

Specific Aspects of Nonverbal Communication in the Intercultural Business Environment

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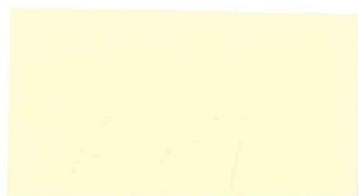
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ABSTRAKT

Tato bakalářská práce se zabývá specifickými aspekty neverbální komunikace v mezikulturním podnikatelském prostředí. Hlavním cílem je určit odlišnosti v interpretaci určitých gest těla Čechů a Řeků a poskytnout doporučení, jak eliminovat nedorozumění v neverbální komunikaci mezi těmito dvěma skupinami. Práce je rozdělena do dvou hlavních částí. Teoretická část je zaměřena na proxemiku, výrazy obličeje, oční kontakt, haptiku, gestiku, posturologii a specifická gesta Čechů a Řeků. Praktická část obsahuje poznatky z pozorování neverbální komunikace těchto dvou skupin a doporučení, jak si tyto dvě kulturní skupiny mohou porozumět i přes odlišnosti v interpretaci určitých gest.

Klíčová slova: Neverbální komunikace, řeč těla, gestika, haptika, proxemika, posturologie, oční kontakt, výrazy obličeje, Češi, Řekové, kultura, komunikace

ABSTRACT

This Bachelor's thesis deals with specific aspects of nonverbal communication in the intercultural business environment. The main goal is to determine the differences in interpretation of certain body gestures of Czechs and Greeks, and to provide recommendations on how to eliminate misunderstandings in nonverbal communication between these two groups. This thesis is divided into two main parts. The theoretical part aims at proxemics, facial expressions, eye contact, haptics, gestures, postures and specific gestures of Czechs and Greeks. The practical part contains findings from an observation of nonverbal communication of the two cultural groups, and recommendations on how these two cultural groups could understand each other despite some differences in interpretation of certain gestures.

Keywords: Nonverbal communication, body language, gestures, haptics, proxemics, postures, eye contact, facial expressions, Czechs, Greeks, culture, communication

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I hereby declare that the print version of my Bachelor's/Master's thesis and the electronic version of my thesis deposited in the IS/STAG system are identical.

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INTRODUCTION

This Bachelor's thesis will focus on fundamental parts of nonverbal communication in the intercultural environment, as we should be aware of the increasing significance of body language mainly in the business sphere.

We live in the century of globalization when it is important to understand the meaning of body language expressions of other cultures. Then, as a university student of English for Business Administration, I can see myself working in a business company and co-operating with corporations situated abroad. I find it very crucial to understand those individuals, whom I will be talking to during my work life. We understand received information thanks to verbal communication and the nonverbal one. Body language forms approximately 93% of the message meaning, so it should not be underestimated.

Unfamiliarity of certain gestures can lead to misunderstandings of some information, but also to a conflict. That is because one culture can consider some body language expressions to be inappropriate or even rude. Meanwhile, the second culture can perceive these expressions as common and adequate. In the business environment, it is important to know how to cooperate during face to face meetings and particularly in the first one. There the first impression plays a big role and the basic issues are discussed. On the other side, sometimes the velvet is the aim. In both cases, it is crucial to have our gestures under control and to understand gestures of other cultures.

This Bachelor's thesis is divided into two main parts. The theoretical part deals with specific types of nonverbal communication, such as proxemics, kinesics, haptics and postures. At the end of this part, the main goal, research questions and research methods are presented.

The practical part of this thesis aims at two cultural groups. The first one is Czechs and the second one is Greeks. It is assumed that these two cultural groups will differ in some aspects of nonverbal communication, and that some incidents could arise because of partial and weak understanding. This problem will be tested in practice on an observational method. The target is to highlight the differences in interpretation of certain aspects of nonverbal communication. Then, at the end of this part, some suggestions how these two groups could better understand each other, a posteriori of chosen aspects of nonverbal communication, will be made. Also, it will be mentioned what the typical body language expressions of these two groups are.

I. THEORY

1 NONVERBAL COMMUNICATION

In this section, the most important terms and expressions referring to the nonverbal communication will be presented. These terms are nonverbal communication, intercultural environment, Czechs and Greeks. It is crucial to start by defining them, as it leads to a clear understanding of this whole topic.

1.1 Nonverbal Communication

When people communicate, not only words are used. In fact, verbal expressions form only 7% of a sent message. The rest 93% include body movements, facial expressions and the sound of voice. Moreover, emotions are expressed through body language. Here the importance of body language is recognized. Learning about nonverbal communication, understanding it and managing it lead to having an influence, which is crucial in the business environment (Bloomsbury publishing 2006, 35–46).

This influence is crucial predominantly in the business environment in which it is needed to present particular pieces of information precisely. Professionals make presentations, have speech, process negotiation, etc. It is important not only to understand bodily expressions but also to be able to control them in a fair manner, as the opposite side could be indicated as manipulation (Akopova 2013, 78).

While analysing nonverbal communication, all aspects of body language must be considered (Hogan 2008, 36). To fully analyse the concrete situation and the message, asking critical questions is key. Answering where, when, who and why questions reveals important findings.

Nonverbal communication is a new field which has been extensively researched for only 50 years, although body language generally is older than the verbal part of communication (Borg 2008, 4). However, people were aware of bodily expressions long ago. In the first half of the 20th century, Charlie Chaplin was a magnificent example showing how powerful body language without verbal communication is. Although no words were being said during his performances, it was clear which situation is being faced (Borg 2008, 5). Then, it was Charles Darwin in the 19th century who listed three principles of body expressions and said that human beings make these expressions subconsciously (Darwin 1897, 28–29).

Body movements, as well as facial expressions and voice, are indicated as nonverbal behaviour and convey one part of a message. This message is being sent to a recipient through nonverbal channels. These channels are categories of nonverbal communication, such as space, posture, eye contact, etc. These actions are being formed during lives of

human beings and are determined, for example, by education and a society by which an individual is surrounded (Matsumoto, Frank, and Hwang 2013, 6).

In comparison to nonverbal communication, the term body language explains simple expressions of the human body, as for example kinesics. However, nonverbal communication refers to a more general term. As the word communication says, it is about sending and receiving messages (Calero 2005, 4–5).

1.2 Intercultural Environment

The 21st century can be defined as an era of globalization. People all over the world have plenty of opportunities to travel and manage businesses across countries. However, many issues connected to this open world have been raised. It is necessary for visitors to assimilate themselves into certain foreign cultures and understand languages in order to communicate effectively. One common language which connects two different cultures is called lingua franca (Bahang, Wello, and Akil 2018, 832).

A lot of problems can occur in the intercultural environment. One of them often arises because of different interpretations of expressions of nonverbal communication as every culture has its own principles of body language. In some situations, these differences could be perceived as insults.

