

A Survey of Kinesics in the Conversational Use of Spoken English

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Introduction

Language mainly functions as a means of transmitting messages and ideas between people. This for the Japanese to learn English is an effective means of communication with all nations and cultures. To be a good communicator for international understanding, elements in nonverbal communication as well as understanding cultural values of all countries are important improving Japanese proficiency in foreign languages. In this paper, the author has attempted a brief survey of Kinesics for nonverbal communication behavior from an intercultural communication point of view.

Categories and Functions of Nonverbal Aspects in Communication

Communication experts indicate four major categories in investigating nonverbal behavior in communication. They include kinesics, proxemics, haptics, and paralinguage. Kinesics refers to all purposeful body movements that accompany spoken language. Proxemics deals with a person's use of social and personal space in communication. Haptics concerns the use of touch in communication. Paralinguage refers to the vocal effects which accompany or modify spoken language.¹

Knapp indicates that in the process of communication there are six major functions in nonverbal behavior. They include repeating, contradicting, substituting, complementing, accenting, and regulating. Repeating refers simply to repeating the verbal message. Contradicting conveys contradictory meanings accompanying speaking behavior. Substituting simply substitutes

for what was said verbally. Complementing modifies or elaborates the spoken message. Accenting may accent parts of the verbal message. Regulating simply regulates the communication flow between message senders and receivers.²

The Meaning of Kinesics

Ray L. Birdwhistell is considered a pioneer in the field of Kinesics.³ Since body movements have communication values which are learned within a culture, Birdwhistell parallels body language to spoken language and has applied the same principle of language to the analysis of body movements. In factors of spoken language sounds, such as phones (rudimentary sounds), phonemes (the crucial speech sounds), and morphemes (sounds like units), Birdwhistell has paralleled factors of body language to kine (rudimentary movement), kineme (interchangeable within a unit), and kinemorph (combined into large units). Birdwhistell states in his book *Kinesics and Context* that "Kinesics is concerned with abstracting from the continuous muscular shifts which are characteristics of living physiological systems those groupings of movements which are of significance to the communicational process and thus to the interactional systems of particular social groups."⁴ As Birdwhistell has stated, kinesics is the study of observable, isolable and meaningful movements in human communication; thus communicators in intercultural settings should count kinesics into their more effective uses of spoken language.

In terms of elements of kinesics in the conversational uses of spoken language, brief identifications in posture, facial expression, and emblems follow:

Posture as an Element of Kinesics

Posture is the way a man walks, stands, and sits. Posture includes the following: Bent Knees (kneeling, sitting, squatting),

Lying Down, and Standing (approach, withdrawal, contraction, expansion.) These areas of behavior in communication produce some communicative varieties, such as slouching, sprawling, perching, slumping, crouchings, lounging, reposing, lolling, stretching out, resting, reclining, and leaning.⁵

James, in his well-known classic study of postures in 1932, indicates four basic types of posture (approach, withdrawal, expansion, contraction) and those meanings in the message which, even today, give us valuable nonverbal cues in communication. In his study, approach transmits things like attention, scrutiny, interest, and curiosity. Withdrawal conveys an indication of negation, refusal, repulsion, disgust, and a drawing back or turning away. Expansion involves erect trunk and head, raised shoulders, expanded chest, all of which convey pride, conceit, mastery, arrogance, self-esteem, and disdain. Contraction involves bowed head, sunken chest, drooping shoulders, and a forward trunk.

In Japanese culture, the bow, in both standing or sitting on tatami floor, is an important posture in communication. Some misbehavior in bowing often signifies a certain social relationship between the members. Bowing is performed in a ritualistic sense that indicates the participants maintain a certain relationship. The proper behavior of a bow is culturally influenced by interpersonal rules.

Postures are related to the degree of the interpersonal situation and to such factors as sex, topics of conversation, place, level of intimacy, distance between encounters; any activities the communication counterparts are involved in while talking, and cultural rules about how all these factors fit together.

While teaching English as a foreign language, more concern should be placed in the way culture influences how posture is used to regulate social interaction and communication, especially in the conversational usages of spoken English across cultures and nations.

Facial Expression as an Element of Kinesics

Facial expressions are an element of kinesics in terms of facial movements which accompany spoken language. Anyone can easily recognize that facial movements have some kind of communication values which give particular meanings to each culture.

Key has suggested eight components of facial expressions, thirteen categories of emotions of facial expression, and five physical descriptions of facial expression components which give people cues in communication.⁶

Components of facial expression include the following:

1. Forehead/Brow: normal, raised, lowered, contracted, single brow raised, wrinkled brow.
2. Eyes: normal (straight ahead), raised, lowered, to side (averted), wide open, narrowed (squint, wink/blink/closed.)
3. Nose: normal, dilated (expanded, flare unilateral, bilateral), wrinkled nose, twitching nose.
4. Cheeks: inflated (puffed), sucked in, trembling, tongue in cheek.
5. Mouth: normal, relaxed (droopy), tense (set, compressed), corners up, corners down, retracted (withdrawn), pouting (puckered, pursed, protruded), open (smiling), open (gaping), curled lip (scornful).
6. Tongue: sticking out tongue, riling tongue, drooling tongue, licking lips.
7. Teeth: clenched teeth, biting lip.
8. Chin: anterior thrust, lateral thrust, drop (jaw drop), jaw movement (chewing).

