

**BỘ GIÁO DỤC VÀ ĐÀO TẠO
TRƯỜNG ĐẠI HỌC DÂN LẬP HẢI PHÒNG**



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KHÓA LUẬN TỐT NGHIỆP

NGÀNH: NGOẠI NGỮ

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**HAIPHONG PRIVATE UNIVERSITY
FOREIGN LANGUAGES DEPARTMENT**



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GRADUATION PAPER

**A CROSS - CULTURE STUDY ON USING
GESTURES OF VIETNAMESE AND AMERICAN
PEOPLE**

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**Class:
NA 1002**

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HAI PHONG - 2010

**BỘ GIÁO DỤC VÀ ĐÀO TẠO
TRƯỜNG ĐẠI HỌC DÂN LẬP HẢI PHÒNG**

Nhiệm vụ đề tài tốt nghiệp

Sinh viên:Mã số:

Lớp:.....Ngành:

Tên đề tài :

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Nhiệm vụ đề tài

1. Nội dung và các yêu cầu cần giải quyết trong nhiệm vụ đề tài tốt nghiệp (về lý luận, thực tiễn, các số liệu cần tính toán và các bản vẽ).

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2. Các số liệu cần thiết để thiết kế, tính toán.

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3. Địa điểm thực tập tốt nghiệp.

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Hải Phòng, ngày tháng năm 2010

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GS.TS.NGƯT Trần Hữu Nghị

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Student

Vu Thi Ly

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PART I: INTRODUCTION

1. Rationale

When I was small, I was taken to visit a school of deaf children to join a charitable program. I was very surprised to see that the children there could communicate with each other by hands, which I couldn't understand. Besides, not being deaf person, my sister also uses movements of hands to show her feeling, or ideas... So I have been interested in observing and guessing the meaning of hands movement, as well as other body parts' movements since then.

Moreover, when I was at school, I was also surprised when foreigner teachers used body language to communicate with other meanings, even opposite to Vietnamese's.

Therefore, I decided to do a research in using body language, especially gestures to see what the differences are in using them in different countries with the hope that it will be of some help for Vietnam learners of English in general and students in Foreign Languages Department in particular to avoid culture shocks when being abroad or in communication with foreigners.

2. Aims of the study

This study is targeted at helping English learners to get enough information and full understanding of the classification of body language and how to use gestures in Vietnam and America to behave in proper ways without making too many mistakes, and to make an efficient communication.

3. Research questions

In order to fulfill the aim above, the study focuses on answering these following questions:

1. What are the common gestures used by American people?
2. What are the common gestures used by Vietnamese people?
3. What are the implied meanings of the gestures used by American people?
4. What are the implied meanings of the gestures used by Vietnamese people?
5. What are the difficulties perceived by Vietnamese learners and the ways to solve the difficulties?

4. Scope of the study

A cross culture study is a very large scale. However, due to the limitation of my knowledge as well as experience and time, only gestures of American people and Vietnamese people are taken into consideration. But hopefully these will partly help people have general knowledge and understanding about gestures to get easier to communicate with foreigners.

5. Methods of the study

To collect data, different methods of study were used. Firstly, I searched data from books and reference materials collected from books, internet, television, dictation, exchanged with teachers and friends. Secondly, I conducted a survey on using gestures in Vietnamese culture, and then analyzed it to compare with American culture.

6. Design of the study

Development of the study is composed of three main parts: The first part introduces the study. The second part involves four chapters. Chapter one provides a theoretical background of culture, nonverbal communication, body language and gestures. The definition, features and classification of culture, body language, nonverbal communication and gestures are involved. Besides,

the similarities and differences of body language in different cultures and their causes are also discussed. A detailed description of typical gesture is also made, which can provide a fundamental look of gesture that are often used. Chapter two mentions the methodology of the study and the results of the survey are analyzed. Chapter three provides the detail comparison on using gestures between Vietnamese and American people. Chapter 4 is designed for some difficulties faced by Vietnamese learners and the way to solve basing on the results of the analysis from the chapter above. The last part is conclusion summaries the study.

PART II: DEVELOPMENT

CHAPTER 1: THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

1. Culture

1.1. Definition of culture

A brief discussion of “culture” is necessary before we can proceed with further study of the barriers. The English word “CULTURE” come from Roman word “cultura” which had securely survived in Latin, the learned language of Europe, almost unchanged for roughly two thousand years. Around 1800, this word suddenly acquired new and important meaning with which it came to pass into common use in the several European languages such as “la cultura”, “die kultur”, “la culture”, “the culture”, “de cultura”. In some societies, the word culture is used to mean “society” or “civilization”.

UNESCO firmly held on to a definition of culture, originally set out in the 1982 Mexico Declaration on Cultural Policies:

“...In its widest sense, culture may now be said to be the whole complex of distinctive spiritual, material, intellectual and emotional features that characterize a society or social group. It includes not only the arts and letters, but also modes of life, the fundamental rights of the human being, value systems, traditions and beliefs” (UNESCO, 2001:148).

Naturally, hundreds of other definitions of culture exist alongside UNESCO’s.

We can also see diverse definitions of culture from “Cultural Anthropology: Tribes, States, and the Global System: (Bodley, 1999: 315)

- Topical definition:

Culture consists of everything on a list of topics, or catalogies, such as social organization, religion, or economy.

- Historical definition:

Culture is social heritage, or tradition, that is passed on to future generations

- Behavioral definition:

Culture is shared, learned human behavior, a way of life.

- Normative definition:

Culture is ideals, values, or rules for living.

- Functional definition:

Culture is the way humans solve problems of adapting to the environment or living together.

- Mental definition:

Culture is a complex of ideas, or learned habits, that inhibit impulses and distinguish people from animals.

- Structural definition:

Culture consists of patterned and interrelated ideas, symbols, or behaviors.

- Symbolic definitions:

Culture is based on arbitrarily assigned meanings that are shared by a society.

Besides, there are also hundreds of other definitions of culture based on the emphasis of one or more components of culture.

In this paper, I accept the most recognized definition of culture as follows: In a broad sense, culture refers to the total amount of spiritual and material products created during the whole developing course of human history. In a narrow sense, culture includes social ideology, a constitution, and organized systems. To be more concrete, culture may be divided into two categories- high civilized and common civilized (Britannica, 1993:877).

1.2. Features of culture

Cultures around the world share six common characteristics: culture is shared, it is learned, it is based on symbols, it is dynamic, it is integrated, and it is ethnocentric (Haviland, 2002).

1.3. Culture shock

In one's culture, people handle the basic aspects of living, such as food, shelter, clothing, family organization, government, law and order, celebration and religion. Their culture helps them to make sense of the world around and gives them security. Their cultural communication seems so natural and familiar to them that entering an alien culture can cause feelings of confusion and isolations.

When people are immersed in a new culture, a typical response is "culture shock" which describes the wide and varying range of emotions that they feel. Culture shock, by definition, is "A combination of the physical and psychological stresses that are experienced when a person moves into a new environment" (Claire Ellis [1996; 112]).

Arriving in a new culture, "people can become overwhelmed when deprived of everything that was once familiar (...). Stress, fatigue and tension are common symptoms of culture shock". (Nguyen Quang [1999; 101]) People are like "a fish out of water". What they need to do is to adjust. The easiest and most effective way to do so is to know about behaviors and gestures of that culture.

2. Nonverbal communication

2.1. Definition of Nonverbal communication

Nonverbal communication is usually understood as the process of communication through sending and receiving wordless messages. Nonverbal communication can be communicated through gesture and touch, by body language or posture, by facial expression and eye contact. It can also be communicated through object communication such as clothing, hairstyles or even architecture symbols and infographics. Speech contains nonverbal elements known as paralanguage, including voice quality, emotion and speaking style, as well as prosodic features such as rhythm, intonation and

stress. Likewise, written texts have nonverbal elements such as handwriting style, spatial arrangement of words, or the use of emotions.

2.2. *Functions of nonverbal communication*

Nonverbal communication, like verbal communication is also a part of culture and the carrier of a certain culture. The functions of nonverbal communication in the whole communication can't be overlooked. A famous anthropologist HALL (1963:422) pointed out: "In any case, when verbal communication conflicts with nonverbal communication, people are willing to accept the information nonverbal communication delivers. Because nonverbal communication sounds more natural, more instinctive and it is hard to pretend".

In general, there are five functions of nonverbal communication:

- Repetition
- Supplement
- Replacement
- Emphasis
- Adjustment

2.3. *Classification of nonverbal communication*

a. Paralanguage

Paralanguage refers to the nonverbal elements of communication used to modify meaning and convey emotion. Paralanguage may be expressed consciously or unconsciously, and it includes the pitch, volume, rate, vocal quality, and, in some cases, intonations of speech. Sometimes the definition is restricted to vocally produced sounds.

b. Extra language

Extra language is divided into 3 kinds: body language, object language, and environment language.

Body language is known as nonverbal behavior which transmits information through gestures, actions and facial expressions. People

communicate with each other by their body language in the ways of nodding, waving, eye contacting, shrugging and so on. According to the research results of psychologists, these ways can express what the verbal language cannot directly. Body language can be divided into sight language, body touches language, posture and gesture, manner, facial expression.

Object language comprises all intentional and non- intentional display of material things, such as implements, machines, art objects, architectural structures, and last but not least, the human body and whatever clothes cover it. Object language can be divided into clothing, jewelry and accessories, make-up, artificial, scents, gifts, flowers...

Environmental language is considered as all factors in communicational environment, have ability to transfer any certain message and affect communication results (Dwyer, 2000:28). Besides, environmental language consists of the following components: Setting, Time, Space, Lighting system, Color, Temperature, Humidity, Ventilation, Smells.

2.4. *Cross - cultural communication*

The relationship between culture and communication lies in the fact that they work on each other. As the carrier of culture, communication influences the system of culture, and culture is necessarily manifested in communication patterns.

Nguyen Quang defines the term “cross - cultural communication” as communication (verbal and non – verbal) between people from different cultures: communication that is influenced by cultural values, attitudes and behaviors”.

Nowadays, more than ever before are opportunities for people to live, work and study, and travel abroad arising. Increased contact with other cultures has brought about the need to communicate more efficiently and effectively. However, because most people have little awareness of cross – cultural interaction, their communication is not effective as it could be.

