

Effects of culture on body gestures

M. Grazia Busà - Public Speaking 2017-18

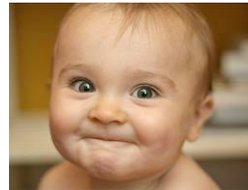
What we have said about gestures

M. Grazia Busà - Public Speaking 2017-18

'Universal' vs culture-specific gestures

- Some gestures are shared by human beings:

- **Smiling** as a sign of happiness or pleasure.



- Some widely-used **gestures may have different meanings cultures**

- pointing, waving, shaking or nodding the head



M. Grazia Busà - Public Speaking 2017-18

Culture effects also on 'presence'

Cultures vary as to what is considered:

- Moving too much/too little
- Gaze
- Distance from listener
- ...

M. Grazia Busà - Public Speaking 2017-18

Effects of culture-specific gestures...

Culture-specific are generally not understood by non-native speakers (or speakers not familiar with the culture)



- may convey unintentional meaning
- may be misinterpreted
- may contribute to creation of stereotypes

M. Grazia Busà - Public Speaking 2017-18

Head movements

- Listeners who engage in head nodding increase the speech duration of speakers.
- Listeners who engage in head nodding provide positive reinforcements for speakers.

M. Grazia Busà - Public Speaking 2017-18

About nodding

- In most cultures, nodding head is used to mean 'no'
- In India, people nod their heads to show agreement → may give rise to misunderstanding in intercultural communication

M. Grazia Busà - Public Speaking 2017-18

An example: Nodding head in India



M. Grazia Busà - Public Speaking 2017-18

Culture-specific hand gestures

- Different cultures use the same hand gestures with different meanings
- So, be aware of the gestures you use when speaking with an international crowd

M. Grazia Busà - Public Speaking 2017-18

Counting with your
fingers



M. Grazia Busà - Public Speaking 2017-18

Careful how you count in English!!

She's saying 'two' but....



Is she aware of the meaning her gesture can have?

M. Grazia Busà - Public Speaking 2017-18

Examples



<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OWFPHW7BCCI>

Look also:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=a1b6MGoxekY&list=RDOWFPHW7BCCI&index=11>



The meaning of Italian Gestures

Italians are well known internationally for using their hands a lot when they speak

Italians assume that the meaning of their gestures is also understood by other language speakers. However, most Italian gestures are meaningless to a non-Italian, or carry a completely different meaning in another language.



M. Grazia Busà - Public Speaking 2017-18

Some common Italian Gestures



M. Grazia Busà - Public Speaking 2017-18



M. Grazia Busà - Public Speaking 2017-18

watch the following video

M. Grazia Busà - Public Speaking 2017-18



M. Grazia Busà - Public Speaking 2017-18

The uses of voice and intonation
are also culture specific

M. Grazia Busà - Public Speaking 2017-18

Culture-specific uses of voice (volume, tone, use of pauses, ...) and intonation are also not understood by people that do not share the same culture ...

M. Grazia Busà - Public Speaking 2017-18

...and may be a cause of:

- misunderstandings or misinterpretations
- annoyance
- stereotypes
- ...

M. Grazia Busà - Public Speaking 2017-18

An example....



M. Grazia Busà - Public Speaking 2017-18

The stereotypical Italian (seen from the US media)



- Mustache
- Salami
- GESTURES!
- Loud voice
- Distinct 'Italian' intonation

M. Grazia Busà - Public Speaking 2017-18

Feel more fun in French? Your personality can change depending on the language you speak



M. Grazia Busà - Public Speaking 2017-18

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WzxRSZYNOZ4>

M. Grazia Busà - Public Speaking 2017-18