



An Insight into Non-verbal Communication for EFL Teachers and Learners

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Abstract

Research suggests that nonverbal communication plays an important role in second/foreign language communicative competence, yet little attention has been given to practical uses that will help English learners incorporate this essential element into their learning process and conversations. To this end, this study aims to assess the use of nonverbal communication among EFL learners to improve strategic competence. AS for data collection, the study has used document analysis to attain the set objective and narrative analysis has been used to analyze qualitative data. Unlike the positivist paradigm, interpretive research does not build a universal theory but theories are grounded and emerge from practical situations

Keyword: Non-verbal Communication (Body Language)

Introduction

Normally, we depend heavily on nonverbal communication in our daily lives. Knowing how and what to say to whom is a cornerstone of communicative competence. And it is important to challenge learners to go beyond the grammaticality of being able to put the subject, verb and object in the correct syntactic order, and achieve what Canale and Swain (1980) called discourse, strategic, and sociolinguistic competencies. These communicative abilities, however, demand that learners go beyond the linguistic contexts and observe the nonverbal signals of their interlocutors. How could the coherence and cohesion necessary for discourse competence be achieved without managing the conversational turn-taking that is often done through the hand gestures that frequently accompany the relinquishing of a turn? Can the mastery of compensatory techniques essential to strategic competence be accomplished without knowing how to incorporate gestures? How could sociolinguistic competence which includes the ability to produce and understand language appropriately, be attained without understanding that an apology is accompanied by an apologetic facial expression, or that words of gratitude are spoken with a smile? The tremendous amount of compensation or communication strategies used by second language interlocutors as they gesture and use facial expressions are used to negotiate their interaction.

Statement of the Problem

Nonverbal communication is one of the most important communicative tools to enhance learners' communicative competence through strategic competence, which is a compensatory activity to a linguistic incompetency one lacks. As cited in Lyle F. Bachman 1997, Canale and Swain describe strategic competence as providing a compensatory function when the linguistic competence of the language users is inadequate: "*strategic competence ...will be made up of verbal and nonverbal communication strategies that may be called into action to compensate for breakdowns in communication due to performance variables or to insufficient competence.*" Research suggests that nonverbal (body language) communication plays an important role in second/foreign language communicative competence, yet little attention has been given to practical uses that will help English learners incorporate this essential element into their learning process and conversations. We depend on about 70% of our waking time in the presence of others, but individuals speak for only 10 to 11 minutes a day, each utterances taking about 2.5 seconds (Birdwhistell as cited by Knapp & Hall,2006). These numbers are testament to the reliance that we depend more on nonverbal communication to express ourselves and to interpret others rather than the verbal one. The nonverbal channel of communication bears an estimated two thirds of the social meaning load, leaving only one third of all meaning carried via the spoken word. Though the significance of body language (nonverbal communication) in EFL classroom is unquestionable, it has been found that it does not get appropriate attention by average Ethiopian students. And this is the point of departure for this study by setting the following objective.

Objective of the Study

This study aims to assess the use of nonverbal communication among EFL learners to improve strategic competence.

Scope of the Study

The study incorporate elements of nonverbal communication: Body languages (Gestures, facial expressions and gazes), extralinguistic elements (and how these elements enhance strategic competence of learners.

Significance of the Study

This study contributes to the enhancement of EFL teachers' and learners' methods and use of body language to improve their strategic competence in EFL classrooms. Moreover this study may help the overall teaching learning process in EFL classrooms so that any communication breakdowns between students and teachers and among students that may arise out of linguistic incompetence may be bridged by the use of body language. And also, curriculum designers and other researchers may use it for further research and input for their activities. In addition, the present study will help teachers to understand the interest or boredom to see the facial expressions of the students and at understanding to inculcate or sustain the level of interest for utmost understanding.

Methodology

The study has used interpretive design because this design gives emphasis to human actions, experiences and values. This approach fits with the aim of the study which is assessing English learners' use of (nonverbal communication) body language. Denzin (2001) an advocate of interpretive interactionism (a form of qualitative research) has said:

Interpretive interactionism attempts to make the meanings that circulate in the world of lived experience accessible to the reader. It endeavors to capture and represent the voices, emotions, and actions of those studied. The focus of interpretive research is on those life experiences that radically alter and shape the meanings persons give to themselves and their experiences.

