

**THE WAYS OF REPRESENTATION OF NONVERBAL ELEMENTS OF  
BUSINESS DISCOURSE IN TRANSLATION**

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**ABSTRACT**

Language is the universal and primary mode of communication between people; however, information is transmitted not only with the help of verbal component, but also with the help of non-verbal signals. Communication is among the most frequently used ones in a number of branches of our modern globalized world. It has been very much preferred in business, where it can lead to great success accompanied with large profits or be blamed for failure and large losses. However, communication is far from being just about words or letters. Quite frequently communication is also about success in business, politics, art or good interpersonal relations. The paper is an attempt to give some more details on how gestures important in business discourse and present ways of translating non-verbal elements.

**Keywords:** communication, non-verbal elements, business discourse, translation.

**Introduction**

Communication and business stand side by side and its significance has risen a lot at contemporary world. To be successful, it is not enough to have appropriate professional knowledge, it is inevitable to be able to communicate it well to business partners. In the globalized world of differences between cultures and potential culture clashes, it is important to possess suitable intercultural competence based on knowledge what particular cultures make different from others. Moreover, not only verbal or written signs add to the fact what make business negotiations successful or not. Nonverbal communication is a specific form of communication that has been achieving a certain place of interest, however its role, significance or balance may be still underestimated from time to time.

People communicate by body language even if they do not talk. As soon as two or more people meet, they transmit some signals to their counterparts and before negotiations start, clever and aware participants may be a step forward in their observations and thus gain some advantage that may help them achieve better chances for final decisions. Nonverbal communication includes those important but unspoken signals that individuals or groups of people exhibit, without saying a word, using just specific parts of their bodies, namely eyes, hand gestures, facial expressions, physical appearance, etc. As generally stated, and mentioned above, verbal communication makes up only as little as 10% of messages we send to one another. In fact, 90% of messages that are being sent back and forth require no words at all, even though estimates slightly vary in the percentage score. In any case it means that even before we open



our mouths to speak, our appearance, gestures and body language send some signals to people we tend to communicate with.

It is difficult to prove that a business deal or political negotiation have failed just because of improper behaviour and lack of knowledge of partner's culture, an awareness of nonverbal communication and the cultural differences in the way that it functions can help people to avoid misunderstandings. We should be aware of knowing what message our business partner is sending and, at the same time, be aware of the possible impact of the messages our partner is receiving from us. Most of the time, this process is unconscious, so it requires a bit effort to pay closer attention to nonverbal cues we send or receive. Even though some people may tend to ignore or neglect it as something unimportant, it is worth of some extra work for gaining this key skill and focus on it during the process of communication.

How exactly the speaker's verbal and nonverbal messages are encoded and emitted, and how they are later decoded and conveyed to his listener or listeners may result in true communication, but at times also in miscommunication and even lack of communication altogether. As for the interpreter's own ability to relay the messages from the source linguistic-cultural block to the target one, we must realize that generally he has learned one of those two languages through the process of foreign-language acquisition, which may cause specific problems, among them that of the interference of one's own language and nonverbal systems. Applying it, for brevity's sake, only to kinesics, we may weigh the interpreter's position as listener by identifying the following attitudes on the part of the speaker he is translating:

a. the speaker uses his own kinesics constructs, correctly decoded by both interpreter and target listener because of their verbal and nonverbal context, being either of different form and meaning (e.g. in Niger, mostly with or by children, patting oneself on the top of the head compliments food as 'delicious'), different form but same meaning (e.g. a Colombian indicating a person's height with the palm of the hand vertically pointing forward), or same form but different meaning (a Venezuelan showing his hand palm down to refer only to an animal's height), in all three cases the correct decoding being perhaps delayed somewhat because the listener-viewer needs to process it within that context in order to switch meanings;

b. the speaker's kinesics expressions are not decoded because they do not make any 'syntactical sense', nor is there any visual association with the listener's native kinesics repertoire (e.g. the Spaniard's lower-eyelid pull with index finger signifying 'I saw it', or 'He didn't fool me');

c. the speaker may use kinesics expressions which the listener does not even perceive perhaps because he simply does not suspect that they carry any meaning (e.g. the Hong-Konger's tapping on the table with index and middle finger to thank someone pouring tea or wine for him, or the Saudi Arabian man reference to an attractive woman by sliding an index finger down his cheek);

