ShodhGyan-NU: Journal of Literature and Culture Studies
July-September 2026 4(2)
https://shodhgyan.org

Original Article

COGNITIVE DISSONANCE AND NONVERBAL SEMIOSIS: SHAPING SECONDARY LINGUISTIC PERSONALITY IN CHINESE LEARNERS OF RUSSIAN THROUGH VISUAL REFLECTION

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ABSTRACT

This study examines the internalisation of nonverbal code as a constitutive element of secondary linguistic personality (SLP) among Chinese learners of Russian. Although up to 80% of social meaning is conveyed non-verbally, the impact of nonverbal communication on deep personal transformation in language learners remains underexplored. To address this gap, the study focuses on overcoming cognitive dissonance arising from clashes between Russian and Chinese nonverbal systems, and its role in developing cultural empathy and hybrid identity. The study's originality lies in three areas: theoretical (integrating SLP, internalisation, semiotics, and the four-dimensional model of language personality), methodological (using visual data as a metacognitive tool through visual languaging), and empirical (focusing on the bicultural context of MSU-BIT University in Shenzhen, China). Data from 24 Chinese Master's students included reflective presentations on "How learning Russian is shaping me," project reports, and field observations. The methodology integrated qualitative and quantitative content analysis. The findings show a three-stage dynamic: primary cognitive dissonance with stereotypical interpretations; awareness of cultural conditionality through reflection; and formation of hybrid practices, with over 83% of respondents reporting changed self-perception when using Russian, evident in new gestural patterns and cultural empathy. The study concludes that nonverbal code operates as an active mechanism of personal transformation, and visual reflection triggers metacognitive processes that help overcome ethnocentrism.

Keywords: Secondary Linguistic Personality, Nonverbal Communication, Interiorization, Cognitive Dissonance, Visual Reflection, Chinese Learners of Russian, Intercultural Empathy

INTRODUCTION

As the strategic partnership between the Russian Federation and the People's Republic of China deepens, intercultural dialogue has shifted from a desirable competence to a prerequisite for professional and educational advancement. Within this context, teaching a foreign language in close connection with culture – the intercultural paradigm Usmanova (2024) – produces a multilingual, multicultural personality. Yet a critical problem remains largely unaddressed by current educational practice: while nonverbal communication transmits between 65% and 93% of social meaning in face-to-face interaction Mehrabian (1972), Burgoon et al. (2022), standard language curricula rarely incorporate systematic instruction on the nonverbal dimensions of cross-cultural communication.

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Received: 06 July 2026; **Accepted:** 23 August 2026; **Published** 24 September 2026
DOI: 10.29121/Shodhgyan.v4.i2.2026.151
Page Number: 59-67
Journal Title: ShodhGyan-NU: Journal of Literature and Culture Studies
Journal Abbreviation: ShodhGyan.NU J. Lit. Cul. Stu.
Online ISSN: 2584-1300, **Print ISSN:** 3108-2742
Publisher: Granthaalayah Publications and Printers, India
Conflict of Interests: The authors declare that they have no competing interests.
Funding: This research received no specific grant from any funding agency in the public, commercial, or not-for-profit sectors.
Authors' Contributions: Each author made an equal contribution to the conception and design of the study. All authors have reviewed and approved the final version of the manuscript for publication.
Transparency: The authors affirm that this manuscript presents an honest, accurate, and transparent account of the study. All essential aspects have been included, and any deviations from the original study plan have been clearly explained. The writing process strictly adhered to established ethical standards.
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This omission creates a fundamental contradiction. Participants in intercultural encounters repeatedly face "silent misunderstandings" when different communicative codes collide. What signals respect in one culture – avoiding direct eye contact with a senior – may be misinterpreted in another as insincerity or even dishonesty Ruzhentseva and Zhang (2016). The absence of systematic attention to nonverbal codes leaves learners unprepared for the very interactions that language education ostensibly prepares them to manage. More critically, while theoretical descriptions of cultural differences abound, empirical investigations of how learners actually internalise new nonverbal norms and transform their communicative identities remain remarkably scarce – particularly in trilingual environments (Russian-Chinese-English), where nonverbal communication often becomes the primary bridge when verbal codes prove insufficient. No study to date has examined how Chinese learners of Russian interiorise nonverbal codes through visual reflection, nor how this process shapes their secondary linguistic personality. This gap is addressed in the present study.

