

Gestures as an Essential Component of Nonverbal Communication

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Abstract

This article is devoted to determining the role of gestures in nonverbal communication. The functions of gestures were clarified and their various classifications were considered. In addition, examples were given to show the main differences between the types of gestures.

Keywords: gestures, nonverbal communication, classification, communicative, modal, emphasizing, deictic, iconic, pantomimic, emblems, metaphorical.

Interest in the study of gestures has appeared since ancient times, during the period of antiquity. At that time, a theory was put forward about the initial emergence of sign language in an attempt to determine the origin of language. However, the first scientific work devoted to the systematic study of body movements belongs to a pastor from Zurich, John Casper Lavater, "Essay on Physiognomy" (1792). [8,175] In this work, he compared and described the relationship between facial expressions and body configurations with types of personality characteristics. Another scientist who has found a connection between the expression of emotions and various parts of the body is Charles Bell, a neurophysiologist and surgeon. Using functional analysis of the nervous system, Bell believed that specific groups of muscles and nerves were responsible for the emotions they expressed. [8, 175] Therefore, it can be noted that gestures can be used to convey emotions, that means they carry a certain meaning like words.

A gesture is a spontaneous or intentional movement of a person, usually with the hand or head, that is used to convey information, express emotion, emphasize speech, and communicate with others. Gestures can be used to support spoken language, as a means of communication for deaf or deaf-mute people, and can be associated with cultural and social norms. According to Gargun, gestures are various movements of the human body (arms and hands) used during communication. Kreidlin, considering the gesture, emphasizes that it comes from the Latin word *gestus*, that is a derivative of the word *gerere*, which means to act in the broad sense of the word, that is, "to do, wear, bear responsibility, control, perform, etc." [6, 46] Based on the data from the first English monuments, the word *gesture* meant "the way of carrying the body, the way a person stands or walks." The primary distinction between gestures and other nonverbal behaviors like eye contact, body posture, or facial expressions lies in the fact that gestures can be considered quite "verbal." To begin with, gestures are only made while speaking. Additionally, the message (or "meaning") conveyed by gestures typically directly corresponds to the subject of the ongoing speech. It's as if the voice and the hand movements are narrating the same tale through different means.

However, gestures play an important role in nonverbal communication, enriching our interactions and improving our understanding of the other person. Nonverbal communication, including gestures, facial expressions, body posture, and vocal intonation, is an important

element of interpersonal communication. According to the studies mentioned by Khamitseva, during the first meeting, the voice conveys 38% of the information, words only 7%, and body movements as much as 55%. [9,1]

Kenenbaev notes that the concept of “gestures”, generally accepted in everyday speech, in scientific circles is divided into three main semiotic classes. [5,83] The first includes emblematic gestures that can be used independently of spoken language and convey a specific meaning; the second is illustrative gestures, whose interpretation depends on the verbal context; the last ones are regulatory gestures that control the communicative process, establishing, maintaining or completing communication.

Smirnova offers the following classification of gestures: [9,2-3]

I. The category of communicative gestures includes gestures that have their own meaning in communication and can be understood without oral speech. Examples of such gestures include: wagging the index finger at a distance (threat gesture), nodding the head (affirmative gesture), calling the child with the index finger (calling gesture), shaking a fist at a distance (threat gesture), and calling at a distance with a hand motion to yourself (call gesture).

II. Modal gestures express evaluation and attitude towards objects, people and the environment. Examples of such gestures include: shrugging the shoulders (gesture of ignorance), extending the right thumb up with the other fingers bent (gesture of approval), turning the head from side to side (gesture of ignorance), patting the shoulder (gesture of approval), and waving the hand from side to side with the back to the chest (gesture of ignorance).

III. Emphasizing gestures accompany oral speech and, outside the context of speech, lose their meaning. An example of such a gesture includes: showing the location of something by pointing at it with a hand or an outstretched finger.

