La comunicación en la clase de lengua extranjera: comunicación verbal y no verbal. Estrategias extra-lingüísticas: reacciones no verbales a mensajes en diferentes contextos.

Communication in foreign language classrooms: verbal and non-verbal communication. Extralinguistic strategies: non-verbal reactions to messages in different contexts.
INDEX

1. INTRODUCTION

2. VERBAL COMMUNICATION IN FOREIGN LANGUAGE CLASSROOMS
   2.1. Verbal communication
   2.2. Paralinguistic resources
   2.3. Verbal interactions in EFL classrooms

3. NON-VERBAL COMMUNICATION IN FOREIGN LANGUAGE CLASSROOMS

4. EXTRALINGUISTIC STRATEGIES: NON-VERBAL REACTIONS TO MESSAGES IN DIFFERENT CONTEXTS
1. INTRODUCTION

Communication among humans is a basic need and a complex phenomenon. We communicate feelings, moods, attitudes and factual information in an interconnected way as we attend to different variables; the context, the participants, the channel or the purpose of the message are some of the factors that influence the forms of our utterances, either oral or written. However, we do not only use linguistic signs to communicate. Speakers also share a non-verbal code that conveys meaning. Both listeners and speakers use non-verbal resources to communicate their purpose and many of these extralinguistic signs are unconscious and cultural-bound. Either linguistic or non-linguistic, we use signs to express and interpret meanings. Acquiring a foreign language means learning a new system of signs to transmit a message effectively, in an accurate and appropriate way.

In the context of EFL classrooms, non-verbal communication is one of the first ways of expressing and understanding messages, as it is also in native speakers children. The next sections will look at verbal and non-verbal communication in the EFL classrooms and to some extralinguistic strategies for messages in different contexts.

2. VERBAL COMMUNICATION IN FOREIGN LANGUAGE CLASSROOMS

As we have just stated, communication among humans involves the use of signs and the need to express and receive a message. Senders and receivers of messages may choose a verbal or a non-verbal code according to the intervening factors in any communicative act and to psychological factors, being both codes shared among the participants.

2.1. VERBAL COMMUNICATION

Language is the main means by which people communicate. There have been many different definitions of what a language is throughout history but language can broadly be defined as a ruled system of signs that are combined to transmit a message. According to Hocket, some of the main features of a human language are the following

Arbitrariness: we can say that there is not a link between the linguistic signs and the reality to which they refer to. For example, there is no intrinsic link between the word “book” and the object it represents.
**Feedback:** speakers (and writers) can reflect upon everything they say. Feedback is a basic to maintaining a conversation, for instance.

**Traditional transmission:** language is acquired by a long and complex learning process. This language acquisition capacity is innate to human beings and developed in society.

**Productivity:** humans can understand and produce sentences which they have never heard or said before. Human language is essentially creative.

**Structure dependence:** the language elements are related to each other and language operations depend on an internal understanding of its system and structure.

This human resource of the language to communicate messages is also influenced by several *psychological factors*, which, of course, are also present for EFL learners. Among them, we will signal the next ones:

**Desire to communicate:** spontaneous verbal expression is not only the product of knowledge or a skill. It is not only assumed that the speakers (and the EFL learners) have something to communicate, but also that the hearers want to listen to the message, understand it and react to it. Language learning activities must direct the students to have the desire to communicate a message to a person or group of people in the target language. Designing significant activities based on learners’ needs will promote meaningful interactions and communication in class in the target language.

**Comprehension as well as expression:** learners need to be exposed to lots of meaningful input before attempting verbal responses. Understanding is a receptive skill which comes earlier than speaking; therefore, EFL learners may use other non-linguistic signs to show comprehension of messages and to answer to them.

**Personality factors:** teachers and learners are influenced by their personalities in verbal and non-verbal interactions. Some students are talkative, others are shy or cautious; the learner’s nature somehow affects participation and interactions in classrooms.

