

## فرهنگ و جنسیت در ارتباط غیر کلامی

## Culture and Gender in Nonverbal Communication

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### Abstract

Nonverbal behavior plays an important role in the interpersonal relationships of people who are from different countries and different sex. This cross-cultural study aims to investigate the knowledge of nonverbal cues in Iranian and Italian people taking into account the gender differences as well. A non-verbal questionnaire was utilized in order to evaluate the knowledge of nonverbal cues in samples of 360 Italian and 360 Iranian participants. The results exposed that, the Italian group got a higher rating in nonverbal cues than Iranian one, which means different cultural backgrounds affect the individuals' knowledge of non-verbal cues, and also in the Iranian group, the women received higher rates than the men, indicating that the women have more non-verbal decoding accuracy compared to the men.

**Keywords** nonverbal communication, Cultural differences, Nonverbal cues, Gender differences.

### چکیده

رفتار غیر کلامی در روابط بین فردی افراد که از کشورهای مختلف و جنس متفاوت هستند نقش مهمی ایفا می کند. این مطالعه متقابل فرهنگی با هدف بررسی دانش نشانه های غیر کلامی در افراد ایرانی و ایتالیایی با در نظر گرفتن تفاوت های جنسیتی نیز صورت گرفته است. به منظور سنجش آگاهی از نشانه های غیر کلامی در نمونه ۳۶۰ شرکت کننده ایتالیایی و ۳۶۰ ایرانی از پرسشنامه غیر کلامی استفاده شد. نتایج نشان می دهد که ، گروه ایتالیایی در نشانه های غیر کلامی رتبه بالاتری نسبت به گروه ایرانی کسب کرده است ، این بدان معناست که پیشینه های فرهنگی مختلف بر دانش افراد از نشانه های غیر کلامی تأثیر می گذارد و همچنین در گروه ایرانی ، زنان نرخ بالاتری نسبت به مردان دریافت می کنند. این نشان می دهد که زنان نسبت به مردان از دقت رمزگشایی غیر کلامی بیشتری برخوردار هستند.

**واژگان کلیدی:** ارتباط غیر کلامی، تفاوت های فرهنگی، نشانه های غیر کلامی، تفاوت های جنسیتی

### Introduction

Without communication, the emergence and the development of the human community are not possible. A wide consensus regards language as the main difference between animals and humans (Berman, 2011). People interact with each other through language, gesture, facial expression, and so forth. Thus, through these, people can better understand each other and improve their interpersonal communication, and ultimately, facilitate the progress of the society (Wang, 2009).

Communication is mainly done in two ways: verbal and non-verbal (Mavridis, 2015). Verbal communication is provided through words, either spoken or written. The non-verbal communication, on the other hand is the process of sending and receiving messages by any means other than spoken language, this type of communication may be established through tools such as facial expression, touch, distance (distance or proximity) gesture, organs' position (posture), and tone of voice. Non-verbal cues include all the significant and meaningful signs and messages (audio, video, touch, etc.) that are used to send and receive messages separately from the language and talk features of the language (Givens, 2005; Shahrabak & Bagheri, 2011). Psychological researches reveal more than 65% of the information exchange during face-to-face interactions is done through non-verbal communication (Guye-Vuillème, Capin, Pandzic, Thalmann, & Thalmann, 1999; Shahrabak & Bagheri, 2011).

Researchers such as Albert Mehrabian have argued that the transmission of a message is only effective when all three aspects of the communication counting verbal (words with 7% impact), audio (tune, gamut, tone with 38% effect), and visual (gestures and body movements with 55% impact) are related to each other (Yammiyavar, Clemmensen, & Kumar, 2008). Thus according to the earlier research, nonverbal behaviors play an essential role in interpersonal communication (Mast, 2007; McCroskey, 1976). Among nonverbal communication means, body language expresses our emotions and makes it easier to regulate relationships. Different dimensions of interpersonal relationships, such as power and domination, proximity, distance, kindness and aversion, are regulated through non-verbal signals (Bänninger-Huber & Huber, 2017). Facial behavior is of particular importance as well, because it plays an important role in emotional communication (Parkinson, 2005). This is especially useful for expressing certain emotions such as joy, wonder, anger, hatred, humiliation, and sadness (Bänninger-Huber & Huber, 2017). We use body language without being aware of it, and we constantly experience and interpret the body language of others (Mandal, 2014). Even if non-verbal behaviors often occur unconsciously, they will have a profound effect on individuals' interactions and often appear more effective than verbal expressions (Bänninger-Huber & Huber, 2017). As stated, non-verbal behaviors include the use of face, head, eyes and hands, body and sound, interpersonal distance (distance or proximity), and the angle of position detection and the ability to express emotions through non-verbal cues (Hall, Coats, & LeBeau, 2005; Knapp, Hall, & Horgan, 2013). From a slightly different perspective, nonverbal cues also may be considered as identifiable triggers for changing relationships (Docan-Morgan, Manusov, & Harvey, 2013; Manusov & Milstein, 2005). According to the literature nonverbal cues are initially accompanied by emotional expressions, in particular, facial expressions, body movements, and speech tones, but can also involve other forms of physical appearance: skin, hair color, stance, proximity, Facial morphology, blinking, gazing or taking eyes off, dress style, or categories of touch (Bucy, 2017).

