

## THE SILENT DIALOGUE

Alexandra – Valeria POPESCU  
Politehnica University of Timișoara

### 1. Introduction

Communication in general is the process of sending and receiving messages. The messages enable the members of a society to share knowledge, attitudes and skills. Although we usually identify communication with speech, communication is composed of two dimensions – verbal and nonverbal.

Nonverbal communication has been defined as communication without words. It includes apparent behaviour such as facial expression, eye movements, tone of voice and gestures, as well as less obvious messages such as dress, posture and spatial distance between two or more people. Commonly, nonverbal communication is learned shortly after birth and practised and refined throughout a person's lifetime. Young children are generally more adept at reading nonverbal cues than adults are because of their limited verbal skills and their recent reliance on the nonverbal to communicate. Gestures are signals towards the viewer. They may accompany or substitute words; they are «invisible words». The connection between language and gestures is essential as it corresponds to a great human necessity that is to communicate. Gestures «speak» and they offer us extra information – their silent dialogue reveals the human personality. The purpose of this article is to prove that decoding the gestures is fundamental in the process of receiving and transmitting messages.

### 2. Classification of Gestures

Analysing the relation between the gesture and the word, Daniela Roventa Frumusani (1999:194) identifies the following gesture categories:

1. gestures that accompany the discourse;
2. gestures that are complementary to the discourse, they either complete or contradict the discourse;
3. gestures that are substitutes, which are used when the distance between the speaker and the audience is too great.

Gestures are part of an infinite semiotic field that allows the interlocutors to carry out and interpret them at the same time, for example the warning and command gestures.

Gestures express feelings and ideas, they may be coded gestures based on formal systems; these are typical for the deaf-mutes where the gestures make possible the communication between the individuals belonging to this social category. Gestures permanently accompany the meaning of the words without anticipating it; they are auxiliary of the words. People often use their hands in communication, and their movement either amplify or stress verbal communication. Septimiu Chelcea (1986:97) remarks that *there are certain parts of our body that help the person who speaks, but the hands speak by themselves*. Our hands help us in

various situations, such as refusing something, asking for something, or calling somebody. They also help us in expressing our joy, sadness and even indignation.

Paul Ekman and Wallace V. Friesen (1969) identify five gesture categories:

1. Emblems;
2. Illustrators;
3. Facial expressions;
4. Regulators;
5. Adaptors

2.1. The first category of nonverbal behavior, called "emblems", is formed by *those nonverbal acts which have a direct verbal translation, or dictionary definition, usually consisting of a word or two, or perhaps a phrase* (Ekman and Friesen 1969: 63). People are *almost always aware* of their use of emblems, and the use of an emblem is usually *an intentional, deliberate effort to communicate*, though, of course, there are exceptions (Ekman and Friesen 1969: 63). Emblems are conventional gestures that can substitute the words completely. They are body acts that require no verbal accompaniment to be understood. Hand signals, such as waving goodbye, the V for victory sign, certain twinkling of the eye; shrugging one's shoulders, are examples of emblems that are commonly used in our everyday life.

2.2. The second class of nonverbal behavior is known as "illustrators". They are used to make the verbal discourse rhythmical, these elements establish the connection between verbal and nonverbal communication. Their role is to complete, explain or emphasize the verbal message; when they refer to the content they show the followings: the direction (up and down), the dimension (large and small), the shape (round and square) or the modality of the action (slow and fast).

2.3. The third class refers to the "facial expressions"; the facial expressions may show approval, joy, friendship. The face is the primary expresser of emotions. The face seems to emit emotionally contagious expressions, for example a smiling face may prompt a spontaneous response to another person. Eye movement is a key part of facial behaviour. Eye use is correlated with the flow of speech as well. The eyes, however, have primacy in the interaction. Facial expressions may occur *below the level of awareness, based on deeply rooted habits* (Ekman and Friesen 1969: 78), or some of them may be intentionally emitted to transmit a message as in a smile or to disguise one's feeling.