AS for data collection, the study has used document analysis to attain the set objective and narrative analysis has been used to analyze qualitative data. Unlike the positivist paradigm, interpretive research does not build a universal theory but theories are grounded and emerge from practical situations.

Results and Discussion

Research suggests that nonverbal communication plays an important role in second language communicative competence, yet little attention has been paid on practical teaching techniques that will help English learners incorporate this essential element into their communication activities. The research will explore how EFL teachers incorporate and employ body languages in their classrooms by examining the indispensable role of nonverbal communication in the overall communicative process. It considers the interplay of body language, particularly gestures, facial expression, and gaze behavior among interlocutors. Subsequently, specific activities that can bring the visual and the auditory channels together through video, role play, and interviews are shared with the purpose of stimulating teachers' activities in producing their own classroom activities to raise students' awareness of how to encode and decode the visual as well as auditory cues in communicative exchanges.

With the emphasis of language instruction moving from grammatical accuracy and phonological correctness to making oneself understood, we need to take a closer look at all of the resources at our disposals that enhance mutual intelligibility. Strategic competence is an indispensable component of communicative competence, whereas the body language is an integral element of strategic competence. Communicative competence is the ability to communicate successfully in a wide variety of circumstances. Kinesics, or the way gestures, facial expressions, and gaze behavior are used to communicate messages, is one of those undercapitalized means.

Strategic Competence

Strategic competence is the ability to compensate or to solve communication problems which arise in the form of verbal and non-verbal means. Language by itself is not sufficient to express ideas. What do we do when we don't know a word that one needs? How do we manage a social situation when we are not quite sure about the rules of etiquette which is the customary code of polite behaviour in a society? In both cases, we rely on our strategic competence to help us communicate. Everyone has some degree of strategic competence of his/her language. If we are hungry, but cannot speak the language, we can probably still make our need known through gesture and facial expression because hunger is a universal fact of human life. Language learners who really need to communicate in their adopted language tend to develop a number of strategies for making themselves clear in spite of their incomplete knowledge. It is common to see people fumbling for words to express their thoughts, that time they use some strategic methods to compensate the gap of expression. These methods may be to use some extralinguistic and linguistic features like *what I mean is that, ummm, you know, do you get me...*

Definition of nonverbal communication

Simply stated, nonverbal communication includes “all communication other than language” (Andersen, 1999, p. 2). This definition emphasizes that language is solely a human endeavor and that arbitrary symbols are used to convey meaning.

DeVito and Hecht (1990, p. 4) describe nonverbal communication as “all of the messages other than words that people exchange.” In this definition, messages are seen as symbolic and therefore their use is intentional. For example, if a language learner extends his arm above his head in a stretching motion to relieve himself of a muscle cramp, this behavior was not intended as communication; however, if the same motion is done to signal his desire to answer a question in class, the movement symbolizes his willingness to volunteer, and would thus be considered nonverbal communication. That is to say, not all behavior leads to communication. The second element of this definition involves “other than words” messages, meaning that nonlinguistic codes such as body language, facial expression, prosodic vocal features, time, touch, space, physical appearance, and environment are used to communicate meaning. The verbal and nonverbal messages interact and become integrated into one communicative event (DeVito & Hecht, 1990). For example, when I correct According to Arndt and Janney (1987, p. 92), “the idea that there are clear boundaries between verbal and nonverbal communication and that it is possible to distinguish sharply between linguistic and nonlinguistic features of conversational events is rooted more in our own logical and methodological assumptions than in the psychological realities of face-to-face communication.” They suggest that people create meaning from the entirety of the communicative event, including the verbal, paraverbal and body language, rather than adding them up as isolated signs.

The verbal modality, therefore, is only one means of human expression used in face-to-face conversation at any given moment. Knapp and Hall (2006) discuss several ways that nonverbal messages function in conjunction with the verbal ones. Nonverbal behavior substitutes, complements, accents, regulates, and contradicts the spoken message. Substitution of a nonverbal message occurs when we use a nonverbal cue instead of a verbal one as when a language teacher gives the thumbs up signal to a student for using the correct verb tense.

