

GREETING CUSTOMS AROUND THE WORLD

Y.R. Zayats, A.T. Tripud, 3rd year of studies
Scientific supervisor – V.N. Lavrushchik
Polessky State University

Mastering the communicative competence is the most important objective of learning the English language. Greeting is essential for communication of all kinds: official, business, face to face. It is the first impression of you. The customs and rituals involved in greetings differ from country to country, and unfamiliar customs can sometimes be confusing. Situations get even more confusing when different greeting gestures are required between male and female, female and female, male and male, meetings one-on-one, formal talks, etc. Travelers, especially when in unfamiliar cultures, almost need a manual just to make sure not to offend someone when meeting and greeting [1].

You can see the differences of a person perspective behind the greeting of several countries. Though it seems just a matter of the way of phrase, in fact, the greeting is the best way to know their culture and customs [2].

We made an investigation showing how people from different countries greet each other. Some people kiss, some hug, and some shake hands while others just say *hello*. Here is the advice how to greet people from different countries [3].

In the USA, it is normal for men to shake hands when they meet, but it is unusual for men to kiss when they greet each other. Greetings are casual – a handshake, a smile and a “hello” will do just fine.

Speaking about the UK, the British often simply say “hello” when they meet friends. They usually shake hands only when they meet for the first time. Social kissing, often just a peck on the cheek, is common in informal situation between men and women and also between women who know each other very well.

The French on the contrary, including children, shake hands with their friends and often kiss them on both cheeks, both upon meeting and leaving.

In Japan, the common greeting for men is a bow when they greet someone, and a casual handshake or a hug.

As for the Arab countries, close male friends or colleagues hug and kiss both cheeks. They shake hands with the right hand only, for longer but less firmly than in the West. Contact between the opposite genders on public is considered to be obscene [1].

A hongi is a traditional Māori greeting in New Zealand. It is done by pressing one's nose and forehead (at the same time) to another person at an encounter [4].

The Chinese tend to be more conservative. When meeting someone for the first time, they would usually nod their heads and smile, or shake hands if in a formal situation.

In Russia, the typical greeting is a very firm handshake. When men shake hands with women, the handshake is not so firm. It is considered gallant to kiss women three times while alternating cheeks, and even to kiss hands.

Here are some more examples of peculiar gestures in other countries:

– In Albania, men shake hands when greeting one another. Depending on how close the men are with each other, a kiss on each cheek may be common as well. When a man meets a female relative, a kiss on each cheek, or two per cheek, is common.

– Namaste is a common spoken valediction or salutation originating from the Indian subcontinent. The word “namaste” means literally, “I honor the spirit in you”. When meeting someone in India, the word “namaste” is accompanied with the palms joined together as in prayer however, in a business setting, a senior person will typically initiate a handshake. Pranāma, the touching of the feet in Indian culture, is a show of respect and it is often an integral part of darshan.

– In Switzerland, one should remember to shake the women's hands first! Otherwise, shaking hands in order of rank is appropriate.

– Mano or Mano po is a gesture used in Filipino culture performed as a sign of respect to elderly people.

– In Armenia, by tradition, and especially in the rural areas, a woman needs to wait for the man to offer his hand for the handshake. Between good friends and family members, a kiss on the cheek and a light hug are also common.

Before visiting a foreign country, it is recommended to check on the various meaning of hand gestures, as a visitor may inadvertently find himself in a very unpleasant situation:

Waving your full arm side to side in many countries is recognized as saying “hello” or “goodbye”. However, in East Asian countries it is considered overly demonstrative. Additionally in some European countries, as well as Japan and Latin America, it can be confused for a “no” or general negative response. In India, it means “come here” [5].

The high five is a celebratory hand gesture that occurs when two people simultaneously raise one hand, about head high, and push, slide or slap the flat of their palm and hand against the palm and flat hand of their partner. The fist bump is a gesture similar in meaning to a handshake or high five. A fist bump can also be a symbol of giving respect.

We can't but mention finger gesture. Counting with fingers starting with index finger toward the pinkie can make people confused in Germany and Austria as forefinger held up means two instead of one, especially when ordering a round of drinks. In Japan, the thumb alone means five. When Hungarians count on their hand, they start with the thumb being number one [6].

Curling the index finger, or four fingers toward you as a gesture of inviting somebody to come closer, can be mistaken for “good bye” in southern Europe. In Philippines and East Asia, curling the index finger is used only to beckon dogs.

Pointing directly to someone or something using index finger in Europe is considered impolite. In China, Japan, Latin America and Indonesia it has very rude connotations. In many African countries, the index finger is used for pointing only at inanimate objects [1].

All these characteristics are due to the culture and customs peculiarities of these countries.

Conclusion can be made that gestures in greeting can say more than words, and just as we are usually very careful when using foreign languages, we should consider carefully what gestures we display whilst in different cultures. The world is indeed full of diversities, so enjoy your learning.

Literature references

1. Greeting customs around the world [Electronic resource] – Mode of access: <http://www.moveoneinc.com/blog/relocations/greeting-customs-around-the-world> – Date of access: 16.01.2012.

2. Mayumi Noda Writing Dr. Tom Sloane Research paper June 24, 2007.

3. Greetings in different countries [Electronic resource] – Mode of access: <http://trifter.com/asia-pacific/greetings-in-different-countries> – Date of access: 16.01.2012.

4. Greeting/Wikipedia [Electronic resource] – Mode of access: www.wikipedia.org – Date of access: 16.01.2012.

5. Cambridge University Press 978-0-521-11754-8 – Tales of Hi and Bye: Greeting and Parting Rituals Around the World Torbjorn Lundmark Excerpt.

6. Using Rituals to Express Cultural Differences in Synthetic Characters 8th International Conference on Autonomous Agents and Multiagent Systems. Budapest, Hungary 2009.