

Nonverbal Emotional Reactions in Cultural Dimension

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Abstract. This article focuses on the investigation of nonverbal emotional reactions of characters in cultural dimension on the material of modern English fictional discourse. Nonverbal expression of emotions and emotional reactions is viewed from the perspective of emotional culture and Contact / Non-Contact Cultures approach.

Keywords: *somaticon (combination of nonverbal signs), emotional reactions, emotional culture, emotional rules, Contact and Non-Contact Cultures*

Modern communicative studies often raise the question of body language investigation especially in the light of emotional behaviour of characters which in written discourse is realized through different language units. The combination of such nominations forms communicatively, pragmatically and expressively loaded space of nonverbal signs – somaticon – [7] syntagmatics and paradigmatics of which offer opportunities for the understanding the emotional and cultural context of communication. Emotions are involved in the formation of meaningful interaction with the world by means of emotional responses which refer to reactive nonverbal and verbal manifestations of personality.

Universal nature of emotions allows characters, communicating with each other, to cross the borders of cultures in a global society. These emotional universal processes allow people to adapt and respond to communicative stimuli. The *aim* of this article is to investigate *non-verbal emotional reactions* as a pragmatically specified set of non-verbal communicative signs, their lingual expressions and emotional colouring, highlighting cultural display rules and providing the comparative analyses of Contact and Non-Contact Cultures.

Some scholars [6, p. 219] developed the idea that culture is communicated across generations. Biological needs and social problems can lead to similar solutions across cultures. Universal psychological processes such as facial expressions of emotions can be traced to the core aspect of a universal human nature based on biological imperatives and universal social problems of adaptation and living. Nevertheless, many psychological processes are also culture specific. Different cultures have developed different ways of behavioural patterns based on their contexts.

Language demonstrates strong evidence to be culture-specific. Each culture has its own language, with its own vocabulary, syntax, grammar, phonology, and pragmatics. The need to have language may be a pancultural universal problem, and having a language may be a universal solution to this problem. But the specific way in which each culture solves this problem – that is develops its own language – is different in every culture. Culture also affects pragmatics. For example, Kashima and Kashima [6, p. 219] examined 39 languages and found that cultures whose languages allowed the pronouns to be dropped from sentences tended to be less individualistic, which they interpreted as reflecting different cultural conceptualizations of self and others. Perceptions of personalization, synchrony, and difficulty in in-group and out-group communications differ according to meaningful dimensions of cultural variability. They all come to one com-

mon conclusion: culture, self-construals, and individual values affect communication styles across cultures.

Prof. Seryakova [7, p. 99] goes through the problem of new approaches to cultural learning, such as Cross-cultural Pragmatics and Critical Language Study, which have been subsumed under the umbrella term *New Cultural Studies*, the motto of which is "language-in-culture". Cross-cultural Pragmatics is the study of different expectations regarding how meaning is constructed and communicated. Critical Language Study analyses social interactions in a way that focuses upon their linguistic elements and hidden determinants in the system of social relationships. In general, language-in-culture implies that special emphasis is made not only on language skills, but also on informative and expressive aspects of speaker's nonverbal behaviour, which facilitates and manages speech interaction.

We claim to develop the idea that there exists a cultural aspect of verbal and nonverbal expression of emotions. Our investigation highlights the cultural value of nonverbal behaviour in the process of emotional interaction on the material of modern English fictional discourse. It presents a framework for characterizing nonverbal emotional reactions in terms of "*emotional culture*" phenomenon, which leads to the development of an individual emotional competence. The phenomenon of "emotional culture" [9, p. 58–75] refers to cultural studies within the framework of cultural approach, which allows to identify the correct cultural environment of the analysed phenomenon. At the same time, emotional culture, like any other, is an open dynamic system, so understanding its nature, structure and mechanisms of formation is possible only through the systemic approach.

The essence of emotional culture integrates into socio-cultural environment of a personality. Emotional behaviour of a personality most clearly reflects identity of this personality, which is manifested in inherent emotional reactions to events and situations folding. Alongside with social rules, which are constructed by a society to regulate interaction, there exist "*emotional rules*" [9, p. 58–75] which mean cultural situations and the emotions that a person should express experiencing them. Culture constructs emotions indicating which of them fit the situation well, and provides sanctions for "nonprescribed" emotions. Consequently, the willingness and ability of a person to express their emotions in accordance with generally accepted sociocultural norms and circumstances is a major quality of an "*emotional competence*" of a personality.

