ON NON-VERBAL COMMUNICATION

The aim of the present paper is to bring together and to analyze different opinions and theories on non-verbal communication.

In communication there is always more than words that pass between people. There are also cues that indicate to the persons who communicate, how the spoken words are to be interpreted. John C. Condon calls these communications about communication metacommunication cues. (Condon 1974, p. 39) He thinks that these may be vocal inflections or non-verbal indicators, such as gestures and expressions (e.g. pounding the table or frowning). Even clothing and the distance between speakers may provide clues for interpreting the message correctly and thus may also be classified as metacommunication.

These cues may reinforce the meaning of the words, may sometimes distract from the words spoken, or may even contradict what the words seem to mean. When the cues are different from the words, a listener has difficulty in accepting the spoken message.

Virginia Satir defines metacommunication as a message about a message (Satir 1974, p.14).

According to Wilbur Schramm, in any kind of communication we rarely send out messages in a single channel. When we speak, the sound waves from our voice are the primary message. But there are also other kinds of information: the expression of our face, our gestures, the relation of a given message to past messages. Even the primary message conveys information on several levels. In Wilbur Schramm’s opinion, it gives us words to decode it and emphasizes certain words above others. It presents the words in a pattern of intonation and timing which contribute
to the total meaning. The quality of our voice (deep, high, shrill, rasping, rich, thin, loud, soft) itself carries information about us and what we are saying (Schramm 1974, p.12).

There are many forms of communication, that is, many ways to send messages. The two most frequent forms are verbal communication (words) and non-verbal communication (actions). These forms of communication occur when we communicate with ourselves (intrapersonal), with another person (interpersonal), in small groups, or to large audience (public or mass communication). For these different forms of communication, the process of sending and receiving messages is similar, but functions that communication serves will vary according to the specific situation. Several general categories of communication functions include transmitting information, persuasion (attitude change), and entertainment.

Communication is a complex business. The receiver assesses all the different ways in which the sender is sending messages, at the same time being aware of his own receiving system, that is, his own interpretation system:

a. when A talks, B assesses the verbal meaning of A’s message,

b. he also listens to the tone of voice in which A speaks,

c. he also watches what A does; he notes the “body language” and facial expressions which accompany A’s message,

d. he also assesses what A is saying within a social context. The context can include the relation of the message with B and others in the past. It can also include B’s expectations about what the requirements of the situation are,
e. in other words, the receiver (B) is busy assessing both the verbal and non-verbal content of A’s message so that he can come to some judgement about what A meant by his communication.

Language can be used to communicate almost about everything. In this sense, the non-verbal behavior is very limited in range. In Albert Mehrabian’s opinion, it customarily reinforces or contradicts the feelings that are communicated verbally. It adds a new dimension to a verbal message, like when a salesman describes his product to a client and simultaneously conveys, non-verbally, the impression that he likes the client (Mehrabian 1974, p.88).

A great many forms of non-verbal behavior can communicate feelings: touching, facial expression, tone of voice, spatial distance from the addressee, relaxation of posture, rate of speech, number of errors in speech. Some of these are generally recognized as informative. Untrained adults and children easily infer that they are liked or disliked from certain facial expression, from whether (and how) someone touches them, and from a speaker’s tone of voice. Onother kind of behavior, such as posture, has a more subtle effect. A listener may sense how someone feels about him from the way the person sits while talking to him, but he may have trouble identifying precisely what his impression comes from. Correct intuitive judgments of the feelings or attitudes of others are especially difficult when different degrees of feeling, or contradictory kinds of feeling, are expressed simultaneously through different forms of behavior. As Mehrabian points out (1974, p.88), there is a distinction between verbal and vocal information (vocal information being what is lost when speech is written down – intonation, tone, stress, length and frequency of pauses, and so on), and the two kinds of information do not always communicate the same feeling. This distinction, which has been recognized for some time, has shed new light on certain types of
communication. Sarcasm, for example, can be defined as a message in which the information transmitted vocally contradicts the information transmitted verbally. Usually the verbal information is positive and the vocal is negative, as in “Isn’t science grand”. Through the use of an electronic filter, it is possible to measure the degree of liking communicated vocally. What the filter does is eliminate the higher frequencies of recorded speech, so that words are unintelligible but most vocal qualities remain. (For women’s speech, frequencies higher than about 200 cycles per second are eliminated; for men, frequencies over about 100 cycles per second). When people are asked to judge the degree of liking conveyed by the filtered speech, they perform the task rather easily and with a significant amount of agreement.

