

## Gestures - A Silent Language

People use more than words when they communicate with each other: nodding, shaking their heads, knitting or raising their eyebrows, wrinkling their noses etc. Facial expressions and body movements are effective communicators. One single gesture, however, can carry a myriad of different meanings in different cultures. What we customarily use may be interpreted as peculiar, or even rude, in other parts of the globe.

Take gestures of greetings. The handshake is one of the most popular gestures around the world. Most of us use it, with a firm grip, when greeting each other. But in some cultures, shaking hands is not a traditional way of greeting — the Maori in New Zealand rub noses with one another, the Japanese prefer bowing and Southeast Asians make a praying motion by pressing their palms together. For such people as the Middle Easterners and the many Asians who do shake hands, a gentle clasp is favoured. Doing otherwise would only suggest aggression.

When signalling “Hello” or “Goodbye”, North Americans normally raise the arm and wave the open hand from side to side like a windscreen wiper. But in much of Europe this action indicates “No”. Instead, Europeans bid a greeting or farewell with the arm up and the hand bobbing up and down at the wrist. This is the case except in Italy and Greece, where people wave completely differently: palm up, and fingers curling back and forth towards themselves.

The “OK” gesture — the thumb and the forefinger forming a circle with the other three fingers splaying upward, is flashed

in many cultures as a signal for “Yes” and “Fine”. However, in France this denotes “zero” or “worthless”. In Japan, the thumb and the forefinger forming a circle is a symbol of money, probably because this gesture creates the outline of a coin. It is noteworthy that such a sign is terribly rude to a German as it signifies “You’re stupid and annoying”. So the “OK” signal as we so well know it is definitely not OK in Germany.

For millions of people, making a “V” shape with the index and middle fingers means “victory” or “peace”. But be careful in England. There, if the fingers and palm face towards the signaller’s body, it is tantamount to an insult. Therefore, remember to make a “V” with your palm facing away from you. An innocent twist of the wrist could result in painful consequences!

The “thumbs up” signal, which silently conveys “Fine”, “Good job!” or “Great!”, is an almost ubiquitous gesture around the world. Its meaning of support and approval is well known throughout North America, much of Europe as well as in the Far East. In certain cultures, however, this gesture can carry entirely different meanings. For example, it is viewed as a rude gesture in Nigeria and should be avoided. In both Germany and Japan, the upright thumb alone is also used when counting: the Germans show it to mean “one” while the Japanese display it to signify “five”.

Gestures indeed play an important role in our daily communication. Awareness of their different meanings in different cultures will help us to avoid cross-cultural misunderstandings or unintended animosity.

Without the stimulus of difference,  
there is no growth.

Jan W. Walls

## 漢語外來詞

“外來詞”令你聯想到什麼？**坦克、卡通、熱狗、血拼、放題**？未知大家有否留意，日常接觸到的詞語，屬於舶來品的不在少數。下面一段文字，有十二個詞語都是進口貨，可有興趣把它們圈出？（答案在文末。）

小桃穿上今年最流行的迷你裙，準備跟媽媽去看芭蕾舞。到了劇場，卻發現演出取消了，只好改去附近的博物館參觀。走得累了，媽媽到小賣部給小桃買了一份三明治和一瓶可樂，自己則要了一杯咖啡。看着還有時間，她們回家前還參加了一個食物營養講座。

外來詞又稱借詞或外來語，是指從外語吸收過來的詞語。漢語外來詞是文化交流的產物，自古有之。漢代以來，中土與西域的貿易往來頻繁，物資的交流不但引進了新器物，還帶來了不少外來詞，例如**獅子、葡萄、菠菜、蘋果、瑠璃**等。元清兩代，蒙古族、滿族先後入主中原，基於政治社會因素，漢語詞彙增添了不少源自蒙語和滿語的外來詞，**薩其馬**便屬一例。**薩其馬**源自滿語，原屬滿族糕點。

自漢至唐朝傳入中國的外來詞，不少來自印度。佛教在漢朝傳入中國後，**佛、羅漢**等佛教詞語也隨之而來。到了魏晉和隋唐時期，源自梵文的字詞更是多不勝數，隨便舉幾個例子：**菩提**指豁然徹悟；**禪**指靜坐默念；**刹那**指時間極短，是古印度最小的計時單位。另外，在現代漢語裏，**世界、如實、平等、現行、相對、絕對**等普通不過的詞語，原來都源於佛教。這些外來詞已完

全融入我們日常的詞彙，外語的味道了無痕迹。

至明清時期，來華宣教的傳教士把西方科技、藝術等知識引進中國。隨着西學東漸，大量西方詞語融入了漢語詞彙，例如源於法語的**芭蕾、香檳、沙龍**，以及來自英語的**咖啡、啤酒、雷達、馬拉松**。

近代傳入的外來詞，不少源自日本。中日文化交流歷史悠久，詞彙互借的情況相當普遍。日本翻譯西方詞語時，間或借用古代漢語的字詞來意譯，但其詞義與古漢語不盡相同。舉例來說，**革命**一詞見於《易經·革卦》：“天地革而四時成，湯武革命，順乎天而應乎人”。古代認為王者受命於天，改朝換代是天命變更，因稱“革命”。日語借用這個古漢語字詞來意譯英語“revolution”，意為社會制度的變革。後來，我們從日語汲取有了新義的**革命**一詞，但仍沿用漢字的讀音。

從日語汲取的詞語，一般只借用漢字字形和詞義，字音則依漢字原有的讀音。**法律、反射、幹部、廣場、建築、教養、解剖、進度、經費、會計、社會、市場、體操、投機、衛生、銀行、知識、總理、宗教**等常用詞語，原來都源自日本。

外來詞是漢語詞彙重要的組件，這些新詞語不但使我們的語言更豐富多彩，也是千載中外文化交流的明證。

外來詞包括源自英語的**迷你裙、三明治、可樂、咖啡**，源自法語的**芭蕾、香檳**，以及源自日語的**劇場、演出、體操、投機、衛生、銀行、知識、總理、宗教**等常用詞語，原來都源自日本。