1.3 Czechs and Greeks

This Bachelor's thesis deals with two other terms which are the Czechs and the Greeks. These are people who create nations, form two states and identify themselves as the Czechs or the Greeks. As a nation and a state cannot be considered to be the same term (Grotenhuis 2016, 28), the Czechs and the Greeks will be specified. However, this Bachelor's thesis will deal with them in the meaning of a community of people with the same language, communication expressions, history and culture which form a nation (Guilbernau 1996, 47).

Czechs are inhabitants of the Czech Republic who celebrated the end of communism in the year 1989, at that time under Czechoslovakia. Moreover, they can be proud of a huge variety of successes with famous composers as well as sportspeople (Ritter 2006, 13–14). "The current population of Czechia (Czech Republic) is 10,704,687 as of Sunday, April 12, 2020, based on Worldometer elaboration of the latest United Nations data" (Worldometers, n.d.).

Greeks are known for their ancient period of time when social institutions were being formed and famous philosophers, such as Socrates, Plato and Aristotle held conversations

(Boer 1959, 91–92). Nevertheless, Greeks are inhabitants of a state called Greece which is officially called the Hellenic Republic. “The current population of Greece is 10,433,868 as of Sunday, April 12, 2020, based on Worldometer elaboration of the latest United Nations data“ (Worldometers, n.d.).

2 SPECIFIC ASPECTS OF NONVERBAL COMMUNICATION

In this part of the Bachelor's thesis, certain areas of nonverbal communication are discussed. In addition, the importance of nonverbal communication in the business environment is acknowledged here.

The areas of nonverbal communication are divided into those parts according to particular channels by which it is possible to analyse meanings of nonverbal behaviour. This nonverbal behaviour has a function of sending messages and responding to specific occasions. Except of common nonverbal expressions, also voice of human beings will be covered.

2.1 The Importance of Nonverbal Communication in the Business

Environment

Communication can be divided into two parts. The first one is verbal communication containing spoken words. On the other side, the nonverbal one includes bodily expressions (Matsumoto, Frank, and Hwang 2013, 4).

In the business environment, both parts of communication are important to carry a message. Professionals can make presentations on business reports, have speech to employees about remarkable successes and can process negotiation, etc. Their listeners can not only hear what is being said, but they can also see what the information behind it is. Moreover, it can be observed whether the speaker is trustworthy.

It is important to not only understand bodily expressions but also to be able to control them in a fair manner as the opposite side could be indicated as manipulation. This term refers to some hidden intentions of a spokesperson whose goal is to change the listener's thoughts, performance, manners, etc. The manipulator uses the verbal side of communication as well as the nonverbal one (Akopova 2013, 78).

As nonverbal communication expresses what happens in minds of human beings, it reflects emotional states and thoughts. On the other side, the later form of communication – the verbal one – carries rather knowledge in the form of speech. As people generally are capable of perceiving of what is being said, it is also possible to be aware of the specific gestures made by individuals. Therefore, professionals continue to improve their bodily expressions (Borg 2008, 3–4). In the intercultural business environment, it is often needed to conform to foreign expressions and customs in order to prevent misunderstandings. With this in mind, professionals can communicate their ideas, suggestions and disagreements.

2.2 Cultural Influence

Since every culture has its language, there must be a difference in nonverbal communication as well. Some bodily expressions are the same all over the world. On the other side, emblems, for example, are unique in each culture and are not the only ones. People who learn foreign languages a lot, cannot be always perceived as native speakers because there are other shortcomings, for example bodily expressions which do not correspond to gestures of the foreign culture. These are the details which make communication across different cultures harder. That is why it is always easier to have a discussion with someone from the same culture (Matsumoto, Frank, and Hwang 2013, 97).

On the other side, mimics belongs to the part of nonverbal communication which is considered to be similar across cultures all over the world. Showing emotions belongs here (Hogan 2008, 193).

The term culture is a complex word as people can imagine different things. Most of them can relate this term to roots of human beings, colours of skin, etc. In contrast with culture, here is a term called nationality which is connected to a state with a government. A state is a place where someone is born and lives there. However, it is crucial to remember that although people are part of a certain culture, they still have their personal characteristics which make them unique and which give them freedom of decision (Matsumoto, Frank, and Hwang 2013, 98, 100, 102).

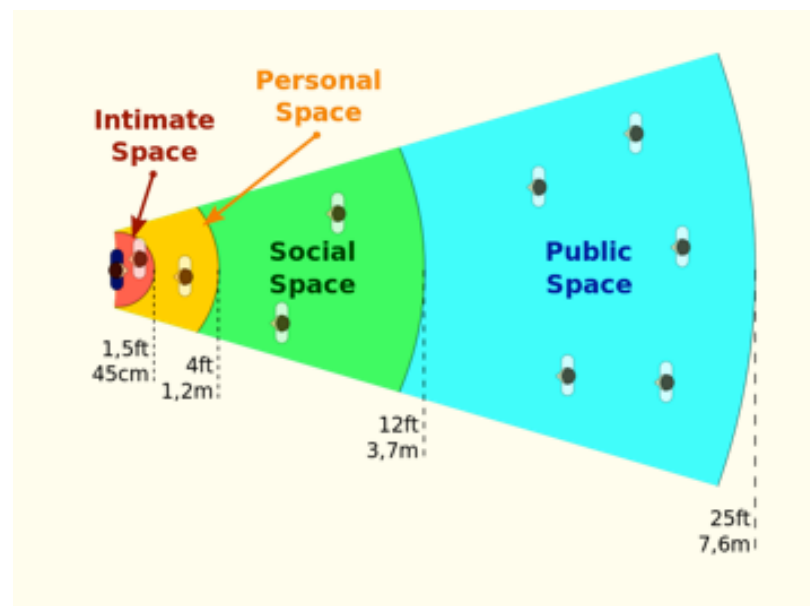
There are a lot of principal reasons why it is crucial to know and understand these cultural differences in expressions of body language. One of them is a business trip during which professionals can meet colleagues from foreign countries, as the business trip can be arranged abroad (Hogan 2008, 192).

2.3 Proxemics

Nonverbal communication can be divided into many parts and one of them is proxemics which deals with space. There is always a certain distance among people (for example a lecturer and students or two or more employees) while having discussions. While analysing the distance between two people, not only inches or cm are used for a general measurement. Specific space between parts of their faces, the upper part of body and legs is important to measure as well (Knapp and Hall 2013, 42–44).

Everyone needs enough space to feel comfortable. It only differs in the size of space according to a culture to which a person belongs as well as a character and temperament of an individual (Hogan 2008, 78–79).

Then, according to Goman, there are five types of spatial zones. The first type is called *the intimate zone* and is opened for the closest people, such as a girlfriend, a boyfriend, a husband, a wife, parents, etc. Two people creating this zone can behave intimately or even sexually. The second zone is *the close personal zone* which can be entered by closest classmates and colleagues, for example, and reaches approximately up to 60 centimetres. Then, in *the far personal zone*, our colleague can stand in front of us without touching us. The fourth zone is called *the social zone* and as the name already says, a reasonable distance is kept among people in a group who communicate wide topics. The last zone is called *the public zone* and can be established during lectures, presentations, etc. It reaches to more than 3,5 metres (2008, 118–119).