In Mehrabian’s opinion, this method allows us to find out, in a given message, just how inconsistent the information communicated in words and the information communicated vocally really are. He describes a case when one group is asked to judge the amount of liking conveyed by a transcription of what was said, the verbal part of the message, a second group judges the vocal component, and a third group judges the impact of the complete recorded message. In one study of this sort it is concluded that, when the verbal and vocal components of a message agree (both positive or both negative), the message as a whole is judged a little more positive or a little more negative than either component by itself. But when vocal information contradicts verbal, vocal wins out. If someone is called “honey” in a nasty tone of voice, he is likely to feel disliked; it is also possible to say “I hate you” in a way that conveys exactly the opposite feeling.

Besides the verbal and vocal characteristics of speech, there are other, more subtle, signals of meaning in a spoken message. For example, everyone makes mistakes when he talks – unnecessary repetitions,
stuttering, the omission of parts of words, incomplete sentences, "ums" and "ahs". In a number of studies of speech errors, George Mahl of Yale University (Mehrabian 1974, p. 89) has found that errors become more frequent as the speaker's discomfort or anxiety increases. Timing is also highly informative. How long does a speaker allow silent periods to last, and how long does he wait before he answers his partner? How long do his utterances tend to be? How often does he interrupt his partner, or wait an inappropriately long time before speaking? Joseph Matarazzo and his colleagues at the University of Oregon have found that each of these speech habits is stable from person to person, and each tells something about the speaker's personality and about his feelings toward and status in relation to his partner (Mehrabian 1974, p.89).

Mehrabian writes that utterance duration, for example, is a very stable quality in a person's speech, about 30 seconds long on the average. But when someone talks to a partner whose status is higher than his own, the more the high - status person nods his head, the longer the speaker's utterance becomes. If the high - status person changes his own customary speech pattern toward longer or shorter utterances, the lower-status person will change his own speech in the same direction. If the high-status person often interrupts the speaker or creates long silences, the speaker is likely to become quite uncomfortable.

Immediacy or directness is, according to the author, another good source of information about feelings. We use more distant forms of communication when the act of communicating is undesirable or uncomfortable. For example, some people would rather transmit discontent with an employee's work through a third party than do it themselves, and some find it easier to communicate negative feelings in writing than by telephone or face to face.
Distance can show a negative attitude toward the message itself, as well as toward the act of delivering it. Certain forms of speech are more distant than others, and they show fewer positive feelings for the subject referred to. A speaker might say “Those people need help” which is more distant than “These people need help”, which is in turn even more distant than “These people need our help”. Or he might say “Sam and I have been having dinner”, which has less immediacy than “Sam and I are having dinner” (1974, p.90).

Facial expression, touching, gestures, self-manipulation (such as scratching), changes in body position, and head movements – all these express a person’s positive and negative attitudes, both at the moment and in general, and many reflect status relationships as well. Movements of the limbs and head, for example, not only indicate one’s attitude toward a specific set of circumstances but relate to how dominant, and how anxious, one generally tends to be in social situations. Gross changes in body position, such as shifting in the chair, may show negative feelings toward the person one is talking to. They may also be cues: “It’s your turn to talk”, or “I’m about to get out of here, so finish what you’re saying”.

