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# **SILENT MESSAGES IN NEGOTIATIONS: THE ROLE OF NONVERBAL COMMUNICATION IN CROSS-CULTURAL BUSINESS NEGOTIATIONS**

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## **ABSTRACT**

*This study specifically explored the perceived importance of the following nonverbal factors in the negotiation process: proxemics (location and negotiation site), physical arrangement (seating and furniture arrangement), and kinesics (eye contact, facial expressions and gestures). The participants are professional business negotiators of different nationalities. The findings show that the negotiators' perception about the three factors and their roles in negotiation are consistent with the nonverbal communication literature.*

## **INTRODUCTION**

Negotiation with China is a topic which has received more and more attention in recent years (Chang, 2003; Palich, Carini, & Livingstone, 2002; Tinsley & Pillutla, 1998, Chen & Faure 1995, Leung & Yeung, 1995; Pye, 1982; Gordon, 1986). Although it has been studied in terms of negotiation styles (Pye, 1982) and intercultural differences (Mente, 1992; Gordon, 1986), there has been a scarcity of studies (Wheeler & Nelson, 2003; Mayfield, Martin, & Herbig, 1998; Stettner, 1997; Kharbanda & Stallworthy, 1991; Johnson, McCarty, & Allen, 1976) that examine the role of nonverbal communication in the negotiation process. Furthermore, no empirical studies were found which examine specifically the role of nonverbal communication in multi-national business negotiations by collecting data from the real world professional business negotiators. It is worth pointing out that the participants in this study are the real world professional business negotiators who report more precisely about what the negotiators' perception than the student sample and simulation method used in the past.

## **THE CURRENT PROBLEM**

As we enter the 21st century, cross-cultural concerns and business will become more and more significant (Chu, Ma, & Green, 2004; Chu, 2003). "One reason is indicated by such terms as

world economy, global village, and spaceship earth which indicate the interdependence facing all of us on this planet. The ozone layer and global warming are a concern of all countries. ...Today more than ever, no country can isolate itself from the rest of the world" (Terpstra, 1993, p.3). The nature of this article is necessary given that increasingly there is a move toward a multi-national economy in this century. Therefore, since nonverbal communication is a critical component of negotiations, it is important to examine its role within the context of multi-national negotiations. This article will specifically explore the perceived importance of the following nonverbal factors in the negotiation process: proxemics (location and negotiation site), physical arrangement (seating and furniture arrangement), and kinesics (eye contact, facial expressions and gestures).

The rest of this paper is organized as follows: First, the paper provides the theoretical background and research questions. Second, presents descriptions of data, instrument and methodology. Third, discusses the empirical results and findings. Finally, points out the managerial implications of this empirical study, its limitation and the suggestions for future research.

### **HISTORICAL OVERVIEW OF THE NEGOTIATION PROCESS**

Negotiation is "a broad conflict management process involving discussions between and among individuals who are interdependent and need to come together for a decision or course of action; frequently associated with the need to compromise effectively" (Shockley-Zalabak, 1988, p. 247).

The process of negotiation involves exchanging messages, both verbal and nonverbal. It is argued that the ability to analyze these nonverbal behaviors adds to a negotiator's overall negotiating ability. Nonverbal signals are deemed as important tools, for they can imply a meaning without verbally committing the negotiator to a particular action, i.e., nonverbal cues cannot be interpreted as promises in the same way that verbal messages can (Smith, 1998). In addition, careful observation of these critical communication elements may yield indications that the message senders are nervous, frustrated, bored, angry, or unsure. Johnson (1993) mentions that negotiators who are proficient at observing and using nonverbal information are more likely to achieve their goals in negotiations than those who have difficulty reading people. In addition, by understanding how nonverbal messages function and knowing what they can expect to learn through the reading and sending of these messages, negotiators are more likely to attribute greater meaning to the subtle nuances of the negotiation process.

### **CATEGORIES OF NONVERBAL COMMUNICATION**

Nonverbal communication refers to communication effected by means other than words (assuming words are the verbal element). It includes three categories. First, there is the communication environment which consists of the physical environment and spatial environment. Second, there are the communicators' physical characteristics: physique or body shape, general

attractiveness, height, weight, hair, skin color, tone or odors (body or breath), physical appearance (clothes, lipstick, eyeglasses, wigs and other hairpieces, false eyelashes, jewelry), and accessories such as attaché cases. Third, there are the body movements and positions. These can include gestures, posture, touching behavior, facial expressions, eye behavior and vocal behavior (Knapp & Hall, 1997). In this research, each of these nonverbal communications is referred to as silent messages.