Picture 1 Spatial Zones (Source: <https://acoarecovery.wordpress.com/tag/healthy-boundaries/>)

When a person does not have his or her personal space, a huge variety of things is used in order to express the need for safety (Goman 2008, 126). These things can involve printed documents, a handbag, a pen or a chair to stand behind. Another option how to express small and uncomfortable distance is to move back (Hogan 2008, 78).

2.4 Kinesics

The second part is kinesics which aims at movements of particular body parts. These movements are narrowed. However, another element which can change the meaning of the certain body expression is the qualitative side of the gesture, for example how fast the movement is done. To be able to analyse such nonverbal behaviour, it is possible to observe

other gestures which occur at the same time. In addition, the verbal part of communication can uncover more information (Knapp and Hall 2013, 51–52).

Kinesics is a term which indicates more than one gesture which is made to create certain meaning. These gestures are called kinesic units (Calbris 2011, 18).

The very basic action which all people all over the world need to do is breathing. It is the primary need by which our body can work. Moreover, breathing can show how an individual feels. People who are not relaxed, calm and even confident cannot take a big breath. And other people are able to notice it (Goman 2008, 25). In addition, without a deep breath, face can get red.

2.5 Facial Behaviour

Then, facial behaviour is another part which uncovers other messages hidden behind nonverbal communication. Face is for people very important, as it can be seen on popular social media such as Facebook and Instagram. Users of these platforms often try to show their image in the best possible way (Knapp and Hall 2013, 132–133).



Picture 2 Anger



Picture 3 Contempt

In addition, another important aspect of decoding certain information is emotions which are observable on face (Knapp and Hall 2013, 138–139). Since professionals often establish interpersonal communication which can have ‘face-to-face’ form, understanding emotions of the other person leads to effectiveness in the particular discussion. Emotions generally are spontaneous, unenforceable, unavoidable, and instantaneous. More than that, all human beings display emotions in the same way. It does not matter to which culture the concrete person belongs. In addition, emotions precede behaviour. It can be observed that someone could try to escape from a room because emotions can express that. Then, characteristics of

an individual, plans and other things are observable through this face channel as well (Matsumoto, Frank, and Hwang 2013, 15–16).

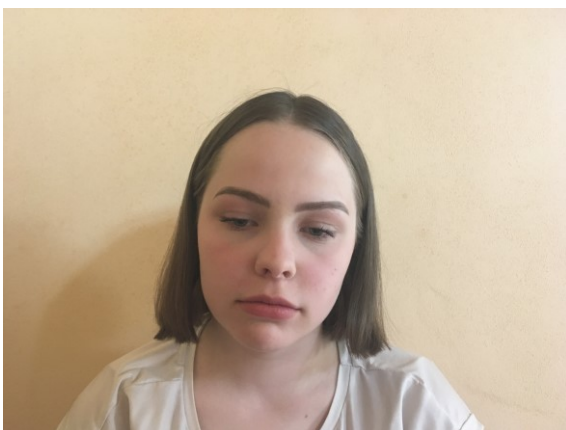


Picture 4 Disgust

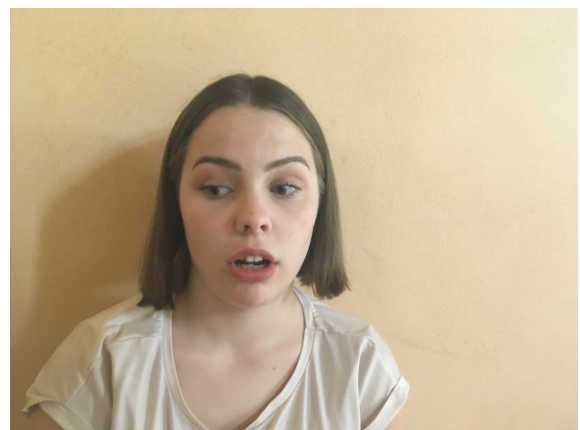


Picture 5 Fear

To recognize emotions expressed on face, it is important to understand what caused them and what is their purpose. People are able to notice anger, contempt, disgust, fear, sadness, surprise and happiness. Facial movements connected with anger are brows being close to each other, the upper eyelids lifted, the lower eyelids and mouth being taut. Then, contempt can be observed on a slight smile just to one side of face. On the other side, a crouched nose or the upper lips moving upwards can express feeling disgusted. Another emotion is fear when one feels unsecured about what can happen. Both brows are close to each other and do not stay in a casual position, they are lifted upwards. Then, one of the most visible signs of fear is lips which are stretched flatly. In addition, sadness can be observed



Picture 6 Sadness



Picture 7 Surprise

on a movement of the upper eyelids as well as lips downwards. After that, surprise is a fast and quick emotion during which brows and upper eyelids move upwards. However, the jaw moves downwards. The last emotion is happiness, by which individuals smile and the cheeks move upwards (Matsumoto, Frank, and Hwang 2013, 34–36).

Reading emotions from mimics is considered to be similar across cultures. However, there might be some little details which can disclose fundamental differences. Japanese, for example, look people in eyes more often than Americans who look into the face and the mouth (Hogan 2008, 41–42).



Picture 8 Happiness

Eye Expressions

This part focuses on eye contact which serves for transmitting messages from one side to another one and back, resp. between a recipient and a sender (Knapp and Hall 2013, 46).

When people look excited and positive, their eye contact tends to be longer and they blink more frequently. On the other side, when they experience a hard moment, eye contact is very quick. Then, in friendly discussions, eyes reflect peace. But most importantly, it is crucial to always look at more than just one body movement, as it does not necessarily must bear one certain meaning (Calero 2005, 72–73).

Table 1 Eye Expressions and Their Meaning

<i>Eye Expression</i>	<i>Meaning</i>
Not looking into sb's eyes	Refusal to talk, impoliteness
Stop looking into sb's eyes	Time to finish the talk, boredom
Looking at a lot of people in a short time	Nervousness
Looking into sb's eyes for a reasonable time	Propriety
Staring	Interest but it is impolite
Staring (between a couple)	Intimacy, passion

(Source: own based on Hogan 2008, 37–38)

2.6 Voice

Nonverbal behaviour can also be expressed through human being's voice. No words, sentences or verbal messages play a role here. On the other side, it is crucial to mind the way how the message is being said. Two important terms here are the style and tone. In the 21st century people are surrounded with social media and quick text messages. To not spend much time on typing a message, people started to use emoticons which are a perfect example of a need to be able to recognize or share one's feeling and to tell the precise meaning of the message (Matsumoto, Frank, and Hwang 2013, 53–55).

Other terms which are used during a speech and which can change its meaning are pitch, loudness, timbre, resonance, speech rate, response length, speech latency, pauses and speech errors (Matsumoto, Frank, and Hwang 2013, 58–59).

