

More Than Words Can Ever Say:
Language and Nonverbal Codes Explained Through Interpersonal Communication

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COMM: Theories of Communication

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INTRODUCTION – “I THINK”

My Personal Understanding of Communication (Supported by Scholars)

Communication is defined as the sending and receiving of messages (meanings) verbally as well as nonverbally. “The basic process of communication, which is assumed to be the same across cultures, consists of individual communicative behaviors ranging from habitual, scripted, taken from granted patterns of interaction to mindful, conscious choices made in the face of obviously unsuccessful and unproductive habits” (Kovacic 8). Communication has multiple ways of sending messages. Also, communication refers to how identities are constructed, maintained and changed through the transmission of signs, symbols and codes between people. According to Fiske, “the more we share the same codes, the more we use the same sign systems, the closer our two ‘meanings’ of the message will approximate to each other” (39). In other words, communication is a process. It is “a process by which one person affects the behaviour or state of mind of another” (Fiske 2). As in the discipline of interpersonal communication one person is influencing the other person’s actions through verbal and nonverbal communication. According to Griffin and Patton, “the most important need for interpersonal communication is achievement of personal growth and development—more specifically, the attainment of a desired self-image. A second need, of perhaps equal importance, is being able to negotiate with other people as we try to attain this personal development and self-image” (qtd. in Norman 50). When communicating you are always seeking to further understand yourself and who you are in relation to others.

Language: The Power of Words

I believe language is the means we use to communicate to one another our meanings. It is the basis of all knowledge, power, and the order of things. Language covers a breadth of topics in all subjects of academia. There is literal language that of English or foreign dialect, mathematic numerical language, musical language, and many others. Language, in a communication studies respect, is a common system of discourse that transmits a message to the receiver that is conceptual, contextual, and meaningful. It is used to crutch meanings, metaphors, symbols, and signs. For something that is not tangible, language impressively holds an irreplaceable power in our society. Language is a verbal as well as nonverbal phenomenon that expresses more than many people realize. If all forms of language was to be taken away from humanity it would essentially leave us 'brain dead', only existing in a morbid physical sense and not truly in a commutative linguistic sense. Language is a crucial tool that enables us to be critical, to forthrightly express ourselves in countless ways. The flexibility it gives us to interact and give meanings to words further defines the power it enables us to have and obtain. Rhetoric, the art of effectively using language, has led to the election of many presidents around the world, the release of murderers from jail and kids getting out of timeout. Linguistics, the science and true structure of language, analyzes the critical facets of language such as the development of meaning, its change of history, and subjects of speech. Language, through communication, is a process that, 'in its nature, function and scope is about establishing, maintaining, and terminating relationships.'

Nonverbal: Talk Without Speaking

I believe nonverbal communication is every other possible way we communicate with one another that is not oral. It is the majority percentage, approximately 65%, of how we communicate with others. Nonverbal communication is an extremely important subject of communication that expresses many meanings that cannot be verbally stated. It goes beyond verbal language and its concrete dictionary definitions. It gives context and 'weight' to what I say and what I mean. However, it can be ambiguous and not clear and coherent to all, but then again everything we say is not 100% clear to all.

In using nonverbal cues ones meanings are more believable. For example if a car was about to hit an ice patch in the street and I said 'stop' they may or may not stop in lack of belief that there is a need to stop. However, if I shouted 'stop!' and frantically waived my arms in a stopping motion it would be more apparent and believable to the driver that I meant they should stop. In going to an interview a nonverbal cue that speaks upon ones character is posture. Slouching would be a sign of laziness and unprofessionalism, while erect posture would signify preparedness and attentiveness. No matter what is said from the interviewee his or her nonverbal body language has already spoken for him or her. First impressions are everything and what I wear, how I carry myself and how I act may cause conflict differing from what I verbally say, causing mixed messages. Many cultures have various meanings of nonverbal communication, such as, for example, eye contact. While eye contact in American culture is acceptable, encouraged, and important to do, in Asian cultures it can be considered rude and disrespectful (especially to elders). Nonverbal behavior has an incredible impact on our perception, interactions, and everyday life. Even breathing sends out a message and communicates the

message 'I am alive'. Nonverbal language is a critical part of the communication process. Bodily communication in an interpersonal relationship (familial, romantic, or friendly) is necessary in, as accurately as possible, expressing your desires and meanings to another person.