The concept of linguistic personality offers a useful framework for addressing this gap. First introduced by Vinogradov in the 1930s and later developed by Karaulov (1987), linguistic personality is defined as "a set of human abilities and characteristics that determine the creation and perception of speech works" Karaulov (1989). Karaulov's three-level model comprises: (1) the verbal-semantic level (everyday language proficiency); (2) the linguocognitive level (the thesaurus, reflecting a systematic "picture of the world" and hierarchy of values); and (3) the motivational (pragmatic) level (communicative-activity needs, motives, and goals). According to Vardzelashvili and Prokofyeva (2022), "the formation of a secondary linguistic personality is inseparable from the comprehension of a new linguistic picture of the world" (p. 206). However, the nonverbal dimension of this comprehension remains under-theorised and empirically underexamined.

Building on Karaulov's foundational work, Khaleyeva (1989), Khaleyeva (1995) adapted the concept for foreign language education, introducing the term "secondary linguistic personality" (SLP). Khaleyeva defines SLP as the aggregate of an individual's abilities for intercultural communication at a level that ensures adequate interaction with representatives of other cultures. Central to her framework is the argument that SLP formation involves not only mastering the verbal-semantic code of the target language but also internalising its "linguistic worldview" and the broader conceptual worldview that enables comprehension of a new socio-cultural reality Khaleyeva (1989). This conceptualization directly informs the present study's focus on the deep personal transformation and cognitive restructuring required to navigate intercultural encounters, particularly the often-overlooked dimension of nonverbal communication.

Cognitive dissonance – the psychological discomfort experienced when an individual encounters information contradicting existing beliefs, attitudes, or behavioural patterns Festinger (1957) – offers a useful framework for understanding this process. In intercultural nonverbal communication, dissonance arises when a learner's culturally ingrained expectations are violated by observed behaviour from another culture. This discomfort can act as a catalyst for learning, prompting the individual either to reject disconfirming evidence (thereby reinforcing stereotypes) or to restructure their cognitive framework (leading to deeper cultural understanding). The present study investigates how Chinese learners of Russian move from initial dissonance through structured reflection toward resolution via interiorisation of new nonverbal codes – understood as "the transition from external to internal... the formation of stable structural-functional units of consciousness through the assimilation of external actions with objects and mastery of external sign means" Fasolya (2019).

Several interconnected theoretical frameworks inform our approach. Hall (1959) distinction between high-context and low-context cultures explains why Chinese culture conveys substantial meaning through nonverbal signals and hierarchical relationships, whereas Russian communication tends toward explicit verbalization. The category of face (mianzi, 面子) regulates Chinese behavior to preserve social harmony, while sincerity predominates in Russian culture – a difference that frequently generates tension in intercultural encounters. Tarnopolsky et al. (2021) distinguish verbal, non-verbal, and mixed communicative behavioral patterns, each of which must be acquired for culturally adequate communication.

Dual-coding theory Paivio (1991) provides additional theoretical grounding. Cognition is formed by two interconnected subsystems: verbal (processing language) and non-verbal (processing non-linguistic objects and events). Combining pictures, mental imagery, and verbal elaboration promotes understanding and learning. Building on this, Chen (2023) introduces visual languaging – integrating visualisation (creating drawings to represent conceptual understanding) and languaging (verbally articulating one's thinking) – as a heuristic tool for deeper learning. This three-step process (visualisation → languaging → enhanced languaging using cognitive discourse functions) offers a pedagogical framework for understanding how learners internalize nonverbal codes.

Visual reflection – creating and analyzing visual representations (presentations, diagrams, cultural maps) of one's own intercultural experiences – serves as a metacognitive tool enabling learners to move from unconscious cultural transfer to conscious construction of shared communicative space. Daszkiewicz (2019) proposes a four-dimensional model of language personality, encompassing: (1) axiological domain (language beliefs), (2) psychomotor domain (language activity), (3) affective domain (language affect), and (4) cognitive domain (language matrices). His empirical study revealed that while students readily reflected on psychomotor and cognitive domains, they had rarely been asked questions about axiological and affective domains – despite affirming their importance. This imbalance directly parallels the present study's findings.