According to Mehrabian (1974, p.90) posture is used to indicate both liking and status. The more a person leans toward his addressee, the more positively he feels about him. Relaxation of posture is a good indicator of both attitude and status, and one that we have been able to measure quite precisely. Three categories have been established for relaxation in a seated position: least relaxation is indicated by muscular tension in the hands and rigidity of posture, moderate relaxation is indicated by a forward lean of about 20 degrees and a sideways lean of less than 10 degrees, a curved back, and for women, an open arm
position; and extreme relaxation is indicated by a reclining angle greater than 20 degrees and a sideways lean greater than 10 degrees.

Mehrabian's conclusions suggest that a speaker relaxes either very little or a great deal when he dislikes the person he is talking to, and to a moderate degree when he likes his companion. It seems that extreme tension occurs with threatening addressees, and extreme relaxation with non-threatening, disliked addressees. In particular, men tend to become tense when talking to other men whom they dislike, on the other hand, women talking to men or women and men talking to women show dislike through extreme relaxation. As for status people relax most with a low-status addressee, second-most with a peer, and least with someone of higher status than their own. Body orientation also shows status: in both sexes, it is least direct toward women with low status and most direct toward disliked men of high status. In part, body orientation seems to be determined by whether one regards one's partner as threatening.

The more we like a person, the more time we are likely to spend looking into his eyes as we talk to him. Standing close to the partner and facing him directly (which makes eye contact easier) also indicate positive feelings. And we are likely to stand or sit closer to our peers than we do to addressees whose status is either lower or higher than ours.

What Mehrabian has said so far has been based on research performed, for the most part, with college students from the middle and upper-middle classes. An interesting question about communication, however, concerns young children from lower socioeconomic levels: are these children, as some have suggested, more responsive to implicit channels of communication than middle- and upper-class children are?

Morton Wiener and his colleagues from Clark University have examined a group of middle- and lower-class children playing learning games, in which the reward for learning was praise. The child's
responsiveness to the verbal and vocal parts of the praise-reward was measured by how much he learned. Praise came in two forms: the objective words “right” and “correct”, and the more affective or evaluative words, “good” and “fine”. All four words were spoken sometimes in a positive tone of voice and sometimes neutrally.

Positive intonation proved to have a dramatic effect on the learning rate of the lower-class group. They learned much faster when the vocal part of the message was positive than when it was neutral. Positive intonation affected the middle-class group as well.

The fact that the children of lower socioeconomic groups are more responsive to facial expression, posture and touch, as well as to vocal communication, could have had interesting applications to elementary education. For example, teachers could be explicitly trained to be aware of, and to use, the forms of praise (non-verbal or verbal) that would be likely to have the greatest effect on their particular students (Mehrabian 1974, p.91).

The one thing the non-verbal communication does express very efficiently is emotion. All of us communicate non-verbally. Most of the time we’re not aware that we are doing it. We gesture with eyebrows or a hand, meet someone else’s eyes and look away, shift positions in a chair. When we respond to non-verbal cues from others, we sometimes recognize those cues consciously but more often we react to them on an intuitive level.

Researchers have discovered in recent years that there is a system of body gestures almost as consistent and comprehensible as language, and so a flourishing new field for research has opened up. The general assumption is that all body movements have meaning within their specific context.
Every culture has its own body language, and children absorb its nuances along with spoken language. A Frenchman talks and moves in French. An American handles his body in a distinctively American way. Some cultural differences are easy to spot. Flora Davis (Davis 1974, p.93) writes that most Americans, observing an Englishman, would recognize that the way he crosses his legs is nothing like the way a male American does it. But it takes an expert to pick out a native of Wisconsin just by the way he uses his eyebrows during conversation. Such regional idioms can sometimes be pinpointed. It's also true that men and women use the same body language in distinctively masculine and feminine ways. The ethnic background, the social class, and your own personal style all influence our body language.