According to the earlier studies, gender differences in the non-verbal behavior of women and men are relatively small (Hall, Carter, & Horgan, 2000; Hall & Gunnery, 2013) but they still can be associated with significant results (Gifford, 2009; Hall, 2006). Men and women are different in communication process in variables such as word choices, conversation style, content of speech, the purpose of conversation, the purpose of the questions, the use of silence, the style of listening and speaking, the change of subject, interrupting the speech of the others and encouraging the continuation of the conversation (Goldshmidt & Weller, 2000; Hannah & Murachver, 1999; Heaton & Blake, 1999). Men and women also show different non-verbal communication patterns. Women interact more closely than men (Evans & Howard, 1973) and allow others to get closer (Patterson & Edinger, 1987), women are also more likely to touch each other more than men (Hall & Veccia, 1990; Tannen, 1990). On the other hand, men sit side by side, often at a particular angle and do not look directly at each other when communicating. women moderately make direct eye contact with each other, and sometimes they take their eyes off from the opposite side, on the other hand, men usually look at other objects of the room and less frequently look at each other (Shahrabak &

Bagheri, 2011). Women often score higher points in judging non-verbal cues, and this is a sign of their excitement and character (Ambady, Hallahan, & Rosenthal, 1995; Hall, 1978; Hall et al., 2000; McClure, 2000; Murphy, Hall, & Colvin, 2003). Ickes et al. (2000) argued that women are more likely to work on interpersonal skills, and this is related to their gender stereotypes, not their knowledge of the subject, and this can lead women to a better understanding of men. It has also been shown that explicit knowledge is meaningfully associated with non-verbal decoding (Rosip & Hall, 2004).

Culture is another important factor in nonverbal behavior and communication which makes the people of different countries practice them differently (Burgoon, Guerrero, & Floyd, 2016; Matsumoto, 2006). Individuals repeat non-verbal behavior and communication according to their own methods, and these are influenced by the cultures that inherited them. As a result, cultural diversity appears between countries (Nakamura, 2017).

Intercultural similarities and fundamental differences in body language are partly related to the use of the body language in its cultural context and its interpretation among people of that specific culture. For instance, The head movement to say "yes" and "no" is not similar in all cultures. Maintaining a physical distance between people in conversation is also different from culture to culture (Mandal, 2014). Apparently People learn how to communicate through the thoughts, feelings, and values of their shared culture (Gudykunst, 1997, 2005). In other words, culture is expected to form verbal and non-verbal communication (Park, Baek, & Cha, 2012).

Anthropologists have also indicated that non-verbal communication styles differ according to culture. However, many people not only lack information and awareness about non-verbal communication styles of their own culture but also do not have enough knowledge about other cultures so people often mistakenly assume that people of other cultures communicate in the same way as they do, and they call this phenomenon a projection resemblance. The result of the false hypothesis about similarity is that misunderstanding, misinterpretation, and lack of understanding in intercultural interactions occur when one interprets the non-verbal communication of another person in the light of his cultural norms. First of all, we must study and learn, and become aware of our own culture, consciously In learning about the culture, we learn how do we act differently from the people of cultures that are around us (Cruz, 2001). Therefore, culture has a significant role in non-verbal behaviors; it can even transmit different messages and concepts. Therefore, the study of intercultural communication is essential and contributes to the interaction between countries (Wang, 2009).