There are primarily two areas of nonverbal communication with which negotiators are concerned: proxemics (including physical arrangement) and kinesics, which are defined as three categories of nonverbal communication in this article. The conceptual definitions for these follow.

First of all, proxemics is defined as "the study of the ways in which space is handled (related to Latin *proximus*, nearest)" (Clark, Eschholz, & Rosa, 1972, p. 457) and "how man perceives, structures, and uses space. ...how you arrange the furniture" (Burgoon & Saine, 1978, p. 89). Finally, kinesics is defined as "the study of movement (related to Greek *kinesis*, movement)" (Clark et al., 1972, p. 457), and "refers to all the forms of body movement, excluding touch." (Burgoon & Saine, 1978, p. 54).

Proxemics (Location and Site) in Negotiation. Lewicki & Litterer (1985) state that the physical environment can contribute to the tone and mood of negotiations, and the anticipated mood of a negotiation can lead parties to prefer one site over another. The site selection was considered a critical variable for the intercultural negotiation process (Mayfield et al., 1998). Negotiators should be aware of the impact that a particular site has on a negotiation, and consciously choose sites that create the desired mood. Most of the site characteristics have their strongest impact on a bargainer's perceptions of the environment, rather than actual, tangible, substantive effects on the negotiations themselves.

Johnson (1993) declares that the sense of personal space influences people's behavior regardless of whether or not they are conscious of it. By watching how people use space, a negotiator can find clues about his or her opponent's intentions and strategies. If one side suggests a change of the seating arrangement of the negotiations, it might be a sign of attitude change for "our use of space (our own and others') can affect dramatically our ability to achieve certain desired communication goals" (Knapp & Hall, 1997, p. 154).

Johnson (1993) believes that negotiators structure their territory to make others comfortable or uneasy. A negotiator may be able to learn more about members of the other side by meeting in their territory or may feel more in control by meeting in his or her own territory. Johnson (1993) also states that thinking about territory and considering the impact of each negotiation setting helps a negotiator overcome the manipulation of territory by the other side. Those with control over the arrangement of the room usually want to minimize the amount of direct confrontation and to keep the other side talking as much as possible. Those who make members of the other side feel comfortable, free, and somewhat trusting have gained command over the environment, for territory can be used to express power. Lewicki & Litterer (1985) declare that sites are not inherently neutral, they are perceived as neutral; a lounge is not inherently "warm" or "cold", but rather perceived that

way by virtue of the decor that is used. In order to handle messages from "territory", negotiators should not allow the setting to intimidate or seduce them. If one must negotiate on the other side's turf, one should not be awed by the environment; otherwise, one may lose his or her best deal in the negotiation.

Lewicki & Litterer (1985) state that cold, sterile, and formal surroundings are generally related to competitive interactions. A very large and formal wooden table, formal chairs, white walls, muted colored carpets and curtains, and a businesslike atmosphere tend to be the location for formal talks and deliberations. These rooms tend to create a "no nonsense" tone for people, and suggest that cold, hard, businesslike transactions are to be carried out within them. In contrast, cheerful, bright-colored rooms, overstuffed chairs, "living room" arrangement of furniture, soft lighting, and artwork create a significantly more comfortable environment in which parties are more relaxed, and can make people feel comfortable. The parties let down their guard and relax, creating an affable mood, which may cause participants to act more cooperatively.

Griffin & Daggatt (1990) assert that the location of negotiations also can favor one side or the other. In order to make sure no side can take advantage of the location, negotiations are usually carried out at a neutral site. Johnson (1993) also suggests that a neutral site is ideal for negotiations because it can be agreeable and comfortable for both sides and advantageous to neither. Griffin & Daggatt (1990) argue that for a diplomatic activity, negotiators tend to prefer a neutral setting, e.g., Malta for the 1989 meeting between Presidents Bush and Gorbachev, Paris for the Vietnam peace talks, Panmunjom for the Korean War talks, and even a raft in the middle of the Neman River when Napoleon Bonaparte and Czar Alexander I met in 1807. A successful negotiator, therefore, does not ignore the important function of the negotiation location and site.