**Limitations of expression:** it may be an inhibiting factor as learners could feel unable of expressing themselves effectively in the target language. Acquiring a language is a very complex process and teachers should promote communication through tasks and activities which are appropriate to the learners’ developmental stage.
Verbal communication is a complex phenomenon in which many factors intervene. The language system, the communicative setting and the psychological features of the participants are some of them.

2.2. PARALINGUISTIC FEATURES

Some scholars reserve the term paralinguistic to specific non-linguistic features of communication, such as body language, and prefer the term “prosodic” to deal with those language elements which are part of the phonological system of the language. In this section we will briefly look at the suprasegmental features of verbal communication which also help to construct meaning and affect to verbal interactions. Pitch, intonation and modulation are some of them.

Debatable as it is, voice quality may have both a psychological and a cultural component as it refers to “the permanent background vocal invariable for an individual’s speech” (Crystal, 1969). It may be the personal identity sign of a speaker of a language by which he/she is recognized from the rest. The pitch, the voice quality, the way everyone speaks also plays a role in verbal interactions as we all answer differently to sounds and tunes.

Intonation and stress are the main prosodic features operative in English. They do not exactly serve to identify the word-forms of which the utterance is composed and yet they are essential in the decoding of a message. Stress and intonation convey attitudes, mood and feelings of the speakers which are meaningful and significant in the interpretation of messages. Closely related to intonation is modulation. That is the variation of tone or pitch in one’s voice by superimposing a particular attitudinal message, which may be indicative of the speaker’s involvement in what he/she is saying or his/her desire to impress or convince the hearer, for example.

Although this section is focussed mainly on oral language, we would like to account for punctuation, which is considered a paralinguistic feature of the written code of the language. Punctuation means the marking of boundaries within a text; it is also a way to segment the utterance into manageable information units for the reader, a resource to emphasize particular expressions or a tool to express the writer’s feelings.

The importance of attending to these prosodic features of the language within the EFL classroom relies not only in the fact that they all of them form part of the messages themselves, and, therefore, of communication, but they are also language specific and have to be acquired equally to the other elements of the target language.
2.3. VERBAL INTERACTIONS

There are two major types of verbal communication within classroom interaction: student-to-student and teacher-to-student. Student-to-student interaction is based on peer relationships, which allows the maximum degree of communication. On the other hand, teacher-to-student relationship is based on superior knowledge and authority. The teacher is a language expert; however, the teacher's superiority does not prohibit effective interaction provided that there is the will to communicate naturally with the student.

Student-to-student interactions develop speaking fluency and the use of communication strategies. In pairs or groupwork, there is a chance for everyone to use the language and feel involved; learners feel more secure and help each other, sharing ideas and knowledge. The learning activities may be really varied, from dialogues to conversations, drama or information-gathering.

Interactions among students at the early steps of foreign language acquisition are still domained by their incipient knowledge of the target language system and its resources. In addition, the age of the students is a key factor to be accounted for, as their knowledge about the world around is limited. Therefore, the language and the topics around any interaction among students must be carefully planned and correspond to the learners' background knowledge and experiences. However, teachers should also provide pupils opportunities to use the language among themselves as much as possible: greetings, congratulations, thanking formulas or simple requests may be easily internalized by students and used in class almost from the very beginning. Although yet inappropriate or inaccurate, student-to-student interaction promotes language acquisition.

Since dialogue represents the most common form of oral communication, it may be fairly used in communicative activities within the classroom. Activities based on dialogues may take different forms, such as dialogues with visual aids or directed dialogues. Within the first stages of foreign language acquisition, dialogues should always be based on a model, as the learners' production competence is still quite limited. Poetry and drama activities are also rich vehicles for encouraging students play and learn language in a personal way. So do information-gathering activities, like interviews or guessing games.

