Paralinguistics, Essential Aspect of Productive Communication

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Abstract: The article will provide in-depth research on essential aspect of successful communication, namely, paralinguistics. Paralinguistics deals with body language, facial expression, voice, pitch and tone. Using paralinguistic means appropriately increase the efficiency, effectiveness and comprehensibility of connection between speaker and listener. Moreover, the exploration highlights the elements of paralinguistics and their functions, their significant role in establishing productive communication.

Key words: Communication, paralinguistics, paralinguistic cues, facial expression, body language, voice, tone, pitch.

Introduction. Communication is the most used form of connection in everyday life. While communicating one uses verbal and nonverbal cues equally for conveying the intended message. Paralinguistics deals with nonverbal cues which are utilized consciously and unconsciously while communicating. These factors play a key role in comprehending the speaker's speech, the aim of the communication, and the interlocutor's attitude to the topic. The capacity to identify, understand, and utilize paralinguistic components of communication successfully is known as paralinguistic competence. This proficiency facilitates the accurate communication of the speakers' intended meanings and helps to minimize misunderstandings.

Moreover, the research shows that according to speaker's nonverbal cues, listener clarifies some ideas about the speaker's knowledge, character, background and identity. Whenever we interact with others, we make judgments about their personalities (e.g., this person is trustworthy, this person is friendly).[2] These judgments are typically formed within seconds (e.g., Willis & Todorov, 2006), tend to be quite stable across time (e.g., Kenny, Horner, Kashy, & Chu, 1992), and are often surprisingly accurate (e.g., Ambady & Skowronski, 2008; Funder, 2012). Most of the time, initial judgments are even formed before any (relevant) verbal information is exchanged. They are thus exclusively based on nonverbal cues (i.e., the way people look, move, or gesture) and they can have far-reaching consequences (e.g., Ambady, Bernieri, & Richeson, 2000; Harris & Garris, 2008). For example, in an employment interview, the applicant's upright posture, firm handshake, and appearance might lead to a positive evaluation (e.g., the applicant seems trustworthy and competent) and eventually to a job offer. In a get-to-know context, the broad smile of an interaction partner and the colorful clothing could lead to the conclusion that this person is friendly, thus resulting in a friendship or a romantic relationship.

Materials and methods. Let us first identify why people should use paralinguistic means in communication what is the significance of it. Paralinguistics plays a major role in making communication more effective, expressive, and efficient. Its significance can be highlighted in the following aspects:[3]

➢ Conveying emotions: Paralinguistic cues such as facial expressions help express emotions that are challenging to communicate through words alone.

➢ Enhancing understanding: Volume and speed of speech, intonation, and other vocal elements add depth and clarity to verbal communication, further supporting the conveyed message.

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[2] Breil, Simon & Osterholz, Sarah & Nestler, Steffen & Back, Mitja. (2019). Contributions of Nonverbal Cues to the Accurate Judgment of Personality Traits. 10.31234/osf.io/mn2je.

[3] https://www.studysmarter.co.uk/explanations/english/discourse/paralinguistics/#:~:text

➢ Contextualizing conversations: Paralinguistics helps shape the context of the interaction, enabling the listener to better comprehend the speaker's point of view and intentions.

➢ Regulating conversation flow: Non-verbal behaviours such as gestures and bodily cues facilitate smooth conversation, helping maintain a congenial atmosphere between the speaker and the listener.

Results and discussions. As we mentioned above, paralinguistic cues include some elements of body language, such as facial expressions, body movement, voice, tone, pitch, and gestures. And, all the means have their role and function in communication. For example, facial expressions can help the speaker to express his emotions and feelings, gestures reinforce and emphasize spoken words. Showing levels of confidence or nervousness helps us body movements. One of the crucial aspects of paralanguage is vocal qualities, namely, pitch, tone, volume. They deal with indicating the speaker's attitude or emotion.

Facial expressions refer to any kind of movements with the facial muscles.[4] This most prominently includes expressions via the mouth and lips (e.g., smiling, yawning, showing teeth) as well as expressions via the eyes and eyebrows (e.g., eye contact, glazing, squinting, winking, scowling).

The emotion of anger can be characterized by pulled-down eyebrows, pulled-up eyelids, and tightened lips.[5]

Body language involves any kind of arrangement or gestures performed with the body and its limbs (i.e., every movement or arrangement of a person except the facial muscles). This includes gestures performed with the arms and hands (e.g., folded arms, waving, itching, peace sign), movement with the legs (e.g., running, walking) or head (e.g., head shake, head pointed towards the ground), as well as arrangements concerning the whole body (e.g., upright posture, energetic stance, crouched position).

An individual who shows cues such as a huddled posture or head pointed towards the ground might, for example, be seen as someone with a (conflict) avoidance motive that wants to maintain a stable relationship with possible interaction partners. This person might then be (correctly) identified as being submissive or introverted.[6]

Paralanguage includes vocal elements such as voice, tone, and pitch, which contribute to the overall impact and meaning of verbal communication. These components are described in more detail below:[7]

Voice: The unique sound produced when a person speaks, encompassing variations such as pitch, volume, and quality. Voice can reveal a speaker's emotional state, sociocultural background, and even physical health.

Tone: The manner or attitude with which a speaker delivers their message. The tone of voice can dramatically change the interpretation of verbal content by adding emotional or attitudinal nuances. Examples of tones include sarcastic, friendly, aggressive, or hesitant.

Pitch: The frequency or perceived "height" of a speaker's voice. Pitch variation plays an essential role in conveying emotions, questions, and exclamations. A high pitch may indicate excitement or surprise, while a low pitch might convey seriousness or sombreness.

Paralanguage (i.e., paraverbal cues) describes nonverbal elements and general features of speech such as speech rate (number of words within a specific timeframe), voice breaks (number of pauses), fundamental frequency (mean voice pitch), pitch variability (variation of the voice pitch), amplitude (mean loudness/intensity of the voice), or amplitude variability (variation in the loudness of the voice).

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[7] https://www.studysmarter.co.uk/explanations/english/discourse/paralinguistics

These vocal cues often parallel the spoken word, but can also provide additional (e.g., emotional state) or contradictory (e.g., sarcasm, deception) information. [8]

Speaking slowly and quietly might be a sign for a sad mood.[9]

Talking in a loud voice to others gives the feeling of dominance to the speaker himself.

Conclusion. As a last word, we can say that maintaining eye contact with someone conveys that listener is paying attention and finding speaker's words interesting. Our faces may convey a vast spectrum of emotions, from joy and sorrow to fear and rage. Speaker's posture and movements all have the power to communicate. For instance, crossing one's arms could suggest that you are guarded or withdrawn. Proxemics is the study of communication through distance. For example, standing close to someone can convey listener's interest in speaker or your desire to speak with him or her, while standing far away can convey your disinterest or desire to maintain your distance. Nevertheless, it differs from culture to culture, as in some cultures standing to close to the listener is the sign of disrespect. That's is why speaker should be attentive to the listener's culture, background, status as well.

In short, nonverbal communication abilities are necessary in many facets of life. They help us build stronger bonds with one another, enhance our general communication skills in addition to helping us comprehend, and interpret the world around us more fully. With enough practice and perseverance, anyone may acquire the nonverbal communication skills necessary for success in both their personal and professional lives. Enhancing our interpersonal abilities can help us all connect with others more effectively.

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