Therefore, studying similarities and differences between cultures is obviously of help.

3. Body language

3.1. What is body language?

Body language is a term for communication using body movements or gestures instead of, or in addition to, sounds, verbal language or other communication. This includes the most subtle of movements that many people are not aware of, including winking and slight movement of the eyebrows. It also includes still postures, such as facial expression and leg positions.

❖ Functions of body language in communication;

Body language is considered as the language everybody speaks. When we come in contact with other people, we always communicate. This can take place through using words, via our voice - spoken language - but also without, or alongside the use of words - non-spoken language or nonverbal communication. Posture and movements, our place in space, use of time and intonation when we speak are all part of this. Nonverbal communication is better known as body language.

We always use body language! Looking at someone for example means something completely different than not looking at someone. Even our presence conveys a message. In our contact with other people it is impossible not to communicate. Several investigators estimate that at least 70 % of the communication between people takes place through body language and tone of voice. The best known theory is that of the American psychologist Mehrabian. He states that when it comes to expressing feelings:

- 55% of the communication consists of body language
- 38% is expressed through tone of voice
- 7% is communicated through words.

If this is the case we express 93% of our feelings in a non-verbal way, and body language plays an important role within our daily lives.

3.2. *Classification of body language*

According to function, we can divide body language into 5 groups:

- Emblems (autonomous gestures) are gestures that can be used instead of speech. They are used consciously and purposely to communicate the same meaning as the words. Emblems are culture specific. The three major characteristics of emblems are:

- + They have a direct verbal translation
- + They are known by almost everybody in a social group
- + They shall have a particular effect on the recipient

- Illustrators are gestures that are used to illustrate spoken words.
- Affect display are facial expressions combined with posture which reflect the intensity of an emotion. Affect displays are often unconsciously.

- Regulators are behaviors that monitor, control, coordinate or maintain the speaking of another individual. Regulators support the interaction and communication between sender and recipient.

- Adaptors are gestures that satisfy some personal needs, are not used intentionally during a communication or interaction. They are difficult to recognize.

According to origin, body language can be divided into 7 groups. They are universal, inborn, genetically transferred, individual, group specific, area specific, culture specific one.

According to body parts, body language can be divided into 6 groups. They are eye contact, facial expression, physical characteristics, gestures, postures and body movements, touch.

- Eye contact (eye gaze) is an event in which two people or animals look at each other's eyes at the same time. As saying goes "The eyes are the window of the soul". That is to say, we can read one's mind through

his/ her eyes. Eye language can express complicated feelings and it is an important way to judge the intimacy of communicators. “But there are many rules about eye language: Whether to look at the other communicator or not; when it is the time to look at them, how long we can look at; who we can look at and who we can’t; they all imply different meaning in communication”. In Juliet’s book “Body language”, there is a paragraph which can explain the problem. “Two strangers sit face to face in the dining room in a train. They can introduce themselves to each other. When they are eating, they can talk anything else. They also can avoid eye contact and do not show interest in each other. In humans, eye contact can show personal involvement and create intimate bonds. Mutual gaze narrows the physical gap between humans.

- Facial expressions result from one or more motions or positions of the muscles of the face. These movements convey the emotional state of the individual to observers.

- Physical characteristics of certain persons, such as eye (small, big...), nose, mouth (full lip, thin lip, narrow,...), body (high, short, fat, thin,...), skin immediately transfer any certain message of his or her social status, physical status, literacy... at different levels of accuracy.

- Gesture is a movement or position of the hand, arm, body, and head, or face that is used to convey an idea, opinion, or emotion. This form of communication gets a point across without the use of words, making it a form of non-verbal communication. Gesture can be used in many ways from showing one's anger with physical violence to expressing a gesture of sympathy at a funeral by placing flowers on the casket. Gestures in that sense aren't just movements of the body, but symbolic gestures. For example, it could be a nice “gesture” to send someone a thank you card for a present they have given you. Another example of a nice gesture would be to send someone flowers when they are sick or something bad has happened to them. This would show that you care for them and are thinking about them.

- Posture and body movements: The position of the body, the situation or disposition of the several parts of the body with respect to each other, or for a particular purpose, especially (Fine Arts), the position of a figure with regard to the several principal members by which action is express, attitude.

The anthropology of posture Hewes (Humanics, 1957) said: “Posture is a matter of how people sit, walk, stand and move”. He pointed out mostly determined what kinds of postures people use and the meaning and emotion they suggested. He also pointed out which factors can affect postures in communication much. They are ages, gender, relationship gap, place, psychological state, powers, stuff, and so on... Posture may consist of formal posture, relaxed postures, defensive postures, sexy postures, aggressive postures, slouching postures...

- Touch (tactile/ haptic) refers to the way people exchange information by touching one’s body. Touching is a common part of many rituals, in which the action often has a long- forgotten symbolic meaning. A touch is a strong communicator in the world of body language acts and they are used by just about everyone. For instance, someone who brushes their hand against another’s forearm may be seen as communicating an act of attraction. Touch as an act of body language is something that occurs in many settings across the board. As always, body language acts of all types are dependent on the user and, of course, the perception of the receiver.

3.3. The similarities of body language in different cultures and their causes

Though different cultures result in different body languages, they also have common features. For example, master of comedy, Chaplin was very popular with people all over the world because his humorous behavior in the silent films during 1920s and 1930s. Charles Darwin mentioned in his book “Emotional Expression of Human and Animals”. This book discussed

whether the same expressions and postures suggested the same meaning both for human and animals. And he asked people all around the world and collected their possible replies. Surprisingly, the answers were almost same, especially on facial expressions. Heading nodding often means agreement or greeting in most countries. And shaking one's head often means disagreement or "No", and so on...

Most of the basic communication gestures are the same all over the world. When people are happy they smile, when they are sad or angry they frown or scowl. Nodding the head is almost universally used to indicate "yes" or affirmation. It appears to be a form of head lowering and is probably an inborn gesture, as it is also used by deaf and blind people. Shaking the head from side to side to indicate "no" or negation is also universal and may well be a gesture that is learned in infancy. When a baby has had enough milk, he turns his head from side to side to reject his mother's breast. When the young child has had enough to eat, he shakes his head from side to side to stop his parent's attempt to spoon feed him and in this way he quickly learns to use the head shaking gesture to show disagreement or a negative attitude. The evolutionary origin of some gestures can be traced to our primitive animal past. Baring the teeth is derived from the act of attacking and is still used by modern man in the form of a sneer and other such hostile gestures, even though he will not attack with his teeth. Smiling was originally a threat gesture, but today it is done in conjunction with non-threatening gestures to show pleasure. The shoulder shrug is also a good example of a universal gesture that is used to show that a person does not know or understand what you are talking about. It is a multiple gesture that has three main parts: exposed palms, hunched shoulders and raised bow.

For the causes resulting in the similarities of body language, "We can analyze the reason why different cultures have the same meaning on body language from psychology, linguistic, anthropology, culturology, semiology, philosophy and so on. From anthropology, body language is the symbols and

a tool of human communication. Human beings have the same ancestor, which determines the similarities of body language". Nowadays, with the development of the world, people from different cultures communicate more and more often. We have more chance to exchange culture and economy. The expert McLuhan compares the world becoming smaller and smaller because of more and more communication. On the other hand, people from east world have accepted the body language from the west world. Besides, with rapid development of East Asia and Southeast Asia, the body language from east world has a great influence on that of the west world. In the communication of east and west people, many westerners have learned each other customs and etiquettes.

3.4. The reasons for differences of body language

Different cultures, genders, and even age groups have different ways of using body language to communicate. Most modern studies of body language are based on the assumption that body language is not a universal of natural language, but the product of social and cultural contexts. Different languages also involve different facial and body movements. Among humans, anthropologists such as Marcel Mauss have pointed out that even the most elementary aspects of physical behavior, such as the ways in which people eat, sleep, walk, or sit, seem to be culturally determined, and vary greatly from society to society. This includes both the deliberate signals used by people to communicate meaning non-verbally, and also seemingly involuntary emotive or physical reactions, such as blushing or weeping. Behaviors which have been represented as spontaneous or instinctive action expressing the emotions are revealed, under closer scrutiny to be neither spontaneous nor transparent. They are, to a greater or lesser degree, formalized, stylized, and ordered to a specific code of meaning, which may become meaningless or inappropriate in other places or cultures, or in another context. The gesture of greeting displayed by someone who leaps, smiling, to her feet, to throw her arms around another person, may cause discomfort or

even offence to a person unfamiliar with this custom, and “cutting” someone, by passing by with only a distant nod, may fail to have any effect on a person who is not used to expecting displays of affection in public.

Different age groups of people also communicate through body language in different ways. Small children use body language to get what they want, where adults and the elderly use it to make a point and to understand other better.

Even though, they may be communicating the same idea, men and women each use slightly different sets of body language. From the way they move, to the way they interpret other’s body language, there are many subtle differences between genders.

No matter what group of people you are trying to communicate with, it is always important to understand how you use your body to communicate with them. When you know the different gestures and symbols used by different groups of people, you will be able to effectively communicate with many different people.

4. Gestures

4.1. What is gesture?

“Considered jointly with speech, gestures open a “window” onto the mind...taking gesture into account, we see patterns not revealed by speech alone and see more comprehensively how meanings are constructed. Gesture is not only a display of meaning but is part of the act of constructing meaning itself, adding a “material carrier” that helps bring meaning into existence...” (Mc Neil, 1992). "For more things affect our eyes than our ears." (Jean-Jacques Rousseau, “Essay on the Origin of Languages”). Gesture, or a visual communication using physical material, can be an autonomous language, a supplement to various other languages or a medium. The word “gesture” derives from the Latin words “gestura” meaning “bearing”, “way of carrying”, or “mode of action”, and gerere, the infinitive form, which means

“to carry, to have, to take on oneself, to take charge of, to perform or to accomplish”.

According to The Oxford English Dictionary Online (January 2002), gesture, as a noun, signifies “the manner of carrying the body”, “grace of manner”, “the employment of body movement”, “position”, “posture”, “facial expression” or “attitude” and as a verb, “to order the attitudes of movements of (the body, oneself)”.