Interpersonal Communication: Two is a Couple, Three is *Too* Many

I believe interpersonal communication is the interaction between two people or two dependant entities [one on one]. And like any phenomenon, communicating interpersonally is a process. Whether it is face to face, by phone, computer or any other form of communication, two dependant entities are engaging in the art and process of interaction. I believe interpersonal communication is based key on developing a relationship with the receiver/sender. It is learning the other individual on the most complex level possible, even if that level is shallow. It is about forming a relationship whether it is professional, sexual, or authoritative, the goal is to understand the context of the person's body and verbal language.

Interpersonal communication in reference to nonverbal language is different than engaging in nonverbal communication on a mass level. Bodily signals in an interpersonal relationship are more personal, significant, and critical than that of a mass medium relationship (ex. Presidential speech). Interpersonal nonverbal communication closely deals with subjects of haptics and proxemics, as nonverbal communication in general expands and covers kinesics paralinguistics, territoriality, environment, and chronemics. In a romantic interpersonal relationship I believe nonverbal communication says far more than words can ever express. Every touch, glance, or facial expression is unique and exclusive to just the two individuals in the relationship. As the relationship grows overtime they develop a deeper understanding of the meanings behind the words spoken and can 'just tell' when the other is upset. Nonverbal

communication is a language all its own because it expresses the meaning, metaphor, and symbols of verbal language on a level that is closer to a common understanding and perception.

However, nonverbal communication, similar to visual rhetoric, is about *seeing* the words acted out and supporting the greater meaning they hold. A kiss can mean the verbal connotation 'I love you', and a punch in the face can mean the verbal connotation 'I hate you'. My paradigmatic view of nonverbal codes through interpersonal communication gives an astronomical amount of importance to nonverbal codes because it defines how I communicate throughout my day and how people judge me. Without speaking to anyone in a room I, in a sense, have spoken to everyone in the room who has seen me. By consciously or unconsciously using arm/ hand gestures and facial expressions I can express my meaning of words better to another person who may have not understood it prior, due to semantic noise. Nonverbal communication on an interpersonal level is a critical part of communication that many do not give enough respect to, or just do not realize the contextualized messages that are sent by the slightest gestures.

LITERATURE REVIEW – “THEY SAY”

Language: The Lingo of the Scholars

According to I.A. Richards, the fundamental nature of language is “best regarded as an instrument; and all instruments are extensions, or refinements of our sense organs”, an “instrument for controlling our becoming” (qtd.in Hochmuth 2). Language holds a great deal of power in what we see and how we interact with the world through our senses. Language enables us to *listen* and not just hear, and *feel* rather than just touch. It allows us to be reflexive and not

