Culture and the Art of Making Oral Presentations

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Abstract
This article aimed to study the predictors of how Singaporeans/Malaysians of Chinese origin evaluate oral presentations, based on factors which provide informational input on emotions, namely eye contact, voice, facial expressions and body movements. The key finding is that voice is the most predictive of the overall performance of oral presentations, which is consistent with research on Eastern Asian subjects. However, facial expressions were found to be the most predictive of emotional input. If facial expressions were more important, this mode would also be the most predictive of the overall performance of oral presentations and not voice. The lack of consistency challenges the assumption that the effective delivery of oral presentations rely more on the visual display of emotions than other non-visual nonverbal modes. These results have implications for how oral presentations are taught in an East Asian context. In cultures where an outward display of emotion is not generally expected, it would be more appropriate to give more attention to other nonverbal modes of communication such as voice.

1 Introduction

Successful business in the modern globalized world depends largely on communication and the successful interpretation of verbal and nonverbal language. The ability to present has been considered a core competency among higher educated professionals (van Ginkel et al. 2015). Standards of good delivery in the English-speaking world are based on those set by experts in the field and many of these communication experts come from Western oral traditions. The gold standard is upheld by most oral communication publications which provide a list of essential skills needed to master the art of making oral presentations. It is, therefore, worthwhile examining these qualities that are purportedly needed for successful oral presentations since they reflect the values of the culture in which the presentations are made.

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2 Background

This study examines oral presentations in the Singaporean context. There are four main languages used in Singapore: English, Mandarin Chinese, Malay, and Tamil but English is the main medium of instruction in education from primary to tertiary levels. The bilingual policy, established in 1966, requires all students to learn a second language which is supposedly the language of their ethnic group. Hence, the so-called first language, English, is not necessarily their best language. But, it is the language of the workplace. Being proficient in English is considered essential for one's career. To keep pace with the growth of Singapore, universities offer communication skills courses to prepare students to communicate in the international business and professional arenas.

As a key part of professional communication courses, universities teach this subject using textbooks such as Business Communication Today (Bovee & Thill, 2018). The gold standard set by these books is taken from the best of the authors' oral traditions. To learn and thereafter apply these standards in a completely different language and cultural context, where language abilities in English vary, poses potential problems of application.

A summary of the general guidelines provided by most publications on oral presentations includes these essential factors for consideration: eye contact, voice, facial expressions, posture and body movements (Goodall & Waagen, 1986; Price, 2012). The emphasis on these nonverbal features is based on studies of nonverbal expressions of emotion which confirm that nonverbal communication extends verbal messages (Argyle, 1975; LaFrance & Mayo, 1978).

In the application of the research on how to best use nonverbal modes of communication, maintenance of eye contact is almost always an essential part of all oral presentations. 'The point of making eye contact is to establish one-on-one contact with the individual members of the audience. People want to feel that you're talking to them' (Locker, 2000, p. 494). The aim of trying to maintain eye contact is to look sincerer. A good speaking voice should include features of optimum volume, pitch and speed which are to be varied to be interesting (Bovee & Thill, 2018). To achieve optimum vocal features while varying the pitch, volume and speed is to ensure that the voice can be engaging. Presenters are advised to smile, look friendly and vary facial expressions to ensure the message is dynamic (Bovee & Thill, 2018). To smile is to look friendly and to move in big gestures is to appear more self-assured. The body movements should generally be 'big and confident' (Locker, 2000, p. 496). Ultimately, being sincere, sounding more interesting, looking more friendly and appearing more confident is to win an audience over with nonverbal strategies that can enhance the verbal message. The intent is to persuade the audience to follow, agree with or believe the argument(s) of the presenter. These nonverbal tools for delivering an oral presentation become powerful devices that draw on an even more potent instrument of persuasion: emotion.

Emotions used in oral presentations can become a powerful persuasive tool as shown in persuasion research. Without a doubt, successful persuasion cannot be isolated from the content but it is beyond the scope of this study to investigate the relationship between the nonverbal communication modes and the effectiveness of the content in oral presentations. In addition to the content, three fundamental communication characteristics relate to the pragmatics of persuasion: authority, credibility and social attractiveness (Kelman, 1958). People's perception of these characteristics that can bring about changes in values, perspectives, and attitudes is necessarily related to the emotional forces behind them (Benoit & Benoit, 2008; Perloff, 2003; Petty & Cacioppo, 1986; Pullman, 2013; Rhoads & Cialdini, 2002). However, how and to what extent emotion is displayed across cultures have been found to vary. Hence, the knowledge of how a particular culture expresses emotions in the different channels and how they are understood can help those outside the culture to better interpret the message and communicate more effectively with those from within the culture.

