front of the body and other non-verbal language to interact. The activity will help teachers understand what're the students feelings when the teacher use such non-verbal language. In the meanwhile, it will also help teachers practicing non-verbal language. Practice is important for teachers. Because many teacher have common mistakes about body-language or facial expressions(Butt & Shafiq 2017). For example, some teachers like frowning unconsciously, or don't like make an eye contact with others. These proper non-verbal body language all need to practice many times. According to Shams et al. (2016), all teachers should use non-verbal communication because when teachers use non-verbal language to teach, the students will become confident and active in the learning process.

Proper appearance is beneficial to promote the learning process. The normal appearance demonstrate the respect for learning and teaching. The teachers should wear appropriately like no heavy makeup, no tight clothes. Because now the school and parents in China require the students and teachers to focus on the learning and teaching. Additional distraction will be criticized. However, when appearance means different culture or religion, it need to be respected. In our school, there were a female Indonesian teacher with a headscarf. The different appearance is due to her religion. All of students and teachers respected her dressing and habits.

Due to silence of most Chinese students, teachers need to clear if the students understand the learning content. Teachers need to make the students relaxed and active, maybe the students will interact more with teachers. To encourage students to talk more, teachers can sit a close place to show interesting about what students talk. Silence with confidence and smile usually means that the students understand the learning content, so teachers can ask them questions. About the confused silence, by asking them display questions to know which part needs to teach again.

In the English course, teacher may teach what the non-verbal communication is and how to use it appropriately. It is also important for students to know different body language or facial expression from different cultures. For example, one Asian student would like to be confused when he goes abroad and see strangers smiling to him. If he knows it is just different non-verbal communication, Western people like to smile to strangers in public, he will not be confused. To learn non-verbal language is vital, because it is also a component of language. To learn non-verbal language in Western cultures and countries is equal to learning a component of English.

Body language can promote learning activity and make students take active part in learning. According to Haneef et al. (2014), if teachers like to use body language or facial expression to active the classroom atmosphere, like to use non-verbal communication to express, the students learning will be motivated and promoted. If students distract from the teachers' words, teachers can use different tones or movement to attract their attention. Using different kinds of non-verbal language especially smiling and positive emotional body movements, may relax the learning environment. Relaxed environment will beneficial for

the students' learning. If there is a strict atmosphere in the classroom, it is hard for students. Obviously, the students learn more quickly in the relaxed classroom than non-relaxed classroom (Haneef et al. 2014). In another hand, teachers should have a good behavior style and non-verbal communication, because the students will intimate the teachers' actions and attitudes (Haneef et al. 2014). The teachers have a great effect on the students, not only teaching knowledge, but also shaping their mind and value. Good teachers is equal to good parents, the teachers should own a high level of respect for themselves career. The teachers should notice their non-verbal communication, but non-verbal communication is hard to change immediately. Therefore, to practice and learn non-verbal communication is difficult, but important.

5. Conclusion

In conclusion, non-verbal communication is an important component of English learning and can promote the students' learning process. Non-verbal communication include body language, facial expressions, appearance, silence and so forth. Although there are some complex issue not to be solved, many useful recommendations can be practiced and applied. Therefore, with the development of non-verbal communication system, it will become mature gradually and play a more important role in the English learning than before.

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