Proxemics (Physical Arrangement) in Negotiation. Burgoon, Buller, & Woodall (1996) state that humans are affected by their physical surroundings. Lewicki & Litterer (1985) find that furniture may be used to communicate status and power. Chairs, tables, interior design, or even the number and size of ash trays are specifically equalized between both parties to assure that no side is seen as "bigger", "better", more important, or how much power each may have. Lewicki & Litterer (1985) state that in more formal negotiations such as international deliberations, status may be communicated by the size of flags and nameplates, the degree of comfortableness of a chair, the height of the back of a chair, or the number of parties at the table. On the other hand, in more informal negotiations, status is most commonly observed through office decor. The decoration of the office reflects the owner's personality and the message he or she would like to communicate. It provides home-turf advantage and an additional group of symbols that enhances the occupant's perceived status and power as well. Lewicki & Litterer (1985) mention that if the occupant chooses to seat his or her visitor across the desk from him or her (a competitive location), and on a chair lower than his or her own (so that there is no eye-to-eye contact, but the visitor is "looking up at" the occupant), the scene is well set for a competitive negotiation that places the visitor at a significant disadvantage. In contrast, if the office occupant moves out from behind his desk, seating himself in a "conversational grouping" of chairs, maintaining level eye contact, and minimizing the

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number of status symbols within the office, he will help to create an environment that encourages more equal-status communication.

Knapp & Hall (1997) claim that leaders and dominant personalities tend to choose specific seats, but seating position also can determine one's role in a group. Johnson (1993) says that choosing where to sit (even if it means moving a chair, or even deciding whether to sit) may help make a negotiator feel more confident. Anderson (1993) states that leaders and powerful people take up more space than others do. By taking up more space, they appear to be taking charge. Johnson (1993) maintains that the manipulation of the seating arrangement is one way that a negotiator can give or receive this type of clue. Negotiators often vie for a "power" position such as head of the table, center of a large delegation, back against a wall, and so on. Some negotiators gravitate toward the most prominent seat. On the other hand, those who want to avoid a show of power will want to have an alternative plan. A skilled negotiator will de-emphasize any single act that could be interpreted as a bid for power and focus greater attention on the other side's patterns of behavior.

According to Johnson (1993), those who are perceived to have strong personal power may be met with resistance if they demonstrate additional power with nonverbal clues. In contrast, they gain greater acceptance when they attempt to diffuse resistance by sending signals showing that they are "just part of the gang."

Sommer (1965) shows that parties who are cooperatively disposed toward one another seem to prefer seating arrangements that are side by side; while parties who are competitively oriented tend to prefer seating directly across from one another. Directly opposing seating, on the other hand, allows each party to "keep an eye on the other" and "keep the opponent at arm's length" – common colloquialisms that, in fact, express the competitive sentiments of each party. Lewicki & Litterer (1985) show that competitive parties seek greater physical distance from one another, and/or are more likely to place "barricades" of furniture between themselves and the other person. Thus, cooperative parties may be very comfortable sitting next to one another (twelve to eighteen inches apart); competitive parties may place tables of all sizes and shapes or other barriers between them in order to prevent the others from encroaching on their territory.

Kinesic Messages (eye contact, facial expressions, and gestures). Even if one keeps silent, one is still saying something. Albert Mehrabian (1981) finds that 55 percent of a message comes from facial expressions and 38 percent comes from vocal tone, which only 7 percent comes from verbal cues. Johnson (1993) recommends that if negotiators want to cool down a particularly hostile exchange, they can reduce the tension of their words, but they will also want to ease back with their bodies, lower their volume, and soften their facial expressions. Nierrenberg (1986) mentions that facial expressions are obvious means of nonverbal communication. However, the "poker face" confronts us with a total lack of expression, a blank look. This very lack of expression tells us that people do not want us to know anything about their feelings. In spite of the assumed mask, we can read their intent. Knapp & Hall (1997, p. 332) state: "The face may be the basis for judging another person's personality and that it can (and does) provide information other than one's emotional state."

Former United Nations Secretary General Dag Hammarskjold says: "The unspoken dialog between two people can never be put right by anything they say" (Burgoon, 1996, p. 297). Hendon, Hendon & Herbig (1996) find that in negotiation, what is not said is in many cases more important than what is openly expressed by the parties involved. This matches the perspective of Knapp & Hall (1997) that how something is said is often more important than what is being said. Hendon, Hendon & Herbig (1996) find that most important, emotional messages at the negotiating table are expressed nonverbally by gestures, tone of voice, or facial expressions. The other side's interpretation of your statement depends on the nonverbal behaviors more than what is actually said.