The term gesture also often signifies non-physical movements such as expressions in sounds or thoughts. The physical gesture could be a variety of different actions. It may be composed of a small wave of the hand, large movements incorporating the entire body or simply be a state of being, a posture or a stance, Although gesture is generally a nonverbal form of communication, it is often incorporated with speech or other media of expression, such as music or song. Gestures in dance, martial arts, sports, ceremonial occasions, religious events, dramatics arts, the symphony and even at the stock market are part of complex systems of regulated movements. Yet such habitual activities as eating, drinking, working and greeting one another can be considered gestures too. The word “gesture” does not refer to subconscious or involuntary actions like expressions or mannerisms. Gestures are generally regarded as intentional movements. A gesture need not to be a physical manifestation of the human body but can be exhibited in other media as well.

In this paper, I consider the aspects of gestures according to its definition in The Oxford English Dictionary Online (January 2002), which is mentioned above.

4.2. Classification of gestures

There are many ways to classify gestures. Hayes (1940) divides gestures into 3 kinds: Autistic gestures, technical gestures and folk gestures.

Anthropologists Axtell (1981) have grouped everyday gestures into three broad categories: Instinctive, coded and acquired.

However, the most common way to classify gestures is based on body parts. In this paper, I just pay attention to some kinds of gestures to compare on the use of them in American and in Vietnam. The use of greeting gestures, touching gestures, hand gestures, head gestures, and leg gestures are concerned with.

5. Detailed description of gestures

5.1. Greeting gestures

They are the gestures that are often used to greet in one or more countries.

- *Shaking hand:*

A handshake is a short ritual in which two people grasp each other's right or left hand often accompanied by a brief up and down movement of the grasped hands. While its origins remain obscure, archaeological ruins and ancient texts show that handshaking



was practiced as far back as the 2nd century BC. Some researchers have suggested the handshake may have been introduced in the Western World by Sir Walter Raleigh in service with the British Court during the late 16th century. The handshake is thought by some to have originated as a gesture of peace by demonstrating that the hand holds no weapon.

- *Hand-clapping (applause)*

Applause (Latin *applause*, to strike upon, clap) is primarily the expression of approval by the act of clapping, or striking the palms of the hands together, in order to create noise.



- *Bowing* (also called stooping) is the act of lowering the torso and head as a social gesture in direction to another person or symbol. Different cultures have placed varying degrees of importance on bowing, and have used bowing in a variety of ways. To show the highest degree of politeness you bend your head and waist about 45 degrees. Common courtesy to most people is shown by bending your head and waist about 15 degrees.



- *Cheek-kissing:*

In a cheek kiss, both persons lean forward and either lightly touch cheek or lip with cheek. Generally the gesture is repeated with the other cheek, or more, alternating cheeks. Depending on country and situation, the number of kisses is usually one, two, three or four.



5.2. Touching gestures:

- *Hand-holding:* to keep (an object or a person) with or within the hands or arms. Two or more people voluntarily hold hands for one of the following reasons and purposes:



emotional support.

- In various rituals
- In certain religious services, to pray
- In various occult rituals
- To express friendship or love
- To enjoy physical intimacy (not necessary of erotic character), or for

- *Kissing:*

A kiss is the touching of one person's lips to another place, which is used as an expression of affection, respect, greeting, farewell, good luck, romantic affection or sexual desire.



- *Hugging:* is a form of physical intimacy that usually involves closing or holding the arms around another person or group of persons. The hug is one of the most common human signs of love and affection, along with kissing. Unlike some other forms of physical intimacy. It is practiced publicly and privately without stigma in many nations, religions and cultures, within families, and also across age and gender lines.

Sometimes, hugs are a romantic exchange. Hugs may also be exchanged as a sign of support and comfort. A hug can be a demonstration of affection and emotional warmth, sometimes arising out of joy or happiness at meeting someone.



There are different variations of hugs. Prolonged hugging in a cozy, comfortable position is called cuddling. Spooning is a cuddling position, a kind of hugging when both the hugger and the hugged persons face the same direction, the front of one person is in contact with the back of the second one.

5.3. *Hand gestures:*

Hand gestures are gestures performed by one or two hands, is the most numerous category of gestures due to the ability of the human hand to acquire a huge number of clearly discernible configurations, the fact of importance for the sign languages.

- *Beckoning gestures:*



Submissive Palm Position

There are three main beckoning gestures the palm-up position, the palm-down position and the palm-closed-finger-pointed position.



Dominant Palm Position

- *Pointing gestures:*

The typical pointing with the index finger is a gesture used in many cultures.



Some cultures used the middle finger (certain regions of India). Other cultures also point with the thumb, often when referring to something behind the speaker.

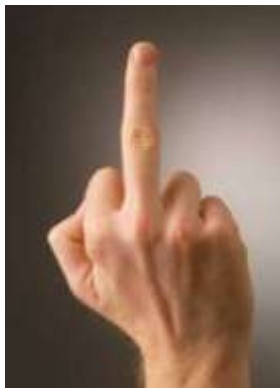
- *The standard arm-cross gesture (folded arms)*

It is the gesture which gestures fold two arms on the chest.



Standard arm cross

- *Fingers gesture:*



In Western cultures, the finger (as in giving someone the finger) is a well known obscene hand gesture made by extending the middle finger of the hand while bending the other fingers into the palm. A known variation includes extending the thumb as well.

- *An A-OK* is both a saying, derived from okay, and a hand-gesture done by connecting the thumb and forefinger into a circle (the “O”) and holding the other fingers straight or relaxed in the air.



- *A thumbs up* is a common gesture represented by a closed fist held with the thumb extended upward or downward in approval or disapproval respectively. These gestures have become metaphors in English: “My boss gave my proposal the thumbs-up” means that the boss approved the proposal, regardless of whether the gesture was made - indeed, the gesture itself is unlikely in a formal business setting.



- *Arms akimbo:*

It is the gesture performed with the arms on the hip and elbows turned outwards. Akimbo is one of those odd words, like the “aback” of “taken aback” and “fell” of “one fell swoop”. The “arms akimbo” stance generally indicates that combination of impatience which is these days called “attitude”.



- *The V-sign* is a hand gesture in which the first and second fingers are raised and parted, while the remaining fingers are clenched.

5.3. *Head gestures:*

Head gestures are the gestures which are performed by the movements of head and face.

- *Nodding the head:*



A nod of the head is a gesture in which the head is tilted in alternating up and down arcs along the sagittal plan. In many cultures, it is most commonly, but not universally, used to indicate agreement, acceptance, or acknowledgment.

- *Shaking the head:*

Shaking the head is a gesture to move your head from side to side as a way of saying “no” or to express disagreement.

5.4. *Legs gestures:*

- *Standard crossed legs gestures:*

One leg is crossed neatly over the other, usually the right over the left.



- *Leg-lock gesture:*

It is the gesture in which the man crosses at the ankles, rest ankle of one leg on top of the knee of the other leg.



- *Sitting plumb gesture:*

It has some different kinds: bending two legs parallel and closely, or fold two legs together, or squat on the ground.



Male version of ankle lock



Female version of ankle lock



6. Summary

In this chapter, an overview of culture, nonverbal communication, body language, and gesture is given. The definitions, features and classification of body language, nonverbal communication and culture are involved. Besides, similarities and differences of body language in difference cultures and their causes are also discussed briefly. Attention is also paid to the definition and classification of gesture. Especially, a detail description of typical gesture is

made, which can provide fundamental look gestures that are often used. And then, a lot of information is collected for the cross cultural in using gestures of Vietnamese and American people in the next chapter.

CHAPTER 2. DATA ANALYSIS

1. Aim of the survey

As can be seen from the methods of the study, a survey was conducted to collect information for the study. It is a set of 14 questionnaires which are divided into 5 parts: greeting gestures, touching gestures, hands gestures, gestures with head and face, legs gestures.

The survey helps me have a general and detailed analysis about using gestures of American and Vietnamese people in real life compared to information collected from Internet and other materials. By that way, a comparison on the use of gestures of Vietnamese and American people will be made.

2. Objectives of the survey

Objectives of the survey are Vietnamese and American people.

Most of American informants who were given survey questionnaires were travelers in Haiphong and Hanoi. 63% of them were males. They were of different ages from 20 to 55.

Vietnamese informants were also of different ages from 18 to 60, in different jobs, and different areas. They were in both of urban and rural areas of Haiphong city, 40% of them were males.

3. Analysis

3.1. Data collection

30 surveys written in English were given to American people, 30 surveys written in Vietnamese to Vietnamese people. There are 60 surveys correspondents being collected for analyzing.

3.2. Analysis

The investigation results about the use of gestures of Vietnamese and American people are showed in the following tables and figures. There are open and closed questionnaires. However, I just analyze closed questions in

this part. Open questions will provide information for comparing on the use of gestures of Vietnamese and American people in the next chapter.