A pause as keeping silence is another way how to give a message meaning (Calero 2005, 48). Readers can take a pause to emphasize what has been said. Parents can do the same in order to let their children know that they should reflect on their behaviour. Professionals can take a pause to keep calm and consider other options or to let other colleagues say their own opinion.

As voice together with lips and other parts can produce sound, here are some groups of sounds. The first one is called fillers and is known among students as well as professionals. These sounds are, for example, “um” and “ah”. They can reflect nervousness as well as a time for thinking (Calero 2005, 55). On the other side, these sounds can be also called vocal reassurances but are produced to transfer a message that we are actively listening to someone (Tracy and Arden 2006, 59).

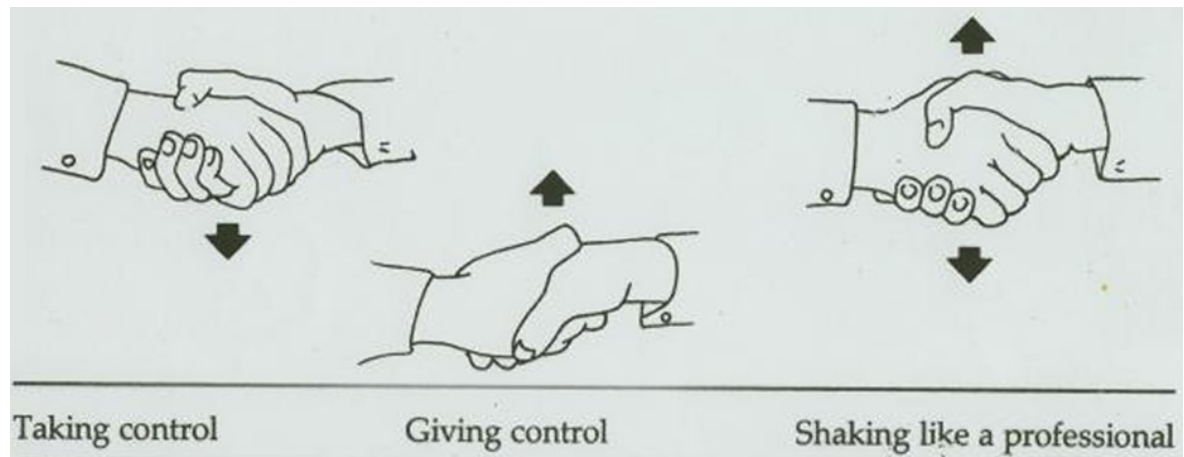
2.7 Haptics

Furthermore, the next part of nonverbal communication is haptics which deals with touch. Together with proxemics, it can show close, personal, physical, even sexual contact between a couple, friends, etc. Certain gestures of haptics and proxemics disclose information about human being's cultural background, one's character, sexual orientation, etc. (Knapp and Hall 2013, 295). The meaning of touch is sympathy, empathy, intimacy, etc. In most cases, no negative meanings would relate to touch (Matsumoto, Frank, and Hwang 2013, 86). But of course, it depends on which part of the body you touch and in which situation (Calero 2005, 7).

Touch is the basic contact with other people through the skin. Human beings have the need to touch someone, but it is recommended to avoid it in some situations, as it is a very personal gesture and people need to keep their personal space as well. On the other side, here are some situations in which one person is allowed to touch someone while the second person must not do that. It depends on status. A doctor would be the first person and a patient the second one (Calero 2005, 7, 9, 18).

Touch can be observed among friends as well as professional. In the business sphere, however, it can symbolize an exact position. It is mostly a director or a leader who readily appreciates a well-completed work of a subordinate by touching his or her shoulder (Goman 2008, 135).

Another part of haptics is a handshake, which can serve as a welcoming gesture. It is among the most common and significant gestures in the business environment. In order to express confidence, a professional should shake hands with other people in the right manner. People often make four mistakes while shaking hands and these can be called *the dead fish* (an uncertain handshake), *the finger grinder* (enormous power is used), *the stiff arm* (outstretched arm for personal space) and *the glove* (both hands holding one hand) (Goman 2008, 137, 139).



Picture 9 Handshakes (Source: <http://blog.meraevents.com/2014/08/05/7-types-handshakes-mean/>)

2.8 Gestures

Gestures can be understood as bodily gestures or preferably as hand moves. Then, these gestures as hand moves can be divided into two groups. Firstly, there are gestures which accompany speech. Secondly, there are gestures which are made regardless of spoken words. The first group is named as speech illustrators and the second one as emblems (Matsumoto, Frank, and Hwang 2013, 76).

The second group of emblems serves as hand movements which symbolize a message without the usage of the verbal part of communication. These are the gestures which can cause cultural misunderstandings, as they are quite unique in each culture. As an example, the OK symbol stands for contentment in the Western cultures. On the other side, here are some cultures and states, such as Turkey, where the OK symbol expresses a vulgar gesture. These emblems cannot be overlooked because they are crucial in situations where verbal communication cannot be used (Matsumoto, Frank, and Hwang 2013, 78).

Furthermore, there is one hand gesture which is used very often and is recommended in the business sphere. It is called open palms. Most importantly, it expresses truthfulness and then willingness with an effort to cooperate (Goman 2008, 92).

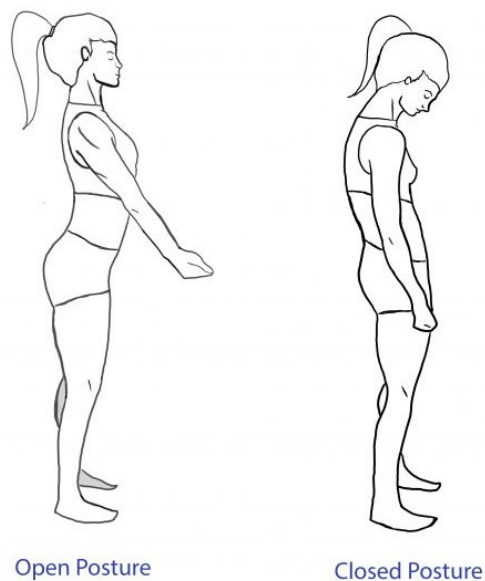
As it has been already mentioned, gestures can be understood as bodily gestures as well. The channels would be the face and other parts of body. People express “yes” or “no” through shaking their heads (Matsumoto, Frank, and Hwang 2013, 81). Besides that, confidence can be observed on a head moving slowly from the left to the right side (Calero 2005, 82).

With raising enthusiasm, hand gestures are used more frequently. In addition, while being nervous, people often touch their faces with slow hand moves. On the other side, if there is a skin rash, for example, people scramble fast (Calero 2005,77–78).

2.9 Postures

Another part of nonverbal communication which cannot be omitted deals with a general position of human being's body. In other words, it aims at a posture of a body. It can tell us whether a person feels calm, stressed out or would rather go home (Lewis 2012, 163).