Hendon et al. (1996) find that effective negotiators are particularly good at controlling (consciously or subconsciously) their kinesic messages and at the same time adjusting to the many nonverbal signals they receive from the opposing negotiator(s). Illich (1980) states that personal power is conveyed primarily by nonverbal channels and understanding by identifying nonverbal clues. However, Anderson (1993) finds that to make one powerful, one should avoid unnecessary gestures, make every movement count, and slow down one's movements. When one's movements are deliberate and thoughtful, people will perceive the speaker that way as well. Griffin & Daggatt (1990) emphasize that it is a good idea to simplify your actions and gestures, while still being yourself. This minimizes the risk that your gestures are contradicting your words.

Anderson (1993) suggests that people perceived as powerful shift their position occasionally, making themselves appear relaxed, confident, and in charge.

When you know your naturally happy, confident, and powerful poses, you can adopt them even when you are feeling unhappy or weak. This keeps you from being at a disadvantage in a time of negotiation and may actually make you feel better (p. 98).

Lewicki & Litterer (1985) state that the eye is universally regarded as the lens permitting us to look into a person's soul, and dishonest people and cowards are not supposed to be able to look us in the eye. Knapp & Hall (1997) find that during fluent speech, speakers tend to look at listeners much more than during hesitant speech. We seem to gaze more at people we like (Knapp & Hall). Burgoon, Buller & Woodall (1996) conclude that those who were more persuasive used more eye contact, longer gazes and spent a greater amount of time gazing, thus promoting more attitude change and improving the overall effectiveness of a persuasive presentation. Moreover, gaze has been shown to be a powerful influence on other people's willingness to help someone or to comply with a request. Finally, Burgoon et al. add that when the nature of the problem and solution were clear, a stare increased the probability of a bystander's offering help.

Hendon et al. deem that nonverbal communication can be quite telling as it can help one determine the exact meaning of what the other side is saying and also can help the negotiator get his own message across. Liking and disliking, tensions, and appraisal of an argument are shown by numerous signs such as blushing, contraction of facial muscles, giggling, strained laughter, or just silence. Whenever a party negotiates, the negotiator must see and observe the other party. While

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seated, people may lean forward when they like what you are saying or are interested in listening, or they may sit back in their seats with crossed arms if they do not like the message. Nervousness can manifest itself through nonverbal behavior, and blinking can be related to feelings of guilt and fear. The more simple and direct the language, the more precisely a position is defined, the stronger the commitment is likely to be. However, Griffin & Daggatt (1990) deem that the more subtle and less direct your explanation, the more likely one is to succeed. People are more likely to be convinced by reasons they discovered themselves than by reasons pointed out to them by others. Sparks (1993) verifies that it is great advice for negotiators to be economical with words, for that helps people understand what is said. It saves time, too.

Nierenberg (1986) says that to the negotiator, as the old song has it, "every little movement has a meaning all its own." Kinesic messages have a tremendous impact on the negotiation process. Hendon et al. argue that everything counts during the negotiation: the time of the negotiation (morning, lunch time, late in the evening), the table (round, square), the lights (white, in the middle of the room), the use of microphones, the breaks, the phone calls, the space between the chairs, the way the negotiators dress, and so on. Everything is important. Effective negotiators are fully aware of the existence of all these factors and of the fact that they are able to use them to their advantage. Nierenberg (1986) emphasizes that the slight movement of an eyebrow, the tilt of the head, the sudden movement of the hand—all are messages that an individual who deals with people must understand and continue to study.

Based on the above review of the literature this manuscript will explore three research questions.

1. How do negotiators of different nationalities perceive the role of proxemics in the negotiation process?
2. How do negotiators of different nationalities perceive the role of physical arrangement in the negotiation process?
3. How do negotiators of different nationalities perceive the role of kinesic messages in the negotiation process?

## METHODOLOGY

**Subjects.** Three samples were collected for this study. The first sample pool was obtained from a multi-national company in China. Participants included 50 individuals from seven different nationalities: Chinese, German, British, Italian, French, Canadian and Pakistani. The second sample pool was obtained from a Chinese textile company and a Mexican company. The 22 participants were Chinese nationals whose first language is Chinese, and Mexican nationals whose first language is Spanish. Some of the participants also speak English as their second language. The last samples were randomly gathered from the business people in the U.S. The nine participants were American nationals whose first language is English. All the participants in the sample were required to have



had business negotiation experience. Both male and female participants ranging in age from twenty-six (26) to seventy (70) took part in the study.

