Non-verbal communication in human social interaction

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Argyle, M. (1972)
'Non-verbal communication
in human social interaction'
in Hinde, R. (ed.).

The human body presentational codes

The human body is
the main transmitter of presentational codes
Argyle (1972) lists ten such codes
and suggests the sort of meanings
they can convey.

1. Bodily contact:

Whom we touch and where
and when we touch them
can convey important messages
about relationships.
Interestingly, this code and the next
(proximity) are ones that appear
to vary most between
people of different cultures.
The British touch each other less frequently
than members of almost any other culture.

2. Proximity (or proxemics):

How closely we approach someone can give a
message about our relationship.
There appear to be 'distinctive features'
that differentiate significantly different distance
Within three feet is intimate;
up to about eight feet is personal;
over eight feet is semi-public; and so on.
he actual distances may vary
from culture to culture:

2. Proximity (or proxemics):

The actual distances may vary from culture to culture:
The personal, but not intimate, distance of Arabs can be as little as eighteen inches—which can be very embarrassing for a British listener.
Middleclass distances tend to be slightly larger than the corresponding working class ones.

3. Orientation:

How we angle ourselves to others
is another way of sending
messages about relationships.
Facing someone can indicate either intimacy
or aggression;
being at 90° to another indicates
a co-operative stance;
and so on.

4. Appearance:

Argyle divides this into two:
those aspects under voluntary control
—hair, clothes, skin, bodily paint
and adornment—
and those less controllable
—height, weight, etc.
Hair is, in all cultures, highly significant
as it is the most 'flexible' part of our bodies:
we can most easily alter its
appearance.

4. Appearance:

Appearance is used
to send messages about personality,
social status, and, particularly, conformity.
Teenagers frequently indicate
their dissatisfaction with adult values
by hair and dress:
and then complain
when such messages
of hostility provoke negative
reactions from adults!

5. Head nods:

These are involved mainly
in interaction management,
particularly in turn-taking in speech.
One nod may give the other
permission to carry on speaking;
rapid nods may indicate a wish to speak.

6. Facial expression:

This may be broken down
into the sub-codes of eyebrow
position, eye shape, mouth shape,
and nostril size. These, in various
combinations, determine
the expression of the face,
and it is possible to
write a 'grammar'
of their combinations and meanings.
Interestingly, facial expression shows
less cross-cultural variation than most other
presentational codes.

7. Gestures (or kinesics):

The hand and arm are
the main transmitters of gesture,
but gestures of feet and head are also important.
They are closely co-ordinated with speech
and supplement verbal communication.

7. Gestures (or kinesics):

They may indicate either
general emotional arousal
or specific emotional states.
The intermittent, emphatic up-and-down gestur
often indicates an attempt to dominate,
whereas more fluid, continuous, circular gestur
indicate a desire to explain or to win sympathy.
Besides these indexical gestures,
there is a group of symbolic ones.

7. Gestures (or kinesics):

These are frequently insulting or scatological and are specific to a culture or subculture: the V sign is an example.
We should also mention the iconic type of gesture such as beckoning, or using the hands to describe a shape or direction.

8. Posture :

Our ways of sitting, standing, and lying can communicate a limited but interesting range of meanings. These are frequently concerned with interpersonal attitudes: friendliness, hostility, superiority or inferiority can all be indicated by posture.

8. Posture :

Posture can also indicate emotional state, particularly the degree of tension or relaxation. Interestingly, and perhaps surprisingly, posture is less well controlled than facial expression: anxiety that does not show on the face may well be given away by posture.

9. Eye movement and eye contact:

When, how often, and for how long we meet other people's eyes is a way of sending very important messages about relationships, particularly how dominant or affiliative we wish the relationship to be. Staring someone out is a simple challenge of dominance; making eyes at someone indicates a desire for affiliation.

9. Eye movement and eye contact:

Making eye contact at the beginning of or early in a verbal statement indicates a desire to dominate the listener, to make him or her pay attention; eye contact towards the end of or after a verbal statement indicates a more affiliative relationship, a desire for feedback, to see how the listener is reacting.

10. Non-verbal aspects of speech :

These are divided into two categories:
(a) The prosodic codes which affect
(b) the meaning of the words used.
Pitch and stress are the main codes here.
'The shops are open
on Sunday' can be made into a statement,
a question, or an
expression of disbelief
by the pitch of the voice,

10. Non-verbal aspects of speech :

(b) The paralinguistic codes
which communicate information about
the speaker.
Tone, volume, accent, speech errors,
and speed indicate
the speaker's emotional state,
personality, class, social status,
way of viewing the listener, and so on.

Conclusion:

These presentational codes
are classified by their medium.
They are all relatively simple,
in that they have
comparatively few units to choose
from in the paradigmatic dimension,
and very simple rules of combination
in the syntagmatic.
They are, in fact, broadly similar
to what Bernstein calls 'restricted' codes.

Thank you for your attendance