

# The Function of Body Language Within Language-Communication Relationship

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**Abstract**—First and foremost, language is a medium of communication. Human is the creature to use this medium most commonly and effectively. Humankind, as a creature with physiological features as well as a sociological and psychological whole, needs to communicate and connect with those in the social environment. Many methods and means of communication, which the humankind establishes in order to understand and be understood, are available. Oral narration among these has been prioritized as a communication medium, richer and more powerful than all alphabetical indicators, before written language. In addition to oral and written narration, colors, pictures, various signs, different mechanical sounds, and some body movements may be used as communication means. In verbal communication, some body movements, often made unconsciously but usually practiced purposefully, are among body language activities playing an effective role in communication. A good speaker uses body language in order to be effective and convincing while conveying his/her message to the target audience because body language, rather than words, is essential in delivering and understanding feelings and thoughts. For the listener or follower, it is a complicated process to know people and to understand the speaker's feelings and whether s/he tells the truth. Within this context, a listener with a focus on understanding pays attention to whatever the speaker tells as well as his/her tone of voice, behaviors, and body movements. S/he considers not only what s/he hears but also what s/he observes and often concludes combining these. Thus, in oral communication, the medium to delivery thought as a product of mental activity is in audio form as well as visual because, in communication, the language has referential function as well as the function to motivate the receiver. Body language is an important dynamic power to actualize this in communication.

**Keywords**—Language and communication, oral narration, body language.

## I. INTRODUCTION

LINGUISTS have developed many similar definitions of the *language* concept as a communication and understanding medium. According to Turkish linguist Muharrem Ergin, "Language is a natural medium enabling communication among humans, with its own peculiar rules, and it is a living thing developing only within these rules; it is an invisible system of contracts whose foundation was laid in times unknown and a social institution of interwoven sounds" (Ergin, 1985:3). Zeynep Korkmaz, who perceives this definition "basically as a communication means", defines language as: "a multifaceted and developed system enabling

individuals in a community to deliver ideas and feelings to others through common elements and rules valid with respect to sounds and meanings in such community" (Korkmaz, 2005:2). Thus, language, in the role of mutual communication among people, becomes unities of sounds, shapes, and meanings used as a medium of communicating feelings, ideas, and wishes. Intelligence, feeling, and thinking as a whole are peculiar to human. These elements forming human's inner self are directly associated with language because human is a social creature who can think and produce new things through this skill for sharing with others (Cuceloglu, 1979: 308). Within the said sharing, communication among individuals often takes place orally, face to face, in addition to written narration.

Language leads the elements forming the nation whose world of thinking it reflects. It represents all members of the nation as an expression and bearer of national and moral values (Akarsu, 1998: 56). Language, used as the most effective source to connect individuals and to feed national consciousness, has a relatively freer, more sincere, and broader field of maneuvers in verbal narration as it becomes official in written narration, based on all defined rules closely associated with terminology utilized in individual's professional world.

## II. LANGUAGE AND COMMUNICATION

Language, as an effective vehicle among means of communication, serves an important function for an individual to adopt a social circle. Almost all living things, from human to ant, enjoy a communication and correspondence system (Aksan, 2000:42). However, human is the only creature developing and using this for certain purposes because the ability to speak just as feeling hungry or need for sleep is coded in human nature and it is one of the important skills giving humankind superiority over other living things. The main factor enabling humankind to become socialized through communication is language. Words of a language have conceptual correspondence in an individual's mind. Communication takes place via these symbolized concepts for "people mostly perceive, evaluate, and make sense of their surroundings through the window of symbols and concepts available in their languages" (Gökçe, 2001: 93). Thus, whatever the conditions of communication taking place, the material of realizing it (including the body language) is mentally perceived symbols, signs, and concepts. However, "in order for the communication process among people to be sound, as in the relationship between speaker and the listener, four basic elements such as sender, receiver, the reference, and the channel must coalesce" (Aktaş; Gündüz, 2005: 7). In addition to oral and written languages, body language also

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silently becomes alive in this main body. According to Aktas and Gunduz, *the sender* as the source is the one delivering the message to the other party. *Reference* on the other hand is the message itself and coded with some symbols such as pictures, words, and body movements with correspondence based in information, feeling, and ideas. *Receiver* is the target consisting of a reader or a listener who perceives the message, by decoding, and is expected to respond accordingly. Another element, *source*, on the other hand, consists of various message-carrying mediums such as words, symbols, objects, signs, and outfit used in the delivery of feelings and ideas. Among these communication mediums, body language ranks after oral and written narration in terms of effectiveness.