reflective, which can help us ‘control our becoming’ as we become more critical about ourselves. “Wendell Johnson (1972) points out that there are 500,000 to 600,000 words in the English language and that they must represent millions of individual facts, experiences, and relationships” (qtd. in Severin and Tankard 93). Language is an instrumental part of our lives, but when put into context and in between two individuals compromising one other’s thoughts it becomes crucial to the communication process. According to I.A. Richards, the new rhetoric of language is “to account for understanding and misunderstanding, to study the efficiency of language and its conditions” (qtd. in Hochmuth 9). In other words, meanings do not lie in words, but in the context and conditions in which we use them in our language. Using codes, nonverbally, is a fundamental way to understand meanings of language. However, another way of understanding the value of words in language is by using metaphors. According to John Fiske, “a metaphor exploits simultaneous similarities and differences” while also “expressing the unfamiliar in terms of the familiar” (92). Metaphors are formed through language for individuals to better understand a meaning or different perspective on a conceptualized message. Often times metaphors are used to assist in understanding the context of language. As stated by Mark Johnson and George Lakoff, “metaphors are conceptual, not linguistic” (253). Metaphors are not dependant on language, but on the general context in which it is used. In an interpersonal relationship, metaphors are a way to understand the other person on a level that is unique to only you two. Each individual in the communication process is shaping the meaning and conceptualizing the context in which the language is being used. According Lakoff and Johnson, “you cannot hold onto traditional conceptions of meaning, thought, and language” (247), but delve into how we develop these meanings as humans. The social understanding of metaphors in interpersonal communication is to make identifying people easier by using a symbolic context

that is, for the most part, understood by society. According to Michael G. Johnson, “when there is no language then all meaning has its source in perception or context, and when there is no “perception” (as in reading) then all meaning has its source in language” (19). Context is essential to language. Metaphors, even though not concrete in their nature, give a more solid definition of people than the meaning of words do because the context is much more precise.

In studying language it is crucial to understand that it is a visual art as well as verbal. As stated by B. Aubrey Fisher, “Richards visualizes the study of language by focusing on the observation of externalized behavior of individuals in differing technical contexts” (111). In other words, Richards studies the illustration of language by studying the behavior of people. Like that of interpersonal communication studying the ‘individual’ is important in understanding the context of the dyadic relationship.

Nonverbal Communication: What the Scholars *Say*

According to John Fiske, “Non-verbal communication (or NVC) is carried on through presentational codes such as gestures, eye movements, or qualities of voice. These codes can give messages only about the here and now” (67). Nonverbal communication is a critical, however, temporary part of the communication process. According to Argyle (1972) the ten codes the human body is the main transmitter of are the following: bodily contact, proximity (or proxemics), orientation (how we angle ourselves to others), appearance, head nods, facial expression, gestures (or kinesics), posture, eye movement and contact, and non-verbal aspects of speech (qtd. in Fiske 68-69). The mentioned nonverbal cues, and verbal cues are important in communicating efficiently with another person in a dyadic relationship. Language contains words that hold an array of different meaning to an array of diverse people. “Nonverbal

behaviors are one set of cues that are normally processed with spoken language” (Woodall and Folger 40). However, nonverbal communication can stand and say a lot on its own. And as much as nonverbal communication assist in filling in the gap of miscommunication it is not perfect and leaves many meanings to be desired on many occasions. According to Judee K. Burgoon, “[b]ecause any single nonverbal indicator can have multiple meanings, and any single meaning may implicate multiple nonverbal cues, nonverbal relational messages tend to be ambiguous and polysemic” and she continues with that notion and explains, “[n]o nonverbal cue is an ‘island.’ It is continually surrounded by host of nonverbal behaviors which together may delimit and clarify meaning” (107). Nonverbal communication is based on multiple facets of bodily cues that assist in decoding the meaning of the message, not just one. For example, if a student slid a book off their desk as they deathly stared into the teacher’s eyes those nonverbal cues could almost solely infer the child was violent and extremely upset at the teacher (a threatening situation). However, if the only nonverbal cue was the student slid the book off their desk with little facial expression that could mean a collection of things like a nervous twitch, or even a fly on the desk startled the student (not a threatening situation). Nonverbal communication can infer many different meanings in an interpersonal relationship

Interpersonal Communication: One On One With The Scholars

According to Richard West and Lynn H. Turner interpersonal communication is, “the process of message transaction between people to create and sustain shared meaning. There are three critical components embedded in this definition: process, message exchange, and shared meaning” (10). As I discussed, communication is a process by which we learn from one another through meanings. According to Peter Hartley interpersonal communication understands that,

“both the form and content of the communication reflect the personal characteristics of the individuals as well as their social roles and relationships” (20). In other words, however the message is conveyed it displays the characteristics of the sender/receiver and their role in the relationship. If they are the submissive one, or the outspoken one in the relationship it will be evident in the way they interact with another person, whether the characteristics show through their verbal or nonverbal cues.

