

# **A Comparative Study on Nonverbal Communication Used by Chinese and English Teachers**

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**Abstract:** In this paper, the methods of in-class observation and literature comprehending are used, studying on the impact of body language in middle school English classes from various aspects, hoping to arouse the junior middle school English teachers' attention for nonverbal communication, especially body language, providing more targeted suggestions for better usages of body language. Chapter 2 systematically discusses the research design, including research objects, research objectives, research methods, explaining the basic information of the observation objects and observation locations. In the third chapter, through the analysis of the English classes from the Chinese and English teachers, the author firstly analyzes their unique effects, then analyzes their problems with independent thinking and the reference to literature. In the last chapter, through the comparative analysis of body language in the teaching process of Chinese and foreign teachers, the author provides suggestions and reflections on the shortcomings of this research.

## **1. Introduction**

In today's English classes, the mainstream of classroom activities is no longer a single teacher-centered one, but a two-way activity between teachers and students communicating with each other, attaining mutual achievements. When it comes to the language used in teaching, experts in the field of education believe that it includes two aspects, one is the relatively simple spoken language absorbed by hearing, and the other is the more "silent" and often ignored silent language, namely the body language. In the process of classroom teaching, the expression of body language not only includes the characteristics of people from different professions, genders, ages in various fields, but also has the unique personality that can be expressed by a teacher. As the old saying goes, the teacher teaches knowledge and refers it to virtues. Therefore, our teachers are more likely to use some implicit body language. While in western teaching, freedom is the orientation, so teachers prefer to use an exaggerated and lively body behavior. This difference between the East and the West often brings us thinking about how to explore the reform of classroom teaching in different body language teaching.

"Wisdom in hold, elegance in mold", even if there do exist some differences between Chinese and western education, but "basing learning on teachers" education concept will not change. "Silent language is more moving than spoken language," Edward said. Therefore, we should attach importance to the development of body language, accept differences, but tolerate each other, in order to give full play to the important role of body language in classroom teaching reform.

## **2. Research Methodology**

### **2.1 Research Object**

#### **2.1.1 In-Class Observation Object**

In order to minimize the influence of other factors except body language in English classes, the author selected two Chinese teachers and foreign teachers who were as close as possible in all aspects. The specific information is shown in the table 1 below.

Table 1 Shows the Details of Objects Observed in Class

Name	Gender	Age	Length of teaching	Education background	Lesson type
Mrs Zhao	Female	30	4	Domestic undergraduate	Spoken
Mrs Yang	Female	30	4	Domestic undergraduate	Spoken
Lizzie	Female	28	3	Foreign undergraduate	Spoken
Nick	Female	26	2	Foreign undergraduate	Spoken

### 2.1.2 In-Class Observation Location

Suzhou is a prefecture-level city in Jiangsu province and one of the important central cities in the Yangtze river delta urban agglomeration. Here, education is well developed and the schools are in good order. The school selected by the author was founded in 1984 and has a long history. The school has 28 classes with about 1400 teachers and students. It is one of the largest junior middle schools in Suzhou. Therefore, the author took this school as a place to observe classes.

### 2.2 Research Objective

Through in-class survey and post-study analysis, this paper aims to investigate the influence of nonverbal communication, which is often ignored by most people, in English classroom teaching. Secondly, by observing the junior middle school English classes of two Chinese and two foreign teachers, the author further discovered the cross-cultural significance of teachers' body language in English teaching, and proposed relevant improvement strategies after analyzing their advantages and disadvantages, so as to put forward relative suggestions for junior middle school English teaching in the future.

### 2.3 Research Method

Observation-in-class method: with the consent of the four teachers, video was accepted to be recorded, in the meantime, the body language used by the two teachers in English class and the real-time reaction of the students were recorded.

Literature method: referring to related literature on junior middle school oral English teaching, teacher body language, etc.

