

## ROLE OF NONVERBAL BEHAVIOUR IN DIDACTIC COMMUNICATION

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**Abstract.** *Didactic communication is an instrumental type of communication with direct implications in the educational process. The main goal is to produce a change among students in the process of teaching-learning, as a model of moulding communicative skills. Verbal communication plays an essential role in cognitive development and school success but what really makes success is proper nonverbal communication. The way teachers convey information to their students is an affective component: criticism has often pointed to the nonverbal aspect of the issue.*

**Keywords:** *communication, didactic communication, nonverbal behaviour, teaching-learning process*

### 1.INTRODUCTION

Humans develop through communication their personality and their relationships with other humans sharing their own experience with a view to build up and convey human experiences. Communication thus becomes a main element of social life: it is a product of social life, not a feature.

The role of communication has been analysed from several perspectives. Thus, according to CASTELLS (2009), its role is “to mould public mentality”; according to PUTNAM AND NICOTERA (2009), it is to make up organisations. Within a student group, communication is essential in dynamics maintenance and functioning, which is influenced by several factors: the number of people sharing common goals is the most important of these factors.

### 1.1.DIDACTIC COMMUNICATION

Didactic communication is considered, by certain authors (SĂLĂVĂSTRU, 2004: 190), “one of the most used paideic relationships between two individuals” and a key-element in the teacher-student relationship given that message exchange is essential in the process of teaching-learning-evaluation. What is essential in didactic communication is represented by the intent to change the receiver of the message and by the fact that it takes place within an organisation, within a specialised institution that is later on evaluated (STĂNCULESCU, 2013). The way in which the information is conveyed plays a particular role: we all know there is no boring or difficult subject but rather teachers who do not know how to convey information, how to support through nonverbal behaviour what they convey through verbal behaviour. Group activities help improving interpersonal relationships and increase awareness of the mutual influences of the individuals within a group, of the group on each of its individuals, and of the society on the group and vice versa.

After a period dominated by the theories of learning followed by an excess of the cognitive revolution, there is a revival of the interest in emotions: the role and impact of emotions on the life of individuals, in general, and on the teacher-student relationship, in particular. The interest in emotions increased considerably: it points out the importance of nonverbal behaviour during emotional episodes, which resulted in 489 articles between 1960

and 1981. According to Online Psych Info, over 3,000 articles on emotions have been published since 1982 (HARRIGAN, ROSENTHAL AND SCHERER, 2008).

## **2. NONVERBAL COMMUNICATION**

The field of nonverbal behaviour is subdivided into facial actions, vocalizations, eye contact, body movement, and perception of interpersonal space. This type of communication has the advantage that it does not appeal to strict rules: decoding is done based on common sense and much quicker than in verbal communication. Response to nonverbal and para-verbal indices of a message is five times higher than in verbal indices (ARGYLE *et al.*, 1971). The congruence between verbal and nonverbal communication was first studied by BOOMER (1963) (in HARRIGAN, 2008) who showed the roles of hand and head movements, of pauses in speech and of prosody in a discourse in both verbal and nonverbal correlations and in the synchrony between speaker and listener. In educational activities, teachers focus more often on thinking, teaching, cognitive development and learning and less on affections and emotions. They have used, to study nonverbal communication, Microteaching ever since 1960, a method adopted for teacher training programmes. Though no longer as successful as it used to be, this method was tried at least once by all the teachers who tried to improve his/her nonverbal behaviour. The risk is that experimental results differ from real-life ones when the teacher is no longer in front of a camera (which generates self-control of certain behaviours) (BABAD, 2008).

