

In the Name of God



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Exploring Teachers' Perceptions on the Actual Use of Nonverbal Communication Signals
in EFL Classrooms

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To my fiancée

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<p>Abstract:</p> <p>Humans communicate through two modes of verbal and nonverbal communication. Until fairly recently, it was commonly thought that the one and only expressive means of communication was through orally uttering and stringing together a couple of words so as to formulate sentences for the purpose of communicating what we had in our minds. As research in the area of nonverbal communication flourished, soon this fallacious conception started to taper off. Nowadays, it is generally agreed that clues in the nonverbal "channels" of communication (how something is said) are often more important than words alone (what is said) and that the body movements and behaviors often communicate more information than their counterpart i.e. verbal language. The issue of nonverbal communication becomes a more pressing issue particularly in foreign language classes. The purpose of this study was to compare teachers' perceptions of nonverbal communication signals against their actual performance. Mixed method was used in this study in the sense that the raw data was quantified to be analyzed through statistical procedures. Four male EFL teachers were selected for the study. First, two consecutive class meetings of the teachers were video-taped and a 20-minute excerpt was coded for the intended nonverbal categories for each teacher. Then, a questionnaire, comprising 13 questions, was prepared and submitted to the teachers to fill in. Finally, as each question corresponded to one of the categories of nonverbal behavior under investigation, the perceptions of teachers were compared against their performance. In comparison phase, two conditions were possible: teachers' perceptions matched with their performance or didn't match. When the perceptions didn't match, it was either a case of underestimating or overestimating their performance. It was revealed that teachers did not have a full command of their nonverbal repertoire and only around 50% of their statements on their use of nonverbal behavior in the classroom were proved to be right. Thus, it is concluded that teachers must be trained to have a more conscious control and awareness of their nonverbal behavior and that teacher training courses should include lessons on nonverbal communication signals.</p>	

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.0 Background & Need for the Study

"As the tongue speaketh to the ear, so the gesture speaketh to the eye"

Sir Francis Bacon

"Humans communicate through two modes of social communication: verbal and nonverbal" (Yager, Strong & Roan, 2009, p.1). Until fairly recently, it was commonly thought that the one and only expressive means of communication was through orally uttering and stringing together a couple of words so as to formulate sentences for the purpose of communicating what we had in our minds. As research in the area of nonverbal communication flourished, soon this fallacious conception started to taper off. Nowadays, it is generally agreed that clues in the nonverbal "channels" of communication (how something is said) are often more important than words alone (what is said) and that the body movements and behaviors often communicate more information than their counterpart i.e. verbal language (Yager et al, 2009). However, some researchers believe that the verbal and nonverbal channels should not be distinguished as being discrete and unrelated; they should be studied and examined simultaneously and in a complementary fashion (Kendon, 1972; Streeck & Knapp, 1992; Jones & LeBaron, 2002).

Highlighting the importance of bodily behaviors in interactions, Birdwhistel (1970) argued that almost 65% of a message is represented nonverbally. Similarly, Hall (1984) claimed that 90% of a communicative message is nonverbal (as cited in Yager et al, 2009). Furthermore, Neil and Caswell (1993) reported that nonverbal communication can account for up to 80% of impression conveyed. All of the above-mentioned conclusions provide proof for the fact that the importance of nonverbal channel in communication is not negligible and should be taken into account in language teaching programs.

The issue of nonverbal communication becomes a more pressing issue particularly in foreign language classes. "Nonverbal communication is an important aspect to be taught to foreign language students if they are to communicate effectively in English" (Schmit-Fajlik,

2007. para1) and since much of the communication is nonverbal (Mehrabian, 1972), the study of nonverbal communication should be included as part of language learning curricula. This holds true not only for students, but also for teachers as well. Harris and Rosenthal (2005, as cited in Riggio & Feldman, 2005, p. 184) reported that a rich body of the literature indicates the significance of teachers' nonverbal cues, gesture in particular, in the teaching of foreign language, "a domain where the verbal channel is not necessarily straight-forward". Elsewhere, Krathwoul et al. (1964; as cited in Anderson, 1986, p. 44) asserted that "nonverbal communication has its most direct instructional impact on the effective domain of learning, which is concerned with student likes and dislikes, attitudes and values, beliefs, appreciations and interests". Anderson (1986, p. 42) advocated the idea that "an important factor in the communication process, contributing substantially to instructional effectiveness is the instructor's nonverbal behavior". Yongming Shi and Si Fan (2010, p. 113) also reported that teachers should use more nonverbal signals in language teaching classrooms as a way of improving learners' motivation for studying.