Teacher should also promote student-to-student interaction using the written code once they have mastered a bit on it. Collective writing or note-leaving are two of the techniques we can use in the EFL classroom.
Teacher-to-student interaction is, of course, basic in the EFL classroom. Teacher-students conversation is assymetrical; for example, pupils do not give directions to their teachers or elicit words from them. EFL teachers adjust their language to the learners’s level by simplificating their discourse, a strategy that is also used by native speakers when talking to children and foreigners. In addition, teacher talk has its own features, which have been the object of several studies within the field sociolinguistics. Research shows that:

- Classroom language is mainly dominated by the teacher, who selects the topics and decides how they will be discussed. The teacher often controls the turn-taking, the beginnings and endings of the conversations, too.

- Teachers use special frames, regularly and very often, to pass from one verbal transaction to another. The favourite frame used by teachers is “now”. These frames form a closed set (well, okay, right, look, now, all right) and they are followed by a pause. The frames indicate different meanings. For example, “well” can mean okay, agreement, or a request. They give learners clues to the structure of the discourse and refer to the different aspects of teaching –content, organization and discipline.

- Non verbal elements like hand gestures or glances are complementary features in classroom discourse.

Surely, the most extended type of verbal interaction among teacher and students includes questions for many different purposes: eliciting, language practice or rising awareness, for example. There is also quite a lot of giving directions on part of the teacher mainly to organize activities, to show how to do a task or to keep discipline in classrooms.

Following a communicative approach to language teaching will mean increasing both the amount and the quality of verbal interaction in the EFL class on part of the learners.

3. NON-VERBAL COMMUNICATION IN EFL CLASSROOMS

The use of non-verbal resources is one of the defining characteristics of the oral language. It is the way people reinforce the spoken messages, or even it replaces the spoken word by using the body to make visual signs. Non-verbal communication helps us to manage our social relationships and, broadly speaking, it helps to present the self that we want others to see – social status, group membership, personality (appearance). We can suggest that non-verbal communication serves three main functions in oral interactions:

- Speakers and hearers convey their mood and interpersonal feelings.
• Supports the verbal message and
• Provides feedback.

Nonverbal communication has received much attention in the areas social psychology, business presentation, sales and marketing. In this sense, it can be analysed as an area of study by itself. However, as we pointed above, non-verbal signs constitute a part of the language and intervenes in the communicative act as one of the elements that form the context and the shared knowledge. One of the most significant characteristics of this paralinguistic phenomenon is that, as language itself, it is culturally-dependant. Every language (or culture) has its own non-verbal resources to communicate different meanings. It is well known, for example, that the speaker of Greek will throw his head back to show disagreement or disent, instead of moving it from side to side. Therefore, non-verbal communicative strategies are not always transferable from the L1 to the L2. In the first place, like speech, non-verbal communication has both form and function, and, secondly, it is not always directly translatable. It is the first of these factors which makes nonverbal communication difficult to teach, and the second which leads to breakdowns and misunderstandings in intercultural communication.

When analysing non-verbal communication, we see that it can be conscious or voluntary sometimes, but, quite often, it is involuntary or unconscious. Hearers or speakers use body language to show they are shocked, embarrassed or amused, for example, in an unconscious way. On the other hand, we can also use non-verbal reactions in a more conscious manner as to reinforce a message or to attract somebody’s attention.

Non-verbal communication includes three main areas. One of them is kinesics which refers to facial expressions, gestures and movements. For example, smiles may be reassuring, frowns can show surprise or eye contact tells us if someone is interested in our message. Head movements carry meaning too, such as nodding for agreement or showing incredulity by shaking it. Equally, we use our fingers for counting or to ask for silence; and arms, hands, legs and feet are also used to express meanings.