## 3. Analysis on the Experiment

### 3.1 The Distinct Influence from the Chinese Teachers

Through the analysis of the oral English classes from Mrs Zhao and Mrs Yang, the author found the most significant and prominent influence of their body language-- management, compared with that of foreign teachers.

In Class 3, Grade 7 of Suzhou Caixiang Experimental School, which is the study sample, the students were seated into two parts, respectively on the left and right of the classroom. Thus the teacher's range of movement was relatively small, and the arrangement could easily cause the distraction of the students. The oral English class of Mrs Zhao and Mrs Yang fully reflected the classroom standard of "student-oriented". In the Presentation section, Mrs Zhao invited students to come to the platform to explain the answers to exercise after class. Meanwhile, Mrs Yang had a heated discussion with students on NBA competitions, history and players. In the Practice section, the two teachers ask students to analyze the text on the platform. When it comes to the final Production section, they both invited several groups to present on stage. In the above activities, students' distraction was extremely likely to lose. Both of the 2 Chinese teachers used their body language to perform well in classroom management.

First, seeing from the teacher's gesture, for example, when a student is lecturing on the platform, two teachers will retreat to the left or right corner of the front of the classroom. But their eyes followed the students, whether they were on display or sitting in class. When the students on the stage ask questions to the students listening on seats, the teacher will raise his or her hand with the following auxiliary questions: "Who'd like to have a try?" "Any volunteers?" and so on. When a

student answers correctly, the two teachers will give the student a thumbs-up sign of recognition and praise them.

Then comes to the analysis of the body language of other parts of the two teachers. In addition to the thumbs-up mentioned just now, teacher Zhao also repeatedly used nodding, taking the lead to applaud and other ways to express encouragement and appreciation to the students, which can not only make the students themselves receive encouragement, but also drive the other students' mood in class, promoting their hands up. Finally, the probability of distraction could be greatly reduced in class. When the students on stage didn't feel confident and looked at Mrs Zhao, she slightly nodded to encourage as well. In addition, there were many group discussions in this class. After the activity was released, teacher Zhao would check the discussion of each group and clap hands with the group members rhythmically at the end of the discussion, indicating the completion of the group discussion. In this way, the efficiency of the class is greatly improved, and students will not waste time on meaningless discussions, but will go straight to the topic.

In Mrs Yang's class, she asked students to answer questions in a continuous position distribution, so that basically she could reach every student when answering to give close feedback. When students answered well, Mrs Yang also used movements like large nodding, clapping, timely exchange of eyes with the surrounding students, etc, not only to stimulate the confidence of students answering questions, but also to enable other students to maintain relatively focused attention when they do not speak.

From the above, Mrs Zhao and Mrs Yang have excellent ability in classroom management.

### **3.2 The Distinct Influence from the English Teachers**

As teachers influenced by foreign education since childhood, teacher Lizzie and teacher Nick have developed their own body language which is naturally different from that of Chinese teachers. Through the observation of the video course of foreign language teaching, the author found the most unique function of body language compared with that of Chinese language teaching -- infection.

Jiang Yuqin and Zhao Qingyong<sup>[1]</sup> pointed out that non-verbal behavior is indispensable in people's communication, classroom teaching is the communication between teachers and students, and facial expressions play an important role in it. Facial expressions have various functions, including auxiliary function, substitution function and emotional transmission function, etc.

Teacher Lizzie showed her lively and cheerful personality from the beginning of the class, saying "Hi!" out loud, accompanied by an obvious smile, so that all students immediately affected and responded as well. Throughout the rest of the class, Lizzie kept a smile on her face both during the teaching and during the free discussion. At the same time, when the students answered wrong, teacher Lizzie also corrected them with a smile, which greatly reduced the students' nervousness. Lizzie often had a happy laugh, because of which, the students listening were also affected and laughed. The classroom atmosphere was very relaxed. Therefore, the teacher's facial expression is very infectious.