The aim of this research is to have a closer look at EFL teachers' perceptions along with their actual application of nonverbal clues in their interactions with the students.

1.1 Statement of the Problem and Purpose of the Study

Nonverbal behaviors are considered to play a central role in interpersonal relationships, particularly in the communication of emotions (Duncan, 1969; Ekman & Friesen, 1968, as cited in Kazdin & Clock, 1973, p. 644). Teachers need to establish a friendly relationship with their students and as such, use of nonverbal behavior can expedite building this rapport between teachers and students. It has also been found that use of gestures, in particular, by both teachers and students improves the atmosphere in the classroom (Lakin et al, 2003).

As mentioned before, the issue of EFL teachers' appropriate application of nonverbal signals in their teaching is what all scholars come to agree. What is missing is that there is a scarcity of empirical evidence pertaining to the teachers' perceptions as well as their actual performance and utilization of nonverbal signals in their language classrooms. What is more, even the nonverbal channel of communication itself is overlooked over the past

decades. “[E]normous efforts have been undertaken in the past to understand the verbal channel, whereas the role of the nonverbal channel is less well understood.” (Esposito, Faundez-zanuy, Keller & Marinaro, 2007, p. 1).

Harris and Rosenthal (2005; as cited in Riggio & Feldman, 2005, p. 184) argued that “although many teacher education programs address nonverbal behavior in their curricula, few empirically validated nonverbal training programs exist”. This study is an effort to bring EFL teachers’ perceptions and performance into limelight with regard to their use of nonverbal communication signals in their classes.

1.2 Research Questions

This research aims at answering the following questions:

- 1- What are the teachers’ perceptions towards using nonverbal communication in EFL classrooms?
- 2- To what extent, do teachers actually recruit nonverbal communication in EFL classroom?
- 3- What are the matches and mismatches between teachers’ perceptions and their actual use of nonverbal communication signals in EFL classrooms?

1.3 Importance of the Study

There seems to be a scarcity of research which would take into consideration both the perceptions and actual performance of teachers together. The studies available in the literature are either survey-based or observational. Thus, this study has the merit of having a mutli-faceted look on the issue of EFL teachers’ nonverbal communication.. The idea of using self-reports is somewhat controversial because they cannot be a valid account of individuals’ performance. As Harris and Rosenthal (2005, p. 183) state:

“Self-reports, while expedient, also raise validity concerns, especially in the domain of nonverbal behavior, given the extent to which nonverbal expression takes place outside the conscious awareness and control of an individual”.

On the contrary, researchers advocate the use of video-recording as a more reliable source of evidence. In the same way, Jones and LeBaron (2002) argue that "...video technology seems to bring the investigator closer to the details of the original event".

1.4 Definition of Key Terms

- **Body language:** It is a term used for the various facial expressions, gestures, use of space and other body movements that people use to communicate. These expressions and gestures form an important part of communication. They can be used to express meaning instead of words (Soepriatmadji, 2008).
- **Facial Expression:** One or more motions or positions of the muscles in the skin. These movements convey the emotional state of the individual to observers.
- **Gaze:** It purports the widely-used idea of consistently looking at the head of another person.
- **Gesture:** Gestures are movements of the fingers, hands and arms (and perhaps shoulders).
- **Nonverbal Communication:** It is communication without words. It includes: facial expressions, gestures, paralanguage, posture, proxemics, eye contact, haptics (touch) and appearance.
- **Self-manipulation:** When either a body part or an object is used to scratch, rub, pick or bite another body part (Gifford, 1994, p. 7)

CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF THE RELATED

LITERATURE

This chapter is organized as follows: Section 2.1 talks about the history behind nonverbal communication and provides us with a brief account of the rudimentary issues of bodily communication. Section 2.1 is about the various functions that can be accomplished with nonverbal communication signals. Section 2.2 discusses the nonverbal behaviors that are attributed to good teachers and those that are considered to be inappropriate and observed in the performance of inexperienced teachers. Section 2.3 is about the controversy over whether body language is conscious or unconscious and whether individuals can be wary of their bodily signals. Section 2.4 elaborates on some of the components of nonverbal communication such as facial expression and head movement, eye contact, and gesture and posture. Next, Section 2.5 expatiates the nonverbal immediacy behaviors that are favorable for EFL teachers. Finally, some empirical studies in the literature that are deemed to be related and influential are described.

2.1 Introduction

Evolutionary speaking, when the oral form of language had not been employed by human beings, nonverbal communication conveyed a significant part of a speaker's overall message. But "with the evolution of language, bodily movements came to be used [as a subsidiary source] with speech" (Schefflen, 1972, p. 9). The fact that bodily signals preexisted the verbal message, prompted some scholars to advocate the biological origins of bodily means of communication. Darwin (1955), in his book *Expressions of the Emotions in Man & Animals*, considered the kinetic facial acts to be simply genetic expressions of emotions (as cited in Schefflen, 1972, p. 8) whereas Birdwhistell (1970, p. 7) held a drastically different view. He viewed communication "as a process to which all participants in an interaction consistently contribute by messages of various, overlapping length along one or more channels (such as language, movement and smell) whose elements are culturally patterned". In the same vein, Ekman (1973; as cited in Jones & LeBaron, 2002, p. 500) in his book *Darwin and Facial Expression* advanced the theory that the meaning of some certain facial expressions is universal (such as smile, anger, fear, sadness and surprise). Mead (1975; as cited in Jones & LeBaron, 2002, p. 500), on the contrary, argued that members of cultures derive meaning from facial expressions by relating them to the context in which they occur, including both verbal and nonverbal behaviors. This either or approach did not last long and now, the general approach is shifting towards a more moderate stance which holds

that “a general theory of communication should account for the natural biologically based aspects of communication as well as its learned and symbolically structured aspects” (Buck & VanLear, 2002, para. 2).

2.1 Nonverbally Successful Teachers

Narrowing down the issue of nonverbal communication to the field of language teaching, it is observed that there are a plethora of studies and articles on the importance of body language in language classrooms. Stanley (2010) contends that teachers can use body language appropriately as a way of creating a desirable atmosphere in their classrooms. Some examples include: using exaggerating movements when explaining something to the whole class, walking towards the person who is talking, responding by smiling and nodding when a student is talking and keeping eye contact with the student who is talking.

He also makes the claim that “Good teachers seem to know instinctively how to use performance skills in the classroom to gain and hold students’ interest”.

Similarly, Darn (2005) has espoused the effective use of nonverbal cues in classrooms and has listed some of the advantages of NV signals which he refers to as ‘extra dimensions’: reducing unnecessary teacher talking time, increasing learner participation, confidence building, reducing fear of silence, clear instructions, efficient classroom management, classroom atmosphere, improving listening skills, improving performance in pair and group activities, self and peer correction, avoiding misunderstandings and improving intercultural competence.

Additionally, Neil and Caswell (1993) suggest that effective teachers use a wide variety of facial expressions, gestures and tone of voice to convey their enthusiasm. For example, head forward and smile can be used as a mild expression of interest in what the student is going to say. They also state that “effective teachers looked intently at the class more often than the others and used head movements such as head forward, head cant and head dip, which are signals of involvement with a speaker” (p. 90).

In another study, they also found that “uncertain people show a variety of stereotyped swaying, rocking or pacing movements, which are intention movements of escape and lead to their being seen as ineffectual”. They conclude that ineffective teachers spent more time with a