Another big area of non-verbal communication is proxemics. Proxemics is about positioning, orientation, and space and physical contact. Regarding the first two elements, we can consider where we stand or sit in relation to others, or how much space is between the participants in a chat. Here again, culture makes a difference and if Spanish people tend to sit or stand closer than the British, EFL learners must also be aware of this fact and follow the rules within native settings as part of their full communicative competence. Proxemics is also about physical contact in greetings (do women kiss each other when introduced or do they shake hands?), congratulating (do they pat on the back?), insulting, etcetera.
The third big area in non-verbal communication corresponds to paralinguistics. This includes the tone and feedback sounds, which may show agreement, impatience, annoyance, or surprise. As we saw in previous sections, they can be very helpful to the speakers as an indication of how the message is being received.

On the one hand, the functions of non-verbal signs vary from culture to culture, although there are some universal nonverbals such as smiles, laughter and sour expressions. There are also differences according to gender and age. On the other hand, nonverbal communication tends to be relatively ambiguous and open to interpretation, but it is an essential part of the language behaviour. As Abercrombie puts it:

“We speak with our vocal organs, but we converse with our entire bodies... Paralinguistic phenomena... occur alongside spoken language, interact with it, and produce together with it a total system of communication... The study of paralinguistic behaviour is part of the study of conversation: the conversational use of spoken language cannot be properly understood unless paralinguistic elements are taken into account” (1968; p. 55).

4. EXTRALINGUISTIC STRATEGIES: NON-VERBAL REACTIONS TO MESSAGES IN DIFFERENT CONTEXTS

Nonverbal and verbal communication are normally inseparable, and, therefore, both need to be taught and practised situationally, in the right contexts, and with plenty of cultural input and awareness.

An important aspect in the use of non-verbal codes within the EFL classrooms is that they have to be shared by teachers and learners. Non-verbal strategies fairly used by EFL teachers respond to what is generally accepted as classroom language. They constitute an efficient and quick system of gestures to deal with aspects of classroom management. Gestures for ‘work in pairs’, ‘open your books’, ‘listen’ and ‘write’ are universal, while individual teachers have developed nonverbal repertoires involving systems for instruction (for example, the use of fingers to represent words), correction (gestures to indicate time, tense and other linguistic features), and management.

As Darn points out, the effective use of nonverbal cues assists in a wide range of classroom practices by adding an extra dimension to the language:

- Reducing unnecessary teacher talking time.
- Increasing learner participation.
Confidence building.
Reducing fear of silence.
Clear instructions.
Efficient classroom management.
Classroom atmosphere.
Improving listening skills.
Improving performance in pair and group activities.
Self and peer correction.
Avoiding misunderstandings.
Improving intercultural competences.

The following paragraphs will show how non-verbal strategies are used by learners to send and react to messages which will also help them in the development of their communicative competence. According to Ellis, communication strategies are “psycholinguistic plans which exist as part of the language user’s communicative competence. They are potentially conscious and serve as substitutes for production plans which the learner is unable to implement.” (Ellis, 1985; p.185). Many of the communication strategies are verbal, but some of them include the use of extra-linguistic devices. These communication tools used by speakers in order to cope with difficulties in communicating in the foreign language are problem-oriented, and look for a short-term answer. Most of the non-verbal strategies used by primary school EFL learners will be compensating strategies and they will be used when participating as speakers and as hearers, too.

From the earliest stages of FLA, learners may use non-verbal devices to express messages and show their understanding of messages:

– By physically responding to orders (“Sit down, stand up”), directions (“Go to the blackboard and take a piece of chalk”), requests (“Can you close the door, please?”), questions (“How many boys are there?”) or words of a song (“You put your right foot in/ you put your out/ you put your right foot in/ and you shake it all about/...”).

– By pointing to objects and drawings (“Which one is red?”, “Can you see the flowers?”).

– By sequencing or ordering elements (from oral narratives or dialogues, for example).

– By drawing (“The alien has a very big head and three eyes”).
In addition, EFL learners employ non-verbal strategies when they are interacting with others and maintaining conversations, for example by using gestures to ask for repetition or clarification, or to show they do not agree, or they do not know an answer, etcetera.