❖ **Greeting gestures:**

Table 1 & figure 1: Greeting gestures used by Americans

Gesturer	Handshaking	Cheek kissing	Hugging
Male	80%	16%	4%
Female	67%	20%	13%

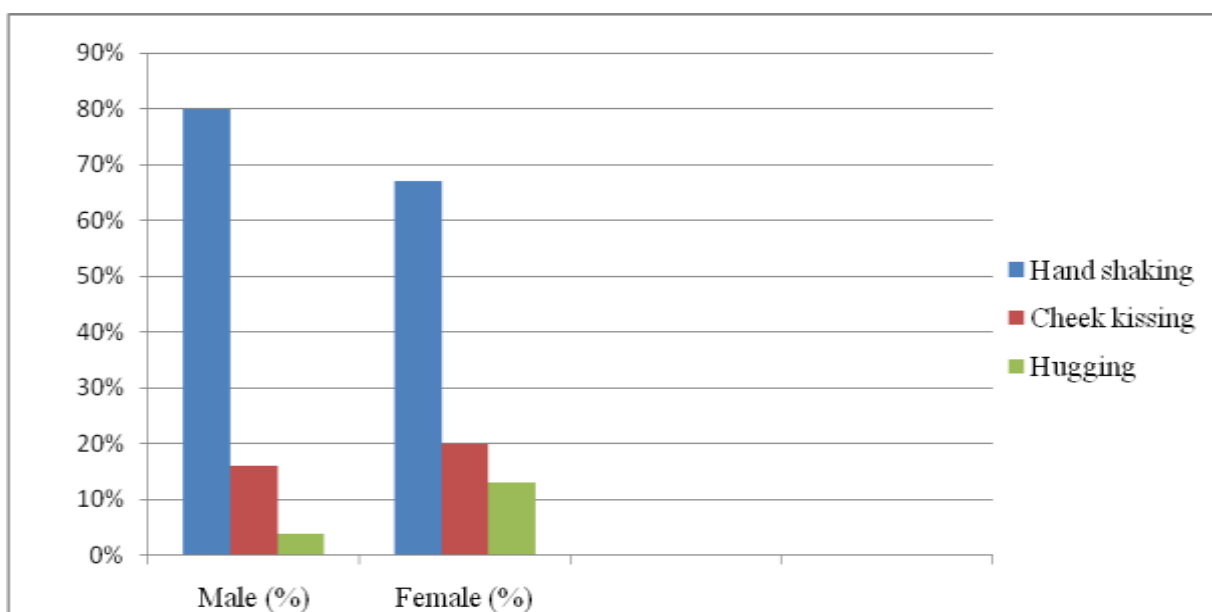
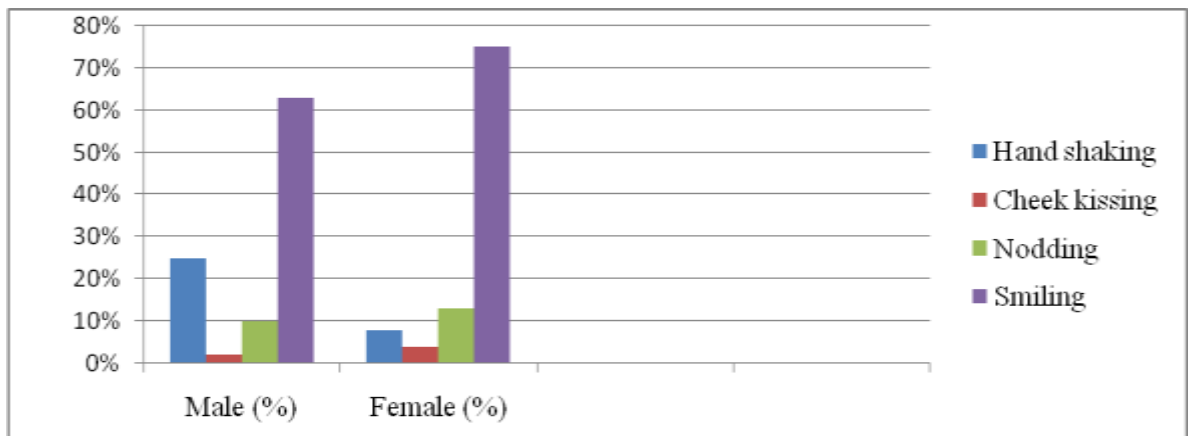


Table 2 & figure 2: Greeting gestures used by Vietnamese

Gesturer	Handshaking	Cheek kissing	Nodding	Smiling
Male	25%	2%	10%	63%
Female	8%	4%	13%	75%



As can be seen from the figures and tables, while handshaking used by 80 percents of males and 67 percents of female in greeting gestures used American, it is only at small percentages to Vietnamese - 25% and 8%. It is the same with cheek kissing. There are 16% of American males and 20% of female using cheek kissing gesture to greet, while there is only a small figure - 2% of Vietnamese male and 4% of female using it.

It can be seen easily smiling gesture reaches to 63% and 75% in using by Vietnamese. As well as handshaking in America, smiling can be considered the most common in greeting gestures in Vietnam. Besides, the figures show that there are also other greeting gestures which used in small percentage rate in either Vietnam or America.

❖ **Touching gestures:**

Table 3: The frequency of touching gestures to show friendliness and affection in public of Vietnamese and American:

Gestures	American		Vietnamese	
	Yes	No	Yes	No
Holding hands	18%	72%	78%	22%
Placing arm on another's shoulder	25%	75%	85%	15%
Standing closer	5%	95%	80%	20%
Hugging	53%	47%	25%	75%
Kissing	83%	17%	13%	87%
Patting the head	5%	95%	53%	47%

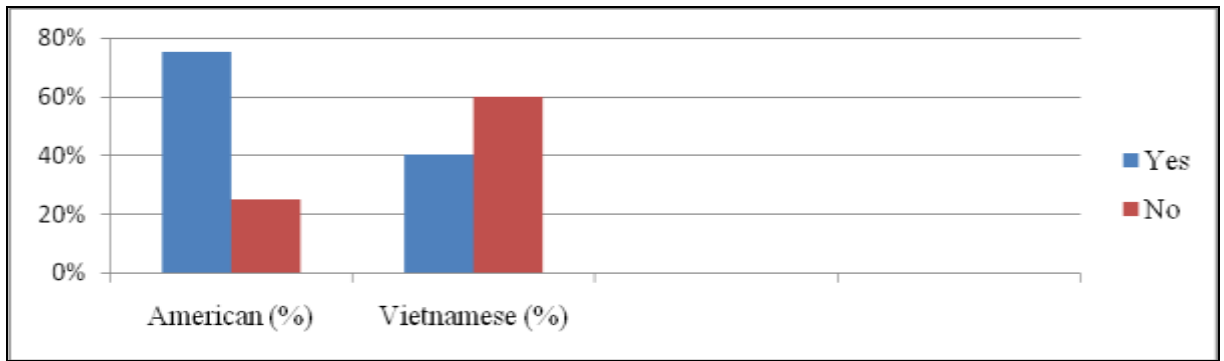
According to the percentage rates of the answer “Yes” from Table 3, we can see American people seem to avoid the gestures such as holding hands, standing closer, patting the head, or placing arm on another’s shoulder (18%, 5%, 5%, and 25% respectively). Meanwhile, those gestures are often acknowledged by quite high percentages of Vietnamese (78%, 80%, 53% and 85% respectively).

In the other hand, the often use of hugging and kissing gestures in public of American people account for 53% and 83% respectively, much higher than the use of Vietnamese (just 25% and 13% respectively).

❖ **Hands gestures:**

Table 4 & figure 3: The frequency of using hands gestures between American and Vietnamese people:

	Yes	No
American	75%	25%
Vietnamese	40%	60%



The first question of this part aims to compare the frequency of using hands gestures between American and Vietnamese people. The result shows that American people use hands gestures more often than Vietnamese people with 75% compared to 40%. An American informant who worked in Vietnam last year said that American people have a set of many fingers gestures that he rarely sees in Vietnam.

Table 5 & figure 4: The most common hands gestures of American when being angry:

	Yes (%)	No (%)
Give the middle finger	82	18
Arms akimbo	75	25
Others	26	74

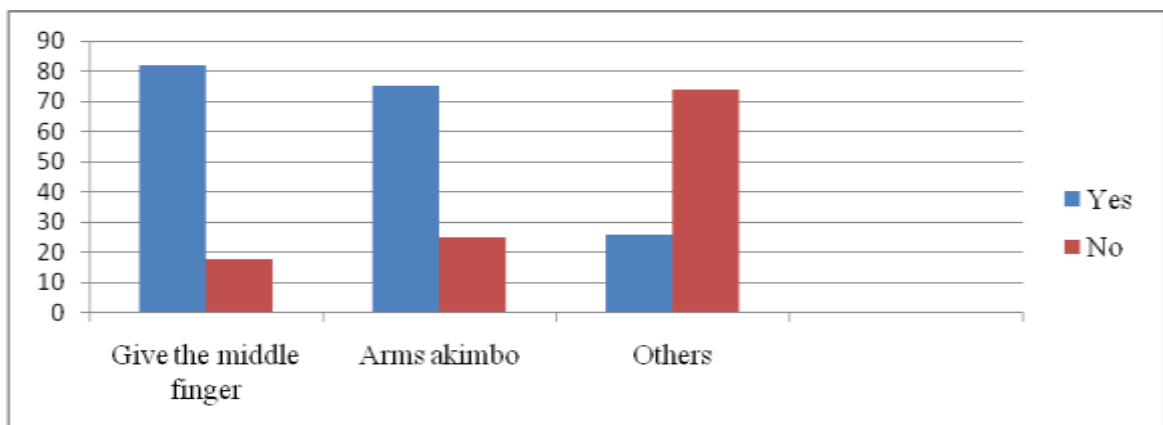
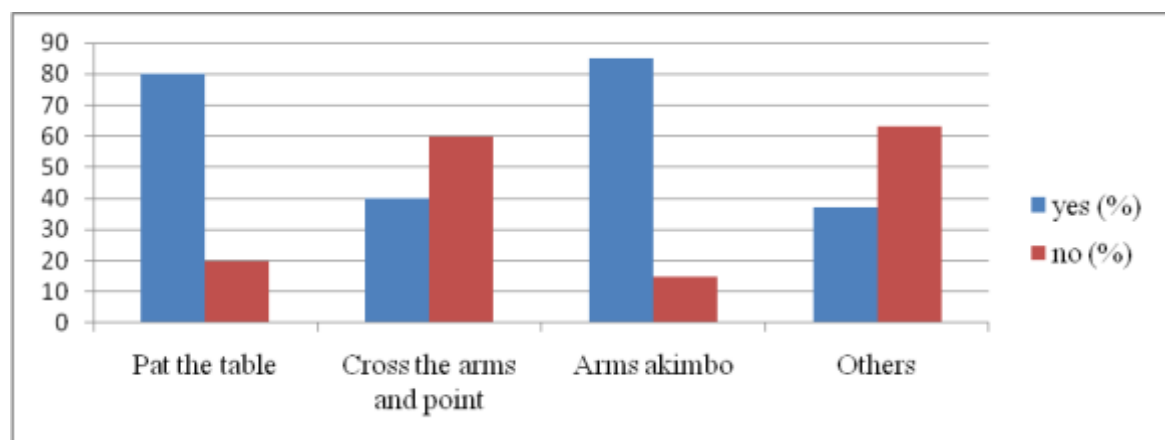


Table 6 & figure 5: The most common hands gestures of Vietnamese when being angry:

