

EYE CONTACT

One of the most powerful body language tools that a human being has is one of the **subtlest** movements we can make – eye contact. The energy it takes to shift your eyes from one place to another or lock your eyes in place with another person’s eye is little to none. It can be effortless or can be as fast as a blink of an eye; yet, it shows a lot about one’s character.

Traditionally speaking, eye contact is more **prevalent** in western cultures. For example, in America it is a sign of respect when one makes direct eye contact when talking to a superior such as boss or the president, while in Japan or China, it would be a sign of disrespect if one were to look directly at a superior in the eye such as the emperor or even, in some common cases, an elderly person.

In many Western societies, including the United States, a person who does not maintain “good eye contact” is regarded as being slightly suspicious, or a “**shifty**” character. Americans unconsciously associate people who avoid eye contact as unfriendly, insecure, inattentive and impersonal.

Latin American and African have longer time looking, but prolonged eye contact from individual of lower status is considered disrespectful.

A polite Englishman is taught to pay strict attention to a speaker, to listen carefully, and to blink his eyes to let the speaker know he or she has been understood as well as heard.

Take the case of American and Chinese, the Americans interpreted the widening of the eyes as **astonishment** instead of danger and polite expression of anger.

However, as times are changing fast and the meaning behind eye contact is now being universalized. Eye contact nowadays, isn’t as dependent on the cultural upbringings as it once used to, and more or less, just depends on the type of person they are or the person’s personality.

LET'S TALK

1. In doing business overseas, how important is the knowledge of cultural issues?
2. If you are preparing a business contracts with people from other countries is it necessary to be acquainted with their culture? Why? Why not?