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THE POWER OF BODY LANGUAGE. HOW TO LEARN TO SPEAK BODY LANGUAGE

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ABSTRACT

This article discusses the essence of the concept of body language, the history of its development as a subject, classification of gestures, non-verbal speech, and provides information on whether non-verbal signals are innate or acquired, whether they are transmitted genetically or acquired in some other way.

KEYWORDS

Person, verbal and non-verbal speech, interpersonal relationships, features, observations, gestures, behavior, sentences, character, body movements.

INTRODUCTION

It seems almost incredible that in more than a million years of human evolution, nonverbal aspects of communication began to be seriously studied only in the early sixties, and the public became aware of their existence only after Julius Fast published his book in 1970. This book summarized the research on nonverbal aspects of communication done by behavioral

scientists before 1970, but even today, most people are still unaware of the existence of body language, despite its importance in their lives.

Silent film actors were the founders of non-verbal communication; for them it was the only means of communication on the screen. Each actor was classified as good or bad based on how they were able



to use gestures and other body movements to communicate. When talkies became popular and less attention was paid to the nonverbal aspects of acting, many silent film actors left the stage, and actors with strong verbal abilities began to dominate the screen.

Albert Mayerabian found that the transfer of information occurs through verbal means (words only) by 7%, through audio means (including tone of voice, intonation of sound) by 38%, and through non-verbal means by 55%.

Most researchers share the view that the verbal channel is used to convey information, while the non-verbal channel is used to “discuss” interpersonal relationships, and in some cases is used instead of verbal messages.

Although much research has been done, there is heated debate about whether nonverbal cues are innate or learned, whether they are genetically transmitted or acquired in some other way. Evidence was obtained through observations of blind, deaf, and deaf-mute people who could not learn nonverbal language through auditory or visual receptors. Observations were also made of the gestural behavior of various nations and was studied the behavior of our closest anthropological relatives, monkeys and macaques.

The findings of these studies indicate that gestures can be classified. The German scientist Eibl - Eibesfeldt

found that the ability to smile in children who are deaf or blind from birth is manifested without any learning or copying, which confirms the hypothesis of innate gestures. Ekman, Friesen, and Zorenzan confirmed some of Darwin's assumptions about innate gestures when they studied facial expressions in people from five widely different cultures. They found that different cultures used similar facial expressions when expressing certain emotions, leading them to conclude that these gestures must be innate.

When you cross your arms over your chest, are you crossing your right arm over your left or your left arm over your right? Most people cannot reliably answer this question until they have done it. In one case they will feel comfortable, in another case they will not. From this we can conclude that this is perhaps a genetic gesture that cannot be changed.

There is also controversy over whether some gestures are learned and culturally determined or genetic. For example, most men put on their coat starting with the right sleeve, while most women start putting on their coat with the left sleeve. When a man passes a woman on a crowded street, he usually turns his body towards the woman as he passes; the woman usually passes, turning away from him.

Most nonverbal behavior is learned, and the meaning of many movements and gestures is culturally



determined. Let's look at these aspects of "body language".

All over the world, basic communication gestures are the same. When people are happy they smile, when they are sad they frown, when they are angry they have an angry look.

Nodding your head almost everywhere in the world means "yes" or affirmation. It appears to be an innate gesture, as it is also used by deaf and blind people. Shaking the head to indicate denial or disagreement is also universal, and may be one of the gestures invented in childhood. When the baby has pumped milk, he, refusing the mother's breast, moves his head from side to side. When a small child is full, he turns his head from side to side to avoid the spoon with which his parents feed him. Thus, he very quickly learns to use shaking his head to express his disagreement and negative attitude.

The origin of some gestures can be traced using the example of our primitive communal past. Baring teeth has been preserved from the act of attacking an enemy and is still used by modern man when he grins evilly or shows his hostility in some other way. The smile was originally a symbol of threat, but today, combined with friendly gestures, it denotes pleasure or goodwill.

The shrug is a good example of a universal gesture that indicates that a person does not know or does not understand what is being said. This is a complex

gesture consisting of three components: open palms, raised shoulders and raised eyebrows. Just as verbal languages differ from each other depending on the type of culture, so the non-verbal language of one nation differs from another's nation. While a gesture may be universally recognized and have a clear interpretation in one nation, in another nation it may not have any meaning, or have a completely opposite meaning. For example, consider the difference in the interpretation by different nations of such three typical gestures as the finger ring, the thumbs up, and the V-shaped gesture with the fingers.