A nonverbal message complements the spoken word when it completes or supplements it as is the case when the words, “good job” are accompanied by the teacher’s smile in praising students’ group work. Accenting occurs when the speaker stresses a specific word in the message. An emphasis on the word, *small* in the sentence, “Please put yourselves into *small* groups for the next language activity,” indicates to the learners that less than four or five students per group is indicated. Nonverbal messages also regulate conversational flow as is the case with the teacher who nods her head as a student is speaking to encourage more talk, or the learner who is working in a group and who leans forward and inhales, signaling that he would like his turn to speak. Lastly, nonverbal cues contradict spoken messages when the verbal and nonverbal interpretations of the message are at odds with each other, as exemplified by the language learner who says, “I love grammar, Dr. Dereje!” but whose voice makes one believe it is the last thing they would want to be spending their time on.

Body language is a form of non-verbal communication, which consists of gestures, facial expressions, and eye movements or gaze behaviors to communicate or send messages or feelings to an interlocutor within a certain context. Body language does have the following elements

Gestures

There are four types of gestures important for effective communication: illustrators, regulators, emblems, and affect displays (Ekman & Friesen, 1969). Those behaviors that complement or accentuate the verbal message are called illustrators. For most individuals, these are the natural hand and body gestures that accompany speech, such as gesturing, smiling, frowning, or pointing to illustrate a point. These nonverbal signs convey the same meaning as the verbal message, and either complete or supplement it. For an English language learner, these gestures greatly aid in understanding a speaker's message as they supply extra context clues for determining the meaning of an utterance. When asking for directions to a particular location, the speakers will most likely point in the appropriate direction as the verbal message is communicated. For example, Juanita may not know the meaning of "straight down the hall," but close observation of her interlocutor's illustrator gesture would send her in the right direction.

Body language signals that serve to control turn-taking and other procedural aspects of interpersonal communication are called regulators. As turn-taking is one of the fundamental organizations of conversation and interaction patterns, it plays a key role in the process through which participants interpret each others' meanings and intentions. A practical requisite of every conversation is the determination of who speaks when, and this is usually done unconsciously and quite smoothly because of regulators like the termination of a gesture, changes in gaze direction, or the speakers' looking away from the hearer as an utterance ends (Duncan, 1972, 1974). Turn-taking in conversations is guided by transition signals. The signals that end an L1 English speaker's contribution might not be recognized by non-native speakers which may result in unwanted interruptions in communication and confusion among language learners, thus affecting their participation in a conversation.

Emblems are nonverbal behaviors that can be translated into words and that are used intentionally to transmit a message. Because these gestures can substitute words, their meaning is widely understood within a culture. The meaning of these emblems, however, can be quite different in another country. English language learners must learn the meaning of the emblems just as surely as they learn the new vocabulary of spoken English. The sideways movement of the head by an Australian indicating a negative response would need to be relearned by the Indian English language learner who previously believed that head movement meant yes!

Finally, affect displays are another type of body language necessary for language learners to process. These are behaviors that express emotion. Most commonly, these displays are communicated through facial expression, like smiling, laughing or crying. Posture is also a conduit through which emotion can be communicated. The norms for expressing emotion differ among cultures. Russian students studying in the U.S. often complain that their professors smile too much, and professors teaching Russian students sometimes believe that their Russian students do not enjoy their classes. Miscommunication of emotional states can result when affect displays (or lack thereof) are not understood in cross-cultural interactions.

Facial Expression

Facial expressions are also a form of kinesics used to nonverbally transmit messages. According to Knapp and Hall (2006, p. 260), the face is rich in communicative potential. It is the primary site for communication of emotional states, it reflects interpersonal attitudes; it provides nonverbal feedback on the comments of others; and some scholars say it is the primary source of information next to human speech. For these reasons, and because of the face's visibility, we pay a great deal of attention to the messages we receive from the faces of

others. The face is a primary means of managing interaction, complementing a response, and replacing speech. Through facial expression, we can open and close channels of communication. For example, in turn-taking, interlocutors will open their mouths in anticipation of their words, signaling readiness.

Smiles and flashes of the brow are used in greetings, and although the smile is usually perceived as a sign of happiness. It is also associated with signaling attentiveness and involvement in the conversation, similar to the head nod, facilitating and encouraging the interlocutor to continue. The face also complements or qualifies a message. When as a speaker or a listener we want to emphasize, diminish or support the spoken word, a flick of the eyebrow or the lips curling into a smile may temper an otherwise negative message. In terms of replacing speech, the face can function similarly to the emblem gesture where there is a general understanding of what the display means.