These elements of facial expression are not isolated entities, but are parts of accompaniments and supplements to oral messages. They may function as sentence makers, enforcers, or contradictory indications, but all contribute to the message.

Categories of emotions of facial expressions includes the

following:

1. Passive: the mask, poker-face.
2. Pleasant: pleasure, happiness, pleased, love, affection, laughing.
3. Fear: horror, anxiety, alarm, terror, distress, pain, suffering.
4. Determination: stubborn, firmness, set.
5. Anger: hate, dislike, rage.
6. Sorrow: sad, grief, weeping.
7. Reverential: respect, worship, religious love.
8. Amazement: astonishment, surprise, bewilderment, dismay, shock.
9. Contempt: defiance, scorn, sneer, disdain, disgust, rejection, displeased, disapproval, resentment.
10. Questioning: doubt, hesitation, quizzical, shame, puzzlement, disbelief.
11. Thoughtful: pity, sympathy.
12. Interest: attention.
13. Boredom: inattention.

Facial expressions may portray the actual emotion felt or may contradict the accompanied spoken messages for both message senders and receivers.

Physical descriptions of the basic components in facial expressions include the following:

1. Neutral: results such as pleasure, mask, respect, thoughtful, and quiet attention.
2. Relaxed: results in love, pleasure, and submission.
3. Tense: results in fear, surprise, content, extreme interest, and determination.
4. Uplifted: results in anxiety, religious love, attention, rage, happiness, and astonishment.
5. Droopy: results in distress, dismay, grief, shock, and suffering.

Facial expressions in communication are influenced by the specific culture, but some visible patterns on the face, such as

anger, fear, surprise, sadness, disgust, happiness, and interest may be universal facial expressions of emotion accompanied by verbal messages.

Reading and thinking of facial expressions in both message senders and receivers are an essential factor for better results in communication, especially in using spoken language across cultures and nations.

Emblems as an Element of Kinesics

Efron, termed "emblems," which distinguish culturally determined patterns and types of certain body movements. Ekman indicates the following five characteristics of emblems as an element of nonverbal behaviors in communication:⁷

1. Emblems have a direct verbal translation usually consisting of a word or a phrase.
2. Precise meaning showed by emblems are known by most or all members of a group, class, subculture, or culture.
3. Emblems are most often deliberately used with the conscious intent to send a particular message to some other persons.
4. Those who see the emblem usually know not only its message but also that it was deliberately sent.
5. The sender of the emblem usually takes responsibility for having made that communication.

Emblems may cause various miscommunications between counterparts from different cultures. For example, an American with O-shaped fingers, O.K. means "all right" or "good" for Americans, but it may not have the same meaning in other cultures. For Japanese, it expresses money, representing the circle shape of coins. In other cultures, it represents the female genitalia. Ekman, in his research, offered the following interesting example: "When Brezhnev visited the United States he and Nixon would use emblems in their public appearances to communicate

the 'spirit of detente.' Nixon typically would use the American hand-wave, a greeting emblem. Brezhnev in these appearances would clasp his hands together with arms extended, raising his clasped hands up to the region in front of his face. This is the Russian emblem for friendship. Unfortunately, he did not know, I presume, that this performance is an American emblem for 'I am the winner,' employed almost exclusively in the context of boxing matches."⁸

Many emblems can be explained by referring to a certain culture, but perhaps we can also expect the same emblems when, especially, we describe regular physiological functions, such as locomotion, breathing, eating, drinking, sleeping, body elimination, and sexual behavior.

The author has attempted a brief survey of kinesics as a factor of nonverbal behavior in communication, hoping to apply kinesics in the effective conversational use of spoken English as a foreign language. For further consideration of kinesics, we may need more data. We may then obtain varieties of semantic meanings and their usage through actual encounters across cultures and nations. The investigation of other categories in nonverbal communication include proxemics, haptics, and paralanguage. These will offer to the author a continuation of his study in the future.

NOTES

1. Winston Brembeck, "The Development and Teaching of a College Course in Intercultural Communication." *Reading in Intercultural Communication*. ed. Davis Hoopes. (LaGrange Park, Illinois: Intercultural Network, Inc. 1977.) pp.9-23.
2. Mark Knapp, *Nonverbal Communication in Human Interaction* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1978), pp.20-6.
3. Randall Harrison, *Beyond Words: An Introduction to Nonverbal Communication*, (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, Inc.1974.) pp.70-1.
4. Ray Birdwhistell, *Kinesics and Context* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1970), p.192.
5. Mary Key, *Paralanguage and Kinesics* (Metuchen, N.J.: The Scarecrow Press, Inc, 1975), p.77.
6. Key, pp.82-90.
7. Paul Ekman, "Movements with Precise Meaning," *Journal of Communication*, 26 (Summer 1976), 14.
8. Ekman, pp.19-25.