When a person stands or sits towards a door, it can signal he or she would leave the room in the best case. Moreover, when the back is hunched, it shows an individual does not feel well. The person can feel nervous about the ongoing situation. When other closed gestures occur, the body position can be indicated as closed. The opposite side is an opened posture by which a professional says he or she is ready for a speech, a presentation, etc. It shows confidence, readiness and an open mind. Except a state of mind, this posture can also maintain a role in a team. A leader of the group could strengthen his or her position by this open posture while standing or sitting upright and still (Goman 2008, 26–27).



Picture 10 Open and Closed Posture (Source: <https://www.globalbowspring.com/open-vs-closed-posture/>)

Another aspect of postures is leaning which means to which side a body turns. It can be divided into two sides. The first one is forward which can be described with a person who is interested in a certain topic and is open-minded. The second side is backward and carries the

opposite meaning. It shows that a person needs more personal space and do not agree with everything that has been said (Tracy and Arden 2006, 50, 52).

It is important to remember that this part of nonverbal communication deals with the upper part of body as well as the lower part, such as legs. In addition, posture can change its meaning when one of these parts moves differently (Hogan 2008, 49).

As a result of the importance of legs, their part, feet, require their own description. Thanks to their movements it is possible to understand nonverbal expressions of people more clearly. The first aspect which can be explored is lying. The person who lies still plays with feet with great frequency (Goman 2008, 106).

In addition, people often pay more attention to hand gestures than to legs. Thanks to this fact, an analysis of the lower part of body becomes a significant finding (Lewis 2012, 166).

When two people have a conversation and one of them puts one foot towards the door, it is clear that this signalizes the need for leaving the room and mistrust. On the other side, one foot towards the second person expresses similar emotions (Goman 2008, 108). Knowledge of this gesture can help professionals in a situation when they do not know when to finish a conversation.

3 NONVERBAL COMMUNICATION OF CZECHS AND GREEKS

As it was already said, cultures all over the world do not communicate in the same way. There are many foreign languages as well as interpretations of certain gestures. Some expressions of body language can be appropriate in one culture. In the same time, the same gestures can be understood as offensive in another culture (Matsumoto, Frank, and Hwang 2013, 97).

Czechs and Greeks can be classified as two different cultures. This part of the Bachelor's thesis aims at their main differences since certain aspects of nonverbal communication have been already mentioned.

3.1 Czechs

Firstly, people from the Czech Republic use head which moves towards the sky and the ground to express agreement or the answer "yes". In contrast, to give a negative response, their head moves to the sides (Axtell 1998, 65). Other cultures, however, can interpret this gesture differently.

Secondly, to express an opinion that they do not agree with someone while thinking the individual or his/her thoughts are silly, Czechs repetitively knocks on their forehead with head leant forward (Scott 2014).

Furthermore, while welcoming a person from the Czech Republic, it is not standard to always offer a handshake. Czechs do not belong to the cultures which make gestures of haptics frequently. In addition, mentioning hand gestures, the thumbs-up gesture can also signalize the need to stop a vehicle because of a pickup when an individual stands beside the road or on the road (Axtell 1998, 134).

In addition, it is important to also know an insult gesture of people in the Czech Republic as it can help to prevent misunderstandings. When the middle finger is raised and one hand is lifted at the high of the upper part of body, it means that the person making this gesture is angry at a person who has caused or came into the conflict (Scott 2014).

During business meetings, it is crucial to remember that personal space of people from the Czech Republic is smaller when surrounded by close colleagues, members of family and friends. Moreover, the eye contact of Czechs lasts for a short period of time, especially when they carefully reconsider some decisions, for example. Nevertheless, it is important to make eye contact in order to establish credibility (Global Affairs Canada 2018).

3.2 Greeks

Greece belongs to the Mediterranean Europe. In this area, many gestures can have different meanings than in the rest of the world. One of them is saying “no” using hands and waving to the left and to the right (Goman 2008, 144). Another way how to express this gesture is through head which is being moved towards the sky and the ground. Furthermore, another expression of this message of refusal is made by head again but this time directed towards the sky with eyebrows up. On the other side, to say “yes” in this culture head goes down several times (Axtell 1998, 65).

Another aspect of the Greek culture is the frequency of haptics. People from this culture tend to touch others more than other cultures do. Greeks interpret touch as a friendly gesture. On the other side, for Germany and the Great Britain, high frequency of touch could mean intrusion (Goman 2008, 148).

Generally, people from this culture are considered to be kind, pleasant and sympathetic. An interesting aspect of their nonverbal communication is that they smile although they experience negative emotions (Axtell, 143–144).

Then, the ring gesture is appropriate in some countries. In Greece, however, it is a rude gesture. Its meaning can be interpreted as an offence to a person who is sexually-orientated to people of the same sex (Hogan 2008, 195–196).

When Greeks want to express that something is good and that they like it, their fingers are put together while their hand is moving up and down. Also, people from Turkey and Corfu make this gesture (Morris 1994, 116).

3.3 Certain Similarities

Czech culture, as well as the Greek one, belongs to the group which can understand the context of messages easily while communicating. On the other side, there are many countries where it is recommended to exchange information precisely. One of these countries is Germany, for example (Goman 2008, 150).

When people from these two countries have a cold, it is common to use a tissue when it is needed. However, here are some countries, such as Japan, where the tissue is considered to be inappropriate (Hogan 2008, 196–197).

4 GOALS AND METHODOLOGY

In this section of the Bachelor's thesis, the main goal, the research questions and research methods are presented.

4.1 The Main Goal

The main goal of this Bachelor's thesis is, based on the research results, to determine the differences in interpretation of certain body gestures of Czechs and Greeks and to provide recommendations on how to eliminate misunderstandings in nonverbal communication among the representatives of these two countries.

4.2 The Research Questions

To meet the main goal of the thesis, the following research questions were stated:

RQ 1: What aspects of body gestures of Czechs and Greeks can cause misunderstandings between these two cultural groups in the business environment?

RQ 2: How to prevent the misunderstandings resulting from nonverbal communication among the Czechs and the Greeks?

4.3 Research Methods

This Bachelor's thesis will reach its goals by observation. It is a method where all senses are engaged in data gathering (Schindler 2019, 149). It is a primary method, which human beings do in everyday life in order to collect data from their surroundings. There are two possibilities how to observe in business research. The first one is called participant observation. On the other side, the second one is non-participant observation and means that the researcher does not participate in the observed group or issue but stays by the participants to be able to record the situation. Then, other two types of this method are overt and covert observation, which say whether the participants know about the research (White 2003, 34–35). This work will use the non-participant observation.

The advantage of observation is the low price of the realization, as everyday situations may be examined without the need of expensive modern technology. Then, for the participants of the research it is in some cases easier to be observed rather than to keep a dialog or to fill in surveys (White 2003, 37). In addition, data are collected at first hand and it is the researcher's choice which data to use, as the participants could omit certain information thinking it is not important to mention or it is obvious to everyone (Schindler 2019, 163, 166).

