

A Research on Both Teachers' and Students' Nonverbal Behaviors in Classroom Teaching of English Majors

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Abstract

The research intends to study the application of NVC of English majors' classroom learning and teaching based on a case study in Sichuan International Studies University. Three approaches are involved in this paper: classroom observation, interview and questionnaires. The author does a classroom observation for two weeks in three English majors' classes. Follow-up interviews are then conducted with the students and the teachers. 100 English majors and 20 English teachers complete the questionnaires. The study aims to make the university English teachers and English majors realize the fact that NVC takes a great part in English majors' classroom teaching and that both teachers and students have to be equipped with sufficient knowledge of NVC so as to improve the teaching and learning efficiency.

Keywords

Nonverbal Communication; English Majors; Nonverbal Behaviors; English Classroom Teaching.

1. Introduction

Human communication can be separated into two parts: verbal communication (VC) and nonverbal communication (NVC), both of which play a very significant part in the whole communication process. As for NVC, most people reckon that it strengthens, substitutes and assists VC. However, for such a long time, some people normally pay much attention to the verbal respect of communication, but they often ignore the reality that in our face-to-face communication nonverbal behaviors convey most of the messages. As Abercrombie summarizes that we speak with our vocal organs, but we converse with our whole body. Samovar briefly defined NVC: "nonverbal communication involves those nonverbal stimuli in a communication setting that are generated by both the source (speaker) and his or her use of the environment and that have a potential message value for the source or receiver (listener)." Therefore it is clear that NVC plays an essential role in our daily communication. In terms of its classification in the classroom teaching, the author employs Bi Jiwan's classification in this thesis, that is, to sort NVC into three parts: body language, paralanguage and proxemics. Recently, nonverbal behaviors have been emphasized in the field of sociology, diagnosis delivery and so on. However in the domain of education, NVC has still been taken for granted. In fact, NVC and VC are of equal importance in classroom teaching. With regard to English majors, though they have learned English for at least ten years, their communication ability has not improved. Even some top students could not communicate with others in English fluently. Not to mention the rest of them. In China, traditional pedagogy always lays stress on English in terms of phonetics, morphology, and syntax and English teachers apply themselves to teaching students language knowledge. Some of teachers and English majors cannot truly understand the application of NVC in pedagogic domain.

Bi Jiwan says: “Western scholars believe that the role of NVC in classroom teaching is greater than that of formal teaching for students’ learning. Research has indicated that teachers are required to learn to use NVC to improve classroom teaching.” English teachers should be supplied with extensive knowledge about NVC and make great efforts to put it into teaching method. English majors are excellent observers, imitators, perceivers and evaluators, and they are more sensitive to the nonverbal behaviors of teachers compared with their monotone speech. By different means, teachers can upgrade their nonverbal behaviors in ways that improve their teaching faculty and English majors’ learning effect.

The study aims at investigating the nonverbal behaviors of teachers and students in English majors’ class and informing both teachers and students that NVC delivers great benefits to them. In this way, teachers can better apply nonverbal behaviors to improve students’ learning effect and students become more aware of those nonverbal behaviors. Teachers and students, especially university English teachers and English majors should be more conscious of NVC, which serves as a bridge to cross-cultural communication.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Definitions and Classifications of Nonverbal Communication

Nonverbal communication has been defined by various scholars from different perspectives. Knapp and Hall (2014) describe NVC as “communication effected by means other than words,” emphasizing its broad scope. Mehrabian (1971) famously estimated that in face-to-face communication, nonverbal elements account for as much as 93% of emotional meaning, underscoring its significance.

Classifications of NVC vary across studies. In the field of education, Bi Jiwan (1999) categorizes NVC into three main components: body language, paralanguage, and proxemics. Body language includes facial expressions, gestures, posture, and eye contact; paralanguage encompasses vocal cues such as pitch, tone, volume, and pauses; proxemics concerns the use of space and distance in interaction. Other scholars have proposed more detailed classifications. Ruesch and Kees (1956) distinguish three categories: sign language (gestures), action language (movement), and object language (use of artifacts). Despite differences in terminology, there is broad consensus that NVC comprises multiple channels that function simultaneously to convey meaning.

2.2. Functions of NVC in Classroom Teaching

The pedagogical functions of NVC have been explored extensively. Cooper (1988) suggests that students derive perceptions of teacher-student relationships from teachers’ nonverbal behaviors, including trust and approachability. In EFL contexts, NVC serves several key functions: (1) enhancing comprehension through visual reinforcement; (2) managing classroom interaction and maintaining discipline; (3) expressing emotions and attitudes; and (4) providing feedback and encouragement (Richards & Lockhart, 1996).