The present study addresses identified gaps by examining the internalization of nonverbal code as a constitutive element of SLP formation among Chinese learners of Russian, with attention to visual reflection's role in mediating cognitive dissonance resolution. Specific objectives are: (1) to identify zones of pragmatic interference where cognitive dissonance arises most acutely; (2) to trace the three-stage dynamic of nonverbal code internalization; (3) to demonstrate how visual reflection catalyzes metacognitive processing; and (4) to articulate implications for teaching Russian as a foreign language.

METHODOLOGY AND MATERIALS

The research was conducted at MSU-BIT University in Shenzhen, China – the first joint Russian-Chinese university, where students and faculty from both cultures live, study, and collaborate in sustained daily contact. This microsociety constitutes a unique natural laboratory for observing the emergence of hybrid communicative norms Abramova and Zhang (2025), Fang and Abramova (2025). The trilingual environment (Russian, Chinese, and English) creates conditions where verbal resources often prove insufficient, making nonverbal communication the primary tool for establishing contact, particularly during initial stages of interaction.

PARTICIPANTS

The empirical basis comprises data from 24 first-year Master's students in philology at MSU-BIT University: 21 Chinese citizens and 3 Russian citizens. Distribution of Russian language learning duration: more than 10 years – 1 student (4.2%); 6–8 years – 4 students (16.7%); 4–5 years – 14 students (58.3%); less than 4 years – 5 students (20.8%). The majority of respondents (79.2%) possess substantial language learning experience (4 years or more), ensuring representativeness of data regarding SLP formation.

DATA SOURCES

Three complementary data sources were utilized.

First, reflective presentations created by students within the framework of their Russian as a Foreign Language (RFL) course, addressing the question "How learning Russian is shaping me: my secondary linguistic personality." The presentations responded to eight open-ended prompts concerning: language learning history; changing perceptions of Russian culture; attempts to understand culturally specific aspects (humor, traditions, values); self-perception shifts when using Russian; emotional experiences while speaking Russian; frequently used Russian words and phrases; acquisition of Russian-characteristic traits; and conclusions about language learning's transformative potential.

Second, project work and observational data collected within the author's English-language course "Nonverbal Communication of Russians and Chinese: Pragmatics of Cross-Cultural Interactions" (Autumn semester 2025/2026, 23 participating students: 19 Chinese, 4 Russian). Students documented real-life cases of nonverbal interaction with Russian culture bearers – both during early language learning stages and in daily campus life – and analyzed changes in their own communicative behavior.

Third, field observations were conducted over four months, documenting spontaneous interaction patterns and emerging hybrid practices within the campus environment. These observations focused specifically on nonverbal behavior during intercultural Russian-Chinese communication, including proxemic patterns, gestural exchanges, facial expressions, and gaze behavior in both formal (classroom, office) and informal (cafeteria, social events) settings. The researcher maintained a teaching journal recording observations, reflections, and interactive decisions made during lessons, following Richards and Lockhart (1996) recommendations for classroom investigation. Additionally, observations of teacher-student and student-student nonverbal interactions across Russian and Chinese participants provided complementary data on emerging communicative norms.

METHODOLOGICAL APPROACH

The central methodological approach was the creation of reflective presentations, where students used visual means – such as images, diagrams, and cultural maps – to convey their experiences of learning Russian. These visual artifacts served not only as data for analysis but also as tools for metacognitive processing, enabling students to externalize and articulate their evolving intercultural understanding. The analysis combined qualitative and quantitative content analysis of these presentations to identify recurring themes and linguistic markers, alongside narrative analysis to trace the evolution of student texts. The findings were then compared with theoretical models of SLP formation.

A distinctive feature of this approach is that the course functioned as a catalyst for reflexivity, transforming unrecognized communicative failures into articulated insights. This aligns with Chen (2023) framework of visual languaging, which involves three stages: (1) visualization – students create visual representations of their understanding; (2) languaging – they verbally articulate their visualizations; and (3) enhanced languaging – they are guided to use specific cognitive discourse functions to deepen their conceptual and academic language use.