3 Literature Review

For this paper, emotions are defined as discrete and automatic affective responses to a personal event (Ekman & Cordaro, 2011). Much of the beginnings of research on emotion dates back to Darwin's proposal that emotions and their expressions have evolved across all human beings (Darwin & Prodger, 1998) (originally published 1872). Supporters of this view found in their studies that a small number of basic emotions displayed as facial expressions are universal across cultures (Biehl et al., 1997; Ekman, 1980; Tomkins & McCarter, 1964). Observations of the face found that emotions are an integral part of communication and that the facial musculature is formed and fully functional at birth (Ekman & Oster, 1979). Human beings are, therefore, innately effective at communicating emotions using their faces and are equally able to interpret other people's facial expressions. These expressions are formed using muscles in the eyes, forehead, nose region, mouth, and neck, combining to form varied facial expressions. They become the direct representation of emotional experiences (Ekman, 1992). Six emotions: happiness, sadness, surprise, fear, anger, and disgust have been central to the universality hypothesis which claims that these emotions are communicated across all human beings (Ekman & Friesen, 2003).

If emotions were indeed universal, the issue of adopting standard guidelines for delivering the best oral presentations would not be an issue. However, cross-cultural research has thrown up many other considerations which focus attention on the way in which emotions are experienced culturally: how the emotions are expressed, and how they are perceived.

Jack et al. (2012) refuted the universality hypothesis with studies that found that the six basic emotions are not universal and that different emotional categories play significant roles depending on the culture of the observers. They found that the six emotions in Western Caucasians represent six distinct emotions whereas the East Asians had more overlap between emotion categories. The other fundamental emotions not covered by the six emotions are shame, pride, and guilt. In addition, they found that the emotional intensity also varied with the culture. This was displayed in the movements of the eyes to show happiness, fear, disgust, and anger for the East Asian group whereas for the Western Caucasians, the emotional intensity was shown in other parts of the face. The use of the eyes is supposedly under less voluntary control than the mouth which reflects restrained facial behaviour (Matsumoto et al., 1988). Based on such research, it has become clear that expressions of emotions use culture-specific facial signals, and they are displayed based on display rules of their specific culture.

Display rules are learnt early in life from being told what to do or not to do, or from observing and imitating what others do as acceptable behaviour (Ekman & Friesen, 2003). Hence, these social norms govern facial behaviour on a habitual basis, and they would vary according to different social settings in the different cultures (Elfenbein et al., 2007).

Cross-cultural studies that compare Western Caucasians and East Asians suggest that East Asian cultures which are generally more collectivistic, express emotions in more inhibited behaviours such as gaze aversion or downward head movements (Cordaro et al., 2017; Tracy & Matsumoto, 2008). It has been suggested that the Asian upbringing that relies more on love withdrawal, shaming and guilt induction contributes to the development of relational sensitivity, self-discipline, and social anxiety. This heightens the interpersonal attunement and sensitivity to negative evaluation of others (Nelson et al., 2006; Wu et al., 2002). This type of upbringing has implications for the value placed on emotional arousal. High emotional arousal is considered ideal and effective in Western cultures whereas in Eastern cultures low arousal is considered desirable (Tsai et al., 2007). Activities that promote excitement and enthusiasm such as active sports, thrilling stories and novelty-centred challenges are preferred in Western cultures. In contrast, low arousal positive emotional states promoted by contentment are states of happiness (Uchida & Kitayama, 2009). In the Korean culture, excessive emotion is considered harmful (Lee et al., 2015). Similarly, in the Japanese culture, too much eye contact is considered disrespectful,

and children are taught not to maintain eye contact. Uono and Hietanen (2015) found that Japanese participants rated neutral faces as more emotional than Finnish participants. The Japanese participants might have perceived the neutral facial expressions as suppressed but the emotions are more intense. This may explain why East Asians tend to look at the centre of a face to avoid high arousal and maintain social relationships. Mortenson et al. (2006) suggest that East Asian cultures such as that in China perceive an individual's distressed emotional state as disrupting the harmony of the social group. The belief is that sadness would hurt feelings of family members or friends and masking the emotion is a more appropriate way of managing the emotion. However, with Euro-Americans it was found that emotion-avoidant support is considered insensitive and ineffective (Burleson & Goldsmith, 1998).