Finally, there are communicative activities which are based on the use of non-verbal devices and tecnicas in the EFL setting and which are part of the classroom procedures:

- One of the most extended activities in classrooms is pantomimes, a scene in body language which can be used to elicit oral or written language.

- Tecniques from the Total Physical Response method or from the Silent Way are also quite used in many EFL lessons, such as the use of cuisenaire rods, colours and charts.

- Other tecniques include the discussion of the meaning of gestures and expressions after the watching of a video clip without sound; or the acting out of a dialogue using gesture and expression only. The following sample dialogue is taken from Darn:

  • A: Excuse me. Can you take a picture of me?
  • B: Yeah, sure.
  • A: Just press that button.
  • B: Er, which one?
  • A: The one on the top.
  • B: OK, right. Er... can you move back a bit?
  • A: Is this OK?
  • B: Fine, now smile. That's it. Very nice.
  • A: Thanks.
  • B: Not at all. You've got a lovely smile. Er... fancy a drink?
  • A: OK, but I've got no money on me.
  • B: That's OK. I'll pay.

In spite of non-verbal communication being an indivisible element of oral language, the teaching of a foreign language must promote the acquisition of the communicative competence in verbal communication, in its oral and written forms. Therefore, learners will progressively be led to make use of their linguistic resources, as body language and non-verbal communication do not domain human interaction, except in specific cases such as in the language of signs among deaf- mute people. Teachers should also be aware that
target cultural aspects are a part of the communicative competence in a language, and the transferability or not of those culture-bound features need to be raised and taught.

**SUMMARY AND KEY POINTS**

1. **INTRODUCTION**

- Both listeners and speakers use non-verbal resources to communicate their purpose, many of which are unconscious or cultural-bound. Either linguistic or non-linguistic, we use signs to express and interpret meanings.

- In the context of EFL classrooms, non-verbal communication is one of the first ways of expressing and understanding messages, as it is also in native speakers children.

2. **VERBAL COMMUNICATION IN FOREIGN LANGUAGE CLASSROOMS**

2.1. **Verbal communication**

- Language: a ruled system of signs that are combined to transmit a messages.

- Main features of a human language:
  - Arbitrariness: there is not a link between the linguistic signs and the reality to which they refer to.
  - Feedback: speakers (and writers) can reflect upon everything they say; basic to maintaining a conversation.
  - Traditional transmission: language is acquired by a long and complex learning process, innate to human beings and developed in society.
  - Productivity: human language is essentially creative.
  - Structure dependence: the language elements are related to each other and language operations depend on an internal understanding of its system and structure.

- Language is influenced by several psychological factors: desire to communicate; comprehension as well as expression; personality factors and limitations of expression.

2.2. **Paralinguistic resources**

The suprasegmental features of verbal communication also help to construct meaning and affect to verbal interactions:
• **Voice quality** may be the personal identity sign of a speaker of a language by which he/she is recognized from the rest.

• **Intonation and stress** are the main prosodic features operative in English. Stress and intonation convey attitudes, mood and feelings of the speakers which are meaningful and significant in the interpretation of messages.

• Closely related to intonation is **modulation**. That is the variation of tone or pitch in one's voice by superimposing a particular attitudinal message, which may be indicative of the speaker's involvement in what he/she is saying or his/her desire to impress or convince the hearer, for example.

• **Punctuation** is considered a paralinguistic feature of the written code of the language.

The importance of attending to these prosodic features of the language within the EFL classroom relies not only in the fact that they all of them form part of the messages themselves, and, therefore, of communication, but they are also language specific and have to be acquired equally to the other elements of the target language.

2.3. **Verbal interactions in EFL classrooms**

a) **Student-to-student interactions** are based on peer relationships and allow a maximum degree of communication. They develop speaking fluency and the use of communication strategies:

– There is a chance for everyone to use the language and feel involved; learners feel more secure and help each other, sharing ideas and knowledge.