The "OK" gesture, characterized by a circle formed by the fingers of one hand, was popularized in the United States in the early 19th century, primarily through the press, which initiated a campaign to abbreviate words and common phrases to their initial letters. There are various interpretations regarding the meaning of the initials "OK." Some believe that they stand for "all correct," which later transformed into "Oll Korrekt" due to a spelling error. Others argue that it serves as an antonym to the term "knockout," abbreviated as K.O. Another theory posits that this abbreviation derives from the phrase "oll Kinderhoor," referring to the birthplace of an American president who utilized these initials (O.K.) as a slogan during his electoral campaign.

While the veracity of these theories remains uncertain, it appears that the circle itself represents the letter "O" in "OK." The meaning of "OK" is widely recognized



across English-speaking countries, as well as in Europe and Asia. However, in some nations, this gesture carries entirely different origins and connotations. For instance, in France, it signifies "zero" or "nothing," while in Japan, it denotes "money."

One of the most significant errors that beginners in the study of body language can make is the tendency to isolate a single gesture and analyze it without considering its context or other accompanying gestures. For instance, scratching the back of the head can signify a multitude of meanings—such as dandruff, fleas, perspiration, uncertainty, forgetfulness, or even deceit—depending on the other gestures that accompany this action. Therefore, for accurate interpretation, it is essential to consider the entire constellation of accompanying gestures.

Like any language, body language consists of words, sentences, and punctuation marks. Each gesture is akin to a single word, and a word can possess multiple meanings. To fully comprehend the significance of this word, one must place it within a sentence alongside other words. Gestures manifest in the form of “sentences” and accurately convey the actual state, mood, and attitude of an individual. A perceptive observer can interpret these nonverbal sentences and compare them with the verbal statements made by the speaker.

It is often observed that a politician stands at a podium, arms firmly crossed over his chest (a defensive posture), with his chin lowered (a critical or hostile posture), and speaks to the audience about how receptive and friendly he is toward the ideas of the youth. He may attempt to persuade the audience of his warm, humane disposition by making quick, sharp gestures towards the podium. Sigmund Freud once noted that when a patient verbally insisted to him that she was happy.

Context for Gesture Interpretation. In addition to considering the aggregate of gestures and the correspondence between words and movements, accurate interpretation of gestures necessitates taking into account the context in which these gestures occur. For instance, if you observe a person at a bus stop on a cold winter day sitting with crossed legs, arms tightly folded across their chest, and their head bowed down, it is likely that this posture indicates they are cold rather than expressing a critical attitude toward something. However, if the same individual adopts this posture while seated opposite you at a negotiation table regarding a business deal, their gestures should be interpreted as having a negative or defensive connotation in that particular situation.

A weak handshake may lead to the conclusion of a person's character weakness. In the chapter discussing the nuances of handshaking, we explore the underlying reasons that support this assertion.



However, if an individual suffers from arthritis in their hand joints, they may employ a weak handshake to avoid pain. Consequently, artists, musicians, surgeons, and professionals in other delicate fields requiring sensitive dexterity typically prefer to refrain from handshaking. When they are compelled to engage in this gesture, they tend to utilize a gentler handshake.

Sometimes, individuals wearing ill-fitting or tight clothing experience restrictions in their movements, which can affect the expressiveness of their body language. While these instances are relatively rare, it is important to consider them in order to understand the psychological impact that such factors have on body language.

Set yourself the task of dedicating at least fifteen minutes each day to studying and interpreting the gestures of others, as well as analyzing your own gestures. The experimental space can be any location where people meet and interact. In particular, airports serve as excellent venues for observing the full spectrum of human gestures, as individuals express a wide range of emotions through their gestures: from passionate desire and anger to horror, grief, happiness, impatience, and much more. Official receptions, business meetings, and social gatherings also provide great opportunities for observation.

By learning the art of body language, you can spend an evening quietly seated in a corner and derive immense

enjoyment from observing the ritual of nonverbal communication within society. Television also offers a wonderful opportunity to study the nuances of nonverbal communication. Turn off the sound and try to deduce what is happening on the screen based solely on visual cues. By turning the sound back on every five minutes, you can verify the accuracy of your understanding of nonverbal signals. Soon, you will be able to watch entire programs without audio and comprehend everything occurring on the screen, much like individuals who are deaf.

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