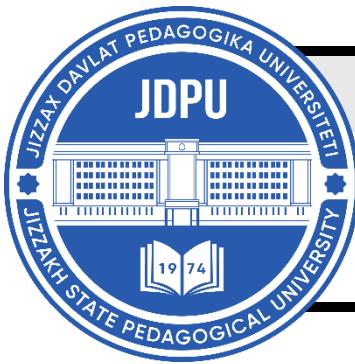


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SPECIFICS OF JAPANESE NON-VERBAL COMMUNICATION TECHNIQUES

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ABOUT ARTICLE

Key words: Non-verbal communication, gestures, facial expressions, Interpersonal relations between speakers.

Abstract: This paper explores various methods of non-verbal communication within Japanese culture, focusing on specific gestures and facial expressions. Understanding these cues allows for more profound engagement with native speakers and fosters harmonious communicative development.

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Problems of nonverbal communication are increasingly attracting the close attention of researchers both in Uzbekistan and abroad. These issues are raised in linguistic theory, where the concept of gesture is defined and types of classifications are described; in comparative linguistics, where the underlying paralinguistic systems of different languages are analyzed; and in theatrical teaching methodology. Of particular relevance is the description of gestures in the methodology of teaching Japanese as a foreign language and in the practice of translating Japanese literature into the languages of other nations.

As an example, let us consider one situation in Uzbek and Japanese communication: where to look during a conversation. According to the etiquette of the Uzbek people, a well-mannered person should be able to listen attentively to the interlocutor, and therefore should look at them not with "empty" eyes, but attentively and with interest. The speaker looks into the eyes, while the listener "listens with their eyes"; those who avoid eye contact during a

conversation have less impact on the listener. Thus, Uzbek etiquette norms require interlocutors to look at each other during a conversation (“he is lying, his eyes are wandering,” “he looks away, so he is guilty”).

Japanese culture, on the other hand, has traditionally been a culture of implicit understanding and impassive communication. The tendency to remain silent or to “soften” a topic—which can be irritating to Westerners and provoke accusations of secrecy or cunning—makes Japan a society of indirect communication.

Typically, people extend the etiquette norms they are accustomed to onto others, which can sometimes lead to “culture shock.” For example, one American businessman wrote that he always found Japanese people to seem insincere. Why? Because Japanese employees in his company, when meeting him, always lowered their heads and avoided eye contact.

Japanese people tend to avoid direct eye contact during conversation and express their emotions minimally through facial expressions. At the same time, they frequently use smiling to show politeness. Taken together, this often misleads Russians and Europeans, who mistakenly perceive such behavior as cold, secretive, or insincere.

Is the habit of lowering one’s eyes necessarily a sign of insincerity? In some cases, obviously yes, but in others, no. In Japanese etiquette, it is not permissible for a subordinate to look directly into the eyes of a superior during formal interactions. Doing so is seen as a challenge, impertinence, or disrespect. Japanese culture specialist Mimitaro Tada suggested: “The question of where to look during a conversation is very complex in Japanese etiquette, as one must show attentiveness while simultaneously not appearing impudent. Where should one direct the eyes? It is quite possible that the presence of ikebana (flower arrangements) in rooms, and the ritual of admiring them, is a result of this complexity. One can calmly and properly direct their gaze to the ikebana: etiquette is maintained, and the eyes are at ease.”

In contrast, Uzbeks usually look directly into the interlocutor’s eyes, but they are not as liberal with polite smiles; combined with their more energetic facial expressions and gestures, this can tire Japanese people and lead them to mistakenly conclude that Uzbeks are overly casual or impolite. In public places, direct eye contact from a stranger, without friendly facial expressions, often creates an impression of threat or aggression for Japanese people.

The tradition of listening with lowered eyes apparently required constant confirmation of attention from the listener, which led to the development of the following behavior: while listening, Japanese people continuously nod to show attentiveness. In Japanese, there is a set phraseology called *相づちを打つ* (aizuchi o utsu)—literally “to strike the smithy,” meaning “to give feedback/acknowledge.” In Japanese, these expressions include はい (hai – yes), そうです (sou desu – that’s right), うん (un – um), and うう (uu – yeah).

