
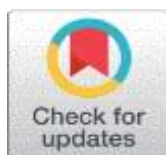




# A SYSTEMATIC REVIEW OF BEHAVIOURAL CHANGES IN L1 LEARNERS DUE TO L2 NONVERBAL CUES

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## ABSTRACT

This systematic review explores the influence of second language (L2) nonverbal cues on first language (L1) behaviours among learners. While existing research has primarily focused on verbal proficiency, the integration of nonverbal communication—encompassing gestures, facial expressions, body posture, and vocal tone—into L2 learning remains under examined. This study investigates the phenomenon of superimposition, where L2 learners adopt nonverbal cues that subsequently shape their L1 interactions. Through an interdisciplinary lens incorporating psycholinguistics, cross-cultural communication, and second language acquisition theories, we identify significant behavioural changes in L1 communication patterns, emotional expressiveness, and social interaction styles. Key areas of impact include alterations in facial expressions, gestural behaviours, eye contact, and paralanguage. Utilizing psychometric tools such as self-report surveys, observational studies, and vocal analysis, this review highlights the complexities of nonverbal communication across languages and cultures. Ultimately, our findings underscore the necessity of understanding nonverbal cue integration to enhance cross-cultural communication and support multilingual individuals in navigating diverse interaction contexts.

**Keywords:** Nonverbal Communication, Second Language (L2), First Language (L1), Superimposition, Cross-Cultural Communication



## 1. INTRODUCTION

The process of learning a second language (L2) encompasses more than just mastering vocabulary and grammar. Nonverbal cues, such as gestures, facial expressions, body posture, and vocal tone, are also fundamental aspects of communication that are often deeply rooted in the culture of the language. As L2 learners integrate these nonverbal behaviours into their communication repertoire, they frequently carry these learned cues into their first language (L1) interactions, a phenomenon known as superimposition of L2 nonverbal cues on L1 behavior. This cross-linguistic and cross-cultural transfer can result in shifts in communication patterns, emotional expressiveness, and social interaction styles. While much research has focused on verbal proficiency in L2 learners, less attention has been given to how these nonverbal elements influence L1 behavior. The current study seeks to explore the psychometric implications of this phenomenon by examining how L2 nonverbal cues affect behavioural change in L1 learners.

## 2. BACKGROUND AND IMPORTANCE

Nonverbal communication is a critical element of human interaction, encompassing all aspects of communication that do not involve spoken words. These include body language, facial expressions, eye contact, proxemics (use of personal space), and paralanguage (tone, pitch, and speech rate). Research indicates that nonverbal cues are as important as verbal communication, if not more so, in conveying meaning, emotions, and social signals. They play a key role in managing conversations, indicating turn-taking, expressing emotions, and establishing relationships of power and intimacy (Knapp, Hall, & Horgan, 2013).

In cross-cultural contexts, nonverbal communication becomes even more significant. Each culture and language has its own set of nonverbal norms and rules that govern behaviour. For instance, the use of eye contact, gestures, and facial expressions can vary significantly between cultures. In some cultures, direct eye contact may be seen as a sign of confidence and attentiveness, while in others it may be perceived as confrontational or inappropriate (Hall, 2005). Similarly, gestures like handshakes, head nods, or even the distance people maintain in conversation can carry different meanings depending on the cultural context.

For L2 learners, adapting to these nonverbal communication norms is a crucial part of the language learning process. This adaptation is often subconscious, as learners begin to mirror the nonverbal behaviours they observe in native speakers of the L2. Over time, these learned behaviours can become ingrained, leading L2 learners to integrate these cues into their communication habits, even when they are interacting in their native language. This can lead to shifts in behavior, such as changes in how they express emotions, manage interactions, or use space and gestures during conversations.

## 3. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The theoretical foundation for studying nonverbal cue integration and superimposition in L2 learners can be drawn from several interdisciplinary fields, including psycholinguistics, cross-cultural communication, and second-language acquisition theories.

- 1) **Cultural Differences in Nonverbal Communication:** Researchers like Hall (2005) and Ekman (1972) have explored how different cultures encode nonverbal behaviours. For instance, Ekman's study on facial expressions demonstrated that while some expressions are universally understood (e.g., happiness, sadness), others are culturally specific and subject to local norms known as display rules. L2 learners who adopt these culturally-specific nonverbal cues often experience a reshaping of their L1 behaviors, as they unconsciously incorporate these rules into their own communication patterns.
- 2) **Psycholinguistic Adaptation:** L2 learners not only acquire linguistic competence but also adapt to nonverbal norms and cues through the social and cultural context of language use. This nonverbal acquisition affects how learners structure conversations, engage with others, and express emotions. Psychometric tools can be applied to measure changes in behaviour, exploring how L2 learners integrate these nonverbal cues into their L1 communications.
- 3) **Nonverbal Communication in L1 vs. L2:** According to Gass and Selinker (2008), language learners are often influenced by both L1 and L2 contexts. The sociocultural theory of second language acquisition by Vygotsky (1978) posits that learning occurs within social interactions. This idea can be extended to nonverbal communication, suggesting that the social contexts in which L2 is learned impact how nonverbal cues are acquired and transferred back into L1 settings.