RESULTS

Analysis of the empirical material reveals a systematic three-stage dynamic in the internalization of nonverbal codes, correlating with the levels of the secondary linguistic personality model proposed by Karaulov (1987). Each stage is characterized by specific patterns of cognitive dissonance, specific modes of semiosis (meaning-making through nonverbal signs), and specific manifestations in student visual reflection Table 1.

Table 1

Table 1 Stages of Secondary Linguistic Personality Formation and Corresponding Reflective Text Characteristics

Stage	SLP Level Karaulov (1987)	Language Learning Duration	% of Sample	Reflective Text Type	Key Empirical Markers
Stage 1	Verbal-Semantic	<4 years	20.8%	Clichéd, stereotypical narrative	75% use stereotypical images (cold, vodka, bears); simple syntax; no emotional evaluation; gap between knowledge about culture and understanding of culture
Stage 2	Linguo-Cognitive	4–5 years	58.3%	Analytical, thesaurus-based text	Engagement with literature (66.7%) and traditions (58.3%); attempts to comprehend "Russian soul" (33.3%); emergence of cause-effect reasoning; first hybrid gestures appear
Stage 3	Motivational	6+ years	20.9%	Empathetic, metaphorical, personally colored narrative	Changed self-perception (83.3%); acquisition of culturally specific concepts (*toska*, *davai*); development of patience (58.3%) and directness (50%); formation of hybrid identity; cultural empathy

STAGE ONE: VERBAL-SEMANTIC LEVEL – PRIMARY COGNITIVE DISSONANCE AND STEREOTYPICAL INTERPRETATIONS

During the initial stage (corresponding to less than 4 years of language study, 20.8% of the sample), students encounter discrepancies between Russian and Chinese nonverbal norms but interpret these differences not as culturally conditioned patterns but as individual personality traits of their interlocutors. This stage is characterized by primary cognitive dissonance: the discomfort arising from the clash between familiar nonverbal expectations and observed foreign behaviors. The semiosis of nonverbal behavior at this stage operates unconsciously – students read nonverbal signs through the lens of their native cultural codes without recognizing that alternative semiotic systems exist.

Proxemic dissonance. Russian participants tend to maintain greater interpersonal distance when interacting with unfamiliar individuals. Chinese students, accustomed to higher population density and closer proximity in public spaces, initially interpret this increased distance as coldness or disengagement. One Chinese student recounted her first meeting with a Russian academic supervisor: upon entering the office, she sat at the table; the supervisor positioned herself at the same table but at considerable distance. In Chinese academic settings, interlocutors typically sit closer together. The student concluded that the supervisor harbored antipathy toward her and felt insecure for several weeks. Only later did she recognize that Russians generally maintain larger distances in formal interactions – a pattern also observable in dining hall queues.

Kinesic and oculesic dissonance. A Chinese student, following his Chinese cultural tradition, slightly bowed when meeting a Russian classmate. The Russian student extended his hand for a handshake rather than returning the bow. An awkward pause ensued. Subsequent reflection revealed that in Russian culture, a bow is not an independent greeting form; in Chinese culture, a slight bow constitutes a complete greeting, especially when addressing seniors. Similarly, a Russian student who maintained direct eye contact with a Chinese instructor interpreted the instructor's gaze aversion as disinterest, later learning that in Chinese culture, avoiding direct gaze with a senior signals respect.

At this stage, visual reflection in presentations remains clichéd: 75% of students employ stereotypical images (cold, vodka, bears, matryoshka dolls). One student candidly admitted: "On the first slide of my presentation, I placed pictures of a bear and vodka". Another acknowledged: "Before studying Russian, I knew only a few stereotypical facts." A third student summarized the prevailing stereotype of Russians as a "'fighting people' (boevoi narod)" rooted in heroic wartime history, survival in harsh climates, and social media dramatization – a perception that blends real observations with China's cultural ideal of resilience and romantic admiration for martial spirit. These statements powerfully illustrate how initial visual representations rely on superficial cultural symbols rather than meaningful intercultural understanding. At this stage, the discomfort of using a foreign language is palpable: one student

admitted that when speaking Russian, she experiences "fear, awkwardness, tension, stress, shame", revealing the affective dimension of primary cognitive dissonance that accompanies the clash of unfamiliar communicative norms.

