

Nonverbal communication in simultaneous and consecutive interpretation

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Abstract: The article give detailed information concerning nonverbal communication in simultaneous and consecutive interpretation.

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Successful communication in the international business environment requires not only an understanding of language but also the nonverbal aspects of communication that are part of any speech community. Nonverbal communication has been referred to as meta-communication, paralinguistics, second-order messages, the silent language, and the hidden dimension of communication, among other terms. As important as language is to the sending and receiving of messages, nonverbal communication is equally important because it helps us interpret the linguistic messages being sent. Nonverbal cues frequently indicate whether verbal messages are serious, threatening, jocular, an so on. In addition, nonverbal communication is responsible in its own right for the majority of messages sent and received as part of the human communication process. In fact, it has been suggested on a number of occasions that only about 30 percent of communication between two people in the same speech community is verbal in nature. In a cross-cultural situation (as is likely in international business), when people are not from the same speech community, they will rely even more heavily on nonverbal cues.

Nonverbal communication functions in several important ways in regulating human interaction. It is an effective way of (1) sending messages about our feelings and emotional states, (2) elaborating on our verbal messages, and (3) governing the timing and turn taking between communicators. Even though some nonverbal cues function in similar ways in many cultures, considerable differences in nonverbal patterns can result in breakdowns in communication in a cross-cultural context.[2] The literature is filled with scenarios of how a misreading of nonverbal cues leads directly to cross-cultural friction. here is the potential hazard of overgeneralization. We frequently hear references made to such geographical areas as the Middle East, Latin America, or sub-Saharan Africa, yet these are hardly appropriate units of analysis for observing patterns of nonverbal communication. In sub-Saharan Africa alone, there are over forty independent nation-states and more than 800 different linguistic

communities that speak mutually unintelligible languages. Yet we cannot count on uniformity even within a single speech community, for even here there are likely to be internal variations in nonverbal communication patterns, depending on such variables as class, education, occupation, and religion. For example, many of Edward Hall's insightful conclusions on Arab nonverbal communication (discussed subsequently) are based on the observations of middle- and upper-class males, largely students and businesspeople. Arab females would not very likely conform to the same patterns of nonverbal communication as the Arab males that Hall describes. Thus, it is advisable to exercise some caution when generalizing even within a single culture or speech community.[1]

Fundamental to the discussion of any type of communication, whether written or oral, is the exhaustive identification of its components from among the various sign-conveying verbal and nonverbal systems that are possible in each situation. Then, in both consecutive and simultaneous interpretation, after considering in what situations participants are in co-presence or visually or acoustically absent from each other, we must establish which of those components are available to the speaker, which are perceived by the listener(s), which by the listener(s) through the interpreter, in what ways the interpreter perceives them from both source speaker and target listener(s), and how he transmits them between the two.

It is obvious that sometimes the sensitive interpreter needs to skillfully switch codes instead of just translating words. Within primary qualities, with extreme drawling and clipping a simple verbal hesitating 'Yees' or a sharp 'Nope' may have to be paraphrased in Spanish as 'Sí, quizá' and 'Claro que no', or 'Nihablar'. Within qualifiers, the interpreter must decide whether the specific voice type through which the speaker says something needs to be rendered verbally along with those words (e.g. the falsetto in a surprised or incredulous 'What?!', or a strongly disdainful muttered negative reply to a proposal). Within differentiators, a half-seriously, half-jokingly laughed statement, a deeply sighed 'Yes', or sneezing by or in front of an Arab Muslim (requiring certain verbal expressions on the part of both sneezer and witnesses, most probably unknown to the non-Muslim speaker).[3]

We know that words, whether arbitrary ('house') or imitative ('gurgling'), lack the semantic capacity to carry the whole weight of a conversation, that is, all the messages encoded in the course of it, because our dictionaries are extremely poor in comparison with the capacity of the human mind for encoding and decoding an infinitely wider gamut of meaning to which at times we refer as ineffable. If that conversation we are trying to translate were to be formed by only stripped words, there would be not just an unthinkable intermittent series of semiotic gaps, but overriding vacuums as well. However, we know full well that there are rarely such vacuums in communication, for those possible gaps are actually intricately and subtly filled with

nonverbal activities, either clearly segmentable (e.g. a tongue click, voluntary or involuntary sigh, an ironic chuckle, an audible inhalation of hesitation, a gesture) or stretching over varying portions of our delivery, from single phonemes to whole sentences to a complete speaker's turn in a conversation (e.g. orotundity, quavery voice, high pitch of irritation, a smile in smiled speech, a crossed-arm posture). An attitudinal blend of, for instance, doubt, amusement and contempt, would require a rather complex, lengthy and even unnatural periphrastic verbal expression; but one of our interlocutors could actually express all three feelings with just one word as simple as 'No', because he could suffuse that word with a series of mainly paralinguistic and kinesic elements (but at times also chemical or dermal) in perfect mutual inherence. [4]

For this reason, we should revise the concept of indescribable, and recognize that the barrier imposed by the purely lexical limitation of our lexicon can be overcome by means of nonverbal elements of whatever type when they are added to those words. What makes language, paralinguistics and kinesics a functionally cohesive structure is undoubtedly their common kinetic (not yet 'kinesic') generator, and then their combined semanticity and lexicality and their capacity to operate simultaneously, alternate with or substitute for each other as needed in the interactive situation; a situation which in interpretation implies a constant challenge for the interpreter.

References

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