### **2.1. FACIAL ACTIONS**

Of all nonverbal behaviours, face actions are the most complicated and confusion-generating ones: they play the role of a commander, are always visible, convey information continuously through the five senses, and ask for attention (as a symbol of the self) (COHN AND EKMAN, 2008). BRUCE AND YOUNG (1998) claim that the face conveys clear information about personality traits, psychopathology, and intelligence. In such a complex relationship as that between teacher and student, the face conveys a lot of information which, if properly decoded by the students, make it positive and constructive. “Teacher immediacy” and “teacher enthusiasm” generate satisfaction, morality, and school success (BABAD, 2008). Social relationships in a class can diminish facial display of emotions (EKMAN AND FRIESEN, 2003): it is known that, when we are alone, we express our emotions in a different way from the case when we are not alone. The feed-back to the messages conveyed through nonverbal behaviour plays a particular role in the establishment of a course and in the way classes are given. Interactions within a class are of the “face-to-face” type: they generate concern for what we convey through looks, gestures, posture or voice – because, in most cases, nonverbal communication brings about decisive supplementary information that influence the way we judge the others.

One of the questions that has haunted the researchers in the field is if a group can function without face-to-face relationships (thus removing the nonverbal component of communication) and if a group can be effective through technology alone (HARGIE AND DICKSON, 2004). Smiling and looking into somebody else’s eyes is an important nonverbal component of social interaction.

When a speaker intends to have our attention, he should also take into account weather conditions because nonverbal behaviour associated with social contacts are strongly influenced by the weather (GUÉGUEN, 2013). Thus, it is in the interest of the entire group to take into account the negative impact if cloudy days on the nonverbal behaviour of both teachers and students.

## **2.2.VOICE**

Voice conveys information on the people's sex, age (HUMMERT *et al.*, 1999), origin, health state, social status, affective state (irritation, anxiety, joy) (JUSLIN AND SCHERER, 2008). Social interaction in a class needs training to develop the skill of making inferences about the intention and the behaviour of the others, while remaining sensitive about the messages received (it is well-known that humans can listen for longer periods to voices than to any other sound (BELIN *et al.*, 2002). One of the main issues in children is to name the emotional expressions that affect the voice particularly in the teacher-student relationship that supposes a number of emotional responses on both sides. The most used names for vocal expressions of emotions pointed out by 104 studies in the field (JUSLIN AND LAUKKA, 2003) are anger (85 occurrences), fear and upset (65 occurrences), happiness (44 occurrences), and joy (31 occurrences). The different types of messages conveyed by words and nonverbal behaviour elements have been made well-known by BUGENTAL (1974, in JUSLIN AND SCHERER, 2008); CAFFI AND JANNEY (1994) claim that philosophers and linguists maintain that the meaning of a discourse lies mainly in verbal content.

Teachers and students that are self-confident tend to speak quicker and louder (KIMBLE AND SEIDE, 1991); prosodic elements also adapt depending on the students' age: speakers have a clear intuition of the emotional and linguistic needs of their listeners (BURNHAM *et al.* 2002). As for the leader role of a teacher in class, KLOFSTAD *et al.* (2012) found out that lower voices, no matter the sex, is associated with a good leader.

Starting from the influence of a teacher's voice on students' behaviour, WOOD (1998) described the features of an "enthusiastic teacher" as one who speaks in an expressive way, who shows intonation and volume variations, who smiles and laughs, makes gestures with both his/her hands and arms, appeals to facial actions, maintains visual contact, and has the sense of humour (BABAD, 2008). Studies concerning "teacher immediacy" show there are flexible, democratic, warm, clear, task-oriented, and active/energetic leaders (MCCROSKEY *et al.*, 1996).

Trans-cultural researches have confirmed that humans express their emotions crying, shouting, speaking in a trembling voice or in a monotonous, low voice (WALLBOTT *et al.* 1986); voice is, according to SUNDBERG (1998, in JUSLIN AND SCHERER, 2008), "the mirror of our soul". We can also talk of the effects of loud voice or shouts on students: the effect is a negative one and it troubles learning and evaluation. The context in which appears a certain emotional expression is an important indicator of our judgement (PLANALP, 1998). This informational background helps establishing relationships within the class since proper interpretation of emotional expressions support correct inferences. In multicultural classes, there can occur problems because of the differences in coding and decoding messages and also in the different meanings associated to the message: sometimes, teachers cannot be sure a message has been properly understood (BABAD, 2008).