STAGE TWO: LINGUO-COGNITIVE LEVEL – SYSTEMIC UNDERSTANDING AND THESAURUS FORMATION

The transition to the second stage (corresponding to 4–5 years of language study, 58.3% of the sample) is marked by qualitative changes in visual reflection and, crucially, by the resolution of initial cognitive dissonance through systematic understanding. Students begin to analyze nonverbal patterns as components of a different cultural worldview. The semiosis of nonverbal behavior becomes conscious: students learn to read nonverbal signs as motivated signs embedded in a broader cultural semiotic system.

From dissonance to understanding. One student explored the Russian concept of khlebosol'stvo (hospitality), understanding it not as a simple custom but as a deep cultural symbol: "In Russian culture, bread enjoys special respect, for it is the foundation of any meal, and salt symbolizes the strength of friendship." Another student reflected: "The vast expanses, the long harsh winters gave Russian people time for deep reflection. This cultivated in the Russian character a combination of strength, breadth of soul, and passionate emotionality. But it also gave rise to a unique melancholy – seriousness in the gaze, a tendency toward sadness." This understanding helps explain why many Chinese students initially misinterpret this seriousness as unfriendliness or aggression. A third student articulated the synthesis emerging in her consciousness: "I see the unique charm of Russian culture in its multifaceted nature and ability to synthesize – it simultaneously preserves the exquisite artistic traditions of Europe and embodies Asian resilience".

Formation of the thesaurus. Presentations reveal engagement with Russian literature (Pushkin, Dostoevsky, Tolstoy – 66.7%), national traditions and holidays (58.3%), and attempts to comprehend the "Russian soul" (33.3%). One student reported: "I have come to appreciate the Russian 'soul'– a combination of emotionality, resilience, and a philosophical approach to life". Another noted her expanding cultural knowledge: "I used to think that Russian culture is mainly vodka and cold. Now I have discovered the richness of Russian culture, such as ballet, musical performance, and sports".

At this stage, students also begin to articulate more nuanced understandings of Russian communicative style. A learner of Russian observed a fundamental difference in emotional expression between the two cultures: "The biggest difference in expressions for me lies in the direct emotionality of the Russian language: here they often say 'very bad' or 'good,' while in Chinese we almost never use such absolute evaluations. We are accustomed to soften expressions with words like 'normal,' 'not bad,' 'it will do' – this is a cultural feature to avoid categoricalness. In Russian, emotional vocabulary is strongly polarized; there are far fewer intermediate shades". This metacognitive awareness of differing emotional registers represents a key step in moving from unconscious cultural transfer to conscious semiotic analysis.

Emergence of hybrid gestures. During this stage, students spontaneously develop compromise solutions. The "open palm" raised to head level emerged as a universally intelligible gesture, devoid of negative connotations in both cultures and intuitively readable as a signal of readiness for dialogue. Regarding smiling, students recognized that Chinese participants deploy smiles across diverse contexts (to smooth over awkwardness, express gratitude, or as a politeness marker), whereas Russian students reserve smiles for genuine joy. This led to the formulation of a metacommunicative rule: rather than defaulting to interpretation, students learned to ask: "I noticed you smiled. In my culture, this means... What does it mean in yours?" Visual reflection at this stage becomes analytical, incorporating comparative diagrams, cultural maps, and systematic documentation of observed differences. One student created a "distance scale" comparing proxemic norms across official, friendly, and intimate communication contexts in both cultures. Another developed an "acoustic map" of the campus, identifying zones where different volume levels are culturally appropriate.

STAGE THREE: MOTIVATIONAL LEVEL – HYBRID PRACTICES AND CULTURAL EMPATHY

The highest stage of secondary linguistic personality formation (corresponding to 6 or more years of language study, 20.9% of the sample, but with psychological markers observable in students with 4–5 years of intensive study combined with reflective pedagogy) is marked by deep personal transformation and the emergence of the capacity for intercultural mediation. Over 83% of students (20 of 24) explicitly report changes in self-perception when using Russian – empirical confirmation of hybrid identity formation. At this stage, cognitive dissonance is not merely resolved but becomes generative: the former discomfort transforms into a resource for creative synthesis. The semiosis of nonverbal behavior becomes flexible and bi-directional: students can produce and interpret nonverbal signs according to either cultural code, depending on context.