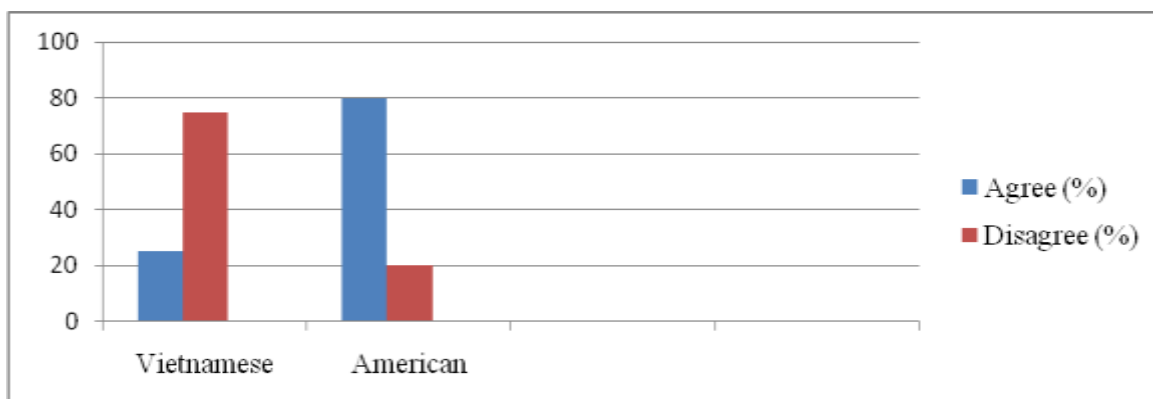
	Yes (%)	No (%)
Pat the table	80	20
Cross the arms and point	40	60
Arms akimbo	85	15
Others	37	63



As can be seen, the most common hands gestures of Vietnamese and American when being angry are different. While the most common hands gesture of Vietnamese is patting the table which accounts for 80% (among them three fifth are over the age of 40 – nearly 65%), the most common one of American is giving the middle finger with 82%. Besides, two countries share the similarities of high percentages in using arms akimbo gesture when being angry (85% of Vietnamese and 75% of American). Other gestures are sometimes used in Vietnam and America (26% and 37% respectively).

Table 7 & figure 6: The gesture of p M.A, ointing others with only index finger

	Agree (%)	Disagree (%)
Vietnamese	25	75
American	80	20



There are 80% of American agree with gesture of pointing others with only index finger. Meanwhile, just only 25% of Vietnamese people agree with this gesture, in contrary, 75% of them disagree this way of pointing.

The other questions in this part are aimed at providing information for the comparison on the use of some fingers gestures of Vietnamese and American people in the next chapter.

❖ **Gestures with head and face:**

Table 8: The use of gesture: Nodding and shaking the head

		Do you always nod the head when agreeing?	Do you always shake the head when disagreeing?
American	Yes	100%	100%
	No	0%	0%
Vietnamese	Yes	100%	80%
	No	0%	20%

It can be seen that all American informants always nod the head when agreeing and shake the head when disagreeing. In the other hand, there are 80% of Vietnamese informants affirmed that they always shake the head when disagreeing with someone or something. However, the rest of informants (20%) said that sometimes when disagreeing, they do not shake the head, but nod the head, instead. Certainly, it is accompanied by some other gestures, as an informant said.

❖ **Legs gestures:**

Table 9: The frequency of using legs gestures of Vietnamese people

	Often	Sometimes	Never
Leg-lock gesture	30%	30%	40%
Sitting plumb gesture	65%	35%	0%
Squatting gesture	45%	55%	0%

It is clear that these legs gestures are relatively popular in Vietnam. There are 30% of Vietnamese often use leg-lock gesture, and the similar percentage of them sometimes use. All of them are males. Meanwhile, the percentages of Vietnamese informants who never use this gesture account for 40%, among them nine tenth are female. Sitting plumb gesture and squatting gesture seem to be used more popularly than leg-lock gesture with the percentage of people who often use is 65% and 45% respectively.

Table 10: The frequency of using legs gestures of American people

	Often	Sometimes	Never
Leg-lock gesture	58%	5%	37%
Sitting plumb gesture	30%	40%	30%
Squatting gesture	0%	0%	100%

From the table above, we can see clearly that leg-lock gesture is used commonly in America. 63% of American informants who use it are all males, and 37% of people who never use it are female. Sitting plumb gesture is also used in America. However, the percentage of people who often use it just account for 30%. Interestingly, squatting gesture is never used by American people.

4. Summary

The information that is found out from the analysis is about the frequency of using greeting gestures, touching gestures, hands gestures, gestures with head and face, and legs gestures. It is also about the most commonly used gestures, and the differences and similarities in using mentioned gestures by Vietnamese and American people. In addition, the way and the frequency of using gestures by different gender are also pointed out.

There are some questions including open and closed questions in the survey are not analyzed in this chapter. They are mainly aimed at providing data for the comparison on the use of some detailed gestures such as V-sign gesture, thumb-up, and others...

Through the analysis above, a lot of information is collected for the comparison on using gestures of Vietnamese and American people in the next chapter.

CHAPTER 3: MAKING COMPARISON ON THE USE OF GESTURES OF VIETNAMESE AND AMERICAN PEOPLE.

1. Greeting gestures

We can see some differences in greeting gestures of Vietnamese and American people.

In American, you can see people mostly shake hands when greeting. In “The power of Handshaking for Peak Performance Worldwide”, the co-author, Brown (2004:34), says:

“Handshaking is a method and process for communicating that we’ve had been with us since the beginning of time. It is extraordinarily important. It seals the deal. It originated during the Roman Empire, about two thousand years ago. Then, when a man met another man, he had to make sure that he wouldn’t be attacked, so the two either laid down their weapons or showed the empty palms of their right hand. To ensure that neither would go for the sword or lunge, the two men grasped hands”.

Each culture has its own way of handshaking. There are twelve basic handshakes in America, according to Brown. They range from the finger squeeze to the water pump (an enthusiastic, rapid movement), to the “dead fish” (limp, effeminate), to the two-handed shake (one hand doing the shake, and the other covering the two clasped hands). Besides, we could also add to that list the finger-busting “Texas” grip. In general, the “all-American” shake is a warm, solid, firm, palm-to-palm shake that a confident person gives with no hidden agenda. From an early age, the children are taught to hold other people’s hand tightly. In addition, it has become more common to exchange handshakes man to woman or among women themselves in American business and even social circles. However, one cautionary rule is to wait and see if the woman extends her hand first.

Another greeting gesture of American people is kissing on cheek to greet, which is quite embarrassing and awkward for Vietnamese, especially between the opposite sexes.

In the United States, the cheek kiss may involve one or both cheeks. According to March 15, 2004 edition of Time Magazine, “a single kiss is acceptable in the United States, but it’s mostly a big-city phenomenon”. In most relationships, the girl usually kisses the boy on the cheek.

Cheek kissing of children by adults of both sexes is perhaps the most common cheek kiss in Northern States of America. Typically it is a short, perfunctory greeting, and is most often done by relatives.

Cheek kissing between adults, when it occurs at all, is most often done between a man and woman who know each other well, such as between relatives or close friends. In this case, a short hug (generally only upper-body contact) may accompany the kiss. Also common is cheek kissing between two women who know each other or are related. Likewise, hugs are common but not required. A hug alone may also suffice in both of these situations, and is much more common.

In Miami, Florida states, areas heavily influenced by Latin American and European immigrants, kissing hello on the cheek is the social norm.

However, the Western custom of shaking hands is spreading rapidly over the world and is now probably the customary form of greeting to express hospitality and friendliness in many countries. But the way of hand shaking is a little different. When greeting others, to show respect or friendliness, Vietnamese male friends usually shake hands and sometimes with a slight bow. When shaking hands, both hands are often used. Vietnamese people often shake hands with a lingering handshake which sometimes makes American a bit comfortable. However, it is regarded as a positive way of greeting to reveal heartfelt emotion and happiness of Vietnamese when greeting. In most situations, the senior person offers to shake hands first, but the junior person bows first. To Vietnamese women, handshaking is not a

common way of greeting. Normally, they use nodding gesture to greet. Today, in Vietnam, a woman can have a handshaking gesture with a man easier than in the past, especially in business and social activities. However, in most situations, the woman does not give their hand first, but wait for the man first. This can be explained by the traditional value of Vietnamese women's morality. In general, handshaking is still considered an important meeting. In daily life, they often greet each other with a slight nod, or much more simply than, just a smile which can be regarded as the most common and typical greeting gestures of Vietnamese.

To greet an older person that they respect, Vietnamese may bow. This gesture originated the feudal times when members of lower classes were required to bow and express respect to higher classes. Nowadays, this gesture is not used as common as in the past in Vietnam. However, it is still in daily communication. It is considered rude to bow with your hand or hands in your pocket. Small children taught to bow with their arms folded on front of their chest when greeting older people while the gesture "folded arms" are only used to show the defensiveness and disagreement by American people.

In Vietnam, if two old friends meet somewhere after several years, they will have many emotional gestures. To greet each other, it is common to see that they give each other a near and dear hug, pull or push each other, or they may pat other's shoulder to show their close friendship. Americans seldom do this. It is rude to touch others wildly even though he is the intimate friend in American culture.

Another gesture which is also considered as one of greeting gestures of Vietnamese people is hand clapping. The Vietnamese are enthusiastic applauders. You may be greeted with your group clapping, even by small children. When a person is applauded in this fashion, it is the custom for that person to return the applause or a "thank you". In general, American people just clap hands or applaud in the middle of certain events to interrupt, to

praise, or to appropriate the speakers, not to greet. Especially, slow rhythmic clapping also signals impatience in American.

In general, we can see that the use of gestures to greet is different between American and Vietnamese people. Difference age, social status, job, or the different rank in family may lead to different ways of greeting in two countries.

2. Touching gestures

When researching into the personal space in different cultures, Hall, International University Press, classifies different cultures into touch and non-touch people are not touch-oriented. It is said that wherever Americans travel, they are each accompanied by an imaginary bubble of air around them, measuring about eighteen inches. It's their personal space. When American meet another in social or business situations, noting that there will be about thirty-six inches between them (eighteen inches of space per person). That's just about the distance of extending your arm and putting your thumb in the other's ear. In other words, in public situations it's a symbolic "arm's length" relationship.

1. The intimate zone is eighteen inches of space extending outward from the body. This is the zone for lovers and parents holding infants. In this zone, the sense of smell and awareness of radiated warmth also comes into play.
2. The personal zone is the "arm's length" distance described previously. In this zone, the facial expressions of the other person are clearer.
3. The social-consultative zone extends outward from four feet to eight or ten feet and often occurs in ordinary daily conversation. It is at this distance that Americans acknowledge other people and include them in their conversations.