Studies have shown that teachers’ use of NVC can significantly influence student motivation. Dörnyei (2001) identifies motivation as a critical factor in language learning success, and nonverbal behaviors such as smiling, eye contact, and varied intonation have been linked to increased student engagement (Wang, 2010). Additionally, NVC contributes to classroom atmosphere. Students tend to perceive teachers who use positive nonverbal behaviors—such as moving around the classroom, nodding, and maintaining appropriate eye contact—as more effective and approachable (Smith, 1979).

2.3. Empirical Studies on NVC in Language Classrooms

Empirical research on NVC in language teaching has grown over recent decades. In China, scholars have examined various aspects of NVC in EFL classrooms. Li Jiequn (2002) emphasizes that effective teachers combine verbal ability with paralinguistic skills to create dynamic classroom communication. Other studies have investigated specific nonverbal channels: eye contact is found to signal attention and involvement (Harrison, 1974); gestures aid in vocabulary instruction and comprehension (Allen, 2000); and teacher proximity influences student participation patterns (Mehrabian, 1971).

However, several gaps remain. First, many studies focus on either teachers' or students' behaviors in isolation, overlooking the interactive nature of NVC. Second, research on English majors—a population with distinct linguistic and cultural needs—is relatively limited. Third, the integration of NVC into teacher training and classroom practice remains underexplored. This study seeks to address these gaps by examining both teachers' and students' nonverbal behaviors in English majors' classrooms, and by providing empirically grounded recommendations for pedagogical improvement.

3. Research Methodology

This study adopts a case study approach conducted at Sichuan International Studies University. A mixed-methods design was employed, integrating classroom observation, interviews, and questionnaires to obtain a comprehensive understanding of NVC use in English majors' classrooms.

3.1. Participants

A total of 100 English majors and 20 English teachers participated in the study. The student participants were drawn from three different classes, representing intermediate to advanced proficiency levels. Teacher participants included both experienced and early-career instructors, all of whom taught courses in the English major curriculum.

3.2. Data Collection Instruments

Classroom Observation: The researcher conducted two weeks of non-participant observation in three English majors' classes, focusing on teachers' and students' nonverbal behaviors across the three categories of body language, paralinguistic, and proxemics. Observation notes were recorded systematically.

Questionnaires: Two parallel questionnaires were designed for teachers and students, covering attitudes toward NVC, frequency of NVC use, perceived functions, and existing problems. The student questionnaire was distributed to 100 students, yielding a 100% return rate; the teacher questionnaire was completed by 20 teachers.

Interviews: Semi-structured interviews were conducted with 10 teachers and 15 students following the classroom observations. Interviews aimed to elicit deeper insights into participants' perceptions, experiences, and suggestions regarding NVC in English classrooms.

3.3. Data Analysis

Quantitative data from questionnaires were analyzed using descriptive statistics to compute frequencies and percentages. Qualitative data from observation notes and interview transcripts were analyzed thematically, following Braun and Clarke's (2006) framework, to identify recurring patterns and categories related to NVC application and its perceived effects.

4. Results and Discussion

4.1. Application of NVC in English Majors' Classrooms

The findings reveal that both teachers and students recognize the importance of NVC in English classroom teaching. Questionnaire results show that 94.8% of students and 97.7% of teachers expressed positive attitudes toward the use of NVC, affirming its necessity. However, a discrepancy emerged between attitudes and practice: only 22% of students reported that their teachers frequently used body language in class.

4.1.1. Body Language

Body language is to study how movement communicates, which comprises facial expression, gesture, posture and eye contact.⁵

4.1.1.1 Facial Expressions

Sentences like "one's face is the mirror of one's soul", "The face tells the secret" and many other sayings indicate that face can express much information and can easily attract people's attention. University English teachers should have suitable facial expressions. For example, smiling faces provides students with closeness and makes the distance between teacher and students shorter. If the teacher is all the time long-faced, it will induce confusion. Students will inevitably get depressed and weaken their interest and motivation in English learning, which can be a big failure for English teaching.

95% of students when interviewed say that they like the teachers who were always putting a smile on their faces, which magically encouraged them to take courage to express themselves freely in class. And almost all the students proposed that smiling teachers were more effective because they were more willing to engage in the classroom and learn more about their thoughts, feelings, and lives. While the stiff English teachers would make them feel depressed and lose their motivation to study. The English lesson will be very dull.

After discussing about teachers' nonverbal behaviors, the author comes to students' part. For instance, if a student dislikes a teacher, he or she will look at the teacher coldly and then give out a neutral expression. Experienced teachers will pick up the message from these subtle expressions. So, smiling will bring students intimacy and get both teachers and students closer. For introvert students, who are usually shy and silent, a warm smile is very polite and proper, so a simple smile will boost their confidence and they will come back with the perfect job.