Another quality that the humans are born with is about the ability to think and the intelligence. Language-thinking relationship in communication bears a mutual vitality. According to some linguists, language is the source of thinking: without words and concepts, ideas cannot be produced and delivered. Hence, German thinker Hammann says that “intelligence is something consisting of all processes of understanding, however, understanding can only take place through language. No intelligence without language because language is both the organ and the scale of thought” (as cited in Akarsu, 1998: 37). According to Akarsu who says “every thought is in darkness without language” (Akarsu, 1998: 31), humankind utilizes language facilities when transforming concepts into symbols and symbols into meaningful messages. Even then, it does not seem possible to name things and develop concepts without the ability to think. Thus, it is obvious that it is hard to talk about the existence of ideas without language and language without thinking.

The human is a social creature, without the possibility to live alone. Hence, people need to share their feelings, ideas, and know-how, thus, to communicate. Therefore, the individual needs and has to live in a community. The language, which functions to form natural, emotional, and psychological connections among people, is at the same time a uniting element. A dictionary<sup>1</sup> consists of the conceptual match between the power of body language and the sub-conscious codes.

Communication, in relation to various disciplines such as linguistics, sociology, and psychology, is a complicated concept whose borders cannot be drawn clearly. This concept, with many definitions by the experts, is described as “a dynamic process where people transform concepts such as feelings, ideas, knowledge, and judgment, through certain codes and symbols, into meaningful messages and share with others of common or foreign cultural background” (Yalçın, Şengül; 2007: 750). Communication is an activity taking place between the sender, who codes messages within the context of feelings, thoughts, and information and deliver to the other party, and the receiver, who decodes the messages from the sender (Erol, 1994: 72). The communication system, attracting

attention in a relevant way, is as much needed as healthy nutrition by the individual to survive in community life. In the communication process, the feedback consisting of the receiver’s response is as important as the sender’s message to receiver. The purpose in this process, where sent and received messages must be related, is to understand and to be understood. It is imperative for the individual to communicate effectively in order to understand the community and the society that s/he lives in, things, nature, and the universe (Zillioğlu, 1993: 49). Often there is a lack and/or oversight of communication in the background of issues occurring among people in daily life and, as a result, fights and struggles to follow. Inadequacies in mentioned communication skills are often experienced around individual’s lack of empathy towards other party and not listening enough. To communicate is not as an easy activity as it is thought to be. For a healthy communication, certain indicators must be utilized. Russian linguist Roman Jakobson lists these indicators as six elements: sender, message, receiver, feedback, and the context. However, before anything, in order for the message to be understood, both parties as sender and receiver must enjoy a code system and experience a healthy listening process. Listening is basically a matter of responsibility and respect as well as a prerequisite to understand the other party. The parties in communication are required to remove all following obstacles before listening for a healthy communication to take place: making comparison; reading intention; focusing on the response rather than listening to the other party; judging; not valuing whatever is said and missing the details; getting smart with the other party; advising the other; often interrupting; distorting the subject; sneering; drowning out the other party; being obstinate; arguing; and acting and behaving beyond the purpose.

One skill in addition to listening, used in communication, is about *revealing one’s self*. Fears such as not being received well, being misunderstood, being refused, and punished are leading factors preventing the individual from using this skill. Individual’s improved self-confidence will facilitate overcoming of said psychological obstacles.

Communication is at the same time a meaningful reflection of people’s inward experiences. Namely, “it is about producing meaning and sharing it with others” (Kilic, 2002:16). The most basic ability for effective communication is individual’s ability to self-express clearly and powerfully enough. This becomes possible when supported by four separate sources. These are, first and foremost, thought, feelings, observation, and needs. Judgments and deductions obtained through listening, reading, and observation represent thoughts. It is important to express this clearly and explicitly during communication. The most difficult thing to understand and be perceived during communication is the feelings delivered because feelings consist of the major part of items making the individual distinct and special. Man can have hardships to share these but confidence and sincerity help overcome this obstacle. Another ability of expression is observation, with no space for prediction, feelings, and judgment. Impartiality is the basic characteristic of observation. Whatever the individual sees, reads, and

<sup>1</sup> A dictionary of body language, symbol-message relationship and conceptual dimension is available. Meanings of human gestures are explained in Desmond Morris’ body language book with meanings of more than 600 facial expressions listed (Tekeli, 2011: 27).

experiences is essential. Inclusion of exaggeration and subjective judgment in observation harms reliability in communication.

Need, on the other hand, is personal. It is important for the speakers to seriously and decisively state what they need to the other party in terms of facilitating understanding. Individuals' ability to effectively state what they see, think, feel, and need in a message during communication will increase the functioning of the communication system that they want to structure; and delivering the elements of message through body language directly, clearly, and in a positively supportive manner will strengthen achieved communication.