When display rules reflect the social norms which have been learnt from young, there is a necessary connection with how emotions are perceived. It would seem to suggest that those within the same culture would have some advantage over those outside the culture and cross-cultural communication might present potential problems. This has been consistently supported by many studies (Biehl et al. 1997; Elfenbein et al. 2007; Marsh et al. 2003; Blais et al. 2008; Jack et al. 2009; Jack et al. 2012; Lau et al. 2009; Laukka et al. 2016; Prado et al. 2014; Yan et al. 2016). The Dialect Theory primarily puts forward the notion that 'the presence of cultural differences in the use of cues for emotional expression are subtle enough to allow accurate communication across cultural boundaries in general, yet substantive enough to result in a potential for miscommunication' (Elfenbein et al. 2007, p.131).

Given the expressions of emotion are displayed on the different parts of the face, they must be interpreted with care and accuracy when they cross cultures. Blais et al. (2008) tracked the eye movements of Western Caucasians and East Asian observers. They found that East Asian observers focused more on the central region of the face whereas the Western Caucasians were fixated with the eye region and partially the mouth. This behaviour is consistent with the study of Nisbett and Miyamoto (2005) who found evidence to show that perceptual processes are influenced by culture. Western cultures tend to organize objects by emphasizing rules and categories, concentrating on the salient objects divorced from the context while the East Asian cultures give context and the relationship between the objects and the context more importance, which is more holistic in approach. A holistic perceptual strategy to focus on the centre of the face provides optimal opportunities for recognition purposes. It is more global than focusing on the eyes or mouth to learn and recognize faces.

In emotion communication, apart from the face, the voice also carries significant expressions of emotion. Such expressions are found overlaid on speech as affective prosody (Scherer et al., 2001) and as nonverbal vocalizations such as screams and laughter (Sauter et al., 2010). When the voice has many acoustic components such as pitch, volume, speed, timbre which can be measured objectively in vocal production, Laukka et al. (2016) argues that the vocal channel is ideal for documenting the role of expressive style as a mechanism for in-group advantage.

In addition to facial and vocal expressions are body movements which play a part in emotion communication (Coulson, 2004; Tracy & Robins, 2008). The research in this area is far less prolific than that focusing on facial and vocal expressions. However, body movements and gestures have been shown to be reliable cues to emotions as the body provides a large observable mass (Boone & Cunningham, 1998; De Meijer, 1989; Kudoh & Matsumoto, 1985). Aviezer et al. (2012) found that during peak intensities of negative or positive emotion, the body shows the affective state better than faces. How the faces were perceived shifted systematically as a function of their contextual body emotion. Their findings challenge the notion that facial expressions better discriminate positive and negative emotions. In other studies of movements, Pollick et al. (2001) found that perceptions of anger and happiness matched movements that were fast and jerky and conversely when the movements were slow and smooth, they were associated with sadness. Similarly, Sawada et al. (2003) also found that arm movements express joy, sadness or anger and varied in velocity, acceleration and displacement. As with the other two channels of conveying emotional communication, body posture and movements can be perceived differently across different cultures.

With substantive research establishing the notion that the expression of emotions varies across cultures, there is a need to question the import of standard training guides for the delivery of oral presentations from one culture to another. The present study investigates the responses of students to other students' oral presentations focusing on the research questions below. The four important nonverbal communication modes: eye contact, facial expressions, voice and body movements are studied as individual components. Another component, emotional input, is created to allow raters to respond spontaneously to the presenters' show of emotion. This 'emotional input' component would be useful to provide an overall rating of the four expressions of nonverbal communication. A high correlation between the overall rating of the delivery and that of emotional input would confirm the importance of emotions in oral presentations for these participants.

1. How is an overall rating of the delivery of the oral presentation predicted by eye contact, facial expressions, voice, and body movements?

