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Doina Mihaela POPA ¹

Abstract

This paper deals with the new communication perspective, according to which the spatial and temporal dimension are included in the inter-subjective communication process. It also has in view that the way in which time and space are perceived and represented constitute essential characteristics of each culture. The appearance of proxemics, defined as the study of social space in biocommunication, or as the study of micro-space in interaction, has changed the grid that the communication specialists use to analyze the interdependence between verbal and non-verbal communication. They theoretize on and accept the scale of interpersonal distances, the idea of mobile space vs set space, or that of monochronism vs polychronism in the temporal perception and representation of communication, otherwise all viewed as interaction dimensions.

Keywords

Interpersonal communication, proxemics, scale of interpersonal distances, monochronism, polychronism.

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I. Encoding the nonverbal

The powerful explicit coding of the verbal language (oral and written) matches with a highly attenuated and implicit coding of the nonverbal language (difficult to be influenced culturally at the level of the fundamental emotion, described by I.Eibl-Eibesfeldt as universal) and defined by- E. Sapir (1967) - as “*a secret and complicated code, written nowhere, known by nobody but understood by everybody*”, a code presented by Gr. Bateson in *Communication et société* as follows: “*The very understanding of the message by the receptor is conditioned by the fact that he/she has adapted to the coding conventions, strictly defined by the culture that imposes them*”(Bateson, 1988:235). Analyzing the interaction between the person and the environment, the author highlights the fact that *the perception and the synthesizing* of the inanimate outer environment bears- due to heir idiosyncratic character - a certain degree of freedom, while, in the interpersonal communication relationship there is less freedom, because the subject of the message undergoes a synthesizing and abstracting process both from the part of the sender and of the receiver: “*Each individual receives, naturally, common sensorial information regarding the other; each sees and understands the other as a physical entity. In return, each receives, from his/her partner symbolic material, verbal or of a different nature and has, consequently the occasion to combine these w types of data in a unique and complex stream, enriching the verbal flow with the simultaneous observation of the body movements.*” (Bateson, 1988:235). All oral communication situation, *in presentia*, supposes at least one of these conditions, influencing *the expression* and the *message* indirectly; the structure of the message is not a homogenous, compact one, but on the contrary a bipolar one – digital/analogical, while the *emission/reception* take place simultaneously, on different sense channels: the nonverbal and the paraverbal constitute the decisive weight (over 90%) within each act of communication “face to face” and constitutes the only *impossible to falsify*” part, being involuntary. On the other hand, C. Kerbrat-Orecchioni defines verbal interaction as a “*suite of events whose whole constitutes a “text”, produced collectively in a determined context*”; opposing “*the referential content*” to the “*relational*”- and explicitly preferring these formulations to those imposed by the Palo Alto theoreticians (*content vs. relation*), she does not reject, however, the relative independence of the two levels, admitting even that there are utterances

deprived off all content or, at least, of all informational value, whose unique function is the phatic one: “*words are like gestures: the most senseless can be in fact the most significant of all*”- the author cites E. Goffman (1974: 81), adding: “*An important part of the material produced during the interaction has only a relational function so that, even when they have, undoubtedly an informative content, the utterances always also have a relational value.*”(Kerbrat-Orecchioni, 1992:13)

During the *face to face* interaction- that Kerbrat-Orecchioni includes in the typology of the *horizontal* communication relations- the nonverbal and paraverbal indexes play a decisive role in minimizing the distance and, subsequently, in building the *symmetry* rapport between the speakers (*the dissymmetry* on this horizontal axis – *here* and *now* – being, generally, perceived as uncomfortable by the partners, who, in this case will unconsciously try to “negotiate” verbally and nonverbally- this embarrassing *distance*). Among them, the indexes – or the nonverbal “delineators”, such as the gestures– take a special place, (recalled also by Cicero, in *De Oratore*), the faithful support of the verbal language, confirming, infirming or replacing the message sent towards this one: “*The gestures constitute an excellent indicator of the state or of the relation (is proved by phrases such as: ”a intampina cu brațele deschise”(to greet someone with open arms),and especially in the touching gestures, which are often- taking into account, the norms in force in that society and of the nature of the communication situation – the index of an intimate relation..*”(Kerbrat-Orecchioni, 1992:41).