On the other side, the observation method carries some disadvantages where the researcher needs to be deliberate. The first one is the atmosphere of the observation, when the participants know the research is held. Under some strict or unfavourable conditions (for example the participants are forced, they are cold), the participants could behave differently what can later cause inaccuracy of the results. Then, the goal must be set properly before the observation takes place. Sometimes it is impossible to collect the data again, as each observed situation is original and unrepeatable (Quinlan et al. 2019, 243).

This Bachelor's thesis asks what aspects of body gestures of Czechs and Greeks can cause misunderstanding between these two cultural groups in the business environment. The theoretical part acquaints us with specific aspects of body language of these two cultural groups. In addition to that, the method of observation enables us to see the real-life situations. Moreover, this work focuses on nonverbal communication which, according to Schindler, could be investigated more accurately through Behavioural Observation (2019, 155). Last but not least, this observation will be structured to record what is needed, to notice beforehand stated gestures typical for Czechs and Greeks. Thanks to this structure, human nonverbal communication in the intercultural environment or communication among team members can be written down. (Saunders, Lewis, and Thornhill 2019, 382).

Some limitations of observation exist. One of them says it is difficult to estimate in advance the most suitable time and place where to observe. Then, when researchers intervene the observation, the authenticity of observation can be disrupted (Schindler 2019, 166).

II. ANALYSIS

5 PRIMARY RESEARCH

This part of the Bachelor's thesis deals with a method of observation, as it leads to reaching the main goal, which is to determine the differences in interpretation of certain body gestures of Czechs and Greeks. Then, it aims at aspects of proxemics, kinesics, haptics and postures, which could cause misunderstandings while one cultural group communicates with the second in the business environment. Last but not least, another objective is to identify problems which can occur.

5.1 Characteristics of the Observation

The method of observation is an opportunity to record and analyse nonverbal communication of certain groups. In this thesis, the different cultural groups are Czechs and Greeks. The observations were recorded at European University Cyprus, in the academic year 2019/2020. The exact date was 18 December 2019, from 11.00 to 11.30 in the School of Business Administration, in a lecture room where leadership lectures and seminars take place. The phenomenon was nonverbal communication, especially gestures and haptics, in order to gather needed data. The observation was structured and non-participant. The observant was present but did not take part in the communication between the two observed cultural groups – three Czech students and three Greek students, all studying Business Studies or a close field. On the other side, the observant wrote notes into an observation sheet in order to be able to focus on specific gestures and expressions of haptics. This is called systematic observation.

The six mentioned students were discussing business topics such as:

1. Four-day work week versus five-day work week in a company
2. The difficulties of setting up a new café
3. How to set up a start-up in Cyprus and in the Czech Republic

This observation leads to specific recommendations, which eliminate misunderstandings invoked by different interpretations of certain gestures and haptics of these two groups.

5.2 Research Results Concerning the Greeks

5.2.1 Proxemics

A significant finding during a discussion among the Czechs and Greeks indicated that Greeks felt uncomfortable and insecure. It was interesting to observe that the Greeks moved

toward the Czechs and turned their backs on the camera at the beginning of the discussion. Consequently, the personal space of the Czechs was disrupted. However, there was a desk behind two of the Czechs. This led them to take advantage of their situation and lean back on it. In the end, a semicircle was created.

The observer realized that the Greeks had moved their positions and the camera could not spot the Czechs precisely. However, it is important to continue recording and taking notes of the needed body expressions.

In addition, it was observed that the three Greek students created a 40-centimetre space among each other. This aspect of proxemics is called close personal zone.

5.2.2 Eye Contact

Surprisingly, the eye contact of the Greeks lasted for approximately eight seconds. It was used to support the other colleagues in their speech. In addition, nodding accompanied the support as well.

Moreover, the Greeks were staring at the Czechs. It was a long deep gaze without breaks or looking aside. This time the eye contact lasted for 15 seconds.

After approximately one minute and 30 seconds of recording, one of the Greeks and one Czech were in a deeper conversation. The eye contact was longer. Both used open arms and were leaning towards each other. As well as this, the Czech nodded to show agreement and another Greek used the gesture of open hands to illustrate what she wanted to say.

Another unexpected finding indicated happiness, understanding and a feeling of belonging, among the Greeks. This finding could be observed when two of the Greeks were looking at each other, one of which was nodding with a wide smile and tidying their hair.

5.2.3 Kinesics

It was observed that after one minute and 30 seconds of recording, the Greeks and the Czechs were in a deeper conversation, as the eye contact lasted for a longer time. Moreover, open hands, which express enthusiasm, were seen frequently. Furthermore, the Greeks showed an interest in the conversation by placing their hand under their chin.

5.2.4 Haptics

After approximately 30 seconds of recording the business focused conversation, (not including the observed gestures before recording – greetings, introduction) the Greeks had started to feel more comfortable based on their body expressions. For example, they touched their arms and the lower part of their faces, such as their chin, lips and mouth. This indicated

their relaxation, as they had kept a closed body posture before that, and it is important to remember that more than one gesture must be observed in order to analyse the nonverbal behaviour well. What supported the fact that the gestures were relaxed, was the way the hands moved. Furthermore, slow gestures accompanied with deep eye contact expressed interest.

On the other hand, the Greeks also touched the hair many times during this business conversation, which can be considered to be an expression of nervousness, time for thinking, or boredom.

5.2.5 Hand Gestures

A welcoming handshake did not occur, although the Greeks generally behaved friendly (as was seen in other occasions in Cyprus in which the handshake lasted for approximately five seconds and the certain people were leaning forward). Instead of shaking hands, the six people waited for the observer's instructions, where to stand and what the topics are.

Signs of nervousness were shown. The Greeks had their arms crossed, some of them had one hand touching the upper part of their shoulder or fingers touching their mouth. This gesture could be indicated as the thinking gesture, however, the rest of the body did not indicate that.

On the other hand, the Greeks had the palm of their hands turned down at the arms height. This does not express nervousness but rather high confidence and dominance.

For the visualization of quotation marks, the Greeks made certain gestures to exteriorize what could not be expressed through verbal communication. This gesture was made of two fingers – the forefinger and the middle finger bent down to the thumb covering the little finger and the ring finger. Also, the hands were positioned slightly above the waist.

In addition, the Greeks showed an interest in the conversation through body language – one hand under the chin, accompanied by a deep eye contact. Through these gestures there is a clear indication of interest.

The Greeks made the gesture of open hands frequently but often at waist height. Moreover, for the emphasis of verbal communication and for the strength of key words ('better, the most beautiful'), open hands occurred at the collarbone height.

One Greek arranged her hair often, while the next one kept the open hands expression. Open hands show confidence which boosted according to the body language, however, the hair arrangement can indicate boredom or flirt, which is inappropriate in the business sphere.