## **2.3.KINESICS**

Kinesics refers to body, head, and limb movements and to the way they are coded and decoded by the individuals.

### **2.3.1.BODY POSTURE**

People, no matter their relationships with other people they communicate with, display a wide range of actions, gestures and body postures that change at a quicker or slower pace depending on what they wish to communicate. Though, compared to the face, the body is much larger, it has a smaller number of parts that can be moved (limb movements) but the latter are of interest for social relationships, in general, and for the didactic relationships, in

particular. The body parts most involved in nonverbal communication are the head and hands: their simple movements do not always have a meaning, but they can convey information concerning the intensity of a certain emotion (DITTMAN, 1987) – first the face and the voice. It is important, in the teacher-student relationship, to know what movement needs to be coded and how we intend to do it to get the expected response. These aspects are valid when there is intentionality; but there are also movements that we do purposeless or with the least intentionality that transmit what we think at the time. Among nonverbal behaviour a teacher uses when talking in class, gestures come first, followed by pitch, look, smile (to the entire class or to certain students), movement, posture, and varied vocal expression (BABAD, 2008). We need to mention the cultural aspect of movement interpretation because all cultures do not decode a movement in the same way (a teacher might fold her arms across his/her chest it is not necessary to indicate a “lack of approachability”, but rather to warm her body in a cool place or because of having no pockets to put her hands) (HARRIGAN, 2008).

Head movements – nodding, shaking, and tilting – hold a particular place in kinesics. Nodding is associated with the feed-back of the listener, indicating he/she listens to the speech (DUNCAN AND FISKE, 1977; MATARAZZO AND WIENS, 1972; ROSENFELD, 1978, IN HARRINGTON, 2008). In evaluation, head movements can confirm the correctness of an answer, which makes students go on. In conflicts, intrusions, and social anxiety, nodding rate decreases.

### **2.3.2. PROXEMICS**

Research in the field focus on the structuring, use, and perception of the space because they reflect the relationships between individuals (no matter if they are members of a larger group or of a dyad) and if these relationships are intentional or random. HALL (1963, IN HARRIGAN (2008) was a pioneer in proxemics. He divided our spatial world into intimate, personal, social, and public space. Given the topic of our paper, the most effective teacher-student relationship is the one that is most important: distance between the partners involved in communication (student-student, teacher-student), frontal body orientation, touch, and gaze. Each of these components support open communication and encourage or discourage indifference messages, the lack of the wish to establish close or cooperation relationships. Another phenomenon influencing didactic communication frequently is “agglomeration” that reflects the physical space between individuals and the space for each individual in a given environment. We know the negative effect of a crowded class on the state of all the members involved in communication that can generate a certain state of discomfort particularly towards intruders (HAYDUK, 1981, IN HARRIGAN (2008).

### **2.3.3. GAZE**

Literature includes eye contact, looking, glancing and visual attention, VON CRANACH (1971) considering gaze as part of a general orientation behaviour. Gaze is a unique component of nonverbal behaviour because it both receives and sends messages. Gaze is, in didactic communication, a main component of the teaching activity because it conveys clear information on attention, interest, motivation, and intention in students; this can generate frustration if the teacher cannot control the class or manage the energy of the class (WEINSTEIN, 2002).

## **3. CONCLUSIONS**

The study of nonverbal behaviour in didactic communication is an element that is almost as important as verbal communication. If we know the components that generate

positive results in students in both learning and behaviour, we can ask ourselves why so much school failure, why so many school dropouts, and why so much frustration on both sides. Teachers who cannot motivate students or capture students' attention should try and apply the information presented in the studies about nonverbal communication.

The field of nonverbal communication is so vast that we could not reach all its elements. We intend to pursue our research focusing on Microteaching within the Teaching Staff Training Department of the Banat's University of Agricultural Sciences and Veterinary Medicine "King Michael I of Romania" from Timisoara, Romania, and on the evaluation of the nonverbal behaviour of the teachers that are most appreciated by our students.

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