All in all, a smile produces a positive and affectionate atmosphere, which encourages the students to do their best and help them to involve in the English class.

4.1.1.2 Eye Contact

"Eyes are 'the window of the soul' since the eyes are capable of communicating a vast range of emotions. By direction and length of glance, by blinking, by opening of eyelids, by squinting and so on, almost any meaning can be sent out by eyes".⁸ According to Harrison, he said that besides "looking", eyes can serve three functions, the first one is to feedback or to monitor fellow interactions, the second one is to convey specific relationships, particularly dominance or submission, liking or disliking and the third one is to exercise control over communication channels.⁹ So it can be seen that eyes have a role to play in body language. In class, the eye contact between the teacher and the students is the key factor to enhance the students' participation, through which teachers will receive feedback from the students if they can understand or not, and if they are interested or distracted. Frequent eye contacts with students can not only give students a feeling of equal treatment, but also get high praise from the students.

Based on the results, the majority of the students gave an absolute "Yes" to the question if they liked their teachers having eye contact with them. And their reason for this during the interview is that the teachers' eye contact has a huge impact on the students' English performance in

English majors' class. If the teacher gives them eye contact in class, they will feel that the teacher pays them a lot of attention. If the teacher rarely makes eye contact, it means that the teacher does not interest in or care about them. But according to the questionnaire, 70% of the students could not accept the direct eye contact of the teacher. They stated that teachers' direct eye contact would give them stress, which would prevent them from thinking. Teachers' direct eye contact, they said, would put them under stress, which would be adverse to their thinking. Many students stated that when asking questions, the teacher would make eye contact with them, but sometimes they didn't have any ideas and would rather keep their heads low and avoid eye contact with their teachers, which would disappoint the teacher. Even if some of them were able to answer the question, they would turn their eyes away from the teacher. However, very few teachers are aware of the fact that direct eye contact can also produce negative outcomes. In a word, eye contact is a significant instrument of emotion expression and reflection of teachers' and students' thoughts. Teachers should make eye contact with their students now and then, otherwise they may feel confused in the classroom. As a result, in the course of English teaching, it is necessary for English teachers to make eye contacts with the entire class, rather than to stare at the PPT or one student. Only by doing so, can the English teacher be able to tell if the students are paying attention or not, depending on how they respond.

4.1.1.3 Gesture and Posture

It is impossible for normal people not to use their hands when conversing with one another. When they explain, they reach out their hands. Simultaneously, they use their hands to shape, enforce, stress and exaggerate.⁶ Gesture refers to hand movements, including board pointing, waving, finger movement and it plays a great part of all nonverbal behaviors. According to questionnaires, the top three most frequently used nonverbal behaviors are eye contact, facial expression and gesture. Gesture has close relationship with speech, complementing and illustrating speech. As for board pointing, it is usually used as a reminder to the students when teachers are emphasizing the key points. It can also help with students' easier understanding. In the English teaching, positive effects of the gesture are very obvious. Positive gesture not only can convey the teachers' messages but also is a good way to show affection. For instance, teachers' gesture "V" matters a lot to English majors before they enter the examination room for TEM-4. This gesture will make a profound impression on the students, which is more impressive and lasting than a lot of speech. Take another example: it is very possible that a simple thumb up may stimulate a student's interest in English, and even improve his/her performance during the whole class.

In a word, it is clear that gesture also plays a crucial role in face-to-face communication and classroom interaction in ways that achieve greater teaching and learning efficiency. Proper use of hand gestures can help people be clearer about what you mean.

Just like gestures, posture can also be used to convey information in class. Posture here contains leaning, sitting, bending and standing.⁷ If an English teacher is standing or sitting in a relaxed and professional manner, he or she will be seen as friendly and approachable. For example, some male teachers occasionally sit on the edge of the students' desks while he is talking to students or asking questions. Some interviewed English majors said they cannot accept it. While others stated that they feel more relaxed and free. Based on the results, 60% of the students preferred that the teacher walked around at his will instead of sitting at the table for the whole class. When students are in a group discussion or work in pairs, the teacher will often walk around the classroom, bow to the students, listen, and occasionally participate in a group's discussion.

Although the use of gestures and postures can be beneficial to the teaching and learning, failure and embarrassment in the classroom may be caused if they are misused or abused.

4.1.2. Paralanguage

Paralanguage is the study of nonverbal cues of the voice, tone, pitch and accent.¹⁰ It includes vocal characterizers (laughing, crying, yelling, moaning), vocal segregates (un-huh, shh, uh), vocal qualifiers (volume, pitch, rhythm, tone).¹¹ In this thesis, paralanguage refers to voice inflection and pause in speech pattern. Voice inflection means the up and down of voice when a teacher is speaking, including a change in the pitch, tone, or loudness of the voice. Using correct paralanguage in class is very powerful to the teaching and learning. Compared with monospeech, paralanguage can instill vitality and vigor into the class, which is of great importance to the performance of both teachers and students. In classroom teaching, it is one of the criteria for teachers to judge a class whether they are able to make proper use of paralanguage.