As it is mentioned in Davis's article (1974, p.94) the person who is truly bilingual is also bilingual in body language. New York's famous mayor Fiorello La Guardia politicked in English, Italian and Yiddish. When films of his speeches are run through without sound, it's not too difficult to identify from gestures the language he is speaking. One of the reasons dubbed films often seem flat and unreal is that the gestures don't match the language. Usually, the non-verbal communication acts to qualify the verbal. Casual conversation is normally quite laconic, its meaning conveyed by a few words blended in a kind of madrigal with other elements. What these non-verbal elements express very often is the emotional side of the message.

In this connection Flora Davis (1974, p. 94) considers the following case: "I don't know how I know it, but I'm sure she doesn't like me," one woman complained about another. When a person feels liked or disliked, very often it's a case of "not what she said but the way she said it".

The importance of the voice can be seen when we consider that even the words "I hate you" can be made to sound seductive. Experiments
have been made with tape-recorded voices with the sound filtered the high register so that words are low and blurred but the tone of voice comes through.

It isn't just feelings that are expressed nonverbally. One of the surprises is that gestures constitute almost a parallel language. According to Flora Davis (1974, p.94), Americans are apt to end a statement with a droop of the head or hand, a tilt of the chin or widening of the eyes. With a future-tense verb they often gesture with a forward movement, for the past tense with backward one.

Flora Davis points out that experts in kinesics - the study of communication through body movement - are not prepared to spell out a precise vocabulary of gestures and probably never will be. They will not say, for example, that when an American rubs his nose it always means he is disagreeing with someone or rejecting something. That's one possible interpretation, but there are others. To take another example: when a student in conversation with a professor holds the older man's eyes a little longer than is usual, it can be a sign of respect and affection, it can be a subtle challenge to the professor's authority or it can be something else entirely. The kinesicist, recording the action with a camera and/or an ingenious shorthand system, looks for patterns in the context, not for single meaningful gestures (Davis 1974, p.94).

The concept of meaning is tricky, since most gestures are not intended to mean anything. The student probably is not trying to tell the professor with his eyes that he respects, or doesn't respect him. He is simply using the eye movement that fits the context, as he might casually use a particular word within a sentence.

Flora Davis writes that, kinesics is a young science, about seventeen years old and very much the brainchild of one man, Ray Birdwhistell. Already it offers a regular smorgasbord of observations.
The author states that eyebrows have a repertoire of about twenty-three possible positions: men use their eyebrows more than women do; and so forth.

One of the most potent elements in body language is, in Davis's opinion, eye behavior. We shift our eyes, meet another person's gaze, or fail to meet it - and produce an effect out of all proportion to the trifling muscular effort we've made.

In this connection she considers the following examples. When two Americans look searchingly into each other's eyes, emotions are heightened and the relationship tipped toward greater intimacy. However, Americans are careful about how and when they meet another's eyes. In a normal conversation, each eye contact lasts only about a second before one or both individuals look away.

Because the longer meeting of the eyes is rare, it is weighted with significance when it happens and can generate a special kind of human-to-human awareness. A girl who has taken part in civil rights demonstrations reported that she was advised, if a policeman confronted her, to look straight into his eyes "Make him see you as another human being and he's more likely to treat you as one," she was told.

Most of the time the American interprets a lingering look as a sign of sexual attraction and scrupulously avoids this minor intimacy, except in appropriate circumstances. By simply using his eyes, a man can make a woman aware of him sexually, comfortably or uncomfortably.

Much of eye behavior is so subtle that we react to it only on the intuitive level. Davis finally suggests the following: "The next time you have a conversation with someone who makes you feel liked, notice what he does with his eyes. Chances are he looks at you more often than is usual with glances a little longer than the normal". Her conclusion is that we interpret this as a sign - a polite one - that he is interested in you as a
person rather than just in the topic of conversation. Probably you also can feel that he is both self-confident and sincere (Davis 1974, p.96).