There is another classification of gestures given by McNeil, which consists of the following categories: [4, 2-3]

- Deictic gestures – refer to locations and directions. These are mainly pointing gestures, but can also be other body movements. Deictic gestures are divided into 2 types - abstract and concrete. Concrete deictic gestures highlight an object or directions in the physical world. Abstract deictic gestures create or refer to discourse markers in the gestural space in front of the subject of communication. So, for example, when during a conversation, saying the phrase “On the one hand...” a person automatically puts his hand out to the right, and continuing the phrase “on the other hand...” the same hand moves to the left.
- Iconic gestures are similar in form to referents in speech. They are like imaginary sculptures formed by the hands of the speaker. For example, a speaker identifying a road sign might draw a large square in the air.
- Pantomimic gestures allow the speaker to imitate with his body the person he is referring to in speech. For example, when talking about a person throwing a ball, the speaker may also imitate the throwing.
- Emblems (lexicalized gestures) that have a specific meaning within a linguistic community. An example would be the gesture of a finger placed on the lips, which means “be quieter.”
- Beats are rhythmic movements of the hand up and down that do not express anything. McNeill proposes a theory that beats have a meta-narrative function, such as emphasizing words in speech.
- Metaphorical gestures - these are similar to iconic gestures, but they display abstract objects instead of real ones.

In addition, gestures allow you to fully convey meaning and personal attitude rather than conveying information. [7, 2] So, for example, if a child behaves badly, the mother can send the child such a sign (a threatening index finger), by which he will immediately understand her

attitude, without any word. Another most obvious function of gestures is to complement oral communication. They can be used to highlight, supplement, clarify or emphasize information conveyed orally. For example, the “lightning” hand gesture can complement the words “very quickly,” making the transmitted information more visual and memorable. Gestures can indicate the mental state of a communication partner, his attitude towards his interlocutors, his desires and intentions. With the help of gestures, you can emphasize or highlight important points in a conversation, express an opinion, or demonstrate it. Thus, gestures help convey information verbally more effectively and accurately.

The role of gestures in communication is also to express emotions and enhance the emotional component of a statement. Our facial expressions and hand gestures can significantly enhance the transmission of emotions, making our interactions with the interlocutor more heartfelt and empathetic. For example, many gestures, such as waving or nodding, can convey agreement or denial, creating a clearer understanding of moods and emotions.

Another important role of gestures is establishing contact with the interlocutor and improving the perception of information. Gestures can be used to attract, establish a connection with the audience, and maintain the attention of the interlocutor during the communication process. They can also help transition from one topic to another and organize the flow of information.

Thus, Khomyakova defines the following main functions of gestures in communication: [10]

- A. Regulation and control of oral communication between speaker and listener (for example, illustrative gestures accompanying greetings, orders, threats and other speech acts).
- B. Displaying current oral actions in the communication process. These are performative gestures such as nonverbal requests, questioning gestures, etc.
- C. Transferring certain semantic information to the addressee, for example, the gesture of placing a finger to the lips. Russian general communicative gestures include actions such as turning away, winking, tapping the forehead, patting the stomach, etc.
- D. Displaying the internal psychological state of the gesturing person or his attitude towards his communication partner. These gestures are based on emotions rather than physiological manifestations. Examples of Russian symptomatic gestures include covering the mouth with one's hand (out of surprise), biting one's lips, scratching one's head, drumming one's fingers on the table, enlarging one's eyes, and stomping one's foot.
- E. Deictic function: explaining the size of an object or clarifying the location of a person or object.
- F. Gestural commentary on a person's physical actions (for example, gestural recreation of someone's gait or imitation of table behavior).
- G. Rhetorical function. Rhetorical gestures include some gestures that necessarily accompany oral speech, that is, illustrators. They are designed to decorate and emphasize certain aspects of the speech that they accompany, and not just to clarify the semantic content of oral messages or their parts.

Comparing gesture functions with the functions performed by non-verbal means of communication, namely communicative, informative, expressive and pragmatic, we can definitely say that gestures are an important part of communication. They can either complement a speech utterance or completely replace it. Consequently, gestures play an important role in communication, improving the quality of interaction and helping to convey information more clearly, emotionally and accurately. Understanding and knowing how to correctly use gestures in combination with spoken language promotes effective communication and improves the quality of our interpersonal relationships.

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