2. Does a highly rated delivery depend on the emotional input of the presenter in the delivery of the presentation?

3. How much of the emotional input is predicted by eye contact, facial expressions, voice, and body movements?

4 Method

4.1 participants

First year Science students from Physics, Mathematics, Chemistry and Sports Science students, studying at the Nanyang Technological University were invited to participate in this study. They were enrolled in a core module, Scientific Communication 1, which has an oral component requiring them to give individual academic/professional oral presentations. A total of 68 students of Chinese origin participated, 66 from Singapore and 2 from Malaysia. There were 27 males and 41 females from 19 to 21 years old. The Malaysians were included because of their shared historical language and cultural background with Singaporeans but the students from other nationalities were excluded from the study. Since Chinese Singaporeans make up about three-quarters of the population, they are the majority ethnic group in any classroom. Therefore, it would be useful to investigate the behaviour of this group with regard to the influence of culture on the delivery of their oral presentations. All the students in the study had experience giving presentations as that is a requirement in the secondary school curriculum.

4.2 Procedure

Each member of the class was given 5 minutes to present on a topic of their choice which had to be science-related or discipline-related. The rest of the class was given a questionnaire each to rate the presenters on a Likert scale from 1 to 5 during the presentation (see Appendix). The total number of raters was 68, the same as the number of presenters because they were raters for each other's presentations.

All the presenters/observers were briefed on the task. They were told that the aim was to focus on the delivery of the presentations. However, it was explained to the students that they had to also rate their understanding of the content to ensure that it was accessible and did not hinder their overall evaluation of the oral presentation. The participants were selected based on a content score that was considered acceptable. The rest were eliminated. The elements of the nonverbal components of the delivery were explained to them. The ability of students to rate the proficiency of the presentations was not in question because the purpose of this study was to investigate if there was a correlation between their assessment of the overall delivery and the nonverbal communication components. As long as each rater assessed both the overall delivery and the nonverbal communication components of the same presenter, this consistency was all that was required for the rating to be reliable.

The main interest in this study was how eye contact, facial expressions, voice, and body movements affected the overall impression of the presentation. Additionally, a rating for emotional input was included to see how these same four components affected their impression of the emotion communication, which is thought to be one of the most important aspects of oral presentations. The rapport question was not included in the final analysis as many of the students did not answer the question. The open-ended questions on what they did not like about the presentation and on other comments were to elicit more specific qualitative comments. Most students did not attempt the questions and hence, no data was collected to corroborate answers given in the rest of the questionnaire.

4.3 Data Analysis

Before the data was analyzed, the score for Content had to be 3 and above to be included in the study. Descriptive statistics of the minimum, maximum and mean values were obtained from the data set. Two multiple linear regression analyses were then performed. First a multiple regression was performed to predict Emotional Input from Eye Contact, Facial Expressions, Voice and Body Movements. A residual value which captures other undescribed and less significant predictors of Emotional Input (e.g. breathing patterns, tears, laughter) was also obtained for further analysis. Another multiple regression was then performed to predict oral presentation scores from the same four factors after the residual emotional input was accounted for and removed. The regression analyses were further bootstrapped 10000 times to obtain the 95% BCa confident intervals of the regression coefficients. Coefficients of the predictors were then compared to determine which factors were more predictive than the others. The coefficients were significantly different if the 95% confidence intervals of the two predictors did not overlap with each other. Statistical analyses were conducted using SPSS 25.

5 Results

The descriptive statistics of the data set are summarized in Table 1.

Table 1
Descriptive Statistics of the Data Set

	Eye Contact	Facial Expression	Voice	Body Movements	Emotional Input	Oral Presentation
Mean (SD)	4.11 (0.773)	3.98 (0.745)	4.23(0.718)	4.11 (0.715)	4.03 (0.733)	4.14 (0.625)
Min	2	1	2	2	1	2
Max	5	5	5	5	5	5

In the first regression analysis, Eye Contact (β = .093, t = 3.31, p = .001), Facial Expressions (β =*.298, t = 9.89, p < .001)* , Voice (β =*.245, t = 8.97, p < .001)* and Body Movements (β =.232, t =8.48, p < .001) were all found to significantly predict Emotional Input (F(4, 1111) = 290.90, p < 0.001, R^2 = .512).