### III. BODY LANGUAGE AND ITS FUNCTION

Three basic elements of communication among people are voice, words, and body language. Body language among these is a more reliable means of communication as it is visual and more effective to draw attention. According to Zeynep Korkmaz, "gestures, mimics, and movements of hands, arms, eyes, and body, used in relationships among people, despite the differences in communication from community to community," are important means of communication (Korkmaz, 2005:1). The importance of body language lies on its purpose to communicate effectively and to reach its target by creating a positive influence on others. Thus, man can mostly express whatever s/he wants to tell in spoken language and through some peculiar gestures. The gestures and movements forming the said behaviors are sometimes revealed as sub-conscious physical reactions to serve the purpose to confirm the truth in the narration and to be more effectively convincing. In daily life, people who communicate better express themselves through their tone of voice, gestures and mimics, hand and arm movements. Phonetics includes the features of voice usage such as intonation, tone, and stress affecting the messages from the sender, in terms of meaning. Credibility in the message is based not only on voice and words but also body language that words are said along with (Izgoren, 2000:41). Hence, visual quality is the element that attracts the attention of listening target mass. Eye contact, facial expression, hand, arm, head, and finger movements, standing positions, and even the distance between the parties in communication are elements directly affecting the communication achieved. Considering narration as the first-degree factor on the success of the communication, in non-verbal narration, how it is said is more important than whatever is said (Layic, 2007:14).

### IV. FACIAL-EYE EXPRESSION

Man often cannot avoid attentive eyes and reveals himself even though he wants to hide his real feelings based on certain accounts. The most important organ telling on someone is eyes and facial expression because man's inner world reflects on his face. Moods of tension, fear, happiness, and embarrassment are revealed on his facial expression. For instance, it is possible to read from people's face when they lie and feel guilty because people can hardly control their facial look in such situations.

First and the most important means, put forward in communication, are eyes. Eye contact in communication is important in terms of sensing the situation, affecting and being affected via connection with feelings, and making a decision. Eyes reflect the covert feelings and opinions, and the message to be given; they mean no lie and hypocrisy. Thus, eyes knowing how to see can discover thousands of meanings hidden on a face. While talking, looking at the other party's face and building eye contact mean the other party is interesting and valued. During the communication process, behavior of someone taking eyes away for more than one third of the total time with the other party may mean that this person is not honest and tries to conceal some things. A person can use an attractive look aside, a certain interest or attack as a means of expression. A frown and lined forehead are indicators of unfriendly and criticizing attitude stemming from a negative message, in a person's behavior. This behavior, developing unconsciously at times, is perceived as a result of being bored with the other party or not wanting to deal with him/her anymore or regarding himself/herself superior to the other party. Facial expression is also effective elements to define perception in communication. It is possible to perceive the receiver's focus of attention, steering away from the topic of talk, acceptance or refusal of the message from his/her facial expression. Tilting head sideways while talking to someone means much interest in the topic of conversation or dropping one's head means a negative, even judging, attitude towards whatever is listened and said.

### V. HAND, ARM MOVEMENTS

Hand, arm, head, and leg movements may be assigned many meanings in communication. Holding an index finger towards your addressee may mean warning in some situations; however, depending on the intensity and the status of the movement, it gives different messages and often means threat. For instance, rubbing a thumb against an index finger is usually perceived as associated with money or expecting money. Touching a nose with a finger means refusal and speaking with a finger pointing at something expresses superiority (Baltas, 1992:124). Hand movements also have many meanings in body language. Leading hand movement is shaking hands. Hand-shaking is the act to begin a communication process. It is a person's venture to indicate moral courage, interest, and attention. The act of hand shaking is the first step in the communication to take place between parties and the approach initiated with the wish to be introduced and to build confidence. Holding a wrist, grabbing an elbow, an upper arm, and shoulder during hand shaking may indicate closeness and sincerity at times; however, occasionally it may mean superiority, too. It is observed that some of the hand, arm, and head movements often identify with behaviors of people in various professional groups. For instance, the standing of someone with interdigitating hands behind head, when communicating, is often peculiar to the mood of someone (such as jurisdiction members, organization/institution heads or managers) who tries to see/show himself/herself superior (Tozar, 2002:102). Rubbing hands is a non-verbal way of exhibiting positive expectations.

Sometimes, a person may understand what the other wants to tell, only through a hand movement. For instance, touching lips with the index finger and putting a hand on a speaker's arm may mean interrupting the other party. Similarly, in order to end a dispute started, it is enough to move a hand horizontally. Cleaning glasses and putting a pen on lips are usually for distracting the other party. Hand movements that mean *come*, *go*, *stop*, *sit*, and *bye* in many communities speaking with open gestures are the same. When crossing arms, if the hands are down and not visible, that means the person's insisting, aggressive, and restless mood. In the same position, if the hands are up and visible, they indicate that a relaxed, trusting person is willfully insisting.