Generally speaking, *emotional culture* is a complex, dynamic formation of a personality, characterized by the ability and willingness to express emotions in accordance

with the socio-cultural norms by means of adequate, controlled communicative methods, using appropriate verbal and non-verbal behaviours.

In our investigation we have involved the ideas of a Russian linguist Ass. Prof. V. Bykov [9, p. 58–75] who has identified such components of emotional culture based on the unity principle of personality, culture and activity as axiological, cognitive and connotative.

Axiological component performs stimulating and semantic functions, reflects the emotional and value orientation of a personality. This orientation integrates into the system of personal meanings, values and needs, which regulate the emotional behaviour of a personality.

Cognitive component performs information and orientation functions, includes a data basis of a person about his/her emotions, means and conventional rules of emotion's expression, and emotional abilities that allow a personality to recognize their own and other people's emotions.

Connotative component performs transmission and regulatory functions, incorporates emotional qualities and skills and determines the type, style and ways of emotion's expression.

The definition of a term "culture" is provided by Dr. David Matsumoto from San Francisco State University who in Chapter 12 called "Culture and Nonverbal Behavior" of The SAGE Handbook of Nonverbal Communication discusses the role of culture in the overall communication process, highlights its effects on verbal and non-verbal behaviours, and considers the influence of culture on facial expressions of emotion [5, p. 219].

The correlation between emotions, culture and body language of communicants was profoundly examined by P. Ekman [1, p. 207] and W. V. Friesen [2, p. 5] who categorized the immense repertoire of nonverbal behaviours into five categories: emblems, illustrators, regulators, adaptors and, finally, stated that *nonverbal behaviours communicate emotion*. It has been proved that relative contribution of nonverbal behaviours to the communication process is larger than that of verbal behaviours. As with verbal language, culture influences nonverbal behaviours in profound ways.

Cultures create rules concerning nonverbal behaviour of characters, for example, their gazing. Cross-cultural research has well documented differences in these rules. People from Arabic cultures, for example, gaze much longer and more directly at their partners than Americans do. Eye contact [7, p. 99] is culturally important too, because insufficient or excessive eye contact may create communication barriers. It is important in relationships because it serves to show intimacy, attention, and influence.

As with facial expressions, there are no specific rules governing eye behaviour except that it is considered rude to stare, especially at strangers. It is, however, common for two strangers to walk toward each other, make eye contact, smile and perhaps even say "Hi." The strangers may immediately look away and forget that they even had any contact. This type of glance does not mean much; it is simply a way of acknowledging another person's presence. In a conversation too little eye contact may be seen negatively because it conveys lack of interest, inattention, or even mistrust. The relationship between mistrust and lack of eye contact is stated directly in the expression, "Never trust a person who can't look you in the eyes".

Prof. Seryakova proceeds that in many Western societies, including the United States, a person who does not maintain "good eye contact" is regarded as being slightly suspicious, or a "shifty" character. Americans unconsciously associate people who avoid eye contact as unfriendly, insecure, untrustworthy, inattentive and impersonal. In contrast, Japanese children are taught in school to direct their gaze at their teacher's Adam's apple or tie knot, and, as adults, Japanese lower their eyes when speaking to a superior, a gesture of respect.

Latin American cultures, as well as some African countries, such as Nigeria, have longer looking time, but prolonged eye contact from an individual of lower status is considered disrespectful. In the United States, it is considered rude to stare – regardless of who is looking at whom. In contrast, the polite Englishman is taught to pay strict attention to a speaker, to listen carefully, and to blink his eyes to let the speaker know that he has been understood as well as heard. However, Americans signal interest and comprehension by bobbing their heads and grunting [7, p. 99].

By far the largest research literature in the area of culture and nonverbal behaviour concerns facial expressions of emotion [6, p. 222]. There exist universal and culture specific aspects of both the encoding and decoding of facial expressions of emotion. Theoretical background concerning the universality of facial expression can be traced back in the work of C. Darwin. "The Expression of Emotion in Man and Animals" suggests that emotions and their expressions had evolved across species, were evolutionarily adaptive, biologically innate, and universal across all human and even non-human primates. Darwin states that all humans, regardless of race or culture, possess the ability to express emotions in exactly the same ways, primarily through their faces.