– The learning activities may be really varied, from dialogues to conversations, drama or information-gathering.

– Interactions among students at the early steps of foreign language acquisition are still domainied by their incipient knowledge of the target language system and its resources.

– The age of the students is a key factor to be accounted for, as their knowledge about the world around is limited.
The language and the topics around any interaction among students must be carefully planned and correspond to the learners' background knowledge and experiences.

Teachers should also provide pupils opportunities to use the language among themselves as much as possible.

Student-to-student interaction promotes language acquisition.

Dialogue represents the most common form of oral communication; Poetry and drama activities are also rich vehicles for encouraging students play and learn language. So do information-gathering activities, like interviews or guessing games.

b) Teacher-to-student interaction is, of course, basic in the EFL classroom. Teacher-students conversation is assymmetrical as it is based on the teacher's superior knowledge and authority. EFL teachers adjust their language to the learners's level by simplificating their discourse. Teacher talk has its own features:

- Classroom language is mainly dominated and controlled by the teacher.

- Teachers use special frames, regularly and very often, to pass from one verbal transaction to another. These frames form a closed set (well, okay, right, look, now, all right) and they indicate different meanings. They give learners clues to the structure of the discourse and refer to the different aspects of teaching –content, organization and discipline.

- Non verbal elements like hand gestures or glances are complementary features in classroom discourse.

Types of verbal interaction among teacher and students include questions for many different purposes: eliciting, language practice or rising awareness, for example. There is also quite a lot of giving directions on part of the teacher mainly to organize activities, to show how to do a task or to keep discipline in classrooms.
3. NON-VERBAL COMMUNICATION IN FOREIGN LANGUAGE CLASSROOMS

• Non-verbal signs are a characteristic of oral language. These signs differ from culture (and language) to culture, and there are not always transferable from the L1 to the L2. In addition, they are often unconscious and ambiguous.

• Functions:
  – Reinforces the oral message.
  – Manages social relationships.
  – Helps present the self.
  – Conveys mood and feelings.
  – Provides feedback.

• Main areas:
  – Kinesics: facial expressions, gestures and movements.
  – Proxemics: positioning, orientation, and space and physical contact.
  – Paralinguistics: tone and feedback sound.

4. EXTRALINGUISTIC STRATEGIES: NON-VERBAL REACTIONS TO MESSAGES IN DIFFERENT CONTEXTS

• Classroom language: an efficient and quick system of gestures to deal with classroom management, instruction and correction.

• Learners use extralinguistic communication strategies: plans and tools used by speakers in order to cope with difficulties in communicating in the L2. They are problem-oriented.

  a) Students may show message comprehension by:
     – Physically responding to orders, directions, requests, questions, etcetera.
     – Pointing to objects or drawings.
     – Sequencing or ordering.
     – Drawing.

  b) Learners maintain interaction by the use of gestures to ask for clarification or repetition, to show agreement, etcetera.

  c) Techniques:
     – Pantomimes.
- Techniques for the TPR and the Silent Way.
- Silent video watching.
- Dramatizations, mimed dialogues, etc.

(The pictures below show how non-verbal signs convey different meanings according to culture)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Perfect</th>
<th>Thumbs up</th>
<th>Stop</th>
<th>The 'fig'</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Commonly – everything’s all right perfect France – worthless Japan – money Germany – rude Malta, Greece, Brazil – obscene</td>
<td>Commonly – all OK Australia, Iran – rude Nigeria – very offensive Japan – five Turkey – political (right) party</td>
<td>Commonly – stop, enough (person, car, action) Turkey – You get nothing from me W Africa – You have 5 fathers!</td>
<td>Turkey, Greece, Tunisia, Holland – obscene Russia – you get nothing from me Yugoslavia – you can’t have it Brazil – good luck</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**BIBLIOGRAPHY AND REFERENCES**


• http://iteslj.org/

• www.eslteachersboard.com