**Survey Instrument.** The questionnaire was developed in consultation with the faculty of the Communication Department at a southwestern university and from the review of the literature. It was piloted on a group of students from various departments across campus. Revisions were made based on the feedback received. The questionnaire in the Chinese version was crosschecked by two professional translators to see if the questions make sense to the Chinese participants. A cover letter was attached to each questionnaire upon distributing to the participants, which clearly stated that their participations were completely voluntary and confidence. A five-point Likert scale (strongly agree 1, agree 2, uncertain 3, disagree 4, and strongly disagree 5) was used in the study.

The final questionnaire consists of 46 questions both in the English version and the Chinese version, which addresses the two nonverbal dimensions of negotiation under study: proxemics (location and site), physical arrangement (seating and furniture arrangement) and kinesics (eye contact, facial expressions, and gestures). See Table 1 below.

Proxemics		Kinesic Message
Location and Site	Physical Arrangement	
Q 22 – Q 31	Q1-Q 21	Q 37 - Q 44
Q 45- Q 46	Q 32 – Q 36	

**Data Collection Procedures.** The first batch of questionnaires was distributed by the researcher during a business negotiation meeting in Culiacan, Sinaloa, Mexico. The chief negotiator for the Mexican company and a representative of the Chinese delegation were each entrusted to distribute the questionnaire to 22 employees from their respective companies. They were instructed to mail the completed questionnaires back to the researcher as expeditiously as possible. The participants from the Chinese textile company received the questionnaires in Chinese.

The second batch of questionnaires was mailed via Express Mail to a negotiator in a multi-national joint venture company located in China. He was instructed to distribute them to 50 employees of various nationalities. In all cases, employees completing the questionnaire were advised that their participation was voluntary and that they were free to withdraw at any time.

The third batch of questionnaires was sent to a business people in the U.S. He randomly distributed nine questionnaires to the business people from various businesses. The participants were asked to finish the questionnaires within two weeks and mail them back to the researcher.

There were totally eighty-one questionnaires passed out, three questionnaires from Hong Kong and one from the multi-national company were not returned, and two of the nine questionnaires from the U.S. were considered as unusable. There was some missing data from

demographic part that did not cause problem. Altogether seventy-five questionnaires were analyzed for this study.

Analysis. Two analyses were conducted in this study. First, in order to test the reliability of the instrument and scale (questionnaire), the correlation coefficient test and reliability coefficient test were employed accompanying with the test of Homogeneity of Variances and multiple comparison. Second, to find out how the professional business negotiators perceived the role of the three nonverbal categories in the negotiation and averages across these negotiators, the means from three groups of subjects were computed. Each of the two results are reported and discussed below. Results. The correlation coefficient test was employed to test the degree of relationship between two sets of scores. The overall strength of correlations in the three categories is above .433 ( $r > .433$ ) and significant at the 5% (.05) level. The items with low correlation coefficients ( $r < .433$ ) were eliminated. The correlation coefficient of Location and Site is from .527 to .702; Physical Arrangement is from .434 to .693; and Kinesic Message is from .433 to .505. Overall strength of the correlations in the three categories falls in the moderate range (Bartz 1999, p. 184), as shown in Table 2.

Test ( $p < 0.05$ )	Location & Site	Physical Arrangement	Kinesic Message
Correlation Coefficients	0.521~0.702	0.434~0.693	0.433~0.505
Reliability Coefficient	0.7983 (9 items)	0.8227 (12 items)	0.4293 (6 items)
Homogeneity of Variances	0.083	0.866	0.418
ANOVA	F=1.629, sig.=0.203	F=4.390, sig.=0.016	F=.055, sig.=0.947

The reliability coefficient test was employed to assess the consistency of the entire scale. The reliability coefficient for Location & Site is .7983 with 9 items. The alpha for Physical arrangement is .8227 with 12 items. The reliability coefficient of the Kinesic Message is .4293 with 6 items. The generally agreed upon lower limit for Cronbach's alpha is .70, although it may decrease to .60 in exploratory research, therefore among the three categories, Kinesic Message had a low reliability coefficient and the reliability coefficient of the other two categories fell in desirable range. Altogether twenty-seven out of forty-six items were left for further analysis.

Test of Homogeneity of Variances showed that the three groups (Chinese, British, and the Other) had the same variances. The test of homogeneity of variances in all three categories showed that the same variances existed among the three categories ( $p > .05$ ). One-Way ANOVA showed that there was a significant difference among the three groups in Physical Arrangement ( $p < .05$ ), not in the other two categories. The Post Hoc Tests (Scheffe test) showed that there were significant differences among Chinese versus British ( $p < .020$ ), Chinese versus Other ( $p < .079$ ); British

versus Chinese ( $p < .020$ ) in Physical Arrangement. There were no significant differences among the three groups in Location & Site and Kinesic Message, as shown in Table 3.