4. The public zone is a ten-to thirty-foot space extending outward from the body, or the outer boundary for acknowledgement, for instance, a professors standing in front of his class.

Therefore it is clear to see that Americans avoid having casual touching gestures in business and social situations, unless the two parties are very close friend. With common friends and acquaintances, they avoid having body touch gestures. As I observe, even in the elevator, body touch is not allowed. If they have touching gestures with other people slightly or unconsciously, they will say “sorry”, “very sorry” or “excuse me” in a hurry to express apology. With good friends, they may occasionally touch a forearm or an elbow, and with very good friends they may go so far as to place an arm around a shoulder. However, hugging is almost never done among casual acquaintances. It is only used by lovers, couples, or one’s mother. Moreover, it is very unusual in America to see two people with the same hug or walk down street hand in hand. They strongly disapprove those gestures because they are considered as a symbol of home sexuality. Handholding gesture is only used to show affection and friendship with children, not adults. A scientist Copper (1979) has made a survey on touching gestures for the people from different countries. He spent an hour observing the people in couples in café and counting their touching gestures. And the results: San Juan (Puerto Rico) 18, Paris (France) 11, Florida (America) 2, and London (English) 0.

In America, public displays of affection are very common. One of the most important ways to show affection is kissing gesture which an American anthropologist Morris called a “relic gesture” because it probably originated when mothers passed chewed food, mouth to mouth, to their infants. The image of two lovers hugging and kissing on the street is acceptable in American society. Among North Americans, kissing is usually reserved for sweethearts, one’s spouse, and one’s mother and occurs among close female relatives, friends, and acquaintances, but rarely between two men.

Another of touching gestures is pushing gesture. To put one's way through crowd, American usually use two hands to push against the crowd. In Vietnam, a bit pushing and showing in stores or when groups board public buses or trains are very ordinary. People, however, are accustomed to getting through the crowd by their bodies with arms keeping close to two sides. Both gestures have their own reason. Americans want to keep wider personal area than Vietnamese, so they push away the people by their hands before their bodies are touched. Vietnamese view this gesture as an overbearing manner. On the other hand, Americans feel very antipathy when Vietnamese touch others' bodies without the remark "Excuse me". However, Vietnamese people consider it ordinary, because they pay less attention to their private space and are used to crowded space, so apologies are neither offered nor expected.

According to Axtell (1998:39), Vietnamese people are touch peoples. However, as in my personal observation and investigation, while American people touch people in the opposite sex more, Vietnamese people touch people in the same sex, especially female, more. And personal space in Vietnam is much less than America in general. Therefore, in some cases, there is a mythical dance called the "conversational tango". That occurs when American and Vietnamese meet each other and the Vietnamese step forward, not realizing he is entering the American's space. The American, naturally, takes a step forward, not realizing he is entering the American's space. The American, naturally, takes a step backward. The Vietnamese wants to show his friendliness, so steps forward again, the American steps backward...again and again, create "conversation tango" as you know.

It can be seen so commonly that in the street two girls walk hand in hand. They have more touching gestures like holding hands or linking holdings hands or linking arms, or hugging sometimes. It is the same situation with men. They often hold hands, put an arm around his male friend's shoulder. All those gestures are regarded as gestures of close and intimate friendship. However, public displays of affection between a man and a female

are not common. In the past, especially in the feudal empire, men and women are rarely touching gestures. They did not directly give and deliver anything, but through an indirect thing. Folk has a sentence to show the distance between a man and a woman, even when they are a couple;

“Nam nữ thụ thụ bất thân”

It means that when couples are not married, they are banned to have intimate touching gestures together.

Another example, in “Luc Van Tien”, the well-known epic poem of Nguyen Dinh Chieu, when Luc Van Tien saved Kieu Nguyet Nga from pillagers, he said; to prevent her from meeting him.

“Khoan khoan ngồi đó chờ ra
Nàng là phận gái, ta là phận trai”

We can see in the feudal periods of more than one thousand years, Vietnamese men and women only used the sight of eyes, or go farther as a sidelong glance to share affection each other. They avoid touching and having any touching gestures.

Nowadays, that feudal thinking has changed a lot. A man show how affection to his lover more naturally and easily by gestures like hugging or kissing, but kissing on the street or in the crowded areas is still a sensation. Because Vietnamese people see that action is an unacceptable and embarrassing way of behaviors. Kissing gestures are rarely used to reveal friendship, just used to show love between two lovers, married people, or the love between small children and their parents.

To show affection with babies or very small children, Vietnamese people often fondle them. Such behaviors like touching, patting their head, hugging or kissing them are just merely signs of affection toward small children in Vietnamese culture. When patting children’s head, doer want to encourage, support or praise them for doing something well. However, they may be considered rude, intrusive and offensive in American culture.

In summary, touching is the way to show one's affection, friendliness, or simply is only to help someone leave away. Touching gestures used by American and Vietnamese people are also varied and different depending on objectives or context of communication.

3. Hands gestures

It can be seen from the analysis that the frequency of using hands gestures between Vietnamese and American people are not similar. American people use hands gestures, especially fingers gestures which are mainly grouped in the set of American Sign Language, more often and more feasibly than Vietnamese people. Most of their hands gestures are used independently, not with speech. In contrary, most of Vietnamese people use hands gestures only as a tool to accompany their speech because they still give prominence to the importance of verbal communication more than non-verbal communication (Dr. Nguyen Quang, 2008). For this reason, in this part, I just mention some most typical hands gestures which can have a great risk of cultural shock, in order to see the similarities and differences in using these gestures of Vietnamese and American people.

3.1. Beckoning gestures

As you read this, imagine that another person walks into the room, and you want him or her to come toward you. What will you do? Which gestures do mean "Come here!". The natural American gesture is to raise one hand, with the palm inward, and move the upright fingers toward you. The second acceptable gesture is to raise the hand, palm inward, with the index finger upright and curling back and forth. The third beckoning gesture of American people is to raise the hand about head high or a little higher, raise the index finger, palm down, curl the index finger in and out. To beckon a waiter in a restaurant, Americans often raise only the index finger.

On the other hand, in Vietnam, to beckon someone, the palm faces downward and the fingers are moved in a scratching motion. Vietnamese people usually try to avoid using the index finger, palm up and toward you, in

a back forth curling motion toward your body, because that gesture is used only for calling animals or sometimes for someone who they despise. In general, it can be considered rude and impolite in Vietnam society. However, beckoning gesture of Vietnamese is easy to be made mistake to waving gesture of Americans which is used as farewells.

3.2. Pointing gestures

American people often point to someone or something by extending the hand with the index finger. Besides, they also chin up to point the direction. To the contrary, Vietnamese people regard that gesture as an impolite and unrespectful gesture. When pointing to an object, they may point with the only index finger. However, when pointing to a person, it is considered rude to do in that way. They point with the open hand, not just one or two fingers. Especially, Vietnamese people always avoid using their feet to gesture or to move, or point other objects because the feet are considered lowly and dirty part on the body and in their culture.

3.3. Hands gestures to show anger

Arms akimbo is a common gesture to show one's anger in both culture. Besides, Americans usually use a gesture-extending the forefinger and makes a circular motion near the temple or ear show that someone is crazy, because to the psychology, crazy man is something wrong with his brain. But when Americans do this, it may be embarrassed to Vietnamese people, because it is just a gesture of thinking in Vietnam.

A very famous gesture that American people often do to show their anger is giving someone the finger. It is commonly called "the bird", "flipping off", or simple the finger gesture. It sends a powerful, insulting message with little leeway for misunderstanding. This gesture originated from the English. Before the Battle of Agincourt in 1415, the French, anticipating victory over the English soldiers, proposed to cut off the middle finger of all captured English longbow and therefore soldiers would be incapable of fighting in future. This famous weapon was made of the native English yew tree, and the

act of drawing the longbow was known as “plucking the yew”. Much to the French by waving their middle fingers at the defeated French, saying, “See, we can still pluck yew”. To this gesture, Vietnamese people usually do not understand its meaning, and do not use it.

In Vietnam, a common presentation of people who are angry is that they will pat the table. Most of older people or who have power, social status are accustomed to this gesture. This can be traced back to ancient time. The gesture appeared in the process of those officials trying the legal cases. When they are angry, they pat the platform to frighten the suspect to confess. With the gesture, Vietnamese people also use some other gestures, such as kind eyebrows (to scowl), or stamping one foot to show their anger. To express the anger to small children, Vietnamese people usually cross their arm in front of the chest and use the index finger point to the children when reproofing them.

3.4. Thumb-up gesture

This gesture has become metaphors in English: “My boss gave my proposal the thumb-up” means that the boss approved the proposal, regardless of whether the gesture was made. It is common in the world. Pilots do it over the world. Astronauts and cosmonauts even do it out of this world. It has become an almost universal signal for “Everything is OK”, or “Fine”, or “Good going!” and many other positive messages in that vein. However, according to my investigation, we see some differences in using this gesture between American and Vietnamese people. To most of Vietnamese, when someone does this gesture, he or she means “good job” when using it. Besides, to Americans, it also means “Ready”. This meaning may originate from During World War II, pilots on U.S. aircraft carriers adopted the thumbs up to alert the deck crew that they were ready to go and that the wheel blocks could be removed. Another meaning that most of Americans who I asked think is “thumb-up” gesture used to show hitch-hiking meaning.

3.5. The ring gesture

This gesture is also called “O.K. sign” or “A O.K” in America. Americans use it to show the friendly meaning “Fine”, “Good”, “Everything is O.K”. It is not definitively known how and why this ring gesture means “O.K” in the United States; however, it originated from America with three main suppositions. Firstly, it is supposed that this gestures sign imitating the initial letter of “Oll correct” (the way of thinking mistake in spelling “All correct”). The second supposition considers Ok as the opposite meaning of KO which means “knock out”, so OK means “no knock out, everything is fine”. The last supposition probably originated in America in 1840. At that time, the Democratic Party’s “Old Kinderhood” label was given to its presidential candidate Martin Van Buren, who was born in Kinderhood, New York. The nickname was shortened to “O.K. Van Buren” and uses as a spoken campaign slogan.

