

PROXEMICS ACROSS CULTURES

ПРОКСЕМИКА РАЗНЫХ КУЛЬТУР

Аннотациясы: Бул макалада проксемика вербалдуу эмес коммуникациянын компоненти катары каралды. Ошондой эле англис жана орус маданиятындагы проксемдик моделдердин салыштыруусу жүргүзүлдү.

Негизги сөздөр: проксемика, аралык, коммуникациядагы дистанция, прайвеси.

Аннотация: В статье рассматривается тема проксемики как компонент невербальной коммуникации и проводится сопоставление проксемного поведения в британской и русской культурах.

Ключевые слова: проксемика, пространство, дистанция в общении, прайвеси.

Abstract: The article focuses on the issue of proxemics as a part of non-verbal communication and considers patterns of distance in the British and Russian cultures.

Key words: proxemics, space, distance in communication, privacy.

Proxemics refers to the study of how space and distance influence communication. It is the human use of space within the context of culture. During the conversation, distance between the two communicators is a key factor. “The conversion of distance between you and the people with whom you

communicate is as much a part of communication experiences as the words you exchange” (Hall, 1974, p. 95).

Scholars have identified four zones of distance in communication, which are public, social, personal, and intimate distance.

Public Space (12 feet or more)

Public space starts about twelve feet from a person and extends out from there. This is the least personal of the four zones and would typically be used when a person is engaging in a formal speech and is removed from the audience. This zone is also great for general observation of other people without really interacting with them.

Social Space (4–12 feet)

Communication that occurs in the social zone, which is four to twelve feet away from our body, is typically in the context of a professional or casual interaction. This distance is preferred in many professional settings. It's the most neutral and comfortable zone to start a conversation between people who don't know each other well. It's the distance you keep from strangers that you may have some interaction with them like: shopkeepers, clerks in the bank and other sales or service providers.

Personal Space (1.5–4 feet)

Personal zone refers to the space that starts at our physical body and extends four feet. This space is reserved for friends, family, and close acquaintances – people you know and trust. It's an easy and relaxed space for talking, shaking hands. Much of our communication occurs in the personal zone, which is what we typically think of as our “personal space bubble” and extends from 1.5 feet to 4 feet away from our body. Even though we are getting closer to the physical body of another person, we may use verbal communication at this point to signal that our presence in this zone is friendly and not intimate. Even people who know each other could be uncomfortable spending too much time in this zone unnecessarily. We can easily touch the other person as we talk to them; briefly placing a hand on his or her arm or engaging in other light social touching that facilitates conversation, self-disclosure, and feelings of closeness.

Intimate Space

As we breach the invisible line that is 1.5 feet from our body, we enter the intimate zone, which is reserved for only the closest friends, family, and intimate partners. If you want to see people lose their self-control, try invading their personal space. Compare it with animal behaviour – elephants have a no-go line of a few feet around them; cross it and you'll hear a noisy trunkful or be charged.

Intimate space can be comforting in some contexts and annoying or frightening in others. For example, while travelling by bus the invasion

of person's intimate zone is quite common in our country for obvious reasons of being in a crowd; one feels stressed in this situation. Compare it with the British culture – a driver in Britain would not take more passengers in case it might cause violation of personal distance.

We need regular human contact that is not just verbal but also physical. Being close to someone and feeling their physical presence can be very comforting when words fail. There are also social norms regarding the amount of this type of closeness that can be displayed in public, as some people get uncomfortable even seeing others interacting in the intimate zone. While some people are comfortable engaging in or watching others engage in PDAs (public displays of affection).

There is an interesting issue related to rural versus city spatial zones. The amount of personal space someone needs is relative to the population density where they live. People raised in sparsely populated rural areas for example, need more personal space than those raised in densely populated cities. Watching how far a person extends his arm to shake hands gives a clue to whether he is from a large city or a country area. City people typically have their private 18-inch (46 cm) “bubble”, this is also the measured distance between wrist and torso when they reach to shake hands.

People raised in a country town with a small population may have a space “bubble” of up to 36 inch (1m) or more and this is the average measured distance from the wrist to the body when the country person shakes hands.

Rural people tend to stand with their feet firmly planted on the ground and lean forward to meet your handshake, whereas a city person will step forward to greet you.

People living in cities, need less personal space than people living in the country. Country people tend to come closer or sometimes too close to city people.

Another topic about proxemics is the issue of territoriality. Territoriality is an innate drive to take up and defend space. This drive is shared by many creatures and entities, ranging from packs of animals to individual humans and nations.

We claim certain spaces as our own whether it is a gang territory, a neighbourhood, our preferred place to sit in a restaurant, our usual desk in the classroom, or the seat we've marked to save while getting concessions at a sporting event.