### 3.1. IMPACT OF L2 NONVERBAL CUES ON L1 BEHAVIOUR

#### 1) Facial Expressions

One of the primary areas where nonverbal cue integration is evident is in facial expressions. L2 learners often adopt facial expressions that are more common in the culture of the L2. For example, learners of a highly expressive language, such as Italian or Spanish, may adopt more dynamic facial expressions, including broader smiles or more overt expressions of frustration or joy. When these learners return to their L1 environment, these exaggerated facial

expressions may seem out of place or unusual within the cultural norms of the L1. This shift in facial behaviour can lead to misinterpretations or a perceived change in the learner's emotional expressiveness. Research has shown that facial expressions are one of the most critical forms of nonverbal communication, often conveying more than spoken words themselves (Knapp et al., 2013).

## 2) Gestures and Body Movements

Another major shift occurs in gestures and body movements. Each language has its own set of gestures that accompany speech. In some cultures, hand gestures are used frequently to emphasize points or clarify meanings, while in others, gestures may be minimal or even discouraged. L2 learners who adopt more dynamic gestural behaviours may bring these habits into their L1 interactions, leading to a noticeable change in how they use their hands or move their bodies when speaking. This shift can affect interaction patterns, making the learner seem more expressive or animated than they were before acquiring the L2.

For example, a learner of a Latin-based language may adopt larger, more expressive hand gestures, which may contrast with the more restrained body language norms in their native culture. The study of kinesics, or body language, is essential in understanding how these shifts occur and their impact on communication dynamics (Knapp et al., 2013).

## 3) Eye Contact

The use of eye contact varies significantly across cultures, and L2 learners often adjust to the norms of their L2 environment. In cultures where direct eye contact is a sign of confidence and attentiveness, L2 learners may become accustomed to maintaining more eye contact than is typical in their L1 culture. Conversely, in cultures where eye contact is seen as disrespectful or too aggressive, L2 learners may develop habits of avoiding direct gaze. When they return to their L1 environment, these new eye-contact habits can influence how they are perceived by others and how they manage conversations in their native language.

## 4) Paralanguage (Vocal Cues)

Paralanguage, which includes vocal tone, pitch, and speech rate, is another key area where L2 learning can influence L1 behavior. L2 learners often adopt the intonation patterns, pacing, and rhythm of the second language, which may differ from those in their L1. For instance, if the L2 uses a higher pitch to convey politeness, L1 learners might unconsciously carry this vocal cue into their native language, resulting in a shift in how their speech is perceived by others. These changes can influence not only how they sound but also how their intentions and emotions are interpreted. Psychometric measures such as voice analysis can help quantify these shifts and determine how significant the influence of L2 paralanguage is on L1 interactions.

# 3.2. PSYCHOMETRIC EXPLORATION OF BEHAVIOURAL CHANGES

The behavioural changes brought about by the superimposition of L2 nonverbal cues onto L1 learners can be assessed using a range of psychometric tools. These tools can measure shifts in emotional expressiveness, social interaction patterns, and overall communication behavior. For instance, self-report surveys can be used to gauge how learners perceive their own behavior after L2 exposure. Observational studies can offer insights into how these changes manifest in real-world interactions. Additionally, vocal analysis tools can measure changes in tone, pitch, and speech rate, while facial recognition software can quantify shifts in facial expressions.

By employing these tools, researchers can gain a clearer understanding of how nonverbal behaviours learned in L2 contexts influence L1 communication. This can have significant implications for fields such as cross-cultural communication, second language acquisition, and even intercultural psychology.

# 4. CONCLUSION

The superimposition of L2 nonverbal cues on L1 learners represents an important area of study in the field of communication and language acquisition. As L2 learners adapt to the nonverbal norms of their second language, they often carry these behaviours back into their L1 interactions, resulting in shifts in how they manage conversations, express emotions, and engage with others. Through the use of psychometric tools, researchers can assess the extent of these behavioural changes, providing valuable insights into the dynamic interplay between verbal and nonverbal communication across languages and cultures. Understanding this phenomenon is critical for improving cross-cultural communication and supporting multilingual individuals in navigating the complexities of intercultural interactions.

## **CONFLICT OF INTERESTS**

None.

## **ACKNOWLEDGMENTS**

None.

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