

Body Language - Perfect Means of Accentuating the Statement

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Abstract

Nonverbal expressions (gestures, mimic, body movement) are reviewed in the article. Body language is a perfect means of accentuating the statement but it should be used very carefully, because the same gestures may mean absolutely different things in various cultures. Do not forget about the subtlety of body language when practicing your language skills.

Keywords: gestures, mimic, body movements, linguistic culture

Introduction

Body language is a perfect means of accentuating the statement but it should be used very carefully, because the same gestures may mean absolutely different things in various cultures.

“Thumbs-up”.

This is a gesture popular in many countries expressing consent or approval but in Bangladesh it is considered to be insulting. In some parts of the Near East thumb up is very insulting. Thumb up has been misleading people for many millenniums!

“Come here”. This gesture is used in the USA to ask somebody to take a step forward. However, this gesture should not be used in Asian countries. Only dogs are called using this gesture in Asian countries. If you use this gesture in Philippines you may be even arrested.

Gesture “goat”. The gesture “goat” is widely used by rockers and represents a sign of approval in the USA

“Rock on”! The gesture “goat” accompanied by a motto “Hook ‘em Horns” - is a traditional welcome gesture of the University of Austin, Texas. However, in many Mediterranean countries as well as in the Latin American countries (Spain, Italy, Portugal, Argentina, Brazil, Columbia, Cuba) this gesture is used to hint to infidelity of the partner of the companion.

“Clock-watching”. This may mean “I am in a hurry” or “I am late”. It is common to have an informal and hasteless

conversation in the Near East. Clock-watching during the conversation is deemed to be a rather unmannerly conduct. It is not accepted to terminate a started conversation in the Arabic culture.

Gesture “OK”. In the majority of English-speaking countries of the world as well as in a number of other countries this gesture means that everything is fine, perfect, OK or all right. Nonetheless, this gesture is considered to be rude in Brazil. The most well-known example is a story which happened in 1950s when Richard Nixon visited Brazil and showed “OK” to the crowd meeting him during his arrival to Rio-de-Janeiro and he was barracked for doing so!

Gesture “V”. There are two options: the palm of hand is directed off yourself and towards yourself. These gestures mean victory in the USA. In other countries, for example, in Great Britain and the Republic of South Africa, if the palm of hand is directed towards oneself, this gesture is considered to be very rude.

Next time when you practice the language skills, do not forget about subtleties of the body language.

Thus, currently foreign language is learnt according to “scenarios”, i.e. using corresponding contexts. Interaction of people in society at the linguistic level is carried out in the form of expression. Linguistic expressions may be verbal (by words), para-verbal (intonation, rhythm, pause) and non-verbal (gestures, mimic, body movements). Such learning helps to achieve successful communication. Understating linguistic behavior is combined with the needs playing a role in real life: ability to quickly find specific information in the

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text, understand the general idea etc. The scientists have established that 35% of information in the process of communication is conveyed using a language.

A distinguished professor of Moscow State University, Svetlana Ter-Minasova (patronymic – Gregory) provides the following data obtained as a result of researches conducted by British psychologists. According to these findings, communication consists of 7% - verbal means, i.e. words; 38 % - phonetics of the speech (intonation, tone, timbre, topics, i.e. understanding so-called extra-segment level); 55 % - nonverbal means (mimic, gestures, body movements, eyes, smile etc.). It appears that in oral and visual communication, during direct contacts, the words, i.e. what we say account for 7% of communication only, while 93% is how we say (Ter-Minasova, 2008, p. 110).

So-called “somatic language” – body language, languages of poses, mimic, facial expressions which also service as the means of communicating information belongs to other, nonverbal means of communication.

Body language is definitely universal only in the part of descriptive gestures (striking a match, shaving etc.), however, to a large extent “gesture communication is the same national phenomenon as verbal languages” (Vereshyagin & Kostomarov, 1999, p. 43). This is facilitated by the double nature of somatic language: on the one hand, biologic, inherent (unintentional, involuntary expressions: paling of face, dilation of pupils, deformation of lips) and on the other hand, social, acquired by humans in the process of socialization (intentional, voluntary expressions: scratch one’s head (thinking over a problem); can’t take one’s eyes off; rub one’s hands (with pleasure or malevolence); punch oneself in the chest (proving once truth). This duality of nonverbal, communication explains the existence of universal signs understandable by everybody as well as specific signals used within the limits of one culture only. For example, Turks express disagreement by throwing their head up, while for Russians this means consent. Nonverbal means can thematize negative emotions independently. They often function in combination with linguistic means. At the same time, a full emotive information is created.

Historically earlier developed and directly perceivable nonverbal means can have a stronger influence on the addressee, convey the subtlest hues of attitudes, emotions, evaluations and convey information which is difficult of inconvenient to express by words for some reasons. So it can be stated that nonverbal behavior is not less important than uttered words. For example, emotional gestures are very diverse. In case of surprise, hands are thrown up; in case of anticipation of something pleasant – hands are rubbed. Astonishment or doubt are expressed by raising shoulders. In-sistence of question is often accompanied by such gesture: the palm of semi-bent hand is directed above and towards the companion (at the level of the chest).

Particular and very important role in the system of communication means is played by gestures expressing consent and disagreement and gestures accepted as symbols during greeting, farewell, addressing and other acts of communication provided for by etiquette.

If the teacher as an orator is interested in success of his/her speech, his/her mimic cannot be inexpressive. Students can always guess by face how interested the teacher is in his/her speech. And if the teacher has a “stupid look” and poker face, such indifference will “infect” the group as well.

Mimic must be closely connected with gestures, i.e. it must be “vivid”, changeable in the process of speech in interaction with the audience. Only if the teacher controls his/her speech, accompanies it with relevant gestures and facial mimic, if he/she “has control over his/her body”, his/her speech and psychological victory over listeners, success for working on oneself, recognition for hard work will be guaranteed.

Conclusion

The teacher should describe peculiarities of gestures and mimic in the linguistic environment. For example, the Russian speech etiquette provides for avoiding rather vivid mimic and gestures as the latter may have unequal meanings in various linguistic cultures.

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