d. perhaps those gestures are perceived but, because of certain deceiving contextual grammatical or circumstantial clues, they are misunderstood, a false decoding situation not untypical between members of different cultures who speak a common language (thus not applicable to the interpretation situation, as with anglophones from India and Canada);

e. the speaker may use kinesics false cognates (as he uses verbal ones) with similar form but different meaning, often worse than if he did not use anything at all (e.g. the Japanese finger-



ring gesture meaning money, and 'Okay' in North America, if done in Venezuela, where it is a sexual insult; or Niger's hand palm as a lid over a vertical fist, signifying 'crowded', done also in Malaysia, but as a sexual insult; unintentionally but gravely insulting a Greek interlocutor by showing him the splayed fingers of one hand to signify 'five');

f. the speaker may quite safely use gestures with the same form and meaning in both cultures, thus like true cognates (e.g. rubbing thumb and index finger to signify money in many cultures with slight differences);

g. the speaker may use his own kinesics constructions, correctly decoded by the listener from another culture because he perceives the right clues of syntactical co-structuration with other verbal or nonverbal behaviors, or because of the situational context, either with different form and meaning (e.g. the Spanish gesture for '/crowded/' by opening and closing once or twice the vertically bunched fingers of one hand), different form and same meaning (e.g. the Mexican vertical fist to indicate an animal's height, but not a person's), or same form but different meaning, like false cognates (e.g. the Spanish bunched fingers of one hand taken toward the mouth to indicate 'eating');

h. in addition, the speaker may at any time suffer from some degree of verbal, paralinguistic or kinesics deficiency, thus leaving semantically empty gaps which will result in the listener not being able to decode any message, for which the interpreter must compensate verbally [Poyatos 1997, 264].

Following the concepts of discourse by Wodak and Chilton (2005), we can define business discourse as the verbalization of business mentality, realized in the form of an open multitude of thematically correlated texts on a wide range of business issues, considered in combination with their extra-linguistic contexts. The concept of business discourse is wide and encompasses some "thematic subspecies", for example "economic discourse", "corporate discourse", "discourse of negotiations".

In a simultaneous interpreting situation, the listener usually sees the speaker and his body language while hearing, with a short delay, the verbal language and paralanguage of the visually absent interpreter [Weale 1997: 295]. Due to cultural differences, it may be hard for the listener to correctly decode the speaker's kinesics; they may not be perceived at all, they may not be understood, or in the worst case, they may be misunderstood. This is particularly the case with emblems, since they can carry much meaning, but it can also apply to other types of kinesics. Since interpreting should convey the entire message, and nonverbal communication is an essential part of communication, nonverbal elements should be conveyed in the target language in one way or another. This goes particularly for emblems that are not verbalized in the source language. Of course most parts of nonverbal communication are not perceived or decoded consciously, but they still influence the listener's understanding of the message [Argyle 2002: 17].

Naturally, only those nonverbal elements that the interpreter perceives consciously can be interpreted. Whether or not to interpret an emotion depends on whether it is intended by the speaker (e.g., irony, benevolence) or unintended (e.g., nervousness), and it is up to the interpreter to judge whether conveying it verbally or through paralanguage would be in the speaker's interest or whether it would constitute an invasion of the person's privacy .



Interpreting nonverbal communication is certainly important if it adds information by stressing or substituting words, in particular if the interpreter can assume the listener would not decode this kinetics statement correctly. When kinesics are used out of verbal deficiency, it is up to the interpreter to supply the word verbally in his interpretation [Poyatos, 1987, 73].

It is impossible to provide a definitive checklist of do's and don'ts regarding nonverbal communication as it is rather personal, denoting belonging to a certain community or culture and it very much depends on specific situations. Business meetings always follow their specific aims focusing preferably on spreading business activities and increasing profit. In the global world, existing financial crisis, surrounded by a huge number of competitors, business people should be well aware not only of their professional, managerial skills and knowledge, but they should possess good soft skills that still tend to be overlooked or neglected. Moreover, translators should have appropriate knowledge of nonverbal communication as well cultural differences may provide clever professionals with comparative advantage to become successful in their efforts. The extent to which the interpreter takes advantage of this input depends largely on the individual's style; some interpreters prefer to close their eyes during difficult passages. While studies show that visual nonverbal information is often redundant, it can nevertheless aid the processing of information. Visual contact can certainly be of importance when the verbal message refers to the audience or the conference room or when the non-verbal element adds information that is not present in the speech. This may also be the case with some types of language markers, which are usually accompanied by vocal stress patterns but can serve to visually structure complex sentences.

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