

The Significance of Body Language in Foreign Language Learning and Teaching

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Abstract: This study aims to evaluate the significance of nonverbal communication in the learning and teaching of foreign languages. The research provides broad information regarding non-verbal communication and examines its history. The specifics of body language, gestures, kinesics, proxemics, haptics, oculosics, and postures have been studied in order to gain a better understanding of nonverbal communication. In addition, the advantages of employing nonverbal communication in language education and instruction have been discussed. Finally, research has been conducted on the role of teachers' body language in the teaching and learning of foreign languages. This paper empirically investigates the significance of nonverbal communication in a foreign language and the function of teachers in this regard.

Keywords: Body Language, Foreign Language Teaching, Gestures, Nonverbal Communication

1. Introduction

Teachers of languages work to provide their students with the linguistic tools necessary for effective verbal and written communication. Additionally, verbal communication is essential to every element of life, and teachers must understand body language in order to communicate effectively with children (Abdulrahman Abubakr et al., 2022; Yildiz, 2016). Not only does body language play a significant role in the education of kids, but also in the development of their personalities, as we can all attest. Moreover, teachers have the responsibility of modeling good behavior and instilling moral principles in their students (Tosun & Yildiz, 2015). This is because pupils in early education imitate their teachers' behaviors and actions. Therefore, teachers must have a solid understanding of body language teaching and work to better themselves in this area (Tai, 2014).

In teaching a foreign language, body language is crucial for instructors. Without body language, it is practically impossible to teach a foreign language. In foreign language classes, students frequently mimic

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the teacher's hand and facial motions. When they miss a piece of information verbally, they use body language to maintain continuity and fill in the gap. Nonverbal communication includes how teachers use their hands, move their eyes, and shape their mouths while pronouncing any word when teaching a language (Hood, 2011).

Education is a process of communication. In this process, body language plays a significant role, and its significance is growing daily. Body language is an integral component of teachers and an excellent technique for transferring lessons to students. Therefore, teachers should study the body language cues of their students and strive to improve in this area. Teachers who effectively use and comprehend body language have a more productive interaction with their students (Fast, 2002). As the saying goes, "actions speak louder than words," and vice versa. Instead of long lectures or sermons, students can be taught moral and ethical concepts through shown attitudes (Yildiz & Dayan, 2022).

Teachers, who are tasked with ensuring the vitality of education, must employ effective body language. In nonverbal communication, the teacher and the student communicate through the use of their various body parts. Teachers must prioritize both verbal and nonverbal communication in order for education to be ended successfully. Therefore, effective verbal communication is crucial for both experienced teachers and novice instructors. When presenting complex concepts in concrete terms, expressing emotions, or stressing the significance of any subject, body language plays a crucial role. Teachers who wish to develop a successful educational relationship with their pupils must, in short, master body language (Çalışkan & Yeşil, 2005).

2. The History of Body Language

Communication is a notion that establishes a link between individuals and the conveyance of a variety of emotions. All individuals communicate with other living things in their environment. This communication can occur sometimes through gestures, sometimes through words, and sometimes through images. Examining the evolution of humans from infancy reveals that non-verbal communication occurs in the early stages of life. A 1-year-old infant's facial expressions indicate that he or she is melancholy. According to Çalışkan and Yeşil (2005), people utilize body language to communicate their emotions or thoughts to the other party.

Our general understanding of nonverbal communication spans over thirty years. Anthropologists in the fields of psychology, linguistics, and sociology have persistently investigated how body language functions and what it signifies. Although it is impossible to precisely describe the meanings of all indications, basic notions regarding body language have been advanced today (Boyes, 2005).