Although Nick was not as expressive as Lizzie on the whole, he was always smiling as well. When it was proposed that all the students sit in a circle and some students made hesitant expressions, he did not show any signs of impatience, but more friendly expressions on face, and took the initiative to gently pull the students around to help them move their chairs to a proper position.

Lizzie and Nick also showed their infectious power through other parts of the body. When students did not understand what the foreign teacher said, teacher Lizzie would make full use of her body language. On the one hand, it reflects that the English class should weaken the standard of Chinese logic. On the other hand, it fully arouses the students' enthusiasm and makes the class field with fun. When students made a speech, Nick would give very specific body movements, such as: big nod, opening mouth and eyes widely to show agreement; When he heard something questionable, he exchanged eyes with other students waiting to speak, encouraging them to put forward their different opinions next.

### 3.3 Respective Problems and Relative Analyses

#### 3.3.1 Analysis on the Chinese Teachers

##### (1) little-changed facial expressions

Through literature review, the author found that teachers' body language includes facial expressions, gestures and other physical conditions. However, by observing Mrs Zhao's English class, the author found that she had some problems in facial expressions. Zhong Hailan<sup>[2]</sup> pointed out that in the process of teaching, teachers often express complicated, subtle and profound thoughts and feelings that are difficult or inappropriate to express in language to students through the change of facial expressions. In fact, the change of facial expressions will constantly change according to the teaching progress and classroom atmosphere. However, Mrs Zhao kept a serious expression during the 45-minute English class and even smiled only four times.

To investigate the reason, the author thinks that in perspective, Chinese classes usually include a large number of students, it's difficult for the teachers to manage the whole class while always maintaining amiable expression. In some circumstances where students need to talk on the platform, teachers will involuntarily turn into serious expression; On the other hand, Chinese teachers generally subconsciously believe that only "seriousness" can make students obey the discipline, and dare not show too many facial expressions in class, but do not know that students may have "fear" instead of "respect".

##### (2) Unstable body language

Through observing Mrs Zhao's English class, the author found that she also seemed to have some uneven distribution of attention. In the first half of the class, Mrs Zhao often appeared absent-minded during the students' explanation on the platform, or only paid attention to the students on stage but ignored below students' reactions. Fortunately, this phenomenon did not last long. By the end of the first third of the course, Mrs Zhao had adjusted her state and restored her body language.

To find out the reasons, the author believes that, considering the teaching experience of teacher Zhao, the teacher is not fully equipped with the ability to completely separate the classroom from the extracurricular activities, so it is likely that there will be "lack of concentration" like students in the early part of the course. In addition, most teachers have not paid attention to the possible influence of body language on the classroom, generally believing that as long as the content that needs to be taught can be said, the classroom effect can be undoubtedly ensured, which is bound to be one-sided.

#### 3.3.2 Analysis on the English Teachers

##### (1) Redundant habitual actions

The author found that Lizzie often made some unnecessary movements, which caused some students to distract. For example, when introducing herself at the beginning, teacher Lizzie frequently touched her face, grabbed her skirt and touched her hair, etc., while teacher Nick was used to putting one hand into the pocket, shrugging his shoulders, frequently putting the piece of paper in his hand into the corner of his mouth, and holding the corner of the table, etc. Besides, some students have imitated him for a short time. In the long term, it will certainly have a certain negative impact on the classroom effect. The reasons are as follows:

Teachers themselves tend to ignore the impact of habitual actions on the classroom. Yu Qinghai<sup>[3]</sup> pointed out that "the formation of teachers' individual gestures is mainly due to the different social environment, cultural customs, religious beliefs and individual personalities." Some kind of gesture has become a habitual action, then its ability to convey information has a certain limitation. It is not difficult to see from the above sentence that if teachers can properly use body language required in class, it will be of great help to the classroom effect and the effect of information transmission. However, on the contrary, if the teacher does not pay attention to the appropriate amount of body language, it will have a negative effect on the classroom effect and the information transmission effect, and sometimes it may even make students disgusted.