Behavioral markers of interiorization. Students report not only cognitive but also behavioral changes manifesting in gestures, facial expressions, and emotional tonality. One student stated: "I began gesturing more actively and using interjections" – a point echoed by another student, who reported having acquired "directness in communication – I learned to express my thoughts more clearly, without unnecessary politeness (like the Russian 'speaking bluntly')". Students analyzed the "language of laughter," learning to distinguish contexts where loud laughter signals genuine joy (more common in Russian company) from where it serves social smoothing functions (more common in Chinese contexts). A student captured the essence of this transformation, noting that speaking Russian "is not at all like the introverted Eastern culture", and that she has developed both "patience... due to the complexity of Russian grammar" and a preference for "clear statements" because "Russian is very direct and affective". A third student

articulated the meta-cognitive awareness characteristic of this stage: "When I speak Russian, I think more structured because of the peculiarities of grammar. Emotionally richer thanks to unique words (for example, 'toska')".

Interiorization of culturally specific concepts. Students do not merely memorize new words; they integrate them into their worldview, employing them to express nuances unavailable in their native language. Examples include toska (a complex emotion lacking direct English or Chinese equivalents), the colloquial pokhodu ("it seems"), the interjection oy, the universal Davai! (roughly "come on" or "let's"), and the proverb Terpenie i trud vsyo peretrut ("Patience and labor will grind everything"). One student reported: "I often use the expression 'Davai!' as a universal word for support and encouragement". Another noted: "I have paid attention to the use of informal variants of words and interjections: what – che [informal 'what'], hello – zdraste [contracted 'hello']... well, so, and so, oh... A third student shared: "'Pokhodu' and 'koroche' – these words also entered my speech after staying in Russia".

Self-reflection on personality transformation. Students explicitly link language study with the development of qualities traditionally attributed to the Russian national character: directness and openness (50%), patience and resilience (58.3%). One student explained: "Thanks to the Russian language, I have become more patient (which was especially developed through studying the case system) and more straightforward. A Russian friend taught me this, saying: 'Why say "maybe" when you can say "yes" or "no"?'". Another student articulated the internal transformation: "Learning Russian and communicating with Russians, I am becoming more and more extroverted and more frank in expressing my true thoughts". A third student reflected on her evolving self: "When I speak or write in Russian, I feel a little different. This manifests itself in the fact that I become more serious, collected and attentive to what and how I say".

Development of cultural empathy. Students articulate the emergence of new emotions connected to the Russian language: "I feel emotionality and openness, pride that I can express thoughts in another language, and a connection with people who use Russian". At this stage, visual reflection becomes metaphoric and poetic: one student captured the shift from cognitive understanding to embodied experience: "When I speak Russian, I feel my courage – even if I make a mistake, Russians always say: 'Nothing, well done, you're trying!'", revealing how the supportive reactions of native speakers reinforce the learner's willingness to experiment with new communicative behaviors. Another student stated, "When I speak Russian, I feel that the boundaries of the world expand, opening new horizons for dialogue". Perhaps most poetically, one learner of Russian described the learning process itself as a profound act of cultural decoding: "The process of learning Russian is like unraveling the ancient rings of years on the bark of a Siberian birch – in these twisted grammatical structures lies the romantic decoding of the life of an entire people". Another student captured the essence of cultural mediation: "Language helps us understand the culture, traditions and values of other people, which makes us more open and tolerant".

DISCUSSION

The findings support and extend existing theoretical frameworks. The three-stage dynamic observed – from primary cognitive dissonance through systemic understanding to interiorisation and hybrid practice – corresponds to Vygotsky (1978) concept of the zone of proximal development and Galperin (1992) theory of the step-by-step formation of mental actions. Interiorisation of nonverbal code advances from external observation (Stage 1) through conscious analysis and verbalisation (Stage 2) to internalised, automatic deployment (Stage 3). This progression also reflects dual-coding theory Paivio (1991): at Stage 1, students rely primarily on verbal processing of new input; at Stage 2, they begin to integrate nonverbal imagery; at Stage 3, both subsystems operate in concert, creating robust, multi-modal mental representations of Russian cultural codes.

