

Cross-Cultural Perspectives in Nonverbal Communication

Edited by
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*To the many colleagues and students
in many countries who have offered me
their hospitality and friendship
in the warmest crosscultural way*

Preface

No single volume on nonverbal communication can cover but a selection of the many areas and topics included under this heading today. Some books deal with specific topics and nothing else; others, while concentrating on specific areas, actually point toward so many additional perspectives that effectively they transcend their title—they go beyond their own table of contents. I believe that this volume is of the latter type in many respects: While offering a crosscultural perspective on nonverbal communication, it also contains much information as well as numerous theoretical and empirical perspectives (with over 700 references) on diverse topics, including disciplines never before presented together in one volume.

This book is for psychologists, therapists, counselors, interviewers, anthropologists, linguists, sociologists, communication scientists—and for practically anyone interested in or professionally practicing face-to-face interaction. At the end, I have included outlines of three different nonverbal communication courses. These are intended as examples for how such courses may be structured. It is my hope that they may incite others to develop similar academic programs, introducing any modifications and additions desirable and necessary.

Fernando Poyatos
University of Brunswick
June 1987

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- to my coauthors, for making this book possible.

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where paralinguistics and kinesics eventually coordinate with language (*Il prelinguaggio infantile*, 1964). She organized the First Congress on Child Language with a separate section on kinesics at the Tuscan Academy in 1972 (*Baby Talk and Infant Speech*, 1976), and completed the first cross-cultural interaction study focusing on nonverbal behavior in Canada during 1971–1972 (published in various books and journals). Besides a great number of articles, she has edited *Aspects of Nonverbal Communication* (1980) and researched *The Perception of Nonverbal Behavior in the Career Interview* (1983) with a special section on minority candidates. In 1984–1985 she directed the “International Seminar on Cross-Cultural Nonverbal Behavior” at Vanderbilt University, with a focus on advertising.

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Introduction

Fernando Poyatos

Nonverbal Communication Studies: Their Development as an Interdisciplinary Field and the Term "Nonverbal"

To issue a volume of papers written by established specialists at this point in the development of Nonverbal Communication Studies cannot be viewed in itself as a novelty; this field has now attained multi- and interdisciplinary proportions, perhaps beyond even what was envisaged during its scientific beginnings some 30 years ago, and the extensive literature has been growing so rapidly that one can hardly keep abreast of it, even leaving aside much pseudoscientific literature. Every congress of anthropology, psychology and applied psychology, linguistics and psycholinguistics, sociology, communication, semiotics (and sometimes even literature) now has at least one session or a larger symposium (or a pre-/post-conference) devoted to the discussion of different aspects of nonverbal communication. National and international conferences and research institutes on this topic are organized periodically, and important volumes are being published containing the contributions to those meetings. View, for instance, Aaron Wolfgang's (1984) volume from the Second International Conference on Nonverbal Behavior, held in Toronto, the volume edited by Klaus Scherer and Paul Ekman (1982) on nonverbal research methodology issuing from the Second NATO Advanced Research Institute (1979)—or the volume by Poyatos (1987) from the ICAES Symposium on Literary Anthropology, which contains much material directly or indirectly concerned with nonverbal communication.

These and other activities stem in the main from seminal gatherings during the early 1960s and the 1970s, in particular the 1963 Indiana University Conference on Paralinguistics and Kinesics led by Thomas Sebeok (Sebeok et al., 1964), and the highly interdisciplinary meetings of the Royal Society of England held during the late 1960s, spurred by Sir Julian Huxley and chaired by W.H. Thorpe, to define the nature of nonverbal communication (Hinde, 1972).

If we understand nonverbal communication as "the emissions of signs by all the nontextual, somatic, artifactual and environmental sensible sign systems contained within a culture, whether individually or in mutual coconstruction, and whether or not those emissions constitute behavior or general personal interaction" (Poyatos, 1983, 69), we realize that both we as social beings as well as our natural, modified, and built environments are constantly emitting nonverbal signs; and that these signs are relatively similar or dissimilar to the verbal ones that make up our prime mode of communication under most circumstances. And yet no single volume can do justice to the interdisciplinarity as it is presently developing within Nonverbal Communication Studies.