According to the questionnaires, teachers use voice inflection quite frequently. According to observation, teachers often have a pause before saying something important or in order to draw students' attention. In comparison, teachers utilize more voice inflection than pauses which can make an emphasis on the significant points. As students are easy to get tired and absent-minded when teacher's voice is toneless and when they speak quickly without a pause. Paralanguage contributes to making an emphasis and arousing student's interest in class learning. 81% students totally agreed that the teachers who were resonant and had varying teaching style or tone were more popular among students. 77% of the students were in complete agreement that if the English teacher always uses a uniform and unchanging tone or teaching style in class, he or she would feel bored in the classroom. So it was obvious that many of the students paid a great deal of attention to teachers' paralanguage. 83% of students said they would be embarrassed if the teacher did not speak because they were sometimes absent-minded or whispering in class. English majors are different from students in other disciplines. They are adults and they are learning a foreign language. Classroom atmosphere and communication are of huge significance. Occasional whispering to each other will not influence the class or their own performance. Besides, several students interviewed said that English teachers' varying voice, unique ways of talking and accent will leave a strong and profound impression on their students, whose effects last much longer than verbal information. It is known to all that imitation carries much weight for English majors and such impression can help their memorization and imitation.

In 2002, Li Jiequn, a Chinese scholar states that a good teacher is able to combine the language ability with paralanguage ability perfectly.¹² Some researchers have also found that adequate use of different tones, pitches, and pauses can stimulate classroom communication. The teacher should adjust his/her voice in accordance with the teaching content and style, and should be just like an actor. When presenting key points, they should speak in a slow and repeated way. When encountering less important knowledge, they can just skim them and speak quickly. While reading lyric poetry, it is best to use lyric tones to draw the attention of the students. Take English literature class as an example. Whenever there was a lyrically beautiful and meaningfully profound poem, the literature teacher would always read in cadence with affection and naturally students will have a deeper impression of this poem.

4.1.3. Proxemics

Proxemics is the study of how to use space and place it during communication. Proxemics in classroom includes the distance between teacher and students, and seat arrangement. Considering the practical significance, the author will only discuss space between English teachers and English majors.

According to the results, most English teachers interviewed tend to walk into students when lecturing to English majors. They said when they get closer to students, they will be more active and energetic. But they will not stay in the middle of the students for too long, otherwise

students may get stressed and nervous. H. A, Smith has proved this phenomena, he states that the teachers who conduct their classes while walking among students are viewed more positively and effectively than those teachers who stand at the front of the classroom.¹³ What's more, students tend to choose this kind of teachers who would like to join them instead of presenting lessons on their own. This kind of teachers is perceived to be amiable and friendly. From the author's observation, different teachers have different walking routes, but they usually can put themselves in a proper position whether consciously or unconsciously. According to the results of the questionnaires, the majority of the students feel comfortable when the teacher keeps a close distance (1-2 meter) to them. In this case, it is easier for them to interact with the teacher and their attention can be more centralized. The students who pass by the teacher's path are more likely to participate in the class, but those who do not pass by the teacher will more or less let themselves be absent-minded. During the observation, the author finds that even if some teachers get off the platform, they are not separated by more than two places from the front of the table. This behavior seems to get close to the students, but in reality, teachers are still in their "safety zone", and they don't really fit in with the students. Teachers' preference for staying around the platform actually has solidified the teacher-centered teaching mode and weakens the concept of student-oriented to a certain degree in the sphere of English majors' class.

Some studies have shown that in group free discussion, when a person stops speaking, on the premise of not requiring the order of speaking, the next speaker is usually the person sitting opposite to the person, rather than the person sitting in the same row or behind. This effect is called Stanzo Effect.¹⁴ In the course of teachers' walking, it is as if the classroom is divided into two regions: the concerned area and the non-concerned region. Even though such habitual distance behavior is a commonplace, it has inadvertently put some students in a marginal or weak state. Under the guidance of the teacher, the students are unable to take an active part in the study, and this may bring about a negative influence on their study.

For English majors, they are free to choose their seats in every class. Those students who sit in the front of the room are more attentive and more likely to be appreciated by their teachers than those students at the rear of the class.¹⁵ Mehrabian reminds teachers of distributing their attention equally among students.¹⁶ Sometimes poor performance is associated with a feeling of rejection or a sense of being underappreciated. While Millard, R. J and Stimpson, D.V proposed that students who had high achievements tended to do well wherever they sited.¹⁷

4.2. Functions of NVC

From the functional perspective, the author explores the purpose of teachers' use of nonverbal behaviors and what role they can play on teachers and students for their English teaching and learning. They also gave examples. Their views can be summarized as follows:

4.2.1. The Enhancement of Learning Motivation and Interest

According to Dornyer, motivation is one of the major individual difference variables that has proved to have significant impact on the language learning success. Based on the analysis above, the author believes that, in English majors' classes, teachers' nonverbal behaviors have effects on students' participation and motivation in English classes.