Psychologist S. Tomkins in 1960s collaborated with Paul Ekman and Carroll Izard to conduct the first universality studies of facial expressions of emotion [4, p.16]. They obtained experimental data of faces expressing emotions panculturally and demonstrated that representatives of all cultures recognized the emotions portrayed, providing the first evidence for their universality. Since the original universality studies published over 50 years ago, the field has continued to obtain a considerable amount of evidence documenting and/or converging in their support of the universality of facial expressions of emotion. For instance, studies have shown that the universal facial expressions of emotion occur in congenitally blind individuals, which means that emotions and their expressions are biologically innate and genetically programmed. At the same time, they also strongly suggest that culture constant learning is not the basis for their universality. The emotions portrayed in the universal facial expressions correspond to emotion taxonomies in different languages around the world.

There is cross-cultural similarity in the physiological responses to emotion when these facial expressions are used as markers, in both the autonomic nervous system and brain activity. There is universality in the antecedents that bring about emotion [6, p. 222]. In no culture in Scherer's study was there an antecedent that brought about an emotion only in that culture; all antecedents were reported in all cultures (although there were different degrees to which different antecedents elicited emotions in different cultures). A meta-analysis of 168 data

sets examining judgments of emotion in the face and other nonverbal stimuli indicated convincingly that emotion recognition was universal and well above chance levels.

It had been agreed that the six original universal emotions – anger, disgust, fear, happiness, sadness, and surprise were universal. Moreover, C. Izard [4, p.139] also suggested that other expressions were universal, including interest-excitement and shame-humiliation. Though, controversy existed as to whether these were actually facial expressions, or whether they were more reflective of head position or gaze direction. A number of studies have reported the existence of a seventh universal facial expression of emotion – contempt.

Despite the existence of universal facial expressions of emotion, people around the world do express emotions differently. The first evidence for cultural differences in expression was W. V. Friesen's study [2, p. 5], in which the spontaneous expressions of Americans and Japanese were examined as they viewed highly stressful films in two conditions, first alone and then a second time in the presence of an older, male experimenter.

Dr. Matsumoto sets forth the issue that in spite of evidence for the universality of emotional expression of basic emotions, there are also cultural differences [6, p. 224]. This discrepancy can be explained by *cultural display rules*, which are rules that dictate how universal emotional expressions should be modified according to specific social situations.

Over 40 years ago P. Ekman and W.V. Friesen [1, p. 207-283] coined the term *cultural display rules* to formulate cultural differences in facial expressions of emotion. These are rules learned early in childhood that help individuals manage and modify their emotional expressions depending on social circumstances. Ekman and Friesen used the concept to explain the American-Japanese cultural differences in expression they observed, suggesting that in the first condition of their experiment there was no reason for display rules to modify expressions because the participants were alone and their display rules were inoperative; in the second condition display rules dictated that the Japanese mask their negative emotions in the presence of the experimenter.

To illustrate this we can provide an example of culturally specific non-verbal emotional behaviour typical for Ukrainians. It is common knowledge that there exist such cultural display rules as Deamplification, Amplification, Neutralization, Qualification, Masking, and Simulation. For example, Amplification belongs to oral culture, it provides "redundancy of information, ceremonial amplitude. In Ukrainian culture, Amplification can be realized in the informal situation of a guest greeting and extending an invitation to him to join a festive dinner table, nonverbally it is accompanied by a variety of gestures.

Most vividly, the work of culture display rules can be seen while comparing western and oriental cultures. According to the Original Display Rule Study Japanese show different nonverbal emotional reactions if accompanied by the experimenter. There appeared a study testing anger expressions between Indonesians and Australians. Waxer examined American and Canadian cultural differences in spontaneous emotional expressions by participants in television game shows and found that Americans tended to be judged as more expressive than the Canadians, despite no

differences in actual behaviours. Edelman and colleagues have also documented cross-cultural differences in expression among five European countries [6, p. 224].

The degree of facial expressiveness also varies among individuals and cultures. The fact that members of one culture do not express their emotions as openly as members of another does not mean they do not experience emotions. Rather, there are cultural restraints on the amount of nonverbal expressiveness permitted. Given individual differences, it is difficult to make generalizations about a cultural style of communication. Americans express themselves facially in varying degrees. People from certain ethnic backgrounds in the United States may use their hands, bodies, and faces more than other Americans [7, p. 100].