DATA ANALYSIS – “THIS MEANS”

The research I have done for this paper covered a substantial area of communication, but nowhere near the majority of the phenomenon of nonverbal communication. To assist me in my work I have used texts and books such as *Introduction to Communication Studies* (J. Fiske), *Communication Theories* (W. Severin and J. Tankard), *Interpersonal Communication* (P. Hartley) and *Understanding Interpersonal Communication* (R. West and L. Turner). These sources helped me gain basic knowledge the discipline of interpersonal communication. It supported my opinions on the understanding of interpersonal communication which provided good ‘building blocks’ for me to branch my research out of. The Fiske text especially helped in supporting the breakdown of the nonverbal cues. It explained them in a very clear and concise verbiage. In the West and Turner text I obtained the basic understanding of interpersonal communication that helped me elaborate the term. Overall, these texts were a great help in doing the research for this paper.

Other scholarly sources I used critically helped in my research for this paper. Significant scholarly journal articles that I found resourceful were “Nonverbal Cues and Interpersonal Judgments: Participant and Observer Perceptions of Intimacy, Dominance, Composure, and

Formality” written by Judee K. Burgoon and Beth A La Poire. This journal article delves into nonverbal cues and how they play an important role in our perception of people and society. The experiment that was done involved participants viewing videotaped interactions (relational messages) and made ratings based on what they saw. The results supported the social meaning of nonverbal communication. The other scholarly journal article that helped with my research was “I.A. Richards and the “New Rhetoric” written by Marie Hochmuth. It discussed the use of language and its conditions of how it can be misunderstood. Hochmuth covered I.A. Richards’ understanding on meanings, signs, and contextual theory. It was a straightforward article to grasp the concept of. It brilliantly covered his passion of language and the ‘new rhetoric’. It mentions excerpts from Richards’ *The Meaning of Meaning* which gives the paper authenticity as it explains Richards’ text.

Many of my sources are from the National Communication Association; however, I have an array of sources that I believe give this paper a unique diversity. While providing sufficient knowledge on language and nonverbal cues in interpersonal communication this paper is supported from the views of many different authors.

Conclusion – Theories of Communication

I believe communication is a critical study. Nothing we do or see in this life should be accepted as face value. I will always, because of this class, live my life through a ‘critical eye’. I will continue to educate myself on critical communication and its effect on my life. Critical communication is the deeper, more significant way in which I share meanings with other people and the world. Critical communication is based on my assumptions and questions upon my transmission of symbols, signs, and codes with the world. It is realizing there is more to

communicating than just a conversation or a kiss. It is analyzing the order of things, the power of its language use, and the process and methodology by which it all stems from. Understanding the depth and not just the breadth of communication is what it means to be critical. To interact with the world through a 'critical eye' is to critically communicate with it.

Nonverbal communication is a form of critical communication. It contains various meanings that every person interprets differently, but that is the beauty behind it. We, as a society can have social misunderstandings that we can learn from each and every day.

Nonverbal communication does not orally say anything, but somehow it can say almost everything. Everyday people get 'bad vibes' from others without meeting them and everyday someone is judged wrongfully because of those nonverbal cues.

Interpersonal communication is the discipline I chose to study for this course. I enjoy critically studying individual's interaction with the other individual. It is a completely different dynamic than that of mass communication or intrapersonal communication. It is an intimate, personal relationship that is like nothing else. Interpersonal communication is a study all its own for a reason. It is the complex meanings, signs and context that establishes, maintains, and/or terminates such a dynamic relationship that makes it such a phenomenon to analyze.

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