THE MANAGEMENT OF NON-VERBAL SIGNS IN DISAGREEMENTS

LUMINIȚA FRENȚIU
West University of Timișoara

Abstract: Gesture, outlined in terms of physical activity, philosophical theory and linguistics are strongly connected in the course of human interaction. Utterances are accompanied by facial expressions, shifts of gaze, movements, posture, etc. Therefore, we support the thesis that a gestural approach to analyzing communicative events is appropriate, since non-verbal components communicate attitudes and emotions and complete the verbal interchange in numerous ways. Disagreements are especially prone to such an analysis.

Key words: non-verbal communication, kinesics, disagreements

1. Introduction

Language, just like the physical universe, can't be acknowledged totally by an observer in one place at just one occasion. Although several authors question whether or not gesture and movement have any vital relationship to the verbal message, we have a tendency to think that language and communication are to be approached in a very complementary manner, taking into consideration all aspects of noticeable behaviour. We have to regard the synchronic interrelationships of the behaviour of participants as vital for deciphering every other's flow of action.

Michael Studdert-Kennedy, a speech research worker with the Haskins Laboratories, has urged that speech will be characterised as "subtly interleaved patterns of movements, coordinated across articulators" (1987:74) The communicative function of language is to be studied alongside the attendant gestures. Armstrong, Stokoe and Wilcox (1995:18) offer the subsequent arguments in favour of this view: The key to triple-crown social life is communication - that with the primates is each visual and vocal. Actually, the first sensory adaptation of primates is visual, that ends up in the conclusion that language as syntax could have come back naturally from the analysis of visible gesture.

Also, language acquisition in youngsters is organized on general principles supported joint devices of language and gesture. Therefore, we have a tendency to begin from the idea that not solely brain, voice and hearing represent language, however, that the total organism, and particularly the visual and motor systems, are concerned with language.

In order to urge responses to the goals which individuals ask for in social interaction, they create use of a range of verbal and non-verbal components of behaviour. Gesture, outlined in terms of fasciculus activity, philosophical theory and linguistics, happens in interaction alongside or alternating utterances, materialized in continuous facial expressions, shifts of gaze, movements, posture, etc. Whatever we will write down is stripped of its emotional content and far of its communicative intent. Therefore, we support the thesis that a gestural approach to analyzing communicative events is appropriate, since non-verbal components communicate attitudes and emotions and complete the verbal interchange in numerous ways.

Dr. Birdwhistell (1952, 1970), in his research on kinesics, has tried to pinpoint simply what gesture indicates what message. One item he has uncovered is that individuals move their heads a

variety of times throughout a language interaction. The head movement at the end of every statement may be a signal to the opposite speaker to start out his answer. This is often a way in which we lead our spoken conversations. Throughout any interaction there is a set of kinesic markers that supplement the linguistic markers. These social signals are encoded and decoded by a sender and a receiver. Usually the sender is unaware of his or her own non-verbal communication, though it is apparently visible to the decoder. Starting from the idea that non-verbal communication is employed to support and accompany language causing emotions or attitudes to people, in what follows, we attempt to analyze how the various channels of communication perform in disagreements. Therefore, it is necessary for people to scale back the risks of potentially dangerous conflict talk and socially injurious outcomes even though, on occasion it means to eliminate the variations of opinion.

2. Disagreements

In the course of talking interactants encounter a variety of assessable matters, matters about which they may express a viewpoint, interpretation, or perspective. People have always held differing opinions on various subjects and they probably always will. There is nothing wrong with differences of opinion or disputes per se. Even if they become public, they need not necessarily be a threat to world peace. But still, participants in conflict talk sometimes intendedly or otherwise cause serious injury to their interlocutors. It is not less true that conflict can be a literally deadly phenomenon, that thousands of persons are killed annually in events ranging from interpersonal fights to wars. Conflict is a social phenomenon and violence is most of the time, preceded by talk.