Historically, the Romans and ancient Greeks were the first to study body language and the link between words and gestures. Hippocrates and Aristotle interpreted the disparities between people's speech and personalities differently. The Romans argued that words alone are not what makes people speak. In addition, they said that their body mimics accompanied speech with words. The ancient Roman philosopher Cicero believed that for communication to occur, the body, words, gestures, and facial expressions must all be integrated. The first scholarly work on this topic was published in 1644 by John Bulwer with the publication of *The Natural History of the Hand*. He investigated over a hundred

distinct hand gestures in his book. The concept of expressing emotions through facial and hand expressions became popular among pantomime teachers and actors in the 19th century. Charles Darwin also authored *The Expression of Emotions in Man and Animals* in the same century (1872). Darwin investigated the similarities shared by humans and monkeys. He demonstrated that humans and apes use facial expressions to communicate their emotions. Darwin's thesis is that both apes and humans use noises and non-verbal signs to impress the opposing sex while expressing their desire to mate. *The Language of Gestures* was published by Wilhelm Wundt in 1921. In his studies, he focused mostly on the relationship between expressions and mimics. The basic thesis of his book is that facial expressions are a reflection of people's inner lives (Wundt, 2010).

Today, body language is a prominent topic among educators, and numerous studies and papers have been conducted on the subject.

3. Definition of Body Language

Communication is an integral component of being human. People express their thoughts, ideas, abilities, knowledge, and emotions in a variety of ways. In light of the adage, "One language is one person, two languages are two individuals," schools with the goal of world peace have tried to increase the means of communication between nations and cultures by teaching more languages to pupils (Dayan & Yildiz, 2022). Communication, a fundamental aspect of human interaction, is split into verbal and nonverbal forms (Bunglowala & Bunglowala, 2015). Moreover, communication is the exchange of ideas and opinions between two parties. For communication to occur, a sender and a receiver are required (Richards & Schmidt, 2010).

Body language consists of communicating with various body parts. Every day "verbal language" is a form of communication that is typically conducted via the use of words. In contrast, body language is a form of "non-verbal" communication in which no words are used. In body language, movements are typically communicated through the head, eyes, hands, and feet (Cooper et al., 2011). Body language is more extensive than verbal language and is easily understood by the majority of individuals. For example, pressing one's closed lips with the index finger pointing upward signifies silence in all cultures. There are other forms of Body Language, such as clearing the throat, voice tone, and touching the nose or ears. In addition to these examples, there are plenty of others, including body language, eye contact, the way we comb our hair, the way we cross our arms, the way we dress, the perfume we use, and the way we dress.

In daily life, body language is not a mode of communication exclusive to certain groups. It has a general function and application. It has occurred in life and is a nearly crucial component of communication. It is beneficial in developing healthier communication for families, a more engaging lesson for instructors, better friendships for students, and influencing their staff for bosses, among other applications. Body language influences numerous aspects of life. In the same way that most people acquire a language unknowingly from birth onward, they also acquire body language in the same manner. Man develops both his body language and his spoken language on a daily basis, arbitrarily and unaffected by any norm. In the later phases of their lives, kids learn via their parents, books, teachers, or friends how to correctly apply the laws of spoken language.

Various research has explored five subcategories of body language (Hişmanoglu & Hişmanoglu, 2008; Lewis, 2012).

Table 1: The body language and its components

Body language
1. Gestures
2. Postures
3. Proxemics
4. Haptics
5. Oculesics

3.1 Gestures

Different meanings can be conveyed by gestures, head-and-hand movements, and movements involving other body parts. These expressions might have distinct meanings in various cultures. For this reason, educators who teach in other cultures must learn the public's body language communication. This language proficiency will allow them to effectively explain their teachings and communicate with pupils more effectively (Pease & Pease, 2008).

3.2 Postures

Posture is a communication concept relating to the position of people's bodies. Examples include how a person sits, uses their hands, and how they stand or sit. In Turkey, for instance, students are expected to stand and not place their hands in their pockets or chew gum during class. These cultural ideals may vary from nation to nation (Sundaram & Webster, 2000).

3.3 Proxemics

Proxemics are key to body language and are crucial for developing relationships between students and teachers. In particular, proxemics is the distance between individuals during dialogues. Robert Sommer, an American psychologist, originated the concept of personal space (1960). Robert said that his patients felt the need for personal space when they visited his clinic. This topic has been the subject of voluminous historical inquiry (Vargas, 1986; Hall, 1959). In their investigation, they found that Turks, Arabs, Latin Americans, French, Italians, and Greeks maintained a very close speaking distance and had frequent interaction. In contrast, they reported that the Chinese, Japanese, North Americans, and Almas pay close attention to the distance between them when conversing and avoid physical touch (Vargas, 1986). Educators in the United States, Japan, and other countries indicated above should pay attention to social distance for these reasons. Otherwise, unpleasant outcomes could occur.