##### (2) Unable to timely manage the progress of group activities with body language

A class is made up of 45 minutes, and a number of scientists have found that teenagers' attention during a class goes from low to high and then back down. Through observing teacher Lizzie's English class, the author soon found that when the class was in the middle and the latter part of group discussion, teacher Lizzie could not manage the activity process with body language completely, and students in the audience often focused too much on the discussion and ignored the teacher on the stage. In order to make the class quiet again, teacher Lizzie needed to use a loud "Quiet, please!" adding some extra time. In the class of Nick, the teacher and the students were sitting in a circle at the same time, as time elapses to the later part, Nick not only failed to stop the students around talking anything irrelevant, even Nick himself also sometimes joined deviations to discuss, and then suddenly noticed putting fingers to the mouth to make the "hiss" action.

The reasons are as follows:

First, English teachers Lizzie and Nick did not give the time limitation before the group task, which made some students tend to be free and loose in the later part of the discussion, deviating from the topic of the discussion. Second, in combination with the first problem analyzed by the author, sometimes teachers Lizzie and Nick were too relaxed in class, which made some students too relaxed and lack the agile thinking ability in class.

#### 4. Conclusion

Based on the analysis of the English lessons of one Chinese teacher and one foreign teacher in caixiang experimental school, the following Suggestions are given:

(1) The combination of Chinese and western, innovation of multi-dimensional teaching model

In the analysis and comparison between Chinese and foreign body language teaching, we can find that the "managerial effect" of body language teaching in Chinese language teaching and the "contagious effect" of body language teaching in foreign language teaching are actually beneficial to help students further understand the teaching content in the classroom teaching. The teaching method of body language in Chinese has improved the efficiency of classroom teaching, while the body language of foreign teachers has fully aroused the students' enthusiasm and sense of participation in classroom teaching. If we can use foreign teachers' body language to improve the efficiency of learning in class, we can also get a sense of gain in class. Such a combination of Chinese and western, not only can avoid students in the high efficiency of classroom teaching a kind of "cramming" boring, but also can solve the teaching process of foreign teachers too casual and appear loose phenomenon. Therefore, exploring the combination of body language in the process of Chinese and western teaching is an innovative teaching model. Under the influence of the teacher's body language, we can not only improve the efficiency of classroom teaching, but also enable students to have a sense of participation and gain, and learn knowledge in a relaxed and free atmosphere.

(2) Student-oriented, promote the new teaching concept

Under the guidance of teachers, let students themselves can participate in, good participation, will participate in the classroom. In the process of traditional Chinese teaching, blindly advocating "respect for teachers" often inhibits students' innovative spirit and self-consciousness to some extent. However, we should also avoid paying too much attention to the sense of participation of students, because in the middle school education stage, students are still in the transition period of life, in this period, the teacher as the leader of students, must through their own classroom teaching process to show students a good character, self-cultivation. An excellent teacher, in the process of teaching, every body language will form a beautiful image in the minds of students, with profound aesthetic edifying and infectious power, so we must avoid some inappropriate body language behavior, because a behavior may cause students to unconsciously imitate. At the same time, teachers should play a leading role in classroom teaching. Let the body language carry out in the teaching process, "one leaf can know the autumn" is often the body language can better reflect the teacher's love for students, through the interaction between teachers and students, the first time to adjust the teaching process of methods and strategies, this is the real application of the new teaching concept.

Although there are some gains in this research, there are still some deficiencies worth thinking about. First of all, the sample of the study is relatively small, which is not representative of the general characteristics of body language of Chinese and foreign teachers. Secondly, only one school in the experiment was selected, which also had the problem of insufficient representativeness. In order to obtain more extensive and universal experimental results, junior middle schools of different regions and levels should be selected for research.

The author hopes that this paper can put forward some Suggestions for the improvement of English teaching in caixiang experimental school, and further arouse people's attention on the application of nonverbal communication in junior middle school English class. After recognizing the deficiency, the author will be more modest and cautious in the future.

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