

Nonverbal Semiotics of Discursive Practices

I. Sieriakova

Kyiv National Linguistic University, Kyiv, Ukraine

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Abstract. In this article we tend to overview an integrated approach to the study of nonverbal semiotics of English discursive practices. It is highlighted in the insights of semiology, cognitive linguistics, nonverbal communication and pragmatics. For this purpose, we provide a semiotic description of nonverbal behavior of people in genesis, cognition and communication elucidation.

Keywords: *nonverbal semiotics, discursive practices, nonverbal universals*

1. Introduction. The ability of Man to perceive the world on the sensori-motor level, the skills to interpret the bodily movements as signs put forward the theoretical assumption of understanding the bodily actions as inferences which require people's semiotic and pragmatic competences. In genesis, history and culture contexts these bodily actions create a specific system of signs which is known as a **system of nonverbal communication** [5, 8]. Gestures, facial expressions, postures are not only the cases of the embodied mind but are such semiotic clusters in which we can observe the changes in meaning and form in the communicative process caused by the conventions and norms of the language community.

Meanwhile we witness the increase of interest in the humanities to *Homo corporalis* which can be labeled as "the concept of body", "the flash", "bodily movements", "nonverbal behavior", "nonverbal semiotics" etc. Scholars state that we observe the so called corporal turn in different research paradigms dealt with the human being – not only in linguistics but in logic and philosophy as well. We consider that the current state of nonverbal semiotics is crucially influenced by T. Sebeok's *Global Semiotics* [13] where anthropological and biosemiotic aspects were outlined. Then, of course, we have to mention a revolutionary by impact on cognitive and semiotic studies the book *Philosophy in the Flesh* by George Lakoff and Mark Johnson, where they argue that "Human concepts are not just reflections of an external reality, but they are crucially shaped by our bodies and brains, especially by our sensori-motor system" [7, p. 22]. The conclusion of semiologists about the act of communication as a conceptual field of the corporalis, and about the discourse as a phenomenon where a corporality space exists in its visual perception by communicators can prove **the topicality** of the systemic description of nonverbal signs in the insights of semiology in its broad meaning.

2. Genesis of Nonverbal Semiotics. Nonverbal behavior in communication is explored by different communication scholars: psychologists, linguists, anthropologists, sociologists etc. The contributions of these researchers have shown that the verbal part of communication is just the tip of the iceberg. The work in nonverbal behavior has led to a new perspective in the communicative linguistics to re-examine its key definitions and notions, for example: (1) definitions, which emphasize only verbal stimuli are seen as clearly inadequate; (2) previous defining characteristics of communication, such as intentionality, purposefulness and awareness, are being re-considered in a new light; (3) new attention is being directed to emotional, cognitive and innate dimensions of communication. Recently, nonverbal researchers begin to talk more about

they are doing in semiotics. They try to find out a consensus on key terms and to articulate the boundaries of nonverbal semiotics within the general anthropological scientific paradigm.

Researches in nonverbal semiotics can help to understand fundamental patterns of human interaction both in evolution of the species and in the development of individual humans. The study of nonverbal signs can be traced back to the time of Aristotle. The modern era of scientific study is begun with Charles Darwin's work on evolution. It was Darwin who put forward the idea that human expressions are at least in part innate, surviving from evolutionary forces in lower animals. The smile, for instance, might be linked to the pleasant experience of baring the teeth in anticipation of biting into a juicy victim [4, p. 260]. Thus, some scholars now agree that people first learn to communicate nonverbally [17, p. 104; 18], and the basic patterns of interaction remain relatively fixed, with only minor shifts and elaborations when the verbal embellishment is added.

Men have been debating the origin of language from the early times putting forward theories designed to account for the evolution of language. Scholars have tended to regard human language either as a unique phenomenon, without significant analogue in the animal world, or as one evolved from animal communication or from systems of nonverbal "instinctive" emotional cries and gestures. Drawing parallels between features of human language and the various systems of communication used by other animal species confirms the view that nonverbal and verbal aspects of communication are closely interrelated in man's evolutionary development.

Ch. Darwin's "Origin of Species" and "Expression of the Emotion in Man and Animal" gave particular speculations to the attempt to construct an evolutionary theory of the origin of language. Although there is no evidence of evolution from a more primitive to a more advanced form of structure in existing languages, there are two kinds of facts relevant to the topic of the relationship between language and nonverbal communication: (1) evidence derived from the study of children's language; and (2) evidence derived from a comparison of the structure and functions of language and nonverbal cues [10, p. 76].

