

Appendix: Anecdotes

The following anecdotes demonstrate that comprehension of nonverbal communication (NVC) in cross-cultural interactions between a teacher and English learners plays a significant role in the teaching and learning process.

Kinesics

Refers to body movements, including postures, facial expressions, eye contact, head movement, and gestures.

Bulgaria

I had a student from Bulgaria in my ESL class. While I was explaining uses of the verb *to be* in English, I was continually checking my student's understanding by asking Yes/No questions. Though the majority of my students were nodding their heads and showing understanding, the Bulgarian student's head movement repeatedly indicated "No." I was concerned and asked him to come to my office after class to make sure that the concept of the verb *to be* was clear to him.

He walked in with his Bulgarian friend, whose English was more advanced; his friend told me that my student did not have any problems with the lesson being explained in class. To the contrary, he was able to understand the concept immediately. I was perplexed and shared with him how he constantly shook his head "no." The friend simply explained that nodding one's head indicated "no" in Bulgaria, while shaking one's head is a sign of "yes." This new knowledge about the intentions behind my Bulgarian student's head movement assisted me in my instructional practice.

India

Two international students from Kerala, India, asked me to provide them with recommendation letters. As I handed them the letters, they glanced over them and their heads started wobbling. It looked like a cross between a shake and a nod. Did it mean "yes"? Did it mean "no"? I remember how confused I felt—and I asked about it. They explained that the head wobble meant a silent "yes" in India. The awareness of the Indian students' nonverbal feature had a profound effect on my communication with them and it created a more friendly environment in our classroom.

Proxemics

Refers to the space and distance, physically, between communicators.

Saudi Arabia

It was at the beginning of my ESL teaching career, and I was teaching a group of students from a Middle Eastern country. I was doing my first one-on-one conferencing with them after their drafted composition. One of the students approached my desk and stood behind me so close that I could feel his breath on my neck. Once I felt my personal space was violated, I quickly got up from the chair and took a few steps back to make sure that I was in a "comfortable zone."

I could see that my student was startled by my sudden action. I found out later that in some Middle Eastern countries, their social space equates to what those from the United States might consider intimate space, and that “people cannot talk comfortably with one another until they are very close to each other” (Hall, 1976, p. 209). My students appreciated me sharing and modeling the differences between the United States and their proxemics.

Romania and India

A colleague of mine shared a story with me in which she described a situation from her ESL class. Shortly after she assigned pair work to her students, a female Romanian student called on her and complained about her assigned male work partner from India, who pulled his chair too close to hers—so that he was almost touching her with his elbow. She said “I move, he also moves. I do not like it!”

My colleague said she was embarrassed about the fact that she used to put all English language learners under the same “ESL umbrella” and did not realize how unique each and every one was. She says, “now I know that NVC speaks differently in each culture.”

Reference

Hall, E. T. (1976). *Beyond Culture*. Anchor.