3.4 Haptics

The concept of haptics relates to the frequency with which people touch one another when conversing. Touch plays a vital role in interpersonal communication. These touches include embraces, handshakes,

supporting someone by touching their back, and tightly squeezing someone you miss. Touch facilitates the transmission of emotions, particularly in close relationships (Brave & Dahley, 1997).

3.5 Oculesics

Oculesics is based on maintaining eye contact while communicating. The significance of eyes differs among cultures. In America, the Arab world, and Turkey, for instance, extended eye contact is a gesture of respect and appreciation of the other person's worth. But in Japan. It is preferred to retain a brief look in Korea and Africa, where brief eye contact is a show of respect (Hişmanoglu & Hişmanoglu, 2008). According to Bancroft (1995), making eye contact with individuals we love is often an act of hostility. In his statement, he emphasized the significance of eye contact when speaking to convey one's emotions. This could be a declaration of love, a threat, awe, or fear. Andersen & Andersen (2005) discovered in a separate study that teachers with good eye contact are more effective with students. He observed that professors who turn their backs on their students lack self-confidence, have inner-world problems, or have lost control of their instruction.

4. Importance of Using Body Language in Foreign Language Learning and Teaching

Foreign language instruction is a primary objective of schools, and body language plays a significant part in pupils' foreign language acquisition. The reason for this is that sometimes we can communicate a word with a simple hand gesture that we cannot explain with many other expressions. Body language accounts for fifty percent of daily conversations. This is due to the fact that our body continually sends us messages that we are unaware of (Hua, 2018). Only seven percent of words have them.

The classroom environment is one of the most common places where nonverbal communication occurs, and body language is an integral aspect of nonverbal communication. Body language is a common way for teaching and learning foreign languages. Teachers of foreign languages utilize body language for several objectives in language instruction.

Tai (2014) put forward 4 main aspects of body language in foreign language learning and teaching.

4.1 Limitation of Students in English Vocabulary

There are so many words in foreign languages, especially English, that it is nearly difficult to learn them all. Typically, students retain the vocabulary of daily life and employ it regularly. Consequently, when kids encounter new words, their body language aids their comprehension of their meanings. This offers numerous benefits for both students and teachers (Gregersen, 2005). For instance, during the class, rather than telling a student who opens the door to sit down, he may indicate the student's seat with his hand. This type of nonverbal expression aids in both preserving the integrity of the lesson and accelerating the student's comprehension. The word "bird" appears in a lesson text, and if students do not grasp its definition, they will not comprehend the material. The instructor can convey the nature of a bird through body language. The use of body language will make learning more permanent and boost students' focus during the lecture.

4.2 Lack of Students' Interest in Language Classes

Learning a language might be challenging at times for non-native pupils in language classes. Like many other areas, success in the language field requires ambition and interest. Consequently, when developing lesson plans, teachers of foreign languages should consider ways to make lessons more engaging and enjoyable for students. Body language is one method to make teaching engaging and enjoyable. Hand and eye motions, as well as facial expressions, allow the instructor to capture the pupils' attention.

4.3 Depressing Atmosphere in Language Teaching

Since learning a language is a difficult process, it is extremely difficult to maintain pupils' interest for a whole course. In addition, when they do not comprehend what the teachers are saying, they will become entirely disconnected from the lesson and refuse to listen to the instructor. The classroom environment will subsequently become anxious. Furthermore, if the teacher gives the material in a tedious manner, students lose interest and may even fall asleep. If teachers use their body language in these situations, they will prevent the classroom environment from becoming tense and engage students in the subject. Teachers are saved by the use of nonverbal expressions in language instruction. In addition, Yang (2017) gave three additional reasons for emphasizing the use of body language in a foreign language, and she underlined the significance of body language.