5.2.6 Postures

In the beginning, the Greeks were standing nervously and stayed in the protective posture, in which the back is stiff and bent. This could be caused by being in a new environment.

In addition, the closed position was observed frequently at the beginning of the discussion, however, one hand was moved under the face where the chin is. This represents an interest in the discussed topic. During the topic number two, one Greek started to use the open gestures like open hands. Moreover, this affected another Greek who changed their position as well, yet the other Greek kept the same closed position for a long time. However, after a cultural disclosure, in which the Czechs and the Greeks started to talk about the Czech Republic and Greece, their positions turned into more relaxed ones, expressing interest (one hand along the body and the second one next to the chin).

5.3 Research Results Concerning the Czechs

5.3.1 Proxemics

The Czechs were assumed to keep a bigger personal space than Greeks and this turned out to be a fact. In the beginning, the Greeks moved toward the Czechs, which caused the Czechs to go closer to the wall. Their personal space was disrupted.

Moreover, one of the Czechs was leaning on the desk later, but not sitting on it, (in comparison with another Czech) and this became their certainty to create a comfort zone.

During the whole conversation, one of the Czechs was standing furthest from others, with her hands alongside her body most of the time, keeping a large personal space.

5.3.2 Eye Contact

The eye contact of the Czechs was shorter. It lasted for approximately two to three seconds, as they more often looked at the ground or the desk situated in front of them.

However, during the discussion, one Czech business student tied up a quick eye contact with one Greek to express support for reading another topic of the discussion.

5.3.3 Kinesics

One of the Czechs nodded as an expression for an agreement several times. Quick participation into the conversation was obvious.

Then, when the Czechs wanted to speak, while someone else was talking, their mouth remained slightly opened to express the intention to verbalize their thoughts.

5.3.4 Haptics

It was interesting to find out that no signs of haptics were made. The Czechs did not touch each other or themselves as the Greeks did, but rather kept their hands alongside the body and expressed interest by open hands.

5.3.5 Hand Gestures

Firstly, as a result of disrupted personal space, two Czechs leaned their backs onto the desk. Surprisingly, their arms were not crossed but were alongside the body.

In addition, open hands were not seen so often. Due to their hands being alongside the body and palms almost touching, we can tell that the Czechs acted neutrally.

After one minute and 20 seconds of recording, the gesture of open hands was made for the first time. Then, one Czech finally sat on the desk and played with his hands. After a moment, his hands were resting and later as he was talking, he propped his elbows on his knees and moved his wrist and hands.

One Czech started to discuss a topic using wide hand gestures to strengthen her words, and then another Czech presented some arguments which were accompanied by sudden and fast hand moves and upright body posture. This expresses the acumen and preparedness for other arguments.

5.3.6 Postures

At first, the Czechs leaned towards the business questions on the piece of paper right from the beginning. In comparison with the Greeks, this can be understood as confidence and interest in the business topic.

There was one alfa person among the Czechs, who led the conversation, sat on the desk, made more gestures in a comparison with other two Czechs and acted confidently. This person's head was straightened towards the ceiling, used a head nod as a response and had their body in a sitting position inclined to others.

In addition, the alfa Czech gained confidence and pride while talking about the Czech Republic. He straightened his body, legs buckled together, leaned towards the Greeks and made eye contact which lasted for four seconds.

After that, the alfa Czech widely opened his arms, leaning back his body with a raised chest. This body language could express disagreement and greatness or a challenge to argue as well.

5.4 The Differences in Interpretation of Certain Gestures

During the observation of the two cultural groups, the Czechs and the Greeks, some differences in the usage and understanding of body language were seen. The first difference occurred in the size of personal and social space. The Czechs needed a bigger space than the Greeks did. During the beginning of the recorded observation, the Greeks moved closer to the Czechs and created a semicircle. The Czechs, on the other side, moved back to the wall and the desk. This symbolized the need for enough social and personal space in order to feel safe and comfortable. One of the Czechs was even pushed to sit on the desk.

Then, the Czechs seemed to feel more comfortable and freer in their behaviour. Although they did not use open hands so frequently as the Greeks, they did not hesitate to sit on the table if we consider it was a business meeting among business students. This decision could actually disburden the new situation among unknown people. In addition, one Czech made a gesture of a challenge and self-greatness – widely opened his arms leaning back the body with a raised chest.

The side of haptics did not occur frequently. The members did not touch each other in any way. However, it was seen that the Greeks touch themselves often. It showed their nervousness when they played with shoulder, lips and mouth. In contrast, touching their chin as an expression of interest in the topic was observed as well. The Greeks used this body language more than the Czechs who kept their hands alongside the body most of the time as their position was near the wall and in front of the desk.

As has been already mentioned, the Greeks used open hands more often and seemed to feel comfortable after 30 seconds of the recorded discussion. Moreover, they held their open hands mostly at waist height. On the other side, the Czechs used open hands after one minute and 20 seconds for the first time and their open hands were at the height of thorax.

Another considerable difference appeared and that was eye contact. The Greeks kept eye contact for approximately 15 seconds. On the other side, the Czechs looked most of the time at the desk, the background or the floor. When face to face communication with the Greeks, the Czechs kept eye contact for maximum of four seconds.

5.5 The Occurrence of Problems

5.5.1 Proxemics

Certain problems caused by a different understanding of body language expressions occurred in this business environment during the discussion. The first one was created when

the Greeks moved toward the Czechs as their personal and social space is smaller. The Czechs felt unsecured and not comfortable and moved back closer to the wall in order to create a larger personal and social space.

5.5.2 Eye Contact

Then, eye contact of the Czechs lasted for four seconds maximally which could be understood as mistrust and uncertainty by the Greeks. Moreover, mistrustfulness could be disturbed. On the other side, eye contact of the Greeks lasted for approximately 15 seconds and the Czechs could feel uncomfortable as long looks can have an effect of staring in this culture. This could be why they looked at the desk, the background of the room and the floor so often.

5.5.3 Postures

Thirdly, one Czech expressed self-greatness and the need to challenge other members to argument with him through his body language expressions. He widely opened his arms while leaning back the body with a raised chest. As a result, another Czech started a discussion with him. But for the Greeks, this situation could be unexpected and not necessary as the topics of this business discussion were oriented more into cooperation than a rivalry.

6 ANSWERING THE RESEARCH QUESTIONS

RQ 1: What aspects of body gestures of Czechs and Greeks can cause misunderstandings between these two cultural groups in the business environment?

Since the Greeks disrupted personal space of the Czechs, who had to move back closer to the wall, proxemics, more precisely perceiving comfortable distance can be indicated as one of the aspects of nonverbal communication, which can cause misunderstandings between these two cultural groups. Then, a different length of eye contact is another aspect which can make representatives of these two cultural groups feel uncomfortable as the Greeks and the Czechs use this signal differently. Eye contact of the Czechs lasted for four seconds maximally and of the Greeks for approximately 15 seconds. In addition, the primary research also showed that one of the Czechs, as the only one, expressed self-greatness and the need to challenge other members. His posture while leaning back the body with a raised chest and widely opened arms led to a misunderstanding as the Greeks perceived the business discussion as a way to a cooperation rather than to a rivalry.