The study of language acquisition has been strongly influenced by the theory of generative grammar. N. Chomsky [2] argues that the speed with which children are able to learn, in a relatively short time, the language of the community in which they are brought up, can be explained only by assuming that children are genetically endowed with a "knowledge" of the structural principles common to all human languages. Chomsky's restatement

of the doctrine of innate ideas has provoked a lot of discussions among psychologists, philosophers and linguists [1, 11]. If one applies the term "innate" to characters, one soon has to answer what exactly it is that is innate. For some scholars, there is no alternative that "innate" means "in the genes". Thus statements that language is innate in man should mean that man differs from other animals in that, if both are put in the same environment, man develops language and animals do not [10].

However, successful the linguists may be in abstracting the principles of a universal grammar, assigning those principles to the mind as an "innate property" does not solve the problem of ontogeny. N. Chomsky and many of the scholars influenced by him have failed to give sufficient attention to the environmental and nonverbal factors involved to the development of what they call "communicative competence". By omitting of any account of the role of the various low-level sensori-motor capacities involved in the perception and production of language, scholars can considerably simplify the universal characterization of cognitive and linguistic capacities.

3. Sensori-motor Program of Man. Our sense of the world begins with and depends on our bodies, especially on sensori-motor apparatus, sensori-motor body capacities which enable us to express and to perceive the ideas and attitudes in human interaction. It also depends on the morphology of our brains, which have been shaped by phylogenetic / ontogenetic evolution and social experience.

In this perspective, it seems important to observe the alternative works by J. Piaget who postulated a very challenging idea of a correlation between the developmental schedule for speech and the stage of cognitive development in child [19]. Investigating the developmental schedule of young children, J. Piaget introduced the notion of the *sensori-motor intelligence* and claimed that the pre-language stage of mankind and the earliest language stage of the infant's life are under the control of the same phenomenon – *sensori-motor program*.

The world acquisition in child comes through all sensori-motor channels. J. Piaget claimed that sensory-motor intelligence could represent the logic of actions much before the existence of mind and language. The child's capacity to assimilate his nonverbal to the schemes of his previous actions predetermines the development of logical generalization of mind. Clearly, the logic of actions is prior to the conceptual logic. Up to the age of two the child demonstrates the symbolic and semiotic function of nonverbal behavior. Sensori-motor intellect is resulted from the processes of biological self-regulation. In this critical period, the child's gestures, mimics and vocal cues are his primary and only means of communication with the world. The development of symbolic nonverbal function gets the brain ready to be "turned" to language [19, p. 133-136]. If language is not acquired during that period, it may not be properly acquired at all.

In this respect, the implication seems to be that nonverbal communication, in general, is under the control of sensori-motor intelligence, whereas language in its fully developed form requires the higher modes of cognitive ability, though continuing to make of the sensori-motor basis [14, p. 8]. We might probably go on to hypothesize that nonverbal communication of the later stages relates to definite cognitive abilities and cognitive constructs favoring to

apply the nonverbal communication cues purposefully in accordance with the pragmatic aims of speech interaction. The one element that is common to all human communication systems is man himself. All human beings, having heads, faces, eyes, ears, hands, legs, and body, display some physiological symptoms, demonstrate physical actions. Visual-motor co-ordination involves simultaneous experience of self-initiated movement and feed-back from seen people. So far, nonverbal communication is in cause-effect relations to the physical world.

O. Vilarroya explores the notion of sensori-motor event as the building block of sensori-motor cognition. A sensori-motor event is presented as a neurally-controlled fact that recruits those processes and elements that are necessary to address the demands of the situation in which the individual is involved. The notion of sensori-motor event is intended to subsume the dynamic, embodied, and embedded nature of sensori-motor cognition [15]. The continuum of neural processes as well as bodily and environmental elements are interdependent. This correlation can be considered the basis for the identification of the particular sensori-motor event. O. Vilarroya comes to the conclusion that the notion of sensori-motor event suggests a new approach to the classical account of sensory-input mapping onto a motor-output.

Making certain generalization from the revised acquisition theories, we argue that sensori-motor intelligence in general is based on the generative sensori-motor basis which includes visual, acoustic, motor, tactile, proxemic parameters. They are universal, regularly realized by the child in his biological and behavioral reactions to the environment. Sensory-motor basis is unique, predetermined by the generic make-up of human beings [16, p. 11]. Human beings come to the world being equipped with the certain parts of the body designed to signal about the needs of man and regulated by means of the processes of assimilation and self-regulation to perform a specific sensori-motor program. In the socio-cultural evolution this program falls into uncontrolled (biologically determined) and controlled (the result of various cultural conventions) nonverbal cues. Uncontrolled nonverbal cues play signaling function, whereas controlled nonverbal cues realize semiotic or symbolic function in communication. Controlled nonverbal cues relate to cognitive constructs in mental structures. It is obvious that in ontogenetic development Modern Man has been extended the sensori-motor intelligence from purely biological basis to cognitive, semiotic and conventional sensori-motor program.