4.4 To Increase the Impact and Quality of Education

Teaching a subject through figures or illustrations is more successful than merely describing it in words. Body language is one of the various examples-based teaching techniques available (Brown, 2002)

5. Sub-Reasons Why Language Teachers use Body Language in Teaching

As long as humanity exists, foreign language study will remain popular. Because we are human, we are perpetually dependent on one another. Humans are born to communicate. This dialogue might be conducted vocally or nonverbally. A great deal of study has been conducted on language acquisition, and several approaches have been devised. No one has generally argued that body language is unnecessary when learning a foreign language. Marwijk (2007) provided four reasons why the value of nonverbal (body language) in foreign language instruction merits investigation.

5.1 Word Inadequacy

The basic purpose of body language is to properly communicate our intended meaning. When we are in the presence of others, the need to communicate arises, and when words are insufficient, the auxiliary component of communication, body language, takes over. We communicate nonverbal thoughts and emotions through body language. Body language is referred to as non-verbal communication because neither sound nor words are used in its expression (Moran & Moran, 1996).

5.2 Using Body Language Subconsciously

In certain instances, no explanation is requested for the use of body language. Due to its lack of self-awareness, it appears unconsciously and participates in the conversation. Body language is an essential

component of quality speech. Some people learn body language in childhood, but it is also possible to learn it later in life. This permits individuals to comprehend others better and convey their own opinions with greater clarity. The incorporation of body language into dialogues might vary according to context, culture, and even gender. Body language, which can signify anything in a given moment or country, can have distinct connotations in another country or in a different set of circumstances. For example, in Turkey and many other countries, joining the fingers of one hand and insulting them up and down signifies approval. In Italy and Russia, however, this gesture is used to insult in furious situations. Thus, extreme caution is advised. As in these cases, language instructors utilize body language subconsciously. Teachers that are uncomfortable with pupils speaking often place their hands on their hips to indicate their discomfort. A verbal expression may not be as useful in this situation. As in this instance, some of our body language actions are spontaneous and unintentional (Borg, 2009).

5.3 As a Tool to Explain Feelings

Body language is a method of communication that is frequently utilized to convey our feelings. When individuals dislike a meal, a person, or a habit, they are hesitant to express so directly. In such circumstances, the use of conscious or unconscious body language is highly illustrative and facilitates people's work. Another characteristic of body language is that it discloses a person's emotions. No matter how well people attempt to conceal their emotions through words, body language always reveals the truth. This is eloquently explained by a famous phrase. The eyes are a reflection of one's heart or soul (Tai, 2014). For instance, a person who attends a lunch as a guest may encounter a dish he does not enjoy. Perhaps he can explain himself verbally, but his body language is more powerful when he says it. Consequently, teachers with a strong command of body language can easily convey circumstances that they would otherwise express in lengthy terms through body language.

5.4 Keeping Student Motivation and Engagement High in The Classroom

The use of body language by teachers in the classroom promotes student motivation and participation. As a supportive element, teachers' eye and facial expressions, gestures, and hand and arm motions allow pupils to better comprehend the lesson. Teachers who sense that their students are losing interest in the course may recapture their attention by raising their voices or making amusing facial expressions (National Research Council, 2003).

6. The Teacher's Role in Body Language Education

Teachers are societies' architects. A poor action by a teacher or a wrong term they teach impacts not only an individual but also society as a whole. Teachers' effectiveness stems from the fact that they organize and administer education, which is a communication process (Çalışkan & Yeşil, 2005).

Teachers' communication style is an important aspect in students' ability to acquire subjects efficiently and intellectually. Teachers' use of verbal and nonverbal communication directly influences students' positive attitudes about both the teacher and the course (Ballester, 2015). Education in the classroom consists mostly of the transfer of knowledge between the instructor and the student. Specifically, it is the verbal and nonverbal communication between the instructor and learner. To communicate effectively with students, a teacher must have a firm grasp of both verbal and nonverbal communication skills (Peng, 2011).

In education, which is a communication process, instructors' body language is of particular importance. This language is essential for educators. For this reason, teachers should be able to interpret students' body language and actively incorporate it into their own lessons. Non-verbal expressions occur instinctively and are crucial for communication to have full meaning (Caswell & Neill, 2003).