In the second analysis, Eye Contact (β = .202, t = 6.96, p < .001), Facial Expressions (β = .134, t = 4.32, p < .001), Voice (β = .317, t = 11.2, p < .001) and Body Movements (β = *.172, t = 6.09, p < 0.001*) were also all shown to significantly predict oral presentation scores (F(5, 1110) = 206.22, p < 0.001, R^2 = .482).

To compare the predictors of overall oral presentation scores, bootstrapping of the model was done to obtain the 95% confidence intervals of the regression coefficients. Voice (β = .317 [.256 .377]) was

the most predictive of oral presentation scores followed by Eye Contact (β = .202 [.136 .269]), though a statistically significant difference was not found. Body Movements (β = .172 [.108 .235]) was the next most predictive *(β =.172 [.127 .217])* and Facial Expressions (β = .134 [.067 .200]) was the least predictive. Voice was significantly more predictive than both body movements and facial expressions. This is shown in Table 2.

Table 2

Coefficients of Regression Models on Emotional Input and Oral Presentation

	Emotional Input	Oral Presentation
Eye Contact	.093 [.036 .151]***	.202 [.136 .269]***
Facial Expression	.298[.236 .364]***	.134 [.067 .200]***
Voice	.245 [.183 .307]***	.317 [.256 .377]***
Body Movements	.232 [.167 .296]***	.172 [.108 .235]***
Residual Emotional Input	-	*.172 [.127 .217]****
F	290.90	206.22

Note. Numbers in brackets indicate the lower bound and the higher bound of the BCa 95% confidence intervals of the regression coefficient after the regression model was bootstrapped 10000 times. *** $p < .05$

6 Discussion

In studying the tools used to deliver successful oral presentations in business/professional/ academic communication, the established standards of what constitutes a good delivery must be explored within the cultural context of their application. The common features that most communication textbooks highlight as important are the use of eye contact, facial expressions, voice, and body movements. The underlying reason for singling out these physical features of the human body is that they carry much of the emotion communication as discussed in 2. Background to the study. While oral presentations in the workplace would not be excessively emotional, having eye contact, and some expressions in the eyes, face, voice and body movements would be expected in effective presentations.

The results highlight three issues. The first is that the feature which predicts Emotional Input most is not Eye Contact but Facial Expressions, followed by Voice and Body Movements in that order. Eye contact is the least predictive. This is consistent with research on the role of eye contact in different cultures even though it is considered the most visible of emotions often found on the face (Ekman, 1980). As the participants in this study are of Chinese origin in the Singapore/Malaysia context, it is consistent with that of the studies of East Asians that show more inhibited traits such as gaze aversion (Cordaro et al., 2017; Tracy & Matsumoto, 2008). With a dearth of research on gaze aversion among the Chinese, Japanese case studies throw some light on this issue. Japanese children were found not to maintain eye contact because they were taught that it is a sign of deference and respect (Sue and Sue, 1977; Uono and Hietanen, 2015) as opposed to studies of Western Caucasians which show people making eye contact as more likeable, pleasant, intelligent, credible and dominant (Argyle et al. 1986; Kleinke, 1986). The importance of eye contact in Western cultures is clearly not shared across cultures. This study shows a diminished role of eye contact in emotion communication perhaps for the same reason as the Japanese who associate an avoidance of eye contact with deference and respect. As in Uono & Hietanen's (2015) study, low emotional arousal is preferred, and an avoidance of high arousal is achieved by focusing on the voice and body for indications of emotions. An avoidance of eye contact in this culture may not

disadvantage the presenter as it may not be considered insincere or rude as it is in Western cultures (Burleson and Goldsmith, 1998). However, the actual reasons need further exploration.

Why facial expressions, voice and body are more predictive of emotions could be because they provide less intimate means of showing emotion. The face and the body provide larger surface areas to display emotions and therefore may be less intense and personal and hence, less threatening (Blais et al., 2008). As voice is non-visual, it is another channel of communication that may also be perceived to be less revealing because it can be better controlled (Matsumoto et al., 1988). Body Movements, although providing the largest surface area to observe emotional input, as a category, is not as high as Facial Expressions. Perhaps it is not in the culture to convey big displays of emotion through body movements and it is not appropriate to have big gestures in more formal and serious oral presentations. As mentioned earlier, Aviezer et al. (2012) found that body language is the most accurate when the emotions are intense. Without the emotional intensity, the observers might have felt that there was not much to observe. If intense emotions are not commonly displayed in the culture through body movements, facial expressions may instead be observed for subtler emotions.