Dr. Edward T. Hall [3, p. 1003] defined four different levels of interpersonal space use depending on social relationship type: intimate, personal, social, and public. While people of all cultures make these distinctions, they differ in the spaces they attribute to them. Arab males, for instance, tend to sit closer to each other than American males, with more direct, confrontational types of body orientations. They also had greater eye contact and tended to speak in louder voices. Dr. Hall and his followers manifested that people from Arab cultures generally learn to interact with others at distances close enough to feel the other person's breath, Latin American students tended to interact more closely than did students of European backgrounds. Indonesians tended to sit closer than did Australians, Italians interacted more closely than did either Germans or Americans, people from Colombia generally interacted at closer distances than did the subjects from Costa Rica.

As pointed out before in terms of proxemics [3] – space investigation of communication – cultures can be classified as either “contact” – characterized by prevailing of nonverbal component “touch” during interaction or as “noncontact” with less direct orientations while communicating. For example,

- *The noncontact cultures* (Asian) prefer between the Public and Social Zones of interpersonal space with little or no physical contact.
- *The low-contact cultures* (North American, Northern Europeans) favour Social Zone for interaction and little, if any, physical contact.
- *The high-contact cultures* (Mediterranean, Arab, Latin) prefer the Intimate and Personal Zones and mutual contact between people.

Due to this, in communicative process, the idea of subdivision into *low, medium and high emotionally reactive cultures* can be elaborated. This subdivision is based on quantitative and qualitative parameters of emotional reactions with regard to extralinguistic factors influencing interaction. If cultures can be subdivided into *low, medium and high emotionally reactive* people, belonging to them, have to adjust to each other verbally and nonverbally to achieve a desired effect of communication, and this definitely requires the abovementioned *emotional competence*.

In our investigation dedicated to the cultural aspect of *nonverbal emotional reactions* the last are viewed as culturally bound psychologically and pragmatically motivated communicative actions. It has already been mentioned that culture plays a great role in molding universal and culture-specific aspects of encoding and decoding of emotions. Cultures create guidelines concerning nonverbal behav-

iours, which can be traced back through the analysis of the illustrative material especially in the comparative aspect.

The following fragment of English fictional discourse containing nonverbal emotional reactions demonstrates cultural differences of nonverbal emotional reactions:

– "We're glad you're here, Hiroko." "I am very glad too," Hiroko said, and bowed low to her older American cousin.

– "You don't need to do that here." Reiko put a gentle hand on her shoulder.

– "I do not know another way to show you respect, and thank you for your kindness," she said, as Reiko walked her to Sally's bedroom.

– "Here you can be less formal."

Hiroko began to bow again, and then stopped herself with a small smile [8, p. 72].

On the background of nonverbal semiotic space, expressed through the nonverbal emotional reactions – "posture", "gesture", "touch", "distance" and "smile" – gender and national aspects are imposed, marked a positive emotion (nomination *with a small smile*). Namely, this example illustrates the cultural differences in the world perception and expression of respect to elders through Japanese and American styles of emotional response. American style of communication belongs to the *low-contact cultures* behaviour, which is illustrated by the use of a nomination "put a gentle hand on her shoulder" in comparison with the Japanese one, belonging to the non-contact cultures.

Having analyzed the examples of fictional discourse and everyday human communication, we can predict that Ukrainian culture belongs to a low-contact one. It shows, though, different degrees of intensiveness of nonverbal emotional reactions to some situations. For instance, let us take a gender aspect. If a Ukrainian woman is experiencing an emotional reaction of anger, nonverbally it is expressed through gestures, e.g. *to put hands on hips; to stamp one's foot*, etc. In general, Ukrainian intercultural dialogue also has its national peculiarities in nonverbal expressing of emotion, which can be the subject of our further investigation.

To conclude we would like to underline that communication involves both verbal and nonverbal behaviours, and culture influences both. Emotions as a set of "socially shared scripts" are inextricably linked with culture and developed when individuals are enculturated into culture. Emotions reflect cultural environment and is an integral part of a culture. Culture shapes emotions. There are universal and culture-specific aspects of human emotions. Nonverbal emotional reactions we defined as culturally bound psychologically and pragmatically motivated communicative actions. In modern English fictional discourse a character constantly makes a selection of verbal and non-verbal means, establishes correlations between cultural norms and emotional manifestations of personal characteristics which are expressed by emotional responses to communicative stimuli.

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