RQ 2: How to prevent the misunderstandings resulting from nonverbal communication among the Czechs and the Greeks?

It is recommended to the Greeks to keep a comfortable and reasonable distance from the Czechs, who have the need for a bigger personal space. Then, these two cultural groups can focus on eye contact. The Greeks should look aside during their 15-second look. On the other side, it is crucial that the Czechs extend their eye contact in order to express trustfulness. Last but not least, it is recommended to the Czechs to use the gesture of a challenge in situations in which persuasion is needed.

7 RECOMMENDATIONS

The primary research of this Bachelor's thesis, which aimed at the representatives from the Czech Republic and Greece, showed some misunderstandings in proxemics, eye contact and an expression of self-greatness. This part of the Bachelor's thesis is focused on recommendations on how to prevent these misunderstandings because in the century of globalization and in the business environment, it is crucial to manage our nonverbal expressions and to understand full meaning of messages from others. Possible misunderstandings can be prevented, and stronger business relationships can be established. As the Czech Republic and Greece belong to the European Union, here are many opportunities to cooperate. Understanding different ways of communication of foreign cultures can lead us to these strong business relationships.

As was observed, the personal space of the Czechs was disrupted. Every culture can have different perceiving of how big personal space is appropriate and comfortable. It is recommended to Greeks to watch clues of nonverbal communication of the opposite culture. These clues, such as moving back, leaning back, taking an object to hide behind, signalize the need for a bigger personal space. Based on the observation, it is advisable to keep a distance of approximately 150 cm and to give the representatives of the Czech culture an open space as they were unintentionally forced to stay between two desks.

Furthermore, eye contact of these two cultural groups lasted for a different amount of time. Eye contact of the Czechs lasted for four seconds maximally and of the Greeks for approximately 15 seconds. The Czechs perceived this contact as steering, and it caused that the Czechs looked at the desk and the floor often. To prevent this situation which can cause misunderstandings, it is important that the Greeks look also aside while these 15 seconds. On the other side, the Czechs should be aware of the fact that eye contact can mean trustfulness for the Greeks. It is recommended to Czechs to support themselves in longer eye contact and to look aside rather than at the floor.

One of the Czechs expressed a gesture of self-greatness and a challenge during the observation. The discussion, however, was aimed at cooperation rather than a rivalry and the Greeks did not show the need to challenge someone. As the Greeks are often seen as a friendly and warm culture, it is essential to use this gesture in the right time and place. Pride can cause decreased interest to cooperate. The gesture of a challenge can be made in a situation in which our aim is to persuade someone about his or her weak arguments and the

need to reconsider certain decisions. However, it is crucial to always behave assertively to not offend our colleagues or opponents.

Then, since the Czechs and the Greeks showed signs of nervousness, being aware of the fact that keeping silence for awhile is appropriate during business meetings can help to remove stress. Language barrier is obvious in the intercultural environment and finding a clear and concrete expression can take time sometimes. It is not always necessary to say something hurriedly. In addition, representatives of these two cultural groups used some fillers, such as “hmm”. It is recommended to avoid these expressions although all cultures can produce them because of the language difficulties or nervousness. It is more professional to rather take a pause, as it expresses confidence.

Based on the nervousness, the Czechs and the Greeks did not make a welcoming handshake gesture and waited for the instructions of the observer. It is claimed that welcoming each other could lead to reducing nervousness right at the beginning of the discussion. When meeting a new colleague or a new business partner for the first time, the first impression is very crucial and can change the atmosphere of the negotiation. These two cultures do not bow but it is common to shake their hands. It is recommended to establish eye contact, lean forward, keep sufficient personal space (the elbow is at a slight angle) and confidently shake hands with a slight smile on face.

CONCLUSION

This Bachelor's thesis aimed at specific parts of nonverbal communication in the intercultural business environment, and was divided into two main parts, the theoretical and practical one.

The theoretical part focused on proxemics, kinesics, haptics and postures. It was mentioned how and why these certain gestures are made. Also, it was said what the typical body language expressions of two cultural groups, the Czechs and the Greeks, are. In addition, this thesis indicated the importance of nonverbal communication in the intercultural business environment as well as cultural influence. Then, the main goal, research questions and the method of observation were presented at the end of this part.

The second part of this thesis, the practical one, dealt with the two cultural groups – the Czechs and the Greeks. It was assumed that these two cultural groups differ in some aspects of nonverbal communication, and that some incidents could arise because of partial and weak understanding. This assumption was challenged during an observation of body language of three Czechs and three Greeks during a business aimed discussion. This assumption showed to be correct.

The main goal was to determine the differences in interpretation of certain body gestures of the Czechs and the Greeks, and to provide recommendations on how to eliminate misunderstandings in nonverbal communication among the representatives of these two cultural groups. The target to specify where the differences in interpretation of certain aspects of nonverbal communication are, was achieved. Disrupted personal space, inordinate length of time of eye contact and expression of self-greatness can cause misunderstandings between these two cultural group. In addition, at the end of the practical part, some suggestions how these two cultural groups could better understand each other, a posteriori of chosen aspects of nonverbal communication, were made.

During the observation it was found out that nonverbal communication plays a big role in the intercultural business environment. Specific gestures of people who join to certain discussions can influence feelings of others. It is possible to cause uncertainty by impatient or careless gestures of nonverbal communication. Furthermore, nonverbal communication of professional can disclose important pieces of information which should be secret. Nevertheless, to be able to agree on something with people from foreign cultures, it is important to control our gestures and to understand body language of others.

Writing this Bachelor's thesis inspired me to continue with research on nonverbal communication, as the importance of this topic in the business sphere was reflected. Also, it influenced me to observe nonverbal communication of foreigners more patiently, since I know that a lot of misunderstandings can occur because of limited knowledge. Last but not least, I will be happy to discover other aspects of nonverbal communication in day-to-day academic but also professional life. The goal of this thesis was met.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

Sb's Somebody's

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P1 An Observation Sheet

APPENDIX P1: AN OBSERVATION SHEET

Phenomenon/What: Nonverbal communication, body language, gestures and haptics

Where: European University Cyprus, School of Business Administration

When: 18 December 2019, 11:00 – 11:30

How: Recording a video, taking notes into an observation sheet, systematic observation, direct observer presence, three Czechs and three Greeks discussing three topics

Why: data gathering of specific gestures and haptics

Who	Gestures	Haptics
Czechs		
Greeks		

Occasion/Body Part	Who – Czechs (C) and Greeks (G)	What happened:
Greetings	C	
	G	
Farewells	C	
	G	
Beckoning	C	
	G	
Insulting Gestures	C	
	G	
Touching	C	
	G	
The “O.K.” Sign	C	
	G	
	C	