For the elimination of a discrepancy of opinion it is vital that the contrasting points of view are externalized, verbalized, i.e. explicitly stated. If people who are in dispute would like to resolve their difference of opinion, they will even have to be ready to enter into an exchange of views with one another relating to the expressed opinion. In its simplest form this suggests that a language user who has advanced a judgement in respect of an expressed opinion should be ready to defend that viewpoint which a language user who has forged doubt upon it should be ready to attack it.

But the typology of conflict talk seems to be according to both folk and formal classifications very complex. Various speech events may be labeled as altercations, arguments, contentions, debates, disputes, dissensions, fights, quarrels, quibbling, wrangles. Speech community members also recognize other varieties of conflict-related talk such as apologies, gossip, insults, etc. which can either occur independently or embedded in other talks.

They all differ through their interactional significance and the importance of goals and risks to participants' social relationships. Grimshaw (1990:13) states that "while it can be demonstrated that some features of the nature and course of conflict are quite similar for family arguments and strikes and community controversies, it cannot so easily be shown that the same holds for international relations." He distinguishes two critical differences: one referring to the magnitude of the outcomes, which can be war or peace in international conflicts, and the second referring to the participants in an international large-scale conflict where the talk is not carried out by those likely to be affected, but by some set of representatives.

Yet, focusing on everyday conversation, we can view conflict talk as a sequence of challenges, defenses, and retreats. Such moves and their outcomes are determined by the participants' interactional goal, as well as by considerations of relations of power and of affect. We can hardly imagine both life and human communication without emotion.

Thus, a message m from the emitter x to the receiver x' is formed of two components: the cognitive component g , the information in fact, which is a partial subgraph of G , $g \subset G$, and the affective component a , described by the qualifiers 1 , -1 , 0 , as x communicates to x' positive, negative or neutral feelings. In ordinary language we use as qualifiers the terms good, bad, indifferent, known from psychology. The feelings in a positive or negative sense are acceptance-

refusal, satisfaction - dissatisfaction, and tension-relaxation states. (Golu, 1975)

Generally positive emotions like love, joy, pleasure, euphoria, exuberance, courage, compassion, increase one's openness to the message, while negative emotions like fear, sadness, depression, hostility, anger, cause the listener to close himself to the message because negative emotions dampen our intellectual powers, and thus our capacity to listen. The affective indifference is proper to a type of elliptical concept with which science and ideal mass media communication operate mainly.

The reception **r** of **x'**, effect of the message **m**, is also formed of a cognitive component **g'** and an affective one **a'**, which may have the same qualifiers as **a**.

3. Non-verbal signs in disagreements

The various kinds of conflict connected talk differ through their conversational significance and therefore the importance of goals and risks to participants' social relationships. The non-linguistic components of communication support additionally the emotional part than the cognitive features. Movement, and particularly head movement, is tied not solely to what we are saying but to emotional content too. To characterize a 'cool' person, one who shows and feels no emotion, an author can have him seem impassive, physically unmoving. James Bond, within the movies made up of Ian Fleming's 007 stories, was played by Sean Connery in a motionless style. The top model holds herself in a very rigid, unnatural pose to communicate no emotional overtones. When the ordinary man or woman talks, however, he looks to the right, to the left, up or down, blinks his eyes, lifts his eyebrows, touches his nose - and every movement is connected to what he is saying.

As a result of the tremendous variation in individual movements it is usually troublesome to link a particular movement to a particular message, however it's still true enough to mention that some attitudes are universally revealed by corresponding gestures and movements. Thus, in disagreements the emotional part can be allotted the numeric values 0 or -1 in both the speaker and the receiver, and consequently their openness to the message is significantly reduced.

Kendon (1990) argues that the behaviour of listeners is in most cases related to the behaviour of speakers. His argument relies on the development of interactional synchrony, first delineated by Condon and Ogston (1966, 1967), where the flow of movement in the listener is described as rhythmically coordinated with the flow of speech in the speaker. Therefore, once the speaker is speaking and moving, the listener is moving too, even though his movements are restricted to his hands, head or eyes and don't seem to be postural. In disagreements, bodily shifts, involving a minimum of half the body, are the most relevant kinesic supports of the argument.