4. Nonverbal Semiosis in Discourse. The contemporary research on the sign has got three main sources: Ferdinand de Saussure dyadic nature sign analysis, Charles Peirce triadic semiotic theory, the basic terms of which were resumed by Roman Jakobson who added to the semiotic model the fourth, very important for the discourse analysis component – the interpretator.

In our research of nonverbal semiotics in the discursive practices the emphasis is put on nonverbal semiosis as the action of "making gestural, vocal, facial signs" through the correlations between the object, the representamen, the interpretant, and finally, the interpretator. In the eyeview of contemporary semiologists, for example, A. Kravchenko, interpretants are included into the objective and conceptual realities, thus they correlate with the rep-

resentation, better, numerous presentations of perceptual processes in discourse [6]. While interpretants are judged by the observers (interpretators) they are involved in the number of discursive practices shaped up by lingual and non-lingual factors. All these lead to the variety of interpretants of nonverbal signs in communication.

How to choose the relevant interpretant and to describe it verbally in discourse was brightly offered by R. Jakobson when he distinguished between two general fundamental semiological operations with different signs. These are the operations of selection and combination.

Let's consider how it works on the following example: *Her voice sounded carefree and relaxed* (D. Fowler). The objective referent here is the female vocal activity, so the representamen is the nominative unit *Her voice*. There are the interpretants of this representamen in the utterance which attribute certain qualities to the female voice – *carefree and relaxed*. They are carefully selected by the interpretator and are logically combined in the structure to represent the actual state of the woman – her feelings of freedom and relaxation.

We attempt to make certain generalization about nonverbal media of communication based on the theory of “conduit” metaphor [12]. In the nonverbal version of the “conduit” metaphor, from the speaker's standpoint a nonverbal sign (e.g. a gesture or a smile) is presented as a container and the message – as its contents. From the receiver's standpoint they are interpreted and viewed as sensory metaphors – “to see-as”, “to hear-as”, “to touch-as” metaphors.

G. Lakoff and M. Johnson [7, p. 50-54] claim that we have a system of primary metaphors simply because we have the bodies and brains we have and because we live in the world we live in, where intimacy does tend to correlate with proximity, affection with warmth, and achieving purpose with reaching destinations. Some of the primary metaphors directly connected with nonverbal signs (motions, touching, gestures etc.) are the following: ACTIONS are MOTIONS, UNDERSTANDING is GRASPING., HAPPY is UP, AFFECTION is WAMTH, INTIMACY is CLOSENESS. Examples: *Galen grabbed her wrist. “Hold on!”(I. Johansen). He leaned across the table, his eyes glittering (P. Burford).*

Concepts of bodily proximity are represented in the English discourse by such verbs as *to approach, to move closer, to lean forward / backward*. Concepts of hand movements are represented by such verbs as *to grasp, to grab, to pull, to tap, to punch* etc.

Nonverbal semiotic codes serve the visual, audial, tactile channels / media of communication. The acts of semiosis are clearly observed in the discursive practice where communicators perceive, realize and interpret the facial expressions, tones of voices, smiles, hand gestures, postures. Combined together these nonverbal signs form the corporality space of the discourse. For example:

Ann looked up into his face – handsome, dangerous and immensely attractive. Whether the words he spoke were true or not, they could not fail to affect her. Gerald pulled her to him and kissed her gently (D. Fowler).

So, the semiosis within the nonverbal medium of communication works like this: we have a transfer of senses from the speaker by means of nonverbal signals (representamens) – gaze, smile, touch – to the hearer. The latter decodes the representamen and create the interpretant of the

nonverbal cue on the basis of sensory perception, communicative competence and pragmatic intention.

5. Nonverbal Universals in Discursive Practices. It hardly needs saying that the discovery of the importance of nonverbal semiotics has crucially transformed the general study of human communication. It has been found that voice qualities, facial expressions or gestures can embellish what people are saying verbally, providing helpful redundancy or emphasis, or even saying the same thing more efficiently.

The characteristics that can be found in all forms of nonverbal communication and hypothesized as being shared by all language cultures are called **nonverbal universals**. Universals can provide a framework within which similar and specific features of nonverbal communication may be viewed in different cultures. Among the universal characteristics of the use of various nonverbal signs in the discursive practices we can mention the following features [14, p. 32-34]: **communicative, functional, semiotic, emotional, social and cultural**.