#### VI. BODY POSE (POSTURE)

Posture, namely body pose, is meaningful in terms of giving important clues of an individual's personality, his/her inner world, and the message that the person wants to communicate. Within this context, theatre actors and mimes are among the most readable. It is assumed that researchers' interesting deductions from postures and facial expressions began in 19<sup>th</sup> century when Charles Bell published his book on anatomy and physiology of expression (Evkarali, 2002:34).

Psychological mood of someone, who constantly forces themselves or feels threatened, will reveal in the following movements: crossing arms in body language, pulling the abdomen back, and dropping head. This is a defensive attitude, which is the clearest sign of feeling threatened. Someone sitting on a chair, slightly leaning forward, holding armrests tight, and crossing legs behind is actually perceived to be shy, timid, and restless. Someone communicating standing upright, with hands in pockets on pants, and feet in an outward position, exhibits an attitude of mocking, over-confidence, and not seriously taking the other party. Behavior of someone, sitting on a chair with unbuttoned jacket, legs crossed, free hand and arm movements, and smiling to the other party, is that of confidently criticizing listener (Izgoren, 2000:73). Sitting style reveals important information about personal characteristics and inner world. The place to sit as well as sitting style on a chair or armchair, and the way legs are positioned, are all meaningful in terms of body language. A person's way of crossing legs may mean many different things and reflect important clues about his/her inner world. For instance, in the communication process, the position of *four* on crossed legs indicates that the person is ready to argue and compete. "It will not be a mistake to think that someone holding a leg with one or two hands in sitting position is a rigid and stubborn person who will not change opinions" (Evkarali, 2002: 27). Sitting on the edge of a chair and putting all the weight on someone's legs mean that this person is on tenterhooks. This position which indicates that they are not willing to stay in the setting is the reflection of inner tension. Sitting upright means being open to communicate and being happy with the setting; whereas a stooping sit indicates shyness and consumed self-confidence. In addition, taking the closest position possible to the other party without violating *personal space* principles during communication often means love and friendship.

#### VII. APPEARANCE

A person's appearance is also a part of body language with various messages. A nice, respectable, and impressive appearance, far from exaggeration and show-off, is considered a silent advice. It means valuing one's self for the individual to choose an outfit compatible with his/her social surrounding, professional group norms, social status, role, and position and to take good self-care, from head to toe (Cüceloğlu, 1991: 38). In addition, individuals' social statuses can be perceived through certain means other than professional group, economic status, culture and belief systems, and body movements. Some people are observed to use some accessories to give message to others. For instance, clothes, logos on clothes, materials such as badges, buttons, and labels, cultural elements such as outfit style and ways of entertainment are indicators of people's social, cultural, and economic statuses and worlds of thought. Within this context, considering people making decisions about one another in less than 3 seconds based on body language, it can be said that appearance is very important in terms of creating a perception and personal image.

As every community has a body language created in relation to its language, culture, and traditions, within the context of messages delivered by body language, there is a universal aspect of this, not changing from community to community. For instance, moods such as happiness, fear, rage, astonishment, sadness, and disgust reflect on human face in common shapes, without differing from culture to culture (Baltas, 2000:68). Facial expression, reflecting various feelings, is the same in every community as it is basically human. It is known that behaviors with similar meanings are exhibited in terms of body movements. Nodding with head, meaning *yes* or *approval* in many different community and culture, is one of these.

Research shows that words are effective in a rate of 10%, tone of voice in 30%, and body language in 60% in communication (Cooper, 1989:56). However, within the context of language-communication relationship, body language and messages alone, exemplified above, cannot be considered a criterion to express the truth.

#### VIII. CONCLUSION

Language is a whole of sound, words, and movements, through which produced messages are delivered to the other party; it is a basic means used in order for communication to take place. Communication, on the other hand, is a process where parties in communication deliver information to each other through verbal or non-verbal messages and various signs and movements within body language and try to understand and interpret these messages. Communication emerges from the need to express feelings and thoughts, wishes and requests, requirements, and visions of future in the best way and share them. Therefore, parties in communication focus to understand each other.

One of the most important humankind characteristics distinguishing him/her from other living things is the ability to make up symbolic codes and assign meaning on them as well as communicating feelings and thoughts, wishes and requests to other people through use of many means of communication.

One of the said symbolic codes is body language. Humankind's ability to think lets him/her to speak, write or express through various signs and movements, for certain purposes. The relationship between parties, the hidden meaning in their movements and expressions can be read through body movements because body language more than words is essential in perception of feelings and thoughts. Non-verbal signs are common and important in a person's daily life. Grasping these and enjoying the skill to use effectively both positively affect individual's personal image and professional achievements and facilitate social relationships.

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