There are three main divisions for territory: primary, secondary, and public. A person's house, yard, room, desk, or side of the bed could be considered primary territories. Secondary territories don't belong to us and aren't exclusively under our control, but they are associated with us, which may lead us to assume that the space will be open and available to us when we need it without us taking any further steps to reserve it. This happens in classrooms regularly. Students often sit at the same desk or at least same general area as they did on the first day of class. There may be some small adjustments during the first couple of weeks, but by a month into the semester, we don't notice students moving much voluntarily.

Public territories are open to all people. People are allowed to mark public territory and use it for a limited period of time, but space is often available for grabs, which makes public space difficult to manage for some people and can lead to conflict. To avoid this type of situation, people use a variety of objects that are typically recognized by others as nonverbal cues that mark a place as temporarily reserved—for example, jackets, bags, papers, or a drink to mark the space.

It is important to know the proxemics patterns across cultures to adequately and effectively contact with people from various cultures. Proxemics varies with each country, language, and culture. Let us have a look at how levels of distance vary in the British and Russian cultures.

First we need to define culture. Culture is the way we do things in the family, social groups, and society as a whole. Cultural values determine patterns of non-verbal communication. Moreover, culture generates people's behaviour. Concerning proxemics patterns in different cultures we see what values are in the heart of people.

If we look at the British culture, we can see that personal space is highly valued by the British. The British keep this non-interfering and non-invading way of communicating because from an early age the British children get the idea and understanding of privacy which is a key factor in determining the British culture.

In the Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary (OALD) the word "privacy" is defined as "1. the state or condition of being free from being observed and disturbed by other people; 2. the state of being free from public attention.

The concept of privacy is not an abstract idea but

objective reality; it is spread throughout the British culture. From babyhood, English children are taught that other people want their privacy. Other people do not want to hear about your plans or unhappiness. It is fine for the family to know, but you should not "impose" yourself on other people. So the English hesitate to talk to people whom they do not know only if they want to talk. Nobody is going to say, "You must not behave like that!" even if you think somebody is behaving stupidly. People are tolerant to whatever behaviour is. Two typical English values are tolerance and fairness. Tolerance is the quality of allowing other people to say and do as they like, even if you do not agree. Fairness is the quality of being reasonable, right, and just. It is a value which sees individuals in their relationship to other individuals.

Personal territory is independence. People in post-Soviet countries have always been dependent, not independent. For post-Soviet republics privacy is still a difficult thing to comprehend. In Russian culture there exists the concept of privacy. Still the word is hard to translate accurately, because the concept is somewhat strange to the Russian culture.

She was longing for some peace and privacy. (OALD)

I value my privacy. (OALD)

He read the letter later in the privacy of his own room. (OALD)

The word "privacy" is translated into Russian as 1. уединение, уединенность, 2. секрет, секретность, 3. частная жизнь.

Neither of these meanings conveys the values of the Russians. There are no direct lexical equivalents to such concepts, as "privacy" and "personal space" in Russian. "Privacy" is associated with private life and refers to male-female romantic relationships. The concept of "privacy" for Russians can also imply the "inner world" of a person, one's soul. Something that should be kept secretly, for example, the sentence "Это ваша личная жизнь" sounds rather disapproving in the Russian culture.

The absence of the concept of privacy in Russia is connected with the concept of collectivism that used to be dominant in our society in the past. Russian values are all about cooperation, living in a society, sharing things and fitting into the common social requirements. Collectivism reflects the values that are at the core of the Russian culture. If you maintain from others, it is considered anti-social weird

behaviour. You only are a part of a society where everything is shared and your business is everybody else's. In Russian culture it is a norm to inquire, to interfere, to give a piece of advice whether you are asked for or not.

However, the situation is changing. The world has become globalized and people being able to travel and communicate could acquire and apply new concepts in a new environment. For example, the concept of privacy is one of the concepts our society has been exploring. Russian society has become more individualist and the word privacy starts to mean something to people.

References

- Altman A. The Environmental and Social Behaviour. – Monterey, Calif. Brooks/Cole, 1975.
- Fillips N.J., Sommer R. Invasions of Personal

Space // School Psy. Problems. – 1966. – N.14, p.206-214.

Orloff J. Emotional Freedom: Liberate Yourself from Negative Emotions and Transform Your Life Random House, 2009

Hall E.T. The Hidden Dimension. – Garden City, N.Y. Doubleday, 1966.

Hall E.T. Proxemics // Nonverbal Communications: Readings with commentary. N.Y., 1974. – p. 205-229.

Dictionaries:

- Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary of Current English, 7 edition by A.S. Hornby, Oxford University Press, 2005.
- Oxford American College Dictionary, G. P. Putnam's Sons, New York, 2002