A purpose of this research is to study non-verbal behavior in two different cultures, comparing its specificity with its generality. One of the general outcomes is that facial expressions are general in the category of main emotions, but the rules about how they are used and when they are used and how they are decoded by others are specific (Gifford, 2009; Matsumoto, Yoo, Hirayama, & Petrova, 2005). Different views about non-verbal behaviors indicate whether these behaviors are general or belong to a particular culture. Ekman (1968) and Ekman and Friesen (1969) Ekman and Frisson argued that there are some behaviors that can be categorized in general, although others must be specifically addressed in the culture. They assumed that there are some common things between the facial muscles and the main emotions, such as joy, sadness, anxiety or fear. However, they pointed out that there are cultural differences in the control of such behaviors, and displaying the rules depends on the social status and emotional arousal results (Ugurel, 2010).

However, few researches have been undertaken regarding this important matter, and this logic needs to be considered and investigated among different cultures. Therefore, the present study examines the hypothesis that the knowledge of non-verbal cues of the women is higher than that of the men and whether different cultural backgrounds affect the knowledge of non-verbal cues. according to the study undertaken by Hofstede in 2010, Iranian and Italian cultures seem to be rather different. Regarding Hofstede's research, Italians are quite individualist yet Iranians are far more collectivist. Hofstede's results also indicate Italian culture is far more masculine than Iranian culture (Hofstede, Hofstede, & Minkov, 2005). Thus the authors of this article chose these two countries

because they assumed comparing countries with such different cultures will better demonstrate effects of culture on nonverbal behaviour in case any exists.

## Methods

### Participants

Participants consisted of 720 students, 360 Iranian students who were recruited from university settings in Rasht, Iran and 360 Italian students were selected from university settings in Genova, Italy. Iranian participants identified as Iranian and spoke Persian but Italian participants had different cultural backgrounds. The age of participants ranged from 18 to 49 ( $M = 25.22$ ,  $SD = 6.0049$ ), 296 (41.1 %) were female and 424 (58.9%) were male. In terms of higher educational degree, 418 participants had a bachelor's degree, 234 participants had a master's degree, and 68 participants had a doctorate degree. Cultural background of the participants was also assessed for both Italy and Iran groups. Although Iranian group had mono-cultural background (Iranian culture), participants of the Italian group mostly reported that they had multi-cultural back ground.

### Procedure

Potential participants were approached and asked to take part in a psychological study about nonverbal communication. Participants completed a survey and reported basic demographic information (sex, age, educational background and cultural background) and completed the Persian version of the TONCK. Participation was based on voluntary and participants were not compensated.

### Measure

Test of Nonverbal Cue Knowledge (TONCK) was developed by Russ and Hall (2004). It has 81 questions. higher score in this test, indicates high non-verbal knowledge and low score, indicates low non-verbal knowledge. The Farsi version of this scale has shown acceptable reliability and validity (Zand, 2016). In the present study, Cronbach's alpha was 0.68

### Statistical analysis

The nature of the present study was rather hypothesis-generating. As a result, descriptive statistics, and t-test analyses were used to draw statistical conclusions. Mean and standard deviation of all measures were computed. Additionally, Levene's test was performed for assessment of equality of variances. Moreover, Cohen's d was calculated as a measure of effect size in order to overcome the problems concerning sample size and statistical significance. All statistical analyses were performed using SPSS 24.

## Results

We examined descriptive statistics of the study variable and sex differences. Table 1 displays the descriptive statistics (i.e., M and SD) of the study variable for men and women for both Iranian and Italian participants. Moreover, sex differences were examined using independent samples t-test and effect size (Cohen's d). As displayed in Table 1, Iranian women in the present sample scored higher on knowledge of nonverbal cues. But Sex difference in Italian group was non-significant.

**Table 1: Descriptive statistics and sex differences.**

groups	Men		Women		t-Test statistic	Cohen's d
	M	SD	M	SD		
Iran	46.78	7.01	51.31	6.44	3.01*	0.67
Italy	52.42	8.13	53.89	5.94	0.95	0.21

\* $P < 0.05$ .

In Table 2, the mean and standard deviation of non-verbal communication scores in the sample group of Iran were 48.58 and 7.10, respectively, and in the sample group of Italy were 53.04 and 7.28, respectively. The significance level was less than 0.05, Therefore, we conclude that there is a notable difference between non-verbal communication skills among students in Iran and Italy, and Italian students with mean of 53.4 have got higher points. Therefore, the hypothesis of the effect of different cultural backgrounds on the knowledge of non-verbal cues was confirmed.

**Table 2: Descriptive statistics and Independent t-test details between Iran and Italy groups**

Groups	N	Mean	SD	t-Test statistic
Iran	360	48.58	7.10	4.15*
Italy	360	53.4	7.28	

\*P<0.05.