On the other hand, for my observation, not all Vietnamese people use this gesture with only that meaning. More than half of them use that gesture with the meaning “Nothing”, or “Zero mark” with three left fingers curling follow the index finger the shape the semicircular. The rest of Vietnamese understand the meaning of this ring gesture.

3.6. V-sign gesture

Most of American people use V-sign gesture with two meanings: victory and peace, whether it was done with the palm facing outward or the palm facing inward, it is a sign of insult and derision in many other countries. For each meaning that the gesture signals, there is one interesting history story. During World War II, it was popularized by England’s Prime Minister Winston Churchill to symbolize victory. It became a powerful rallying symbol during that war. Then American people also used it to show victory (President Richard Nixon frequently used this symbol). Besides, this gesture is also well-known in the United States from the days of the demonstrators

against Vietnam War in the year of 1960s, when it did not signal “victory” but instead meant “peace”.

However, most of Vietnamese people do not distinguish the differences in using this gesture with palm facing inward from using it with the palm facing outward. Nearly half of them consider it as a symbol of “Victory”, less number of Vietnamese people affirm the meaning of V-sign gesture is “number two”. Some of them think this gesture is a cuckold gesture, and the rest of them said that this gesture is meaningless to them. When I perform this gesture with the palm facing inward and the thumbs put in the middle of index and middle fingers by chance, many of Vietnamese explain that gesture as an obscene gesture.

4. Gestures with head and face

4.1. Nodding and shaking head

“Nodding the head up and down” means “Yes” and “shaking the head side to side” means “No”. At this point, Vietnamese people are same as American people. But in some situation, the action of the head in America may confuse Vietnamese people. For example, “You should not be discouraged”. Mother said to us. We all shook our heads. Shaking head means “No. We will not be discouraged” in words. But it means “Yes” when translated into Vietnamese. So Vietnamese people will nod the head at the same situation.

However, in some cases, there are still exceptions. For example, the Vietnamese people that says “Yes” with nodding head gesture while lowering the eyes may mean, “No”. It is caused by the fact that sometimes they feel reluctant to disrupt the harmony of the relationship by directly saying “No” (for example, when father ask you to do something which you do not like, you may also “Yes” in order to keep the harmonious relation with Dad).

For American people, nodding the head also means understanding and shaking the head means you do not understand. On the other hand, whether

Vietnamese understand or not, agree or not; they may keep silence. This is just a gesture of respect to speaker, especially, to the elder. However, silence usually means failure of communication in America. So the Vietnamese do not nod or shake their head may make American embarrassed.

4.2. Smiling gesture and laughter

According to my investigation, smiling gesture, in general, is considered as an intimate gesture. Smiles and laughter usually convey friendliness, approval, satisfaction, pleasure and joy etc. This is generally true in Vietnam as well as America. However, there are situation when some Vietnamese people laugh that will cause negative reactions by Americans because of misunderstanding. To illustrate, here is an example:

When an American is parking his bicycle, for example, and the bicycle accidentally falls over, he feels embarrassed at his awkwardness, and is quite angered and humiliated when Vietnamese onlookers laugh. Another example in the dining room, when an American foreigner dropped a plate quite by accident and felt bad and Vietnamese onlookers laughed, compounding his discomfort and causing anger and bad feeling.

Such laughter, of course, is not at the person or his misfortune. It can convey a number of feelings” don’t take it so seriously; laugh it off, it’s nodding; such things can happen to any of us, and some other meanings. However, for people who are unaware of this attitude of Vietnamese people, the reaction to such laughter is usually quite unpleasant and often generates ill feeling towards those laughing

5. Gestures with legs and feet

After observing on TV and conducting the investigation about gestures with legs and feet in American people, I see that there are some typical legs gestures as following:

- Crossed legs gestures:

The typical sitting gesture of American men which is used commonly is leg-lock gesture. It is the sitting position used by many American males who have a competitive nature, so it is also called American position. This being the case, it is difficult to interpret the attitude of an American during a conversation, but it is quite obvious when this gesture is used by a Vietnamese man. This leg cross indicates that an argumentative or competitive attitude exists. Therefore, except those people who have high social status or in power, Vietnamese people mostly avoid this gesture.

To women, the sitting gesture shares the similarities between Vietnamese and Americans. It is the standard crossed leg gesture in which they cross the legs at the knees, cross the legs at the knees and curls the upper foot around the calf of the lower leg.

- Another leg gesture that is easily considered to be offensive in other countries is putting one's feet on the table except America. To American, it's normal to do it. This gesture shows a territorial claim of American people, and it is called ownership gesture. Besides, as being investigated, many Americans said that this gesture makes them comfortable when working. Therefore, they think that when working and communicating with colleagues, this gesture can create a friendly working atmosphere. On the contrary, to Vietnamese, putting feet on the table is regarded as a discourtesy. It makes people have unrespected feeling. So they always avoid this gesture when communicating. We can see the same thing in a Vietnamese class that an American teacher sits on the table to lecture. Aims of creating friendly atmosphere of American teachers will be understood to be an unrespectful behavior to students.

On the contrary, one of the typical sitting gestures of Vietnamese people is sitting plumb gesture which rarely used by Americans. It can consist of three kinds: oriental leg-cross, sitting knee-to-chin gesture, and squatting gesture. Firstly, oriental leg-cross gesture is usually used when sitting on the cushions, the floor, the sedge mat, the pillow. It is the gesture in which

gestures folds two legs; normally, the left is on the right. This gesture is very common in Vietnam, both in the cities and countryside. We can see this gesture regularly when Vietnamese people have meals or when they sit together to chat. One cautionary rule when sitting in this gesture is to avoid coming out the sole of the foot, because it is regarded as an impolite gesture. However, women are not advised to do this gesture. In Vietnamese society, women dignity is valued strictly; so women often avoid doing in that way. Instead, they often sit in the gesture of putting two legs parallel aside without coming out the sole of the foot.

Secondly, sitting-to-knee gesture is also a common one in Vietnam. It is the gesture of bending two legs parallel and closely; two hands are usually folded to keep the legs. The touching part of legs and hands are the upper part of wrist and feet. Most of people who are investigated said that they usually do this gesture when they want to get relaxed. When observing at public places like some bus stations and trains where have Americans and Vietnamese people, I see that after waiting for buses or trains in a quite long time, Americans still in the constant posture, but Vietnamese people usually change into the sitting-to-knee gesture or squatting gesture.

Thirdly, the gesture which I have just mentioned above is squatting gesture. That gesture which is called “ngồi xổm” in Vietnamese is originated from the agricultural civilization. To adapt the condition of many wet swarshy places, the habit of squatting is diffused in Vietnamese people. In the rural areas, it is popular to see the cultivators squatting to have meals because they are always in a ready way to go out the rice field to carry on working. Nowadays, this gesture is more commonly seen in the countryside and rural areas than in the big cities in Vietnam. However, in the cities, we can still see this gesture in the public places, especially in the markets, where the venders squat when they are waiting for someone or something or when they feel impatient or nervous. On the other hand, American people acknowledge this gesture in the bad mood. They never use this gesture because they think that it

is originated by slaves. According to thinking of philosopher Hegel, he adduces the word “chairman” which is combined by two meaning words “chair” and “man” means the officer who presides at the meetings of an organization. Then he explains that each man has his own chair, so the way of sitting without leaning on anything is the one that only slaves or people in lower status have. Therefore, American people often have bad impression on this gesture and people who use it.

6. Summary

To sum up, this chapter handles commonly used gestures in Vietnam and America. Firstly, greeting gestures are discussed. As can be seen, many greeting gestures which are used by Vietnamese and American people show many differences in the frequency of use and objectives. Secondly, a comparison on using touching gestures being used by American and Vietnamese people are also varied and different depending on objectives or context of communication. Next, the most common gestures belonging to the fields of hands gestures are mentioned. They are typical gestures in Vietnam and American, which show be paid attention to avoid culture shock.

CHAPTER 4: IMPLICATION OF THE STUDY

1. Difficulties faced by Vietnamese learner

After presenting and comparing on using gestures between Vietnamese and American people, we can see that there are many differences and similarities in using gestures between two countries. They can become the barrier for Vietnamese learner to research and understand gestures of American as well as their culture.

1.1. Greeting gestures

Have you ever been confused when a colleague stands closely by you while communicating? Vietnamese people often don't feel comfortable while American people think that it show friendliness and truth. When a Vietnamese communicates with an American, it is easy for them to misunderstand each other, because they don't understand implied meaning of gestures which the other used. Therefore, they become confused and the conversation will not be efficient.

For example, an American teacher was very surprised when a Vietnam student greeting him by bowing with his arms folded on front of his chest because with American people, the gesture "folded arms" are only used to show the defensiveness and disagreement.

Another example, when an American business who was invited to be guest at a meeting, people clap hand to greet him. He was very confused because he thought that clap hands or applaud in the middle of certain events to interrupt, to praise, or to appropriate the speakers, not to greet.

1.2. Touching gestures

Americans have personal space, measuring about eighteen inches. When Americans meet another in social or business situations, noting that there will be about thirty-six inches between them (eighteen inches of space per person). That's just about the distance of extending your arm and putting your thumb in the other's ear. Therefore, it is clear that to see that Americans avoid having casual touching gestures in business and social situations, unless the two parties are very close friends. With common friends and acquaintances, they avoid having body touch gestures.

One time, I witnessed the "conversational tango" between a Vietnamese person and an American person. That occurs when an American and a Vietnamese meet each other in the meeting room and the Vietnamese step forward, not realizing he is entering the American's space. The American, naturally, takes a step backward to keep the distance. The Vietnamese wants to show his friendliness, so steps forward again, the American steps backward...again and again. It is interesting that they are too absorbed in talking to notice that they moved from top to bottom of the room.

In addition, if you are in board public buses, trains or crowd, you can see that, to put one's way through crowd, Americans usually use two hands to push against the crowd before their bodies are touched with remark "Excuse me". In Vietnam, a bit pushing and showing in stores or when groups are very ordinary. People are accustomed to getting through the crowd by their bodies with arms keeping close to two sides.

1.3. Hand gestures

While Vietnamese people usually try to avoid using the index finger, palm up and toward you, in a back forth curling motion toward your body, because that gesture is used only for calling animals or sometimes for someone who they despise. Americans often raise the hand, palm inward, with

the index finger upright and curling back and forth when they want to beckon with another.