The second issue is that voice predicts the overall score of the oral presentation the most followed by eye contact, body movements and facial expressions in that order. Why voice is the strongest predictor is consistent with the discussion above. The research on voice shows it is a strong medium of emotion communication (Laukka et al., 2016; Sauter et al., 2010; Scherer et al., 2001). This is consistent with the cross-cultural studies discussed earlier. The properties of the voice such as pitch, volume, speed, timbre, inflection and stress can provide added subtle information such as the level of interests, aptitude and attitudes of the speaker (Goldman & Fordyce, 1983; Kramer, 1963). They contribute to the emotions generated. At the same time, the voice may not be perceived to be as personal as the eyes for conveying emotion because it is not visual and therefore less revealing. The combination of all these qualities of the voice may be the reason that makes it the most predictive of the overall oral presentation score.

The third issue from these results is not as straightforward and consistent with the discussion so far. If the assumption is that effective oral presentations are driven by emotions, then the strongest predictor of emotional input should be the same as the strongest predictor of the overall oral presentation score. However, the results show otherwise. Facial Expressions is the strongest predictor of Emotional Input followed by Voice and Body Movements even though the differences are not statistically significant between each category. For the overall oral presentation, Facial Expressions is significantly lower than Voice as a predictor.

The reasons for this anomaly could be explained by the possibility that emotions may not be as important in the delivery of effective oral presentations, especially academic/professional presentations, as the literature suggests. The observers may find that voice is the most comfortable mode because it is non-visual and perhaps less threatening. Even though Voice is quite strong in predicting Emotional Input, Facial Expressions is stronger, but it is not a predictor of how the delivery of oral presentations is evaluated. In fact, it is the weakest predictor. Hence, it can be suggested that emotions are not so critical in judging whether an oral presentation is well delivered. To reaffirm this view, eye contact which is the least able to predict emotions is second in predicting the delivery of oral presentations. As for Body Movements, it is a stronger predictor of Emotional Input than Eye Contact, but it is not significantly stronger as a predictor of the overall oral presentation score.

If emotional input as is conventionally understood is not the key to a good delivery of an oral presentation, particularly an academic/professional presentation, then something else appears to be more important. It is often understood that the use of emotions in delivering oral presentations relies heavily on visible declarations of some affective response (Ekman & Cordaro, 2011; Locker, 2000). It may be suggested that when emotional input is highlighted as a category, the observers are able to assign certain parts of the body as predictive of emotional input. However, when the same parts of the body are orchestrated to perform for the delivery of an oral presentation, only a narrow range of emotions may

be required. This range might be best conveyed by the voice and by eye contact. The range of emotions could include confidence rather than any intense emotion which is less appropriate for academic/ professional presentations. The many acoustic components of the voice such as pitch, volume, speed, timbre can convey confidence in measured ways as voice may be more easily controlled as mentioned earlier. More complex emotions need not be voiced. Similarly, eye contact could be used to indicate respect as opposed to happiness, sadness or any type of more complex emotion, especially if presenters choose not to use it for expressing these emotions in academic/ /professional type presentations. Unlike the Japanese, the Singaporean/Malaysian Chinese sample may not be as uncomfortable making eye contact to convey simple expressions of emotion.

The notion found in business/professional communication literature (Bovee & Thill, 2018; Locker, 2000) (Bovee & Thill, 2018; Locker, 2000) that effective oral presentations require open displays of emotions has to be questioned for all cultural contexts and all types of presentations. This study has shown that culture determines what is considered effective in oral presentations and in the case of the present study, it has also shown that an open and visual display of emotion does not garner the best scores from the audience.