Nonverbal behaviors serve as a regular means of communication. It is impossible not to behave, consequently, it is impossible not to communicate. Broadly speaking, regardless of what one does or does not do, one's nonverbal behavior always communicates something to someone in a social interaction. Even small movements are extremely important in interpersonal relationships. We can often tell when two people genuinely like each other and when they are merely being polite. These inferences, many of which are correct, are based primarily on the small nonverbal behaviors of the participants such as, for example, the degree of eye contact, the tone of voice, the way in which the individuals face each other, and so on. All nonverbal behaviors, however small or transitory, are significant in communication.

Nonverbal signs form a functional system within the process of social interaction. Functionally, nonverbal behavior is strongly related to verbal communication. Nonverbal cues can substitute for, contradict, emphasize, or regulate verbal messages [17]. And most certainly we regulate the flow of conversation nonverbally by raising an index finger, nodding, leaning forward, raising eyebrows, and changing eye contact. Nonverbal signs appear to operate at three levels. First of all, they define and condition the communication system. Secondly, nonverbal signs help to regulate the communication process. They signal referents, statuses, indicate who is to speak next, provide feedback about evaluations and feelings. Finally, nonverbal signs communicate contents and intentions [4, p. 258] in speech acts.

Nonverbal behaviors are signs which exist in semiotic clusters. Whether they involve the hands, the eyes or the muscle tone of the body, usually it occurs in nonverbal clusters, in which the various nonverbal signs reinforce each other, an occurrence referred to as congruence. For example, we do not express tear with our eyes while the rest of our body relaxes as if sleeping; rather, the entire body expresses the emotion. In the process of communication, we may focus out attention on the eyes, the facial expressions, or the hand movement of the person, but we understand that these cues do not occur in isolation from other nonverbal behaviors. In fact, it is physically difficult to express an intense emotion with only one part of the body.

Nonverbal signals are innate emotional codes as they are built into nervous system. Some researchers claim that nonverbal signals are universal in transmitting emotions. It is unlikely that an expression which has survival value and which appears within the first month of life could be other than innate. The best evidence for innateness remains the cross-cultural comparison, which has been carried on more seriously by Paul Ekman and his colleagues who distinguished unique facial cues for happiness, surprise, anger, sadness, contempt-disgust, fear and pain [3]. It was found that changes in one's facial expression produce changes in one's feelings.

Nonverbal communication is a conventional social system. Nonverbal communication is always rule-governed. It is regulated by a system of rules and social norms of a definite language speaking community, that states what is and what is not appropriate, expected, and permissible in specific social situations. We learn both the ways to communicate nonverbally and the rules of appropriateness at the same time from observing the behaviors of the adult community. For example, we learn that touch is permissible under certain circumstances but not others, and we learn the rules governing touching behavior. Furthermore, we learn that there are certain parts of the body that may not be touched and certain parts that may. As a relationship changes, so do the rules for touching [9]. As we become closer, the rules for touching become less restrictive.

Nonverbal semiotics is a culture attribute. Speaking naturally means to keep your words consistent with nonverbal signs. Speaking accurately means to do things with words and nonverbal cues consistent with cultural norms. Thus,

nonverbal is a special area which bridges up languages and cultures. Nonverbal communication is desperately culturally marked. For example, in the United States, direct eye contact signals openness and honesty. But in various countries of Latin America and among Native Americans, direct eye contact between a teacher and a student would be considered aggressive – the appropriate student's behavior would be to avoid eye contact with the teacher. From this simple example, it is clear how miscommunication can easily take place in the multicultural discursive practices.

Conclusion. The revision of the studies of the language acquisition can give explicit recognition to the genesis of nonverbal communication. In doing so, we have been attempting to bridge the gap between sensori-motor basis and cognitive structures which together form sensori-motor intelligence with a specific nonverbal functioning program. While linguists are attempting to formulate the ways of functioning for verbal messages, nonverbal researchers are attempting to formulate the same ways for nonverbal signs, taking into account the universal features of nonverbal semiosis. By listing the universal features of nonverbal signs, I have been assuming that in various types of discursive practices they can serve the following universal functions: (1) they are semantically and functionally related to verbal messages; (2) they are used purposefully in communication; (3) they can naturally signify the speaker's physical and emotional states; (4) they can represent the speaker's cultural and social values; (5) they can regulate interpersonal relationship; and finally, (6) nonverbal behavior can effectively manage the whole speech interaction between people from different language cultures.

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