

Few researchers have contributed more to intercultural understanding than American anthropologist Edward Twitchell Hall. Best known for his studies of personal space and his definitions of high- and low-context cultures, Hall was instrumental in establishing intercultural research as a field of its own after World War II.

In his book *The Silent Language*, the author explores the cross-cultural context of communication. His basic thesis is that while much human communication is non-verbal, it always follows cultural and contextual patterns. Hall investigates concepts such as 'spacial accent,' analyzing culture-specific behaviors associated with the 'invisible zone' humans carry around themselves, and discusses cultural views of the role of time, which he also describes in terms of an 'accent.' He identifies both as tools for transmitting messages, illustrating his ideas with several culture-specific examples and practical observations. Since the major difference between verbal and non-verbal communication is that the latter is mostly subconscious, Hall also looks at mechanisms through which children learn these concepts as a way for adults to familiarize themselves with others' cultural context.



Since it was originally written in 1959, potential readers may conclude that *The Silent Language* isn't worth reading any longer. Indeed, concepts that may have been considered revolutionary at the time the book was written, such as the observation that "people are bound by cultural rules and are not masters of their fates," may seem self-evident today. Nevertheless, none of the principles Hall identifies are any less relevant today than they were back then. Given current globalization trends, understanding these principles may actually be more important than ever.

What makes this book a bit frustrating to read, though, is that the author's train of thought can be difficult to follow. For instance, Hall introduces the idea that all cultural conventions can be classified as either formal, informal, or technical, but the distinctions appear confusing. While later chapters revisit and further discuss these classifications, they do little to add clarity to the underlying concepts. Basic familiarity with Hall's other publications, such as his books "Beyond Culture" and "Hidden Dimension," may at times be helpful.

These challenges notwithstanding, *The Silent Language* gives important insights and can be enlightening for the open-minded reader.

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