



Peculiarities of Nonverbal Communication

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ABSTRACT

This article provides detailed information about the peculiarities of nonverbal communication, in particular sign language and its role in speech.

KEYWORDS: Nonverbal communication, body language, gestures.

INTRODUCTION

Language is a social phenomenon that cannot be imagined outside of society and community. This can also be linked to sign language, since gesture is likewise a component of language and, as a separate bodily movement, is a social product. These ideas can be expressed as follows: a human being is not endowed with these by heredity, but rather possesses motor skills and bodily plasticity, and while communicating, involuntarily uses body language as well.

At the same time, the body language existing in a given society is acquired by each of its members and becomes natural to a particular body. Thus, sign language becomes the basis for an individual's personal use of the possibilities of language. Taking these features of gesture into account, we find the definition given by J. Lgambep to be very precise: "A gesture is something between creation and performance."

Like any other language, sign language can also change over time. Changes in gestures often occur without members of society noticing, yet it cannot be denied that at a certain moment such a change did occur and sign language became different.

D. Granin describes this as follows: "Every era has its own gestures, its own way of walking, of bowing, of shaking hands, of drinking tea, of speaking. In the fifties people behaved differently than they had in the thirties or twenties."

Because sign language is also a social phenomenon, it, like other languages, is subject to being learned: gesture possesses something that might be called "communicative persuasiveness." If bodily behavior contradicts words, then the participant in communication to whom the words are directed trusts what the gestures convey more.

The contemporary communication scholar J. Allwood writes: "If a conflict arises between words and facial expressions, which are relatively easy to control, and vocal intonation and bodily behavior, which are much harder to control, then we consciously come to trust the thing that is harder to control." Fourth, gesture plays a major role in direct communication between people. Face-to-face communication develops under the influence of facial expressions, vocal intonations, gestures, and the partner's outward appearance — no less than through the words and content of speech itself. We largely choose the words we speak based on nonverbal signals: we rely on information about how our interlocutor will react to what is said, on their social identity and personality, and on the emotional state we read from their gestures.



It is in this sense that J. G. Mead says that participants in communication adjust to one another through gestures. He understands a gesture as a sign that indicates how the person performing it will behave afterward: "Conscious communication arises when a gesture becomes a sign." Gestures express not so much the rational part of information as its emotional part. As J. Allwood writes, "gestures and vocal intonation are a convenient, spontaneous, and natural way of expressing feelings and attitudes toward something. They may well be our primary means of expression."

This is felt especially strongly in the simultaneous presence of words and gestures in communication. Words appeal to reason, gestures to feeling. Then, when the emotional component of a situation reaches its limit, words are overtaken by silence and turn into gestures. Many vivid examples of this can be found in classical literature.

For example: "Silence reigned. I went on holding her hand and looked at her. Her whole body still shrinking, she breathed with difficulty, and so as not to weep, so as not to let the welling tears escape, she quietly bit her lower lip... I looked at her; in her timid stillness there was something touchingly helpless: she had barely managed to sit down on the chair from exhaustion and had only just sunk into it. My heart melted... 'Asya,' I said, my voice barely audible... From time to time a trembling sound like a sigh could be heard, and I felt a weak hand, trembling like a leaf, touch my hair. I raised my head and saw her face. How suddenly it had changed! The look of fear had vanished from it; her gaze had gone off somewhere far away and carried me along with it; her lips were slightly parted; her forehead had turned pale as marble, and her curls had shifted back as though the wind had blown them there. I forgot everything, I drew her toward me — her hand yielded obediently, her whole body was drawn after her hand, the shawl slipped from her shoulders, and her head lay quietly on my chest, beneath my burning lips."

"Language was originally a certain kind of relation — an appearance, a movement of the body and its parts — indicating an impending social action to which other individuals must adjust their own behavior." The immense importance of gesture in face-to-face communication is justified by gesture's ability to keep contact uninterrupted, whereas verbal language functions only when a speaker and a listener (an author and a reader) are simultaneously present.

Extraverbal communication, expressed through visible plasticity, simultaneously contains two opposing streams of information: "how I speak and listen, and how you speak and listen." In many situations — for example, when a teacher communicates with students — this feature is of great importance, because it helps to see how ready the students are to grasp new material and how interested they are, thereby allowing the learning process to be managed more successfully. As we can see, our gestures are not accidental, created solely by a particular situation; they depend not only on individual personal qualities but also on the body's experience and its plasticity. Gestures are, to a large extent, predetermined by society: the general manner of holding the body, body technique, symbolic gestures, and bodily appearance differ from society to society. This allows us to speak of a society-specific sign language. Indeed, every society has its own sign language, distinct from that of other societies.

References

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