Category	(I) Nationality	(J) Nationality	Mean Difference (I-J)	Std. Error	Sig.
Composite Location	Chinese	2	-6.419	3.56	0.204
		3	-4.277	3.774	0.529
	British	1	6.419	3.56	0.204
		3	2.412	3.319	0.812
	Others	1	4.277	3.774	0.529
		2	-2.142	3.319	0.812
Composite Physical	Chinese	2	-18.562	6.469	0.02
		3	-15.73	6.859	0.079
	British	1	18.562	6.469	0.02
		3	2.832	6.031	0.896
	Others	1	15.73	6.859	0.079
		2	-2.832	6.031	0.896
Composite Kinesic	Chinese	2	-0.134	4.491	1
		3	-1.35	4.762	0.961
	British	1	0.134	4.491	1
		3	-1.26	4.187	0.961
	Others	1	1.35	4.762	0.961
		2	1.216	4.187	0.959

The results of mean average showed that the three nonverbal categories were believed important and the Agree mean percentages of all the three categories exceeded Disagree. The findings are reported in the following.

## FINDINGS

When the focus of the research is on averages across people or group behavior (as in this study), a 3-point scale is sufficient, which reduces the complexity thereby increasing the accuracy (Dant et al., 1990; Lehmann & Hulbert, 1972). For the analysis and in order to find out how the negotiators perceive the three nonverbal categories, the two categories of "strongly agree" and "agree" were combined, to represent an "agree" response rate. Also, the categories of "strongly

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disagree" and "disagree" were merged into a "disagree" response rate. The findings of Scheffe test and mean comparison are discussed in the following.

Proxemics (location and site). The Scheffe test shows that the Chinese negotiators think the Location and Site are more important for a sound negotiation than the British negotiators, and the British negotiators think it is important, whereas the negotiators from the group of the Other nationalities think it is less important than both the Chinese and British negotiators. Overall, the differences among the three groups are not statistically significant. It is not consistent with the literature or theory, which indicates that it is important for a successful negotiation.

The total percentage of the responses in the "location and site" category shows that 50% of the participants believe the location and site are important for a sound negotiation. 19% of them do not think the location and site are important; and 31% are not certain about it.

Physical arrangement (seating and furniture arrangement). Both the Chinese negotiators and the British negotiators deem the seating and furniture arrangement important for a satisfactory negotiation. The group of the Other shows no statistically significant and they may not think the seating and furniture arrangement play an important role in negotiation. Overall this category is statistically significant and is consistent with the literature and theory.

The total percentage of the responses in the "physical arrangement (seating and furniture arrangement)" category is less significant than "location and site" category. This category shows that 46% of the participants deem the seating and furniture arrangement important for a satisfactory negotiation. 24% of them do not think the seating and furniture arrangement play an important role in negotiation, and 30% are not certain about it.

Kinesic Messages (eye contact, facial expressions, and gestures). Overall the Kinesic Message category is not statistically significant. However, both the Chinese negotiators and the British negotiators think that the "eye contact, facial expressions, and gestures" are less important for a successful negotiation than the group of the Other nationalities for they believe that the "eye contact, facial expressions, and gestures" are important for a successful negotiation. The finding of this category shows an inconsistent with the literature and theory.

The total percentage of the responses in the "Kinesic Messages (eye contact, facial expressions, and gestures)" category is less than the other two categories. The Kinesic Messages category shows that 45% of the participants believe that the "eye contact, facial expressions, and gestures" are important for a successful negotiation. 21% of disagree with the major role the "eye contact, facial expressions, and gestures" played in negotiation, and 34% are not certain about it.

## DISCUSSION

The findings of two out of three groups are inconsistent with the literature and theory from Scheffe test. I would assume that the negotiators from these two groups might think the Location & Site and Kinesic Message are both important in their daily life or social life, however, in their professional life, they respond differently. It might be true that "Business is business", and they

might ignore the roles of Location & Seating and Kinesic Message in their professional interaction with the other people.