From the author's point of view, nonverbal behavior can improve the students' attitudes in class and their knowledge comprehension. Teachers' nonverbal behavior in English classes makes teaching more lively and the class full of joy. As a consequence, students' attention is more focused and concentrated. Based on questionnaires and interviews, the majority of the students could be conscious of their teachers' nonverbal behaviors and held positive attitudes towards the effects of them. What's more, they held the view that smiling teachers have a strong impact on the classroom atmosphere and the teacher's smile also affects the relationship between teachers and students. The happy expression of teachers in particular lifts the spirit of the

English majors for the full class ahead and it is helpful for them to enjoy the learning process and there is usually a corresponding increase in students' understanding during the learning process.

To a certain extent, teacher's energy and enthusiasm can be transferred to their students. Most students indicated that teachers' varying tone, appropriate accent and confident speaking are filled with charm and magic, which motivated English majors to imitate those behaviors and even practice them after class so as to speak English as fluently as their teachers. Besides, teacher's eye contact to nearly every student equally in class also improves English majors' motivation and interest. Just as an example, in English classes, a good English teacher always uses his/her various paralanguages to support and supplement their verbal behaviors. Usually, he or she changes the tone or volume depending on the difficult and focal points, which shows that the right tone has a significant impact on the students' interest in learning and participating. Give a counter-example then. From the author's observation, if the teacher stands or sits at the table for the whole class without moving around, interaction, eye contact and reads the ppt mechanically in a monotone, almost every student will look down at their cellphones, some of whom may even fall asleep. So it is obvious that few nonverbal behaviors generate a boring class, which not only discourage students' motivation and let them lose interest in English language but also have a pernicious influence on the understanding of the class.

Furthermore, it can be found that nonverbal behaviors' effects on students' emotion and motivation can also be reflected in the creation of students' love and passion for English and its culture. Various kinds of non-verbal behaviors of teachers have great effect on stimulating students' latent capacity and their initiative in English study. On the basis of the observation, the author believes that the teacher with positive facial expressions may be perceived as approachable and amiable. For example, the teacher interviewed always teaches her students with a smile. Especially for introverted and temporarily backward students, this category of nonverbal behavior can arouse their learning motivation by a considerable amount so that they can study with relative ease.

4.2.2. The Establishment of a Good Relationship Between Teachers and Students

P. J. Cooper believes that students can get a certain view of teacher-student relationship through the analysis of teacher's nonverbal behavior, such as a teacher's action can reflect the degree of teacher's trust in students.¹⁹ The function of nonverbal behavior is the medium for the effective interaction and relationship between the students and the teachers in English classes. From the observation of the 15 English classes and the answers to students' questionnaires, the results show that the nonverbal behavior of teachers is very important in the interaction between the teachers and students, and it has a huge impact on the teacher-student relationship. Take the writing lesson as an example. Under the guidance of Teacher A, some of the students in the interview complained that their English teacher was always standing on the platform, reading the textbook or the words on the ppt, like a priest. She rarely had eye contact with students or participates in their group discussion with much less smile. Hardly any students could build any emotional communication with their English teacher. Moreover, there is an enormous, intangible generation gap between English majors and their English teachers. In class, the teacher's frown and cold face discouraged their interaction. However, under the direction of Teacher B, some students in the same class said the atmosphere in the classroom created by Teacher B was so warm and interesting with some sense of humanism and morality. Teacher B encouraged students to discuss different kinds of questions, hold group discussions and then express their ideas freely. He could make the most of the NVC in class and were willing to walk into the students, listen to their opinions and instruct them to do deep and comprehensive thinking, or do some meaningful games such as telling stories according to a given picture. In doing so, the teacher became a member of this big family. At this time, students' attention wouldn't be distracted from the English class.

What's more, the author believes that the quantity of nonverbal behavior in class influences the students' assessment or judgement of the teacher's performance and the quality of the class. The enhancement of nonverbal interaction in the classroom environment with identical verbal interaction can further the teacher-student relationship.