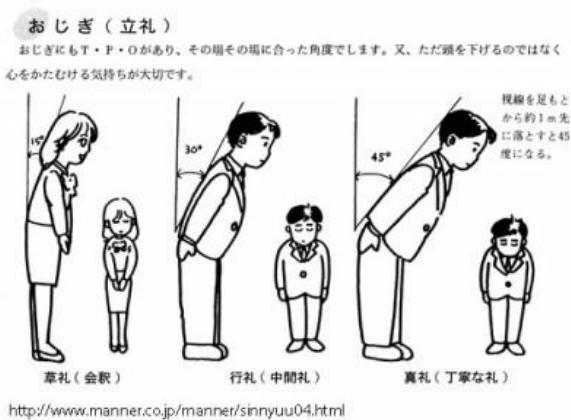
か (sō desu ka – oh, I see), そうですね (sō desu ne – yes, really), うーん (ūn – hmm/yes), and others.

Aizuchi are indispensable in conversation with Japanese people. For someone unaccustomed to hearing constant acknowledgments from the interlocutor, it may sometimes be unclear why so many affirmations are necessary. On the other hand, if a person does not use aizuchi while conversing with Japanese people, the Japanese interlocutor may become offended and think they are not being listened to.

Next, we will consider some specific nonverbal communication techniques and a few examples of gestures and facial expressions unique to the Japanese.

Bowing. In almost every country, bowing is considered a special sign of politeness. But it can vary depending on the situation. When greeting a Japanese person, it is important to remember nonverbal communication practices. In everyday polite or official interactions, greetings are inseparable from bows of various types. Historically, the bow お辞儀 (ojigi) in Japan has been a demonstration of peaceful intentions toward the interlocutor, as the head is the weakest part of the body. Japanese people bow everywhere and at all times, even when no one is watching (for example, while talking on the phone). Handshakes are used mainly with Europeans. In daily life, head nods or half-bows are common. Of course, simply waving your hand is also appropriate as a greeting.

Bows, like everything in Japan, follow strict guidelines, and deviations are not approved by society. Special attention is given to bows in business. There are three main types of bows most commonly used in professional contexts.



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会釈 (Eshaku) – considered a light bow. To perform this bow, one tilts the upper body by 15 degrees and looks about 3 meters ahead. Another way to visualize it is to imagine your body as the hand of a clock, slightly deviating from the 6 o'clock position. This bow is used in everyday situations, to greet people of equal status, or when passing by someone.

普通礼 (Futsūrei) – a more polite bow, more commonly encountered than Eshaku. It can be used, for example, to greet a guest at a company. The upper body is bent at 30 degrees, the gaze is directed about 1.5 meters ahead, or one can imagine the clock hand slightly deviating by 5 minutes from 6 o'clock.

丁寧礼 (Teineirei) – a very deep bow, used when one must apologize sincerely or express strong gratitude. In this bow, one bends the body at 60 degrees, looks half a meter ahead, and imagines the clock hand deviating by 10 minutes. Men and women have different prescribed postures: men keep their arms at their sides with fingers together, while women place their hands on their abdomen, left hand over the right.

Handshakes. Japanese people are generally reserved, especially in personal interactions. Handshakes are not a customary form of greeting in Japan. They are mainly used in encounters with foreign guests, during elections, or when meeting well-known figures in art or theater.

Gestures and facial expressions are inherent to every nation and play a very important role in life. According to various estimates, up to 90% of communication is nonverbal. It has been observed that different nations use gestures and facial expressions differently: for example, Americans – 60%, Germans – 85%, Japanese – only 20%. Knowing the features of Japanese gestures and facial expressions helps better understand the interlocutor and avoid mutual misunderstandings.

In everyday, informal communication, Japanese people also have a large set of gestures that express various important everyday concepts, actions, objects, etc. These gestures either replace or accompany speech, ensuring linguistic economy and enhancing the expressiveness of communication.

Gestures and facial expressions of the Japanese. Japanese people use fewer gestures that emphasize speech compared to other nations, and the gestures themselves are less energetic, with smaller movements. Japanese are characterized by noticeable restraint in expressing emotions. Specifically, their eyebrow and mouth expressions are quite limited; there are almost no bright, energetic national gestures of negative emotions—such as strong indignation, open threat, direct insult, or rude refusal.