THE ROLE OF COGNITIVE DISSONANCE IN INTERCULTURAL LEARNING

Cognitive dissonance functions as a driver of intercultural learning. Festinger (1957) theory holds that dissonance motivates cognitive restructuring. In this study, dissonance arising from nonverbal expectation violations – a Russian's direct gaze misinterpreted as aggression, a Chinese smile misinterpreted as insincerity – creates psychological discomfort that, when channelled through reflective pedagogy, triggers deeper cultural learning. Students who merely register dissonance without reflection remain at the stereotypical stage; those who engage in metacognitive processing of dissonance – supported by visual reflection – progress toward cultural empathy. This process parallels what Bondarenko (2023) describes as the resolution of the contradiction between expected and actual professional behaviour in the formation of a linguistic personality, where success in extreme situations depends on correctly interpreting information and using appropriate speech tactics.

VISUAL LANGUAGING AS A HEURISTIC TOOL

The integration of Chen (2023) visual languaging framework provides a pedagogical mechanism for understanding how this progression occurs. The three steps – visualisation, languaging, and enhanced languaging – directly correspond to the three stages of SLP formation identified in this study. At Stage 1, students engage in rudimentary visualisation (stereotypical images) but without systematic languaging. At Stage 2, visualisation becomes analytical (comparative diagrams, cultural maps), and languaging emerges as students articulate their drawings using their existing language capacity. At Stage 3, enhanced languaging occurs as students are

guided to use specific cognitive discourse functions – describing, explaining, defining, evaluating – to articulate their conceptual understanding with academic appropriacy. The artifacts students created – "distance scales," "acoustic maps," "cultural code reference books," "relationship road maps" – represent the materialization of visual languaging and serve as enduring evidence of their developing secondary linguistic personality.

THE FOUR-DIMENSIONAL LANGUAGE PERSONALITY AND THE CULTURAL MEDIATOR

Daszkiewicz (2019) four-dimensional model provides a framework for understanding the balance (or imbalance) of reflection across different domains of language learning. The empirical data from this study reveal a similar pattern to that identified by Daszkiewicz: students initially focus on the psychomotor domain (what they can do with the language) and cognitive domain (how they understand the world through language), with minimal reflection in the axiological domain (what they think of the language) and affective domain (how they feel about using it). However, through structured visual reflection activities, students progressively expand their reflection to include the axiological and affective domains, achieving balanced reflection across all four dimensions by Stage 3. This finding has clear implications for language teaching: explicit attention to the axiological and affective dimensions – through questions such as "What do you think of the words you've learnt?" and "How do you feel about using the words you've just learnt?" – can accelerate the formation of a fully integrated secondary linguistic personality. As Oleinik and Spiridonova (2019) argue, such a personality constitutes a "cultural mediator" – an individual who "develops double vision, accepts another culture without losing cultural identity, has equal contacts with native speakers of two cultures" (p. 59).

COMPARISON WITH ALTERNATIVE APPROACHES

These findings diverge from purely cognitive approaches to second language acquisition that prioritise grammatical competence over pragmatic and nonverbal dimensions. While communicative language teaching has long acknowledged the importance of sociolinguistic competence, it has rarely integrated systematic instruction on nonverbal codes or reflection on their interiorisation. The present study suggests that such integration is not supplementary but constitutive of deep secondary linguistic personality formation. Unlike assimilationist models of intercultural adaptation, which assume cultural convergence toward the host culture's norms, this study shows that learners develop hybrid practices – the open palm gesture, the contextual smile, the three-second gaze rule – that are neither purely Russian nor purely Chinese but adaptive syntheses suited to the specific conditions of joint living and learning. This finding challenges the assumption that intercultural adaptation entails the loss of native cultural identity.