The adoption of nonverbal interactive teaching strategies by teachers can make the teaching and themselves more popular with students. As far as the author is concerned, teachers who conduct more nonverbal teaching behavior make students feel more involved with and concerned by the teachers, which helps English majors have a preference for their English teachers. Among the three categories of nonverbal behavior of teachers, a smile is the primary key to maintaining a good teacher-student relationship. For example, when the teachers are moderate in speech and wearing serene smiles, students can get signals from their teachers that they care. Therefore, proper and abundant nonverbal behavior of teachers can improve the relationship between students and teachers, which provides a mental and emotional basis for the vigorous development of teachers' relations.

4.2.3. The Improvement of Teaching and Learning Effect

The nonverbal behaviors of English teachers are conducive to the establishment of a favorable learning environment and classroom management, which can greatly enhance the teaching and learning quality and efficiency in the classroom. The functions of nonverbal behaviors on English class atmosphere can be reflected in the creation of foreign language classroom teaching atmosphere. From the results of the observation, it can be shown that teachers' nonverbal behavior is positively correlated with the classroom atmosphere. The greater use of gestures by teachers is tending towards a friendlier and more compatible classroom style, which in turn wins popularity and cooperation from others. Consequently, teachers' nonverbal behaviors in English classes make the classroom atmosphere more dynamic and active. As for classroom management, take teacher C as an example. In her English classes, when students are immersed in a heated debate without paying attention to the teacher's instruction, she will increase the pitch of her voice and clap her hands to attract students' attention. And consequently, the students would break off their discussions no matter whether the task is finished or not. For this reason, it is necessary for teachers to adopt some nonverbal behaviors in order to manage and control the entire class. Thus teaching quality and effect can be guaranteed and improved.

Appropriate use of non-verbal communication can help English majors be taught by English teachers in a subtle and progressive manner. Researchers abroad said that the effect of NVC in classroom instruction is significantly higher than that of verbal instruction. To a large extent, it binds to students' physiological, psychological and emotional state. Some of the English teachers said they have raised their voice to alert the students and keep hitting the blackboard and the platform to divert the students' attention from unimportant things. But all that ends in failure. And students grumbled that they are easily scared by loud voice and tone in normal situations so naturally they hated them. As a matter of fact, they hoped that their English teacher would be able to convince them and be concerned about them in a gentler manner, rather than remaining voiceless and pulling a long face. Otherwise what they are doing will only start up a vicious circle. Some of the teachers with experience interviewed stated that NVC was a very useful tool for them to control the class and make it more appealing and interesting. For instance, when students are learning different words concerning walking such as stroll, meander, stalk, stride, trudge and so on during the advanced English class, English teacher can invite students to perform different kinds of walks while stepping onto the podium. In addition, the teacher could pick one student who "walked" to perfection and let the student show that nonverbal behavior as a live model so that the rest of the entire class are able to understand the words more easily and bear them in mind. By the application of the NVC, the teacher had a

successful and vivid class by reason that the students understood it clearly and deeply in a joyful classroom atmosphere.

4.3. The Underlying Problems of Nonverbal Communication and Some Related Suggestions

The previous text give a detailed analysis of the classroom observation, the questionnaires and the interview. It can be seen that teachers' nonverbal behavior is of great significance to students' learning motivation and interest, the relationship between teachers and students and the effect of classroom teaching and learning. But, there are still a great many problems in our English class. What are they? Can teachers improve their ability to use nonverbal behavior and how to promote? How can we make the most of NVC? Some experts and scholars think that people form nonverbal behavior in unconscious state and cannot be easily changed. However, some scholars disagree with them on this point. Therefore, there are still areas and possibilities for the change and improvement of nonverbal behavior. However, change can only happen when teachers realize the necessity and ways of change.

In this part, the author will list the underlying problems and further discuss the nonverbal behaviors in English teaching, with the aim to come to solutions to fix those problems in ways that improve the adoption and application of NVC.

4.3.1. Awareness of Nonverbal Behaviors in English Majors' Class

Influenced by the university syllabus and the application of multimedia, most college English teachers interviewed aim at finishing up with all the key points and contents in the textbooks or teaching materials required by the syllabus. And they tend to stand or sit near the multimedia computer, paying little attention to the students' nonverbal behavior. What's more, university teachers are irresponsible for students' scores and achievements. So they usually make great efforts to instill the verbal language into students so as to complete the teaching task in the class while lacking the awareness of applying NVC in English classroom teaching and observing students' nonverbal behavior to adjust the class.