Facial expressions offer (very often involuntarily) to the receiver the information concerning the general state of a person. A smile on one's face or a gaze often communicates more than words. A wide range of feelings may be expressed by a smile, such as joy, satisfaction, pleasure or on the contrary disgust, irony and cynicism. Some facial expressions such as those showing fear, embarrassment, and astonishment have a universal intercultural signification. The facial expressions are undoubtedly the most important means of non-verbal communication. They are the main source of information.

2.4. The fourth category is named "regulators". They are gestures that permit, maintain and regulate verbal communication between interlocutors. For example the eye gaze towards the interlocutor may suggest approval or acceptance to speak. The regulators are, like illustrators, related to the conversation, but the regulators are mostly related to the conversational flow.

2.5. The last category is that of "adaptors". The authors consider that *these movements were first learned as part of adaptive efforts to satisfy self or bodily needs, or to perform bodily actions, or to manage emotions* (Ekman and Friesen 1969: 84). These gestures show an effort to adapt and control personal feelings. Their role is to diminish the tension of a certain situation, and to re-establish the comfort and the calm of the communication between the interlocutors. This category is sometimes called "autistic actions" or "body manipulators". There are two types of gestures: the auto manipulation, such as to fiddle with one's hair, to bite one's nails and the manipulation of the objects, for example pencils and glasses.

The way the glasses are manipulated is very important for the decoding of the message. The persons who manipulate the glasses all the time and are preoccupied with their symmetrical position are authoritative and tidy persons. The persons who put on or take off their glasses are either confused or they want to divert someone's attention. When a person is nervous, she or he usually manipulates objects. The adaptor gestures frequently appear when a person is in a tension situation. The gesture in general is complementary to the communication situation.

### 3. Gestures and Intercultural Communication

Culture is created by repeated communicative behaviors and processes. *The spoken language acts as a cultural lens, shaping and influencing human perceptions, while nonverbal communication is the action component* (Allan Canfield, 2002:55). Both the verbal and nonverbal communication, *reflect cultural norms* (Allan Canfield, 2002:55). It has been said that nonverbal communication is where nature meets culture. The information in body kinetics is open to interpretation. Human gestures may be interpreted differently. People may mask their feelings with a smile so a smile can mean different things to different people.

Gestures are part of a cultural code with different cultural significations. The manner someone greets represents a gesture that identifies both the person and his or her attitude. There are two types of greeting: the persons' greeting and the greeting of the solidarity that expresses a message of friendship. The greeting may offer information about the region where the person comes from. The shaking of hands, a ritual in many cultures, may be done without words being spoken; yet people know what it means. Cultural patterns are revealed in greeting rituals varying considerably from country to country. *The Eskimo nose rub, the arm grasp and the handshake are greeting patterns that are assumed to be the norm in each culture in which they are used. It is important to note that people are not required to know the origin of their greeting habits in order to use them efficiently and effectively. People present themselves to others using simple handshakes, gestures or gazes* (Allan Canfield, 2002: 61). The gesture of shaking hands has different significations according to the circumstances and the participants. The English shake hands when a new employee comes while the French do this gesture several times a day.

### 4. Final Remarks

We may conclude that the gestures are as important as the words are. The gestures define the identity and the personality of the individuals.

The facial expressions show someone's personality – we find out *who* speaks. The illustrators and the emblems make reference to the transmitted content – we find out *what* is transmitted. The regulators make reference to the relation of communication – we find out *what* the result of communication is. The adaptors refer to the means of communication – we find out *how* the message is transmitted.

They may block or on the contrary optimize the communication between people. People use nonverbal communication for several reasons as follows:

1. the words have their limitations and, whenever we give explanations concerning the shape, the dimension or the direction, the nonverbal communication is more efficient;
2. the nonverbal signals are much more powerful as they express our own inner feelings;
3. the nonverbal messages are most of the time genuine, as they cannot be very easily controlled as the words are in verbal communication;
4. the social ethics limits the manner we use the words, while the nonverbal signals can transmit thoughts that are not limited by the social ethics;
5. the speaker can enrich the verbal message very much when the nonverbal signals accompany it.

### References

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