Flora Davis then writes that all this has been demonstrated in elaborate experiments when its participants talked in the psychologist’s laboratory, innocent of the fact that their eye behavior was being observed from behind a one-way vision screen. In one fairly typical experiment, the participants of the communication process were indicated to cheat while performing a task, then they were interviewed and observed. It was found out that those who had cheated met the interviewer’s eyes less often than was normal, an indication that “shifty eyes” – this is the phrase borrowed by Flora Davis from the mystery writers’ (Davis 1974, p.96) can actually be a tip-off to an attempt to deceive or to feelings of guilt.

In the Far East it is impolite to look at the other person during the conversation, while in England the polite listener fixes the speaker with an attentive stare and blinks his eyes occasionally as a sign of interest. That eye-blink says nothing to Americans, who expect the listener to nod or to murmur something such as “mnhmn”.

Flora Davis (Davis 1974, p.96) suggests to examine a typical American conversation.

Joan and Sandra meet on the sidewalk. Preliminary greetings over, Joan begins the conversation. She starts by looking right away from Sandra. As she hits her conversational stride, she glances back at her friend at the end of a phrase or a sentence. She does not look at her during pauses or when she hesitates but only at natural breaks in the flow of her talk. At the end of what she wants to say, she gives Sandra a longer glance. In Davis’s opinion, these experiments indicate that if she fails to do this, Sandra, not recognizing that it is her turn to talk, will say nothing at all.

When Sandra takes up the conversation, Joan, sends her longer glances, than she did when she herself had the floor. When their eyes meet, Joan usually makes a certain sign indicating that she is listening.
Davis then concludes that it's not hard to see the logic behind this eye behavior. Joan looks away at the beginning of her speech and during hesitations to avoid being distracted while she organizes her thoughts. She sometimes glances at Sandra for feedback, that is to make sure she is listening, to see how she is reacting or for permission to go on talking. And while Sandra is doing the talking, Joan often glances at her to show her politeness. For Americans, thus, eye behavior is a kind of conversational signal helping, to control how talking time is shared.

It can be concluded that people use their eyes differently and spend different amounts of time looking at others.

A man's eye movements and the rest of his body language are more apt to provide a clue to his origins than to his unexpressed thoughts. There is no doubt, though, that there are times when what a person says with his body gives the lie to what he is saying with his tongue.

It is known that people who can control their faces are often unaware of what their hands, legs and feet may be doing, or else they just can't prevent signs of tension and anxiety from leaking out.

Anxiety is one emotion feet and legs may reveal. Rage is another feeling: while arguing feet often tense up. Fear sometimes produces barely perceptible running motions—a kind of nervous leg-jiggle. Besides there are the subtle, provocative leg gestures that women use, consciously and unconsciously.

Normally people sit too close to each other so that to observe the lower body easily. People who have to sit at a distance from others, without a desk or table to shield them, usually feel uncomfortable and vulnerable.

Sometimes a person signals his inner emotions by his posture—sitting, for example, in a very tense way. It is rather interesting to observe postural shifts. They sometimes parallel spoken language. The individual shifts his head and eyes during conversation rather often, usually just as he finishes making a point, he makes a major shift of his whole body to coincide with a change in a point of view—from that of listener to
speaker, for example. While children learn spoken and body language-proper postures, eye behaviors, etc., they also learn a subtler thing: how to react to space around them.

Anthropologist Edward Hall (Davis 1974, p.99) was one of the first to comment on man's feelings about space. Hall points out that North American demands more personal space for himself than do people from many other countries. According to the researcher, for two unacquainted adult male North Americans the comfortable distance to stand for conversation is about two feet apart. The South American likes to stand much closer, which creates problems when the two meet face to face. For as the South American moves in to what is to him a proper talking distance, the North American feels he's being pushy, and as the North American backs off to create the size gap that seems right to him, the South American thinks he's being stand-offish.

To sum up, it should be stressed that the verbal communication is only a part of communication between human beings which would be dull if it were all done with words.

Being an important part of human communication, the non-verbal communication, its various types need to be investigated thoroughly.

**Literature**


Mehrabian A. Communication Without Words/ Psychology Today – September 1968.