The conspiratorial wink of the eye, the wrinkling of the nose in disgust, or the eyebrows' meeting in the middle communicating "what?" are all facial displays that replace a spoken word and will usually be interpreted consistently and correctly (Knapp & Hall, 2006). Although the examples just given may have some cultural variation, Ekman and Friesen (1975) created a list of six emotions that they contend are innate and universal. That is to say, no matter where one travels on the planet, these six emotions will be expressed and interpreted in a consistent way. They include happiness, sadness, fear, anger, disgust, and surprise. Research with blind children has demonstrated that the same facial expressions are used to communicate the same emotions as sighted children, thus supporting the notion that these six basic expressions are not learned, but part of an innate communication system (Eibl-Eibesfeldt, 1972). Initial interest in the communication of emotion through facial expression, its universality and its innateness began with Charles Darwin, who in 1872 published his book, *The Expression of Emotions in Man and Animals*. In it, he made a case for his evolutionary ideas, positing that the ability to communicate nonverbally had followed an evolutionary process similar to that of the brain and body in humankind.

The language learner who intensifies his facial expression, or wants to appear as having more feelings than he really does, is content with his classmate's oral performance but smiles from ear to ear as he wildly applauds in order to really encourage his friend. The neutralizer or the individual who demonstrates feeling when in reality nothing is felt, can be seen in Haile who stands stoically stone-faced in front of his teacher not wanting to reveal his surprised, innermost joy at having received an A, because he wants to give the impression that he had expected it all along. De-intensification of emotion, or giving the appearance of feeling less than what is real, is exemplified by Ruth's half smile. She really wanted to leap for joy at having heard she had just won \$2,000 as the recipient of the Best Female Student Award of the Year. Finally, those individuals who mask their emotions are those who cover a feeling by expressing another. This display rule is accomplished by Zeritu who thought that she would win the award, and is actually quite angry, but instead of her face communicating her discontent, she smiles broadly and congratulates her friend. Although not innate, these display rules are learned early in childhood and are defined differently by individual cultures (Andersen, 1999). Therefore, this important body language element may contribute to teachers' knowledge by giving clues of what a student is feeling about the class situation or the teaching method or any discomfort that impedes the teaching and learning of the language.

Gaze Behavior (Eye Contact)

"Eyes are the window to the soul." This may be one of the reasons why interlocutors focus so much of their attention on the eyes during interaction. Another reason may lie in the highly

expressive nature of the eyes, which send and receive a plethora of message during a face to face conversation. Eye behavior has a higher probability of being noticed than any other bodily movements, so it is a much more prominent interaction signal. Through the use of our eyes, we can control interactions, elicit the attention of others, and show an interest (or lack thereof) in the information being communicated by our interlocutor (Richmond & McCroskey, 2000). Communications researchers make a distinction between eye contact (or mutual gaze), which occurs when both people involved in a conversation look into each others' eyes and gazing, which occurs anytime when an individual looks at another (Andersen, 1990).

Knapp and Hall (2006) define five functions of gazing: Regulating the flow of conversation, monitoring feedback, reflecting cognitive activity, expressing emotion, and communicating the nature of interpersonal relationship. Like all of the other kinesic behavior already discussed, all of the functions of gazing behavior contextualize the verbal message and aid in understanding the spoken word. First of all, the flow of conversation is regulated through visual contact in two ways: it indicates that the interlocutors are open to communication, and it manages turn-taking by sending and receiving signals. Individuals who seek visual contact with another are signaling that they want to engage in communication, and those who obviously avoid eye contact are sending the opposite message (Knapp & Hall, 2006). Most teachers and learners are familiar with the classroom episodes where students who do not want to answer will look everywhere BUT at the teacher, and those who do want to volunteer a response are eagerly trying to catch the teacher's eye.

In terms of turn-taking, listeners look more at their interlocutors than speakers do. One reason for this may be that, by looking away, speakers will improve their concentration on their verbal messages, allowing them to focus on constructing utterances that are more comprehensible. Speakers who do not want to give up their turn considerably reduce eye contact with their listener; whereas, listeners who want the speaker to continue usually seek greater visual connection. When speakers are willing to yield their turns, they usually indicate this by turning their head toward their interactant and increasing eye contact. Listeners requesting a turn will usually move their heads away from the speaker and reduce the visual connection (Richmond & McCroskey, 2000). Miscues in turn-taking among interactants with differing L1 languages and cultures often results in frustration, with one individual thinking that conversational overlap is rude, and the other believing that there is no interest on the part of his companion to participate in the conversation.