All participants in three groups – Chinese, British and Other believe that Physical Arrangement is important for a satisfactory negotiation. The finding of Physical Arrangement is the only category showing consistent with the literature and theory. Burgoon, Buller & Woodall (1996) have argued that humans are affected by their physical surroundings. Lewicki & Litterer (1985) state that furniture may be used to communicate status and power; furthermore they find that face to face seating arrangement creates competition and places the visitors at a significant disadvantage. In this case, the parties seek greater physical distance from one another. Sommer (1965) shows that parties who are cooperatively disposed toward one another seem to prefer seating arrangements that are side by side. Knapp & Hall (1997) claim that leaders and dominant personalities tend to choose specific seats. Johnson (1993) says that choosing where to sit may help make a negotiator feel more confident. In addition, negotiators often vie for a "power" position and gravitate toward the most prominent seat.

However, the results of mean average show us a different picture from Scheffé test. After data analysis, the results of mean average show that the findings are consistent with the theories covered in the literature review. The three categories discussed here are deemed to have the strongest impacts on a successful negotiation.

Proxemics (location and site). Johnson (1993) declares that a negotiator may feel more in control by meeting in his or her own territory. Furthermore, Lewicki & Litterer (1985) believe that if one negotiates on the other side's turf, one should not be awed by the environment; otherwise, one may lose his or her best deal in the negotiation. Johnson (1993) also finds that a neutral site is ideal for negotiations because it can be agreeable and comfortable for both sides and advantageous to neither. "Our use of space (our own and others') can affect dramatically our ability to achieve certain desired communication goals" (Knapp & Hall, 1997, p. 154). The above argument is strongly supported by the participants in this research.

In this study, 71% of participants who feel they have a greater advantage in the negotiation when that negotiation occurs on their own turf. 71% of the participants also feel more "comfortable" when they are negotiating on their own turf; 66% feel more "confident" when negotiating on their own turf; 59% of them feel that they "perform more effectively" when negotiating on their own turf. Moreover, 56% of participants feel a "greater challenge" when negotiating on the other's turf. 69% of participants believe that the person who designates the negotiation site has an advantage in negotiations, and 50% of participants regard the home site in negotiation as equivalent to a home team advantage in sports.

Physical Arrangement (seating and furniture arrangement). Burgoon, Buller & Woodall (1996) have argued that humans are affected by their physical surroundings. Lewicki & Litterer (1985) state that furniture may be used to communicate status and power; furthermore they find that face to face seating arrangement creates competition and places the visitors at a significant disadvantage. In this case, the parties seek greater physical distance from one another. Sommer

(1965) shows that parties who are cooperatively disposed toward one another seem to prefer seating arrangements that are side by side. Knapp & Hall (1997) claim that leaders and dominant personalities tend to choose specific seats. Johnson (1993) says that choosing where to sit may help make a negotiator feel more confident. In addition, negotiators often vie for a "power" position and gravitate toward the most prominent seat.

In this category, the data are consistent with the literature about furniture arrangement as mentioned above. 62% of participants report feeling calm when they negotiate in a room with paintings of countryside scenes on the walls. 74% of participants feel "more pleasant" when they sit at a table decorated with flowers, 60% of them feel more at ease when there are soft drinks on the table when they negotiate, and 56% think the arrangement of furniture should receive more attention from negotiators. 75% of the participants believe that seating arrangement should receive more attention from negotiators. In regards to a round table, 57% of participants believe a round table eases tension, 54% generally prefer round tables to square tables in negotiations, and 53% of them deem that a round-table seating arrangement makes an atmosphere more conducive for discussion. Also, 50% of the participants say that notebooks and pens neatly arranged on a large table encourage them to reach an agreement in a negotiation. A room equipped with a large screen TV, VCR, and computer is deemed more professional when negotiating by 51% of participants.

Kinesic Messages. Even if one keeps silent, one is still conveying messages. Knapp & Hall (1997, p. 332) state: "The face may be the basis for judging another person's personality and that it can (and does) provide information other than one's emotional state." Knapp & Hall (1997) find that how something is said is often more important than what is being said. In addition, Anderson (1993) suggests that people perceived as powerful shift their position occasionally, making themselves appear in charge. Burgoon et al. conclude that those who were more persuasive used more eye contact, longer gazes. Gaze has been shown to be a powerful influence on other people's willingness to help someone or to comply with a request.

The responses in the kinesic messages category show less consistency with the theory than the last two categories. However, 51% of the participants say that they move physically closer to emphasize the importance of their point in negotiations. In addition 66% believe that people who smile more get greater cooperation in negotiations. 49% of participants think that people who look straight into the other's eyes gain power in negotiations; and 44% of them believe that people who can tolerate silence longer have more power in negotiations. Finally, 44% of the participants lean back in their chairs as a gesture of encouragement to respond to their proposals.