In communication studies of the modern classrooms, the cultural dimensions emerge as significant in 'creating inclusive environments that respect the diverse communication norms' (Tiu et al. 2023. Page 351). The concern is that assessment privileges the values and languages of the majority. It is peculiar that in an Asian, and in particular the Singaporean context, the issue is not the lack of inclusivity. In fact, it is the wholesale exclusivity that is a problem. By adopting a set of assumptions that may not be entirely culturally relevant as a basis for teaching oral presentation skills draws attention to the lack of cultural validity of the approach (Baidoo-Anu et al. 2024). However, the difference in how nonverbal communication is interpreted may not be as significant when put into a multicultural context. In Singapore, it is not uncommon to find multinationals and locals who may be Chinese, Malay or Indian, working in the same space. Nonverbal modes such as eye contact, facial expressions and body movements are still important, albeit, not as important as voice, as suggested by this study.

7 Conclusion

Delivering effective oral presentations is an essential part of professional communication. Learning from the experts is seemingly the most logical way to improve knowledge and skills. However, when the guidelines for delivering effective oral presentations cross cultures, the adoption of accepted standards should be questioned. This study aimed to explore how Singaporean/Malaysian Chinese use the nonverbal modes of communication, namely the eyes for eye contact, the face for facial expressions, and the voice and body movements in the delivery of oral presentations. These features were analysed for the predictive value of emotional input considered to be essential in effective oral presentations. They were also analysed for the predictive value in the overall oral presentation score. The results showed that emotional input was predicted more by the facial expressions, voice, and body movements in that order than eye contact which was significantly lower than the other factors. This is contrary to what is understood in the research of emotions of Western Caucasians who place considerable importance on eye contact. However, this is consistent with the research on Eastern Asian subjects. Similarly, the results showed that the overall delivery of oral presentations was predicted more by voice than eye contact. However, when the two sets of results were compared, it became clear that emotions as they are conventionally understood to mean may not be what the observers consider important in the evaluation of the delivery of oral presentations. If emotions were significantly important, the analyses of what predicts emotional input and an effectively delivered oral presentation should match but they did not. A possible interpretation of the results could be that emotional input in the conventional sense is not as necessary as assumed. This study suggests that a well-delivered presentation requires a mastery of

the voice and eye contact. Intense emotions in the face or body movements appear not be important in academic/professional presentations. The study has shown that culture plays a part in the way emotions are displayed as well as the type or intensity of the emotion.

8 Limitations

This study is limited by the student sample used to indicate the behaviour of East Asian Singaporeans/ Malaysians in communication in industry. Future studies could target a sample of working people. In addition, gender differences could be explored since how males and females display and perceive emotions can be different. In the explanation of the behaviour found in this study, further analyses of types of facial expressions, vocal outputs and body movements would provide insights into subtler differences in the categories of nonverbal expressions. A post-introspective analysis of the observers' reactions after their assessment of the oral presentations would have provided a useful insight into the way in which the presentations were evaluated. Without this extra dimension, the explanation of the results can only be guessed at. This additional dimension to analyse observers' reactions is recommended for further insight in future research.

Appendix

Questionnaire
Oral Presentations – Feedback Form

| Name of presenter: |
| Rater's information   Age: Gender: Nationality |

Please tick the relevant boxes and provide written answers to the open-ended questions below. Thank you.

Statement	5	4	3	2	1	Remarks
Content						
C1. How do you rate your ability to understand the content? From very easy (5) to very difficult (1)						
C2. How is the content organized? From very clear (5) to disorganized (1)						
Delivery						
D1. Is there enough eye contact? Most (5) to least (1)						
D2. Are there enough facial expressions? Many (5) to very few (1)						
D3a.. How do you rate the voice? From very good (5) to not so good (1)						
D3b. Give reasons for your answer to D3a.						
D4a. How do you find the body movements? From very natural (5) to very unnatural (1)						
D4b. What do you think are the main features of the body movements?						

D5. How do you rate the level of emotional input? From very involved (5) to not involved (1)						
D6a. How do you find the visual? From very clear (5) to not clear (1)						
D6b. How do you find the visual? From very attractive (5) to not very attractive (1)						
General Comments						
G1. How do you rate this presentation From excellent (5) to bad (1)						
G2. How do you rate the rapport between the presenter and you? From excellent (5) to no rapport (1)						
G3. What do you like about the presentation? From most (5) to least (1) Repeat rating is accepted. a. I am learning something new. b. I find the topic interesting. c. I like how the topic is delivered. d. I find the presenter personable. e. Other qualities:						
G4. What do you not like about the presentation?						
Additional Comments:						

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