At the same time, nonverbal means of politeness play a very important role in Japanese communication. They represent a broad, strictly regulated system of etiquette and typical communication situations (greetings, congratulations, requests, apologies, etc.), most of which are uniquely Japanese.

Below, we present several concepts of Japanese gestures and facial expressions.



① Raised little finger (pinky) – signifies “woman; mistress; wife; hostess.”

For example:

内のがこれ(小指を見せながら)のことをかぎつけて大騒ぎを起こした

Uchi no ga kore (koyubi o misenagara) no koto o kagitsukete ōsawagi o okoshita – “The wife (or mistress) found out about it and caused a big scandal.”

② Raised thumb –



② Raised thumb – signifies “man; lover; father; master.”

For example:

これ (大指を見せながら) がうるさくて...

Kore (ooyubi o misenagara) ga urusakute... – “Our [boss] is really annoying.”

③ “Money” gesture – forming a circle with the thumb and index finger, resembling a coin.

Example of use:

ちょっと貸して (ジェスチャを見せながら) くれないか。

Chotto kashite (jesucha o misenagara) kurenai ka? – “Could you lend me some money?”

Pinky promise – intertwining pinky fingers, with partners slightly shaking their hands. This is more common among children and signifies a mutual promise or agreement. It can be performed with the phrase:

指切りだ！ Yubikiri da! – “It’s a deal!”

Pointing to the tip of the nose – a unique Japanese gesture meaning “I” or “me.” It can be used with:

私ですか？ Watashi desu ka? – “Are you talking about me?”

Beckoning gesture – extending the hand toward the person, making two or three short downward waves with the palm, means “come here.” To emphasize the request, both hands may be used. It can be accompanied by:

ちょっと Chotto – “for a moment,”

ちょっと来て Chotto kite – “come here,”

おいで Oide – “come” (usually to a child).

Gesture of refusal or prohibition – crossing the arms in front of the chest or face. At close distance, this can be replaced by crossing the index fingers in the shape of an X. It may be accompanied by:

だめ！ Dame! – “No! / Not allowed!”

Hands folded in front of the face with a slight bow – indicates a request, apology, or gratitude.

Common phrases include:

このとおりお願ひします Kono tōri onegaishimasu – “I sincerely ask you,”

or どうも Dōmo – “Thank you,” “Sorry,” etc.



If a Japanese person, while talking about their job, draws the edge of their hand across their neck as if cutting off the head, this gesture means “to be fired.”

For example:

おまえ、部長とけんかする気か。これ（ジェスチャを見せる）になるだけだよ。

Omae, buchō to kenka suru ki ka. Kore ni naru dake da yo. – “You want to pick a fight with the boss? You’ll just end up getting fired.”

It is noteworthy that Japanese has the idiomatic expression 首になる (kubi ni naru), which literally means “to become a neck” and is used in the sense of “to be dismissed / fired.”

Japanese etiquette takes into account such factors as social status, age, and gender of the participants in communication. Thus, older people and those of higher social status are obligatorily regarded as superiors in relation to their interlocutors. Men still occupy a higher position than women on the social ladder, which is reflected both in everyday life and in formal business communication. Within the system of nonverbal etiquette, one can distinguish means that serve polite, ceremonially official, and casual, informal communication. These usually accompany or replace verbal expressions, and in polite and ceremonially official

communication they are, as a rule, obligatory elements of complex communicative units combining gesture and speech. Means of this group are often used by Japanese people in communication with foreigners, especially those who are not well known to them, in order to facilitate mutual understanding. Alongside distinctive features, Japanese nonverbal behavior also includes elements common to many other peoples. These include gestures indicating size, pointing gestures, and others, as well as numerous gestures and facial expressions reflecting psycho-emotional and cognitive activity and largely unconscious in nature: a satisfied smile, touching the chin while thinking, an absent gaze during contemplation, displeased pursed lips, and so on. Knowledge of the characteristics of Japanese gestures and facial expressions is useful and necessary not only for those studying the Japanese language or engaged in Japanese studies, but also for tourists and businesspeople, as well as for everyone interested in the life, daily customs, and traditions of the Japanese people.

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