### Discussion & Conclusion

The focus of this study was on cultural and gender dimensions that had significant effects on non-verbal behaviors. The evidence from this analysis suggests that the female participants in the Iranian group has more knowledge about non-verbal cues than men, and women have more non-verbal decoding accuracy than men. There is an essential difference between the means of non-verbal communication knowledge in the two groups of Iran and Italy, which means that different cultural backgrounds affect the knowledge of individuals' nonverbal cues.

The findings of the present study about the difference between women and men in the knowledge of non-verbal communication in the Iranian group are in line with the research that has been carried out before. The results of the study by Lauren et al. (2003) have exposed the gender differences in accuracy of identifying the nonverbal cues in favor of the women, which was in line with the research by Russ and Hall (2004) showing that non-verbal knowledge and the ability to decode the non-verbal cues of female students is more and better than male students.

Culture is another important factor which has been proven to affect behaviour generally and on non-verbal behaviour specifically (Archer, 1997; Barlett et al., 2014; Chau, Cole, Massey, & Montoya-Weiss, 2002; Druckman, Benton, Ali, & Bagur, 1976; Greenbaum & Greenbaum, 1983; Henley & LaFrance, 1984; Ho, Bluestein, & Jenkins, 2008; Liu & McClure, 2001; Madsen, 1971; Marsh, Elfenbein, & Ambady, 2003; Vrij & Winkel, 1991; Zinkhan & Karande, 1991). Matsumoto declared that culture has a significant influence on non-verbal behaviors, and this can create certain non-verbal social behaviors (Matsumoto, 2006). Intercultural research shows various examples of these differences, and the present research also illustrates this issue. Of all the remarkable work done, Hofstede (1980) built a six dimensional model for culture based on urgency, long and short history, individualism, collectivism, gender, power distance, and avoidance of uncertainty (Ugurel, 2010).

In individualist cultures, one is more important than the group, while in collectivist cultures, individuals must be matched with the group to suit each other (Gudykunst, 2004). When the culture of collectivism becomes more independent, individuals often engage in daily activities, and they are put together, while they stand more apart in individualist cultures and act more independently. Therefore, individualism and collectivism are important dimensions that help to understand the cultural differences and similarities in the context of communication in all cultures. According to Matsumoto (1992), culture not only affects the understanding of emotions but also affects the level of cognition. He argued that some cultures might be conservative in the discussion of emotions, and when there is much excitement, these lead to a lack of accurate recognition of excitement. Therefore, a person from a multicultural environment can easily understand different emotions and negotiate them with the different cultural backgrounds, while a person with the same culture may find it challenging to interpret the behavior of different cultures (Ugurel, 2010).

Thus, people with individualist cultures are relatively free to express their feelings and, therefore, their emotional moods are more visible and less suppressed. However, people in the collectivistic cultures are more accurately decoding the feelings of others to maintain their appearance, and thus their emotional states are more indirect and not very clear (Park et al., 2012).

Yet quite a few researches have investigated Iranian behaviour from different perspectives (Aliakbari, Faraji, & Pourshakibae, 2011; Alizadeh & Andries, 2002; Asoodeh et al., 2011; Behjat, Bayat, & Kargar, 2014; Lahsaeizadeh & Yousefinejad, 2012; Sadeghi, Mazaheri, Motabi, & Zahedi, 2012; Safarali & Hamidi, 2012; Zandpour & Sadri, 1996) to the best of our knowledge none has compared knowledge of non-verbal cues of Iranians with that of a European country.

In the present study, the Iranian group seems to be acting conservative in emotions, and as Ugurel (2010) states, Iranians, despite having a similar culture in non-verbal communication knowledge, allocate the lower score to themselves, while the Italian group, despite the presence of people with different cultural histories won higher scores.

In summary, the present study showed as we hypothesized that the knowledge of non-verbal cues is different in Iran and Italy, and women in the Iranian group got higher scores than men in decoding nonverbal cues. Thus the findings of this study contributes to the body of nonverbal behavior literature by providing even more evidence on the effect of culture and gender on nonverbal communications. To improve the current study, one can use an experimental method besides the questionnaire in order to obtain a more fundamental difference. For future research, it is suggested that the comparison of the communication in people with mental disorders and healthy individuals be investigated in order to distinguish between these variables in these two groups, and we also need to investigate the need for non-verbal communication with the personality characteristics of individuals as well as interference factors such as economic, social and marital status in non-verbal communication.

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