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### **Gestures in Russia and the US: Semantic Differences and Similarities**

A gesture is a significant part of nonverbal communication. Using gestures, a person is able to transmit his or her thoughts and feelings without words. However, in different cultures, the same sign can be perceived differently, which can lead to an unpleasant situation.

In nonverbal communication, there are such phenomena as cross-cultural synonymy, homonymy, and paronymy. The term “cross-cultural synonymy” is used when, in different cultures, the same meaning is conveyed by gestures that are different in form. For example, both in Russia and the US, a person agrees with another one nodding the head. However, in Russian culture, the head moves up and down, and the gesture is not accompanied by any sound or any word, while, in American culture, the head moves up and down more energetically, and the gesture is accompanied by sounds like uh-huh [2, c. 142].

Americans and Russians also count in different ways. Americans start with a closed palm and straighten each finger, one by one. Russians, on the contrary, start with an open palm and bend each finger, one by one [4].

As for cross-cultural homonymy, it implies that a gesture has the same form but, in different countries, it has a different meaning. For example, if Russians rotate the index finger near the temple, they want to say that someone has lost his or her mind. However, if Americans use the same gesture, they give a hint: “Think for yourself” [4].

A thumbs-up sign (the thumb is raised while the fingers are curled) is another example of cross-cultural homonymy. The gesture has a positive sense in Russia, meaning “OK”, “I like it” or “cool” in various situations [5]. In the US, it may have another meaning and represent 5 [1, c. 80].

The term “cross-cultural paronymy” is used when gestures are quite similar in form but are perceived differently in different cultures. For instance, the shaka sign is popular in America. Both the thumb and the little finger are extended while the other fingers are curled. The hand may be rotated back and forth for emphasis. The gesture implies a friendly intent, has the meaning “relax”. In Russia, the gesture has nothing in common with that. It is mostly seen as a telephone conversation. In this case, the little finger points down [3].

The ILY sign, which is widespread in the US, means the phrase “I love you”. The letter “I” is the raised little finger, the letter “L” consists of the thumb and the index finger, and the letter “Y” is made up of the little finger and the thumb. However, in Russian culture, if the index finger and the little finger are pointed to a person, the gesture is perceived as a threat [3].

In conclusion, it should be noted that gestures are an important part of communication. A person should pay a lot of attention to his or her movements because, in different cultures, the same sign may make people smile or insult them.

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