## **LIMITATIONS AND SUGGESTIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH**

Overall the validity of nonverbal theory is strengthened by the findings because all the agreed responses exceeded the "not important" level. However, the percentage is a little less than what researcher anticipated. The mean showed that the tendency is toward not certain (2.66, 2.77, and 2.74). It is not clear which genders and age groups favored "important", "uncertain" and "not

important". Future research will be needed to distinguish the differences among each demographic group. Since all the participants are experienced negotiators instead of a college population, the generalizability of the research findings may be increased and broadly applied to business negotiations. However, another limitation of the study is that the sample (i.e., the subject pool) was too small. This made it difficult to distinguish the differences among each gender and age group. The number of female participants was also too small. The questionnaires will need to be examined according to the different nationalities. The researcher might have obtained different results if she would have interviewed or observed the negotiators. Future research will need to focus on the responses from these dimensions. High context cultures and low context culture may respond differently to the nonverbal messages in negotiation. Different genders may respond differently, and negotiators may respond to nonverbal messages differently in social life and professional life.

Since this study is the first empirical research on nonverbal communication in cross-cultural business negotiation by collecting data from the real world professional business negotiators, its implication to practitioners and contribution to nonverbal theory is evidently. Besides culture factors and negotiation styles, silent messages play the role in successful business negotiations too.

### **CONCLUSION AND MANAGERIAL IMPLICATIONS**

With the increase of international business and globalization cross-cultural business negotiation becomes more important than ever. It is estimated that global managers spend more than half of their time negotiating, and negotiation is often ranked as one of the most important skills for global managers to possess (George, Jones, & Gonzalez, 1998, p. 750). Moreover, China's economy has been growing at an annual rate of 7.7 percent, more than double the world average of 3.3 percent (china-embassy.org, 8/18/00). "Western observers thus confront the paradoxical possibility that by the year 2010, if it maintains just two-thirds of its current rate of growth, China could have become at one and the same time, the world's largest capitalist and Marxist-Leninist state (Boisot, 1996)." The implications of this study provide guidance to cross-cultural negotiators, and offer them advice as well.

Overall it was found that the averages of the means of the three nonverbal communication categories are consistent with the literature, demonstrating that nonverbal communication is important for business negotiation. On the other hand, the findings show that not all three groups of negotiators view nonverbal communication as important in their professional area. The implications for managers from the three categories are addressed as follows.

**Location and site.** The findings of this study indicate that most negotiators feel that they have a greater advantage in negotiation when they do so on their own turf. Negotiating on their own turf can make them feel more comfortable, confident, and perform more effectively because they believe that the home site in negotiation is equivalent to a home team advantage in sports. They also feel a greater challenge when negotiating on the other party's turf, for they believe that the person who designates the negotiation site has an advantage in negotiations. Therefore, negotiators might try to

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select their own location or a neutral site. If the meeting does not occur on your own turf you should not be awed or influenced by the location and site. On the other hand, when you are confident about negotiations and would like to cooperate with your counterparts, you will make them feel comfortable when negotiating at the site of their choosing. And you might get more cooperation than when negotiating on your own turf.

**Physical arrangements.** The findings of this study indicate that paintings of countryside scenes on walls and a table decorated with flowers and soft drinks will make negotiators feel calm, more pleasant, and at ease. They prefer round tables to square tables in negotiations because they believe that a round table eases tension, and a round-table seating arrangement makes for an atmosphere more conducive for discussion. Thus, when negotiating on your own turf, decorate the room with paintings of countryside scenes on the walls, use a round table decorated with flowers and put soft drinks on the table. This physical arrangement will ease tension and make your counterparts feel calm, more pleasant, and at ease. The setting will be more conducive for discussion, and you will get more cooperation from them too.

**Kinesic message.** The findings indicate that people move physically closer to emphasize the importance of their point in negotiations, and that people who smile more get greater cooperation. To bargain effectively it is important to determine the counterpart's priorities and goals. Therefore, you might observe when they move physically closer that they are emphasizing the importance of their point. Moreover, you may obtain greater cooperation in negotiations when you smile more; a straight face might not be a good cue in cross-cultural negotiations.

If negotiators work out a satisfactory agreement or want to terminate negotiations, employing silent messages might be more effective than direct confrontation. If negotiators pay attention to the three nonverbal categories the results will be cooperative, constructive, effective, and reach a desirable end.

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