Moreover, American people often point to someone or something by extending the hand with the index finger. Besides, they also chin up to point the direction. Therefore, you don't regard that gesture as an impolite and unrespectful gesture because these are their culture.

1.4. Gestures with legs and feet

In almost countries, putting one's feet on the table is easily considered to be offensive, American people often use this gesture because as being investigated, many Americans said that this gesture makes them comfortable when working. Besides, they think that when working and communicating with colleagues, this gesture can create a friendly working atmosphere.

2. Some suggestions to solve these difficulties

From what I have accumulated during my study, I want to share some suggestions to solve these difficulties as my experiences.

2.1. It's better to pay attention to the implied meaning

To understanding the implied meaning of gestures of the other cultures, firstly, getting information of the use of gestures in different countries through films, websites, other materials as much as possible.

Secondly, when in Rome, do as the Romans do. Adapting your style to the local customs may be tough, but it will pay off in the long run. Use the gesture like the way the local people do.

Besides, to avoid misunderstanding and become an impolite person, when communicating with the foreigner, if we are confused about their gestures, do not be afraid to ask questions. A good idea is to repeat back our

interpretation of what has been said and ask for classification. An example of this might be “so what are you saying is that...”

Finally, Language and culture always have a close relationship. Therefore, it is essential to prepare a foreign language well before being abroad. It will also help to minimize misunderstanding which leads to culture shocks when using gestures.

2.2. It's better to take the context into account.

When we are communicating with others, we always consider the situation and the context in which the communication occurs. Some situations require more formal behaviors that might be interpreted very differently in any other setting. Consider whether or not nonverbal behaviors are appropriate for context. If we are trying to improve our own nonverbal communication, especially, gestures, concentrate on ways to make our signals match the level of formality necessitated by the situation.

In short, I hope these methods will prevent people from misunderstanding any positive gestures of foreigners when being abroad or communicating with them.

PART III. CONCLUSION

1. Issues addressed in the study

Language and culture are so closely interrelated that there are just dimly blurred boundaries between them. Language does not exist apart from culture and culture becomes much more important if we want to learn a foreign language for communicative purposes. Therefore, the cross culture study is a big concern of all English learners.

With hope to help avoid culture shock and create efficient communications, this cross culture study on using gestures of Vietnamese and American people is carried out with 3 mains parts:

The first part introduces the study. It consists of rationale, the aims of the study, scope of the study, the method of the study and the design of the study.

The second part involves four chapters. Chapter 1 provides a theoretical background of culture, nonverbal communication, body language and gestures. The definition, features and classification of culture, body language, nonverbal communication and gestures are involved. Besides, the similarities and differences of body language in different cultures and their causes are also discussed. A detailed description of typical gesture is also made, which can provide a fundamental look of gesture that are often used.

Chapter 2 mentions the methodology of the study. The survey questionnaires are analyzed through 10 tables and 6 figures. Through the analysis above, a lot of information is collected for the comparison on the use of gestures of Vietnamese and American people in the next chapter.

Chapter 3 is the part of the results and discussion – a comparison on using gestures between Vietnamese and American people. It includes the way and frequency of using greeting gestures, touching gestures, hand gestures,

head gestures and leg gestures. It also about the most commonly used gestures, and the differences and similarities in using mentioned gestures by Vietnamese and American people.

Chapter 4 is designed for some difficulties faced by Vietnamese learners and the way to solve basing on the results of the analysis from the chapter above.

In the last part, an overview of the study is provided.

2. Recommendations and Suggestions for further study.

Because of limitation of time and knowledge, only some typical gestures are mentioned. If having any chances for further study, a deep research about using gestures in different contexts of communication will be expected. Moreover, this study cannot avoid mistakes, so I'm always willing to receive the contributions, advices and sympathies from teachers and readers to make my graduation paper more completely.

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Appendix I

SURVEY QUESTIONNAIRES FOR AMERICAN PEOPLE

My name is Vu Thi Ly from Haiphong Private University. I'm conducting a cross culture study on using gestures of Vietnam and America. I highly appreciate your cooperation!

- Age:
- Gender:
Male
Female
- Living area:

A. Greeting gestures

1. When greeting a person, which way do you choose?

Objectives	Hugging	Shaking hands	Nodding	Bowing	Cheek kissing	Smiling
Male						
Female						
An older person						
A child						

B. Touching gestures

1. How often do you use these following gestures to show your friendliness and affection?

	Yes	No
Holding hands		
Placing arm on another's shoulder		
Standing closer		
Hugging		
Kissing		
Patting the head		

2. Which objectives these following gestures used for?

	Objectives
Holding hands	
Placing arm on another's shoulder	
Standing closer	
Hugging	
Kissing	
Patting the head	

3. If you are stuck in the crowd, will you push against other people to escape by two hands or body?

- a. By two hands
- b. By body

Do you say "Sorry" going with that gesture? Yes No

C. Hand gestures

- 1. Do you often use hands gestures? Yes No
- 2. Do you often use these following gestures when you are angry?

	Yes	No
Give the middle finger		
Arms akimbo		
Others		

3. When someone gives you the sign of "Thumb up", how do you understand it?

- a. You are number one!
- b. Good job!
- c. I'm ready!
- d. Another meaning:

4. When you use gesture "V-sign", you do it with :

- a. The palm facing inward
- b. The palm facing outward
- c. I don't care much whether the palm facing inward or outward.

Which meaning do you think this gesture has?

5. If you want to beckon someone, how will you do?
- Hand extend toward person, open palm, palm down, with all fingers crooked in a beckoning motion
 - Hand extend toward person, open palm, palm up, with index fingers crooked in a beckoning motion
6. Have you ever pointed to someone with the only index finger?
- Yes No
7. What do you mean when using “The ring gesture”?

D. Gestures with head and face

1. Do you always nod your head when agree and shake your head when disagree with an idea?
- Yes No
2. When someone laughs at your embarrassment, you think he means:
- “You are a foolish!”
 - “Don’t take it so seriously!”
- Other ideas:

E. Gestures with legs and feet

1. How often do you use these following gestures?

	Often	Sometimes	Never
Leg-lock gesture			
Sitting plumb gesture			
Squatting gesture			

2. What do you think if someone puts his feet on the table when working or talking with other people?
- It’s a very impolite way
 - It’s an ordinary way
 - It’s a friendly way

Thank you for your cooperation!

Appendix II

SURVEY QUESTIONNAIRES FOR VIETNAMESE PEOPLE

Tên tôi là Vũ Thị Lý đến từ Đại học Dân lập Hải Phòng. Tôi đang tiến hành một nghiên cứu về giao thoa văn hóa qua việc sử dụng ngôn ngữ cử chỉ của người Việt Nam và người Mỹ. Rất mong sự hợp tác của các bạn!

- Tuổi:
- Giới tính: Nam Nữ
- Khu vực sinh sống:

A. Cử chỉ chào hỏi

1. Khi chào ai đó, bạn thường chào bằng cách nào? Đánh dấu X vào ô bạn chọn!

Đối tượng	Ôm	Bắt tay	Gật đầu	Cúi chào	Hôn má	Cười
Nam						
Nữ						
Người già						
Trẻ nhỏ						

B. Cử chỉ động chạm

2. Bạn có thường sử dụng các cử chỉ sau để thể hiện sự thân thiện không?

Đánh dấu X vào ô bạn chọn!

	Không	Có
Nắm tay		
Khoác vai		
Đứng gần lại		
Ôm		
Hôn		
Xoa đầu		

3. Bạn thường dùng các cử chỉ sau đây với ai?

	Đối tượng
Nắm tay	
Khoác vai	
Đứng gần lại	
Ôm	
Hôn	
Xoa đầu	

4. Nếu bị mắc kẹt trong một đám đông, bạn sẽ đẩy người khác để thoát ra bằng 2 tay hay bằng cơ thể?

c. Bằng 2 tay

d. Bằng cơ thể

Bạn có nói xin lỗi kèm theo cử chỉ đó không? Có Không

C. Cử chỉ tay

5. Bạn có thường xuyên dùng cử chỉ tay không? Có Không

6. Khi giận dữ bạn có hay sử dụng các cử chỉ sau đây không?

	Có	Không
Chống nạnh		
Đập bàn		
Khoanh tay rồi chỉ		
Cách khác		

7. Bạn hiểu như thế nào khi thấy ai đó làm cử chỉ giơ ngón tay cái lên?

e. Bạn là số 1!

f. Làm tốt lắm!

g. Tôi đã sẵn sàng

h. Nghĩa khác:

8. Khi làm cử chỉ chữ “V”, bạn làm với :

d. Gan bàn tay quay vào trong

e. Gan bàn tay quay ra ngoài

f. Bạn không quan tâm gan bàn tay quay vào trong hay quay ra ngoài.

Bạn nghĩ cử chỉ này có ý nghĩa gì?

.....

9. Bạn sẽ làm thế nào khi muốn gọi ai đó?

c. Giơ tay lên, gan bàn tay mở, hướng xuống, các ngón tay gập lại theo chiều vẫy

d. Giơ tay lên, gan bàn tay mở, hướng lên, ngón tay trở gập lại theo chiều vẫy

10. Bạn có chỉ vào người khác với một ngón tay trỏ không?

Có

Không

11. Bạn dùng cử chỉ “chiếc nhẫn” với ý nghĩa gì?

D. Cử chỉ với đầu và mắt

12. Bạn có luôn luôn gật đầu khi đồng ý và lắc đầu khi không đồng ý với cái gì không?

Có

Không

13. Khi ai đó cười sự lúng túng của bạn, bạn có nghĩ anh ta có ý:

c. “Bạn là một kẻ ngốc!”

d. “Không có gì nghiêm trọng cả!”

Ý kiến khác:

E. Cử chỉ chân

14. Bạn có thường xuyên sử dụng các cử chỉ sau không?

	Thường xuyên	Thỉnh thoảng	Không bao giờ
Gác chân			
Ngồi xổm			
Ngồi bệt			

15. Bạn nghĩ gì nếu ai đó đặt chân lên bàn khi làm việc hay nói chuyện với người khác?

d. Rất bất lịch sự

e. Bình thường

f. Một cử chỉ thân thiện

Cảm ơn bạn đã hợp tác!