This definition of nonverbal communication might, however, refer the reader to the inevitable topic of what to include within the concept of "nonverbal communication." Should we keep this label or replace it with another one, perhaps one more felicitous and less controversial? Whatever attempts might be made at this point to change it would, in my opinion, be futile: The literature of many disciplines has been using "nonverbal" for years now, congresses and symposia and the resulting publications likewise. The term has gained considerable ground in the academic world, signifying the many things we utter beyond words, our "body language" as well our ways of emitting messages in daily corporeal (or next-to-corporeal) interactions. Not too long ago some argued over the term "paralanguage"—perhaps an even less fortunate term, yet one that has been accepted in the meantime and is a workable term, referring to the complex series of sounds, voice modifications, and silences we produce which go beyond the recognized suprasegmental features of stress, pitch, and juncture in the Western languages.

In 1952 Hill used the term "paralanguage," later (1958) "paralinguistics," which included both "paralanguage" (body motion) and "kinesics." Other scholars followed, among them Abercrombie (1968) and Laver and Hutcheson (1972), who came to distinguish "vocal paralinguistic features" (tone of voice) and "nonvocal paralinguistic features" (kinesics). Most other researchers, however, considered paralanguage and kinesics two different, albeit interrelated, areas of study. The difficulty in paralanguage lies in drawing a boundary between language and paralanguage. Today those not satisfied with the all-encompassing label of "nonverbal" continue, for how long we cannot say, to voice their discontent.

Thomas Sebeok, whose perceptive arguments may succeed in shaking the deep-rooted convictions in others, has offered the best criticism of the term in reviews of other workers' thoughts. He feels that "the concept of nonverbal communication is one of the most ill-defined in all of semiotics" (Sebeok, 1977, 1065—1067). He mentions, for instance, the truly

verbal value of many gestures, the nonvocal but nevertheless verbal quality of American Sign Language, etc., and concludes by suggesting (tongue-in-cheek) that “nonverbal surpasses the sphere of bodily communication to subsume the entire range of culture exclusive of language”—but overlapping ethology. No one would disagree with him that “the formula ‘communication minus language = nonverbal communication’ is clumsily negative, simplistic, and obscurantist” (Sebeok, 1975, 10).

Kendon, in the excellent introduction to his compilation of papers on “nonverbal communication” (Kendon, 1981) reviews the emergence of the term, its limits, and consequences since serving as part of the title of a book by Ruesch and Kees (1956/1969) based on cybernetics and the mathematical theory of information (which regarded all behaviors as informative, whether intended or not), and then explains why behavior does not have to be intentional in order to communicate, intentionality not always being possible to determine.

Nevertheless, the work in “nonverbal communication,” as unsure of the term as we may be, goes on—indeed at an increasingly rapid rate, with not a few discrepancies regarding the behaviors included. While Ekman and Friesen (1969) include within nonverbal behavior only “any movement or position of the face and/or body” (thus not differentiating between nonverbal and nonvocal), Duncan (1969) includes as well paralinguistic, kinesics, proxemics, olfaction, skin sensitiveness to touch and temperature—and even the use of artifacts, such as Ekman and Friesen’s “object-adaptors.” Within body motion or kinesic behavior Duncan includes facial expression, eye movement, and postures.

These are but a few examples. One could cite other authors with differing opinions. While such discrepancies may lead those less familiar with the field to confusion, they cannot really affect the scientific growth of Nonverbal Communication Studies. And we surely cannot wait for the invention of the ideal term or for the happy consensus to emerge as to its content.

It is true that verbal language is a unique anthroposemiotic and anthropomorphic social communication system going far beyond the interactive possibilities of, say, chemical systems or gestures; words not only speak for themselves, they can also refer to other intersomatic or extrasomatic systems, either as those activities take place or—more significantly—long after they have occurred. Further, this unique trait makes language the moderator, judge, and commentator of whatever kinesic, chemical, dermal, or thermal activities we or our cointeractants may activate. This enriches the communicative possibilities of an encounter immensely, something directly related to the problem of false redundancy: