

Hand Gestures in Japanese Communication

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Abstract. In nonverbal communication, gestures are performed to be used in conjunction with verbal communication. Japan is a country that uses more nonverbal communication compared to Indonesia. When communicating, the Japanese often use hand gestures. This hand gesture is very important to know for Japanese language learners because it has many variations of use in body language learning. The same hand gesture sometimes has a difference in the intent to be conveyed between the sender and recipient of the message. Therefore, this study was conducted to describe the form of nonverbal communication, especially the form of hand gestures and the meaning of hand gestures. This study used Japanese drama as a source of data that can be seen and studied by Japanese language learners. This study used a descriptive method to describe the differences in the hand gestures of adult Japanese and children in communicating. The results of this study are expected that Japanese language learners, especially students of the Japanese Language Education Program FKIP Universitas Riau, can understand the culture of the Japanese people and that to suppress verbal communication, they often use hand gestures.

1 Introduction

Humans engage in communication through language, which can be verbal or non-verbal. Verbal communication involves using sound, while non-verbal communication relies on symbols. Culture and communication are intertwined [1], and communication occurs within a social context [2]. Non-verbal communication aids speakers in emphasizing pragmatic meaning and influencing the assumptions of their interlocutors. To effectively communicate with a specific community group, one must understand their cultural context.

One example of non-verbal communication is the use of gestures. Unconsciously, we employ gestures such as raising eyebrows, using hand movements and nodding our heads during conversations. These non-verbal cues serve to emphasize the intent of the conversation or respond to the topic being discussed [3,4]. Gestures are a natural form of human communication [5]. When combined with speech, gestures provide information about the intentions, interests, feelings, and ideas of the speaker.

Japan is a country known for highly valuing cultural traditions while embracing technological advancements and complex social life [1]. The Japanese way of life reflects a harmonious blend of modernity and tradition. They make continuous efforts to uphold their cultural values, which remain integral to their lives. While language usage may vary across

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different cultural interactions, languages can be learned, and communication problems arise when conveying messages verbally and non-verbally. Non-verbal communication, in particular, is a complex and multidimensional process. Japanese society is known for its extensive use of non-verbal communication, which is often challenging to interpret. However, the Japanese have embraced this communication style as part of their cultural identity.

In Japan, hand gestures are frequently used. For learners of the Japanese language, it is crucial to understand the gestures employed by Japanese people during communication. Hand gestures, in particular, are commonly used. Out of the 120 gestures used by Japanese people, approximately 70 are still in common use today [6]. Among these 70 gestures, around 90% involve hand movements. This study aims to provide information about the use of hand gestures by Japanese people in communication, as these gestures are an inherent part of their non-verbal language.

The study utilizes Japanese drama genre films as a data source. By observing these films, Japanese language learners can directly observe the hand gestures used by Japanese people and understand their meanings.

2 Theoretical Review

In society, non-verbal communication is commonly referred to as gestures, while in linguistics, it is known as kinesics. Japanese communication incorporates 70 different gestures, which can be classified as (1) general body language, (2) slang body language, and (3) children's body language [7].

This study specifically focuses on hand gestures, known as "bolder" in Japanese. Hand movements encompass a wide range of variations [8] and can be classified into four forms: (a) gestures and hand signals, involving finger movements, arm movements, and wrist and palm movements (e.g., pointing with the index finger, clenching the hand, opening the palm); (b) head movements, including nods, shakes, and tilting to the right or left; (c) body postures when interacting with others, such as sitting, standing, and other postures; and (d) facial expressions and eye movements, encompassing changes in facial expressions and pupillary movements. Facial expressions convey seven emotional states: happiness, sadness, fear, surprise, anger, disgust, and interest.

Hand gestures can serve various purposes, including repetition, complementing verbal messages, substituting verbal messages, regulating or controlling verbal messages, contradicting verbal messages, and accentuating verbal messages [8].

3 Methods

This study adopts a quantitative method with a descriptive approach. Qualitative research involves interpreting phenomena that occur [9]. The results of qualitative research can take the form of descriptions of speech, writing, and observed behavior within individuals, groups, or communities [10]. This method allows for the description and analysis of research findings. The study aims to provide descriptive information regarding the use of hand gestures by Japanese people in everyday life. The data sources for this research are the hand gestures observed in the films "Blue Hour" and "Living in Your Sky." Data collection involves listening to and recording the hand gestures used by the characters. The data is then categorized based on research requirements, specifically focusing on hand signals from the two films. Data triangulation techniques are employed to ensure data validity. Data triangulation involves checking and re-checking the data [11]. Data analysis techniques used in this research include data reduction, data presentation, and drawing conclusions.

4.1 Results

4.1.1 Hands Gesture Form

Finger Movement

In both films, four types of finger movements are observed: pointing the index finger at others or oneself, raising the index and middle fingers together to form a "v," clenching all five fingers and extending all fingers.



Fig. 1. Point the index finger at yourself.

Arm Movement

Arm movements involve one or both arms from the base to the fingertips. Examples include shaking hands to the sides, pointing hands forward, and raising hands.



Fig. 2. Crossing both arms

Wrist and Palm Movement

These movements involve the forearms and palms, such as placing palms on the sides of the mouth, clapping both palms, patting the shoulders, and clenching the fists.



Fig. 3. Touching other's people head

4.1.2 The Purpose of Using Hand Gestures in Japanese Communication

Pointing Yourself

Watashi is the first-person pronoun. In Japanese culture, the index finger is used to point at oneself. However, unlike Western countries where people point towards the chest, in the films analyzed, a woman points to her chest instead of her nose.



Fig. 4. Pointing yourself

Resource: <https://livejapan.com/id/article-a0000211/>

Pointing to another person

In the film "Living in Your Sky," a woman wearing a red headband points to someone sitting next to her. When Japanese people want to refer to a person's location, they often point directly at the person with their index finger.



Fig. 5. Pointing to another person

Expressing feelings of happiness or pleasure

In a scene from the film "Blue Hour," two women are shown, and one of them raises her hand while cheering.



Fig. 6. Raising a hand

Requesting Someone to Approach

The hand gesture "come, come here" is performed by raising the hand toward the person and rapidly moving the fingers up and down with the palm facing down.



Fig. 7. Calling someone

Requesting Someone to Wait

In the film "Living in Your Sky," a woman gestures with her arm to ask a man not to pour wine immediately. She points her arm toward the man.



Fig. 8. Asking to wait

4.2 Discussion

Based on the analysis of the films "Blue Hour" and "Living in Your Sky," three forms of hand gestures used by Japanese people in communication were identified: finger movements, arm movements, and wrist and palm movements [8]. These gestures serve various purposes, such as complementing and repeating verbal messages, expressing denial or rejection, and regulating verbal communication [12].

Understanding the meaning of gestures used by Japanese people during communication is essential to avoid misunderstandings for learners of the Japanese language [13].

The hand gestures depicted in the films "Blue Hour" and "Living In Your Sky" can be categorized into three forms: finger movements, arm movements, and wrist and palm movements.

The following table illustrates these three forms of movement:

Table 1. The Shape and Meaning of Hand Gestures

Forms	Meaning	Gesture
Finger Movement	Self-pointing	Pointing at the nose or chest using the index finger.
	Pointing another person	Pointing to another person using the index finger.
Arm Movement	Expressing happiness	Raise arms up
	Asking to wait	Pointing hands toward
Wrist and Palm Movement	Saying no/rejecting something	Crossing arms
	Asking to come closer	Moving wrist up and down.
	Expressing affection/compassion/pity/caring	Touching the head of the child, friend, or younger people

5 Conclusion

Gestures are used to replace, emphasize, repeat, deny or reject, and complete verbal messages. Finger gestures specifically serve the purposes of enhancing emphasis on verbal messages, repetition of verbal messages, and substitution of verbal messages. Pointing at oneself with the index finger, either towards the nose or the chest, emphasizes the identity of "I." Similarly, pointing at someone with the index finger indicates referring to that person.

Arm movements contribute to repeating and emphasizing verbal messages. Crossing both arms serves as a form of emphasis and repetition of conveyed verbal messages. Arm movements share similar purposes with wrist and palm movements.

In conclusion, hand gestures play a significant role in Japanese communication, complementing and reinforcing verbal messages. Finger movements, arm movements, and wrist and palm movements are observed in various situations. Learners of the Japanese language should familiarize themselves with these gestures to better understand Japanese communication.

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