Teachers who wish to be effective foreign language instructors must understand the body language system of the target language, as well as its dominating eye expressions and hand gestures. Teachers who have never undergone seminars or courses in verbal communication should not worry. The Internet is an infinite resource that is always accessible to individuals in modern times. If teachers utilize this resource effectively, they will be able to reach all non-verbal communication classes and develop their own communication skills. Teachers who are proficient in the functions of body language in the target language can serve as excellent role models for pupils and instruct them on the fundamentals of body language. The manner in which teachers connect with students has direct and indirect consequences on the academic achievement of students. Teachers' verbal or nonverbal contact with students has a direct impact on students' receptivity to new knowledge and enhances the quality of learning (Sutiyatno, 2018).

The use of body language by foreign language instructors in the classroom facilitates the resolution of undesirable behaviors. In addition, foreign language instructors should be mindful of the nonverbal communication expressions they employ, particularly in multicultural classes. They can generate misconceptions and hurdles between teachers and students if they do not understand the implications of nonverbal expressions in different cultures.

Before preparing for a class, foreign language teachers should also consider whether the course book has any nonverbal expressions that will be useful for students. If not, research can be conducted using relevant sources, and all non-verbal expressions can be filtered out to help pupils comprehend the topics.

Pre-service instructors who have just begun teaching may initially encounter problems. Body language has significant benefits for resolving these issues. In primary schools, students' control time is limited to a maximum of 15 to 20 minutes. Lectures should not exceed twenty minutes in length. Effectively using body language to maintain lesson control and discipline can yield positive effects for teachers and contribute significantly to classroom management (Caswell & Neill, 2003).

Communication is an occurrence in many aspects of life. When interacting with others, shopping at the market, discussing a student's issue, or gazing eye to eye. During this communication, individuals experience sending and receiving messages from one another. This message transmission can include feelings, ideas, gestures, and facial expressions. This communication occurs in both verbal and nonverbal forms. Teachers' nonverbal expressions in the classroom can be more successful than their vocal expressions (Negi, 2009). Using nonverbal expressions, a teacher might achieve faster outcomes at times. When confronted with a noisy atmosphere at the beginning of the course, the instructor can convey a great deal with a single glance. Occasionally, one look can convey what he would explain in lengthy remarks (Rosa, 2002). The overall effectiveness of teachers and students is contingent on their ability to communicate effectively. The most significant factor in the classroom is the teachers' body language (Capirci et al., 1998). The method in which teachers utilize their gaze, the space they create between themselves and their students, and the way in which they attempt to explain something with their hand

gestures all serve to build emotional bridges between teachers and students. Nonverbal communication represents a significant percentage of our everyday conversation. Facial expressions, eye contact, body language, and the way we comb our hair are all examples of nonverbal communication. When all of these factors are considered, it becomes clear that nonverbal talks are more successful for teachers than verbal conversations. Nonverbal expressions aid others in making accurate judgments about us (Mey, 2001).

7. Conclusion

Communication is a process that began with the evolution of humans and has reached the present day. This idea refers to conveying information from one living creature to another by gestures, facial expressions, clothing, eye movements, and other means. This transference has distinct verbal and nonverbal components. Verbal communication is a principle that everyone understands and can implement. Verbal communication is the cause for our research and the significance of which we like to underline. Teachers who can employ verbal communication in teaching and mastering a foreign language have greater success than others (Korte, 1997). In foreign language instruction, both students and teachers benefit greatly from body language. Teachers that understand nonverbal communication skills are able to clarify their explanations, and students retain this information. Body language is an additional component of communication. It enhances the clarity of what is intended to be stated. Students find it tiresome when lecturers lecture as though they just read plain text. According to studies, the instructors must therefore supplement their presentation with supplementary materials. Nonverbal communication is this auxiliary aspect. Occasionally, what is intended to be expressed in ten sentences can be explained using only the teacher's perspective. Some educators may have weaker verbal communication abilities than others, but this is not causing concern. With courses, internet or online courses, this skill can be acquired later, and the courses' effectiveness can be enhanced. Verbal communication is fundamental to the teaching and learning of foreign languages. Teachers that possess this skill will add a new depth to their pupils' academic education.

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