LIMITATIONS

The study has several limitations. First, the sample size (24 students) and specific institutional context (MSU-BIT University) limit generalizability. Second, the cross-sectional design captures stage differences through comparison of learners with different language learning durations but does not track individual longitudinal trajectories. Third, the study focused on Chinese learners of Russian; the extent to which similar dynamics operate for Russian learners of Chinese or in other language pairs remains an open question. Fourth, while the study invokes Vygotskian interiorization theory, the original sources do not provide detailed operationalization of interiorization stages specific to nonverbal behavior. Future research should develop finer-grained behavioral markers for each stage. Fifth, the neurocognitive mechanisms underlying the observed changes remain unexplored; neuroimaging studies could illuminate whether interiorization of new nonverbal codes corresponds to measurable changes in brain activity patterns.

CONCLUSION

This study examined the interiorization of nonverbal code as a constitutive element of secondary linguistic personality formation among Chinese learners of Russian. The findings reveal a three-stage dynamic that directly answers the research questions. First, at the verbal-semantic level, students experience primary cognitive dissonance when their culturally ingrained nonverbal expectations clash with observed Russian behaviors, leading to stereotypical interpretations of communicative failures. Second, at the linguo-cognitive level, facilitated by structured reflection and visual reflection activities, students develop systemic understanding of the cultural conditionality of these codes, resolving initial dissonance through cognitive restructuring. Third, at the motivational level, students form hybrid practices and develop cultural empathy, with over 83% reporting changed self-perception when using Russian, manifesting in new gestural patterns, intonation contours, and the behavioral component of cultural empathy.

The study makes several theoretical contributions. First, it demonstrates that nonverbal code is not a passive adjunct to verbal communication but an active mechanism of personal transformation – a finding that extends Karaulov (1987) model of linguistic personality beyond its verbal-semantic and linguocognitive dimensions. The interiorization of new nonverbal patterns – proxemic, kinesic, oculesic, prosodic – correlates with and arguably enables the deeper identity shifts characteristic of mature secondary linguistic personality. Second, cognitive dissonance arising from nonverbal expectation violations functions as a catalyst for intercultural learning when supported by structured reflection. Third, the semiosis of nonverbal behavior – the process by which

nonverbal signs acquire meaning – is not merely descriptive but constitutive of new hybrid identities. Fourth, visual reflection materialized in presentations serves as a tool for metacognitive processing, enabling students to move from unconscious cultural transfer to conscious construction of shared communicative space. Fifth, the integration of Chen (2023) visual languaging framework and Daszkiewicz (2019) four-dimensional language personality model provides a robust theoretical foundation for understanding and promoting balanced reflection across all domains of language learning.

Practical implications for teaching Russian as a foreign language include: incorporating systematic reflection on nonverbal communication into curricula; using students' reflective texts and visual reflection products as diagnostic tools to track secondary linguistic personality development; creating opportunities for metacommunication about nonverbal norms; designing project-based activities that encourage the emergence of hybrid practices; and explicitly addressing cognitive dissonance as a learning resource rather than an obstacle. Additionally, following Daszkiewicz (2019) findings, language teachers should explicitly incorporate questions pertaining to the axiological domain ("What do you think of the words you've learnt?") and the affective domain ("How do you feel about using the words you've just learnt?") into regular classroom practice, as students consistently affirm the importance of such questions despite rarely being asked them.

The experience of the MSU-BIT University microsociety offers an optimistic model for the multipolar world: a model in which cultural diversity becomes not a source of conflict but a resource for developing shared rules of living. Nonverbal code interiorization, catalyzed by visual reflection and driven by the productive resolution of cognitive dissonance, constitutes a key mechanism in this process – one with implications extending far beyond the language classroom to any context of intensive intercultural interaction. As one student eloquently concluded: "Language is the key to an alternative version of yourself. The more languages you know, the more 'selves' exist within you". This statement encapsulates the transformative potential of developing a secondary linguistic personality – not as the erasure of one's primary identity but as the expansion of selfhood through the acquisition of new semiotic resources and cultural perspectives, ultimately achieving the status of a cultural mediator capable of bridging two worlds.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The author wishes to express sincere gratitude to the students of the Faculty of Philology at MSU-BIT University (Shenzhen, China) whose reflective presentations and project work constituted the empirical basis of this study. Their willingness to engage in deep self-reflection and to share their intercultural experiences made this research possible.

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