The teachers interviewed talked about their understanding of nonverbal behavior, which can be summarized as follows. First, English teachers' cognition of teachers' nonverbal behaviors is one-sided. The interviewees are uncertain about the meanings of the related concepts, and cannot accurately identify the commonly used nonverbal behavior types systematically. Second, English teachers have a positive attitude towards classroom nonverbal behaviors, but their awareness of their use is relatively weak. Teachers interviewed expressed that they would occasionally use non-verbal behavior to assist verbal teaching. For example, some teachers think it is natural to use. When asked about the role of NVC in foreign language classroom teaching, Teacher A states that it is a special way of communication between teachers and students. Teacher B says that it works. For instance, sometimes, college students are absent-minded and play with their mobile phones all the time. The teacher cannot call their names directly, so the teacher will raise the voice or/and go to the students to warn them. But teacher C proposed "the teacher's nonverbal behavior should be reasonably used with the language". It is obvious that English teachers have a positive attitude towards the role of teachers' nonverbal behaviors in classroom interaction and classroom management. However, there is a lack of systematic understanding and effective use of teachers' nonverbal behaviors in classroom.

Here are some suggestions for the lack of awareness of nonverbal behavior used in class. First, get the messages from nonverbal cues. Silent language plays a big part in conveying the messages. Students will be affected greatly by their English teachers' facial expression, eye contacts, gestures and positioning. Meanwhile, English teachers can get the messages whether the students can understand teaching contents or not from students' facial expression, actions and sitting ways. If the students smile and nod their heads, it indicates they get the messages and absorb them. If the students frown and shake their heads, it indicates they cannot

understand or disapprove. While the students keep a deadpan and listless expression, it indicates students are not interested in the class. In that case, English teachers had better adjust their teaching methods and their teaching style timely, pay attention to students' behaviors and keep eye contact with them instead of just keeping talking on their own. Students might be encouraged by teacher's a gesture like "OK" or a nod. Second, use proper and positive nonverbal behaviors more. The Pygmalion Effect in the Classroom is the best annotation of the effects of teachers' nonverbal behaviors in class, and especially, the teacher's positive nonverbal behaviors will have a subtle positive impact on the students. There is evidence that students learn more from teachers who are more nonverbally active and dramatic and who have positive facial expressions. For the teachers, they should consider using nonverbal behavior that is expected by the students. It is meant to create a better classroom atmosphere for students and to minimize the gap between teachers and students in the process of teaching and learning. Teachers' nonverbal behaviors like maintaining eye contact with students, accepting their responses through nodding and walking towards them should be highly encouraged. Behaviors that show disapproval of learners' responses by walking away and shaking of head sideways should be discouraged because these negative attitudes towards the students may bring poor performance. During individual presentations, students prefer teachers who smile, nod affirmatively, and then comment in a friendly and warm voice.

4.3.2. Feedback from Students' Nonverbal Cues

It is well known that feedback is an effective way to improve teaching both the verbal communication skills and nonverbal communication skills. Some teachers observed have the interaction with their students and never have self-reflection after class, so they do not know where the problem is. In fact, students are the best observers, information receivers and evaluators. They are very sensitive to teachers' nonverbal behaviors. For example, if the teacher notices that a great many students are abstracted and they are in low spirits in his/her class, the teacher should reflect whether the class is boring, or his/her teaching methods and teaching styles are not suitable for the students. If the teacher notices an active student become silent suddenly, the teacher should get close to him and pat the student's shoulder or tip the student's table. And colleagues are also good helpers to point out problems, because the teacher is absorbed into the teaching, he/she might not know where the problem lies, but their colleagues may know, so they are also good feed backer.

There is one suggestion for the lack of feedback: be a good observer of NVC. Since students and colleagues can give useful feedback after observing the teachers' behaviors in their class, teachers themselves are also able to become an observer. It is a good idea that English teachers especially young teachers observe the authentic English classroom teaching. At the same time, they need to observe other excellent teachers' class characteristics and focus on finding out the use of nonverbal behaviors from the aspects of body language, paralanguage, and proxemics in the classroom, which can help you learn how to use nonverbal behaviors effectively. By distinguishing different teachers' nonverbal behaviors in class and their students' different responses, teachers can make decision which nonverbal cue is more effective in English teaching. In order to improve teaching and learning efficiency, young teachers had better imitate excellent and experienced teachers' positive nonverbal behaviors and then apply them into their own English teaching.

4.3.3. Professional Training on NVC Skill

Even though some teachers realize the importance of NVC, they don't know how to apply it into their teaching efficiently. In other words, they lack the theoretic knowledge and practical knowledge concerning NVC. Therefore teachers need professional NVC training badly. There still exists the phenomenon that some teachers abuse these nonverbal communication behaviors without considering the fact that the NVC varies from country to country. Sitting on

the desks of students is a typical example. Sitting on the desks in China is regarded as disrespect to the students, whereas in western countries, it is a commonplace. Some teachers use exaggerated facial expressions to attract students' attention, conversely, it distract students' attention.