Thus, in a situation when a man is holding forth on a particular subject, the listener leans back in his chair, arms and legs crossed, as he listens to the speaker's ideas. When the listener reaches a point where he disagrees with the speaker, he shifts his position in preparation for delivering his protest. He may lean forwards and uncross his arms and legs. Perhaps he will raise one hand with the forefinger pointed as he begins to launch a rebuttal. When he is finished, he will again lean back into his first position, arms and legs crossed - or perhaps into a third, more receptive position where his arms and legs are uncrossed as he leans back signalling that he is open to suggestion.

If, in a conversation, the listener is sitting with his legs crossed, one arm across his chest, while the other hand supports his face, thumb under the lowered chin, forefinger on his cheek and another finger over his lips, position displaying defense and hostility, there is no doubt about the verbal disagreement it accompanies and about the tonality of the communication which will be -1.

When in a verbal dispute the listener clenches his hands he signals a negative attitude but he is likely to repress it if the speaker's effort to add to the cognitive component of his argument the appropriate affective one, expressed either by open gestures of the hands, or by mutual gaze, turns the tonality of the communication from a negative one, at least to a neutral one.

An aggravating non-verbal element in disagreements can be the spatial behaviour. Encounters are usually started by people moving sufficiently close and into the right orientation to see and hear one another and are ended by moving away again. Individuals are known to have 'personal space' and feel uncomfortable when this area is invaded. If, in an argumentative talk, the speaker invades the listener's personal space he amplifies his hostility, contributes to his closing to the cognitive component of the message and risks to give the whole communication a negative tonality.

Still, if, during an argumentative talk the listener gives kinesic signs of opening, like uncrossing arms or legs, relaxing muscle tension, interactional synchrony might bring the speaker to reduce hostility, first by changing the behavioural signs of the affective component of the message, and then, in rather rare cases, by adjusting the cognitive component to a positive tonality of the communication.

In conclusion, the coordination of the listener's movements with the behaviour of the speaker is brought about through the listener's response to the stream of speech. The listener can impose an organization on his movements which fit or not with those of the speaker by clearly using visual input. In the case of disagreements, the interactional synchrony is of great importance since it allows the listener in some way to anticipate what the speaker is going to say and, thus, to reduce the conflict through both verbal and non-verbal means.

References:

- Armstrong D.F., Stokoe W.C., Wilcox S.E. 1995. *Gesture and the Nature of Language*. Cambridge: University Press.
- Birdwhistell, R. 1952. *Introduction to Kinesic* Louisville: University of Louisville Press
- Birdwhistell, R. 1970. *Kinesics and Context* Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1970
- Bocsa, Minerva, 1988. *Strategiile fundamentale ale comunicarii conform conceptiei cibernetico-consonantiste*, in "Cibernetica si Revolutia Tehnico-Stiintifica", Bucuresti: Editura Academiei, p. 69-74
- Condon, W.S., Ogston, W.D. 1966. Sound film analysis of normal and pathological behavior patterns. *Journal of Nervous and Mental Disease*, 143:338-347.
- Condon, W.S., Ogston, W.D. 1967. A segmentation of behavior. *Journal of Psychiatric Research* 221-235.
- Golu M., 1975, *Principii de psihologie cibernetica*, Bucuresti: Editura Stiintifica.
- Kendon, A. 1990. *Conducting interaction. Patterns of behavior in focused encounters*. Cambridge: University Press.
- Studdert-Kennedy, M. 1987. The phoneme as a perceptuomotor structure. In D.A. Allport (ed.) *Language perception and production: relationships between listening, speaking, reading and writing*. London: Academic Press

About the author:

Luminița Frențiu teaches Discourse Analysis and Translation Studies at the English Department, of the West University of Timișoara. She holds a PhD in General Linguistics. She is the Director of Study of the MA programme in Theory and Practice of Translation at Timișoara University. She has been a coordinator of the BAS conference from its first edition in 1990. She is editor of the Romanian Journal of English Studies and has authored, edited and co-edited over 10 books and numerous papers in her area of expertise.