Another function of gaze behavior is monitoring feedback. When speakers gaze in the direction of their listeners, they are seeking visual confirmation that the person is actually listening, as well as try to get feedback on what is being said. In many cultures, listeners who do not make eye contact with their interlocutor will be perceived by their conversation partner as not being attentive (Knapp & Hall, 2006). Language learners who are not familiar with the cultural codes of eye behavior in Western countries and divert their gaze for other reasons dictated by their L1 culture (such as showing respect for authority, for example) may find themselves sending the wrong message both in the classroom and outside that they do not want to participate in a conversation.

Eye contact also signals cognitive activity. When one of the interactants looks away during a conversation, it may be due to complex information processing (Andersen, 1999). There is a shift in attention from the external conversation to internal cognition (Knapp & Hall, 2006).

Conjugate Lateral Eye Movements (CLEM) are movements of the eye to the right and left and often accompany cognitive processing. These movements are intensified when individuals must think or reflect, and a question posed to the speaker may cause an involuntary shift (McCroskey & Richmond, 2000).

Expressing emotion is another function of eye behavior. Since individuals have less control over the eyes than other parts of the face, the eyes will more accurately reflect what people are truly feeling (McCroskey & Richmond, 2000).

As the eyes are a primary communicator of emotion and are considered as the most genuine expression of feelings, particular attention must be given to the eye behavior of language learners. Consider the language learner whose foreign language anxiety is impeding progress in language acquisition. Gregersen (2005) proposed that the nonverbal behavior of high anxious and low anxious foreign language learners differed and that those learners suffering from foreign language anxiety maintained less eye contact with the teacher.

How much we look at another person may also be an indicator of how much we like them. Another interpersonal indicator dictated by eye behavior considers that people who like each other tend to engage in longer stretches of eye contact than those who do not (Richmond & McCroskey, 2000). Eye behavior is frequently culture-specific, and therefore what is perceived as appropriate in one culture does not hold true for all of them. For example, eye contact is expected in North American culture and signals trust, self-confidence, respect, and that one is paying attention. In the classroom, teachers expect students to be looking directly at them and maintain their gaze while asking or answering questions. This same behavior is a sign of disrespect in some Asian cultures, and many North American teachers who are unaware of such Asian cultural norms may inadvertently accuse their learners of not paying attention, lacking trustworthiness, or having issues with their self-confidence.

Gesture, facial expression, and gaze behavior all work together with words to create meaning, both in encoding and decoding messages. When activities and interaction in the ESL classroom are devoid of the information that can be derived from kinesic behavior (as evidenced by the increasingly common practice of using audio-taped materials and multimedia software), a reduction in the quality of communication may result (Kellerman, 1992). The following section of this study suggests different techniques that language teachers can use to make the communicative process more authentic by including the visual as well as auditory channels in classroom activities, and also by raising the learners' awareness to the importance of noticing the kinesic behavior of their interlocutors.

Concluding Remarks

Reasons abound for including visually supported spoken messages in the ESL/EFL classroom. As opposed to information communicated through auditory only channels, kinesics behavior can reduce the ambiguity in spoken language, facilitate communication by increasing the redundancy within the message, and reduce the fatigue experienced by listeners who do not have the benefit of using all the sensory channels (Kellerman, 1992). Communicative competence is limited when learners are deprived of all the authentic input, both visual and auditory, that works in tandem to achieve such competence (Pennycook, 1985). Thus, teachers may want to reconsider the use of materials such as audiocassettes and non-visual multi-media that limit the learners' ability to rely on visual sensory input, and to provide opportunities for learners to increase their awareness of the appropriate use of nonverbal communication. The end result would be what Pennycook (1985) referred to as being "bi-kinesic," meaning that the body motions of the language learner would be more closely aligned with the target language, and have less interference from the source language. Essentially, we need to be providing activities where verbal and nonverbal behaviors reinforce each other. Among these are the use of video, drama and role play, and interviews.

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List of abbreviations

EFL	English as a Foreign Language
ESL	English as a Second language
CLEM	Conjugate Lateral Eye Movements
L1	First language
L2	Second Language
MoE	Ministry of Education