Here are two suggestions for the lack of professional NVC skill training in teachers' education. First, cultivate the awareness of intercultural NVC differences. Both the teachers and students should be aware that different countries have different nonverbal cues. Body language, paralanguage and proxemics are expressed in different ways. The same gesture or posture stands for different meanings in different countries. Therefore it is extremely urgent to cultivate the awareness of intercultural nonverbal communication differences or it will cause the conflicts or contradictions among counties. Students learn languages and teachers teach languages in order to communicate across languages and cultures. As a foreign language learner, in order to really master a foreign language, students and teachers must learn all aspects of the target language and culture. Teachers should cultivate students with intercultural communication skills. Intercultural communicative competence includes verbal communicative competence and nonverbal one. In cross-cultural communication, NVC plays the same important role as VC. So, while teaching language knowledge, teachers should try their best to use body language to create the atmosphere of the target language culture for students, so as to help them feel and understand the cultural conventions of target language.

The second one is participatory classroom observation learning through microteaching and video recording. The training of nonverbal behavior can be carried out through microteaching and video recording, from which teachers can obtain video feedback and students' feedback, so as to improve classroom atmosphere and promote classroom teaching. The above section has already told teachers to observe the authentic English classroom teaching. But it is not enough. The next step is to watch these excellent teachers' teaching videos again, classify the nonverbal behaviors, and summarize the advantages for learning. After that, choose your own teaching content; design the corresponding nonverbal behavior for each sentence of classroom teaching language by yourselves. Then conduct trial teaching and video recording, so that you can find your own problems, and other teachers can make comments. The second from last step is to watch the video of your teaching, find out the problems and analyze the reasons. This step is very important to improve your nonverbal behavior in class. Then comes the final step: teach the same content as the trial again, and consciously adjust your nonverbal behavior. Once the whole pattern is done, there will be an extraordinary leap forward.

5. Conclusion

This study investigated the application, functions, and problems of nonverbal communication in English majors' classrooms. The findings indicate that both teachers and students recognize the value of NVC, particularly in enhancing motivation, fostering positive relationships, and improving instructional effectiveness. However, significant gaps remain in teachers' awareness, systematic use, and professional training in NVC.

As to NVC in English classroom teaching, the author mentions facial expression, gesture, posture, paralanguage and the distance between teachers and students etc. The findings can be summarized as follows:

First of all, it is proved that the active use of NVC in English class is very effective in practice. There are many functions of NVC. NVC can improve English majors' learning motivation and increase their interest in English. NVC is conducive to building a good teacher-student relationship. NVC also helps English majors and university English teachers in improving their English learning and teaching effect.

Secondly, based on the analysis of questionnaires and interviews, both English teachers and English majors acknowledge that NVC is very effective in English teaching and learning. However, although some English teachers are aware of the importance of NVC, they fail to put it into practice in a conscious way. Some teachers, for instance, are unable to have a good command of the handling of the distance with students. They, from the start to the end of the class, stand on the platform in a flat voice and with a dull face, which leaves a bad, unemotional and passionless impression on the students.

Thirdly, the feedback of the majority of the English majors to NVC can be found in the following aspects. With regard to the facial expressions of the teachers, the majority of the students liked teachers who always keep smiling, rather than those who maintained a rigid expression. The latter always causes them to feel depressed, which leads to low motivation for learning. Regarding the teachers' eye contact, the students believe that it should be evenly distributed, covering all the students in the entire class. The body language of an English teacher, including gestures and gestures, should be natural and elegant.

Fourthly, English teachers' feedback shows that they ignore the fact that the majority of students dislike having direct eye contact with teachers, which leads to a lot of pressure on them. It is particularly important to avoid sitting on the edge of a table, as it is considered disrespectful to a student. Staying close to students for a long time can also cause nervousness and discomfort. So not too far, either. Teachers also believe that the distance between teachers and students and seating arrangements are not advised to be fixed, but should be adjusted in accordance with the size and type of the class.

The existence of NVC actively cooperates with and supplements to verbal teaching, and it plays a vital role in college English classroom teaching. It is much richer and deeper than VC. In the English classroom teaching where information exchange is extremely frequent, the proper use of various nonverbal behaviors can convey abundant information and promote efficient communication. The author hopes that the research can be of some practical significance and arouse the interest of teachers and students in the application of NVC with a view to improving teaching effectiveness and students' communicative competence.

The study contributes to the literature by offering a comprehensive analysis of NVC across three domains—body language, paralanguage, and proxemics—within the specific context of English majors in Chinese universities. It also provides empirically grounded recommendations that may inform teacher education and classroom practice.

Several limitations should be acknowledged. The study was conducted at a single institution, limiting generalizability. The sample size, while adequate for a case study, is modest. Future research could extend the scope to multiple institutions and incorporate longitudinal designs to examine the sustained effects of NVC training. Additionally, further investigation into the interplay between NVC and other instructional variables—such as task complexity or learner proficiency—would enrich our understanding of nonverbal dimensions in language education.

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