II. The gestual semiotics

In a ‘gestural semiotics’ or a mixed one: verbal/gestural, T. Slama-Cazacu classifies the gestures⁷ in: 1. “parasite” gestures- *alternative* vs. *concomitant with the signs of the verbal code*, indicator of the speaker’s restlessness, fright, or difficulty of expressing oneself etc.; 2 superposed - complementary –completing the verbal material and adding a stylistic effect, rhetoric or even referential; 3. redundant – doubling, simultaneously, on a physical level, the verbal utterance and 4. Substitutive – replacing within a complex sentence, the elliptic verbal elements.(Slama-Cazacu, 1999:195). In this last case (J. Miller, K. Bühler, M.R.Key, M.Argyle s.a.) the gestures form a mixed syntax, being included in the verbal chain and replacing completely certain absent

verbal segments with different frequency and efficiency, according to the context (distance and noises), but even on the socio-cultural statute of the speakers: personologists such as Allport state that, generally, a medium level of education, a weakly structured vocabulary, are intuitively compensated by an *ample gesticulation*, accompanied by an *extremely lively mimicry*, unlike the intellectual type, interiorized, who gesticulates barely and masters a complex and diversified vocabulary; we feel it is necessary to highlight the role of the sight- a necessary condition to read, decode/interpret the gestures of the other: “*It plays a “sine qua non” role, in this communicational strategy by double channel, certain habits created by the life experience and by education; we refer to the habit of watching the interlocutors to capture the indices furnished by gestures and mimicry. It is not seldom that we have been witnesses of failed communication because either the receiver did not watch the sender, or this one did not pay attention to the fact that his/her interlocutor was sitting with his/her back to him/her.*” (Slama-Cazacu, 1999:187)

Contextualization indices and their perceptive bases have been studied by J. Gumperz, this one placing himself on the Paloalto trend, inaugurated by Hall and Birdwhistell, of the microanalysis of the nonverbal signs within- main- *the intercultural comprehension*; it constitutes more than a simple value or a process to produce certain ethnical or racial stereotypes, because most communicative strategy errors are recorded on the level of perception and interpretation of the facial signs and gestures: “During the speech act, the eyes, the face, the limbs and the torso automatically produce signs which, even if they pass unobserved, they still transmit information. These nonverbal signs may be compared with the language: likewise they are learned during interaction, they are specific to each culture and may be analyzed as a sub-adjacent process” (Gumperz, 1989:40). Reading a study made by Schefflen in 1972 – “*Body Language and the Social Order*” – where he details and thoroughly analyses his patients’ and analysts’ body stances during some psychiatric interviews – proving the degree in which these stances contribute to building the interaction, reflecting and signalling the passage from one phase to another of the meeting – Gumperz concludes that the human communication process, should be taken as a complex phenomenon guided and constrained by a multidimensional system of verbal and nonverbal signs, which are taught and then produced

automatically, in close *interdependence*. J. Gumperz' premise is that of the direct/indirect rapport between the *conversational synchrony* and the belonging/ non-belonging to one and the same *culture*; thus, he compares the studies made by A. Kendon *et al.* (1975) on the synchronized movements between the locators, to those of F. Erikson and J. Schultz (*The Counsellor as Gatekeeper: Social and Cultural Organization of Communication in Counselling Interviews*, 1982), deducing the degree (positive or negative) of *fastness* of their rhythm, according to the corresponding stimuli type: *predictable/unpredictable*. In our opinion, Kendon's study is excessively mechanic – typically behaviourist - that eludes the affective-sensorial dimension of the interpersonal relationship, a dimension not at all to be neglected in the case of the analogical communication, structured right on the sensorial/emotional. Other aspects- such as the repetitive character of certain nonverbal components of the interaction – can be, however explained as such: the affirmative-approving moves of the head, face, within a dialogue an incontestable phatic role.

As to the above cited study, which highlights the *ethnic* factor within the *interaction* focused on counselling (type of interaction taken by Gumperz as “*instrumental*” and “*neutral from the point of view of their expressivity*”) - the interviews (filmed or recorded) are analyzed on three levels or communication channels: 1. the non-verbal signs: the sight direction, the distance (the proxemics), the kinaesthetic rhythm and the synchronization of the body movements and of the gestures; 2. The paralinguistic signs: voice, timbre, rhythm; 3. the semantic content of the message. The results show a close rapport between the first two levels, and the third, on the other hand; in other words, between the synchrony/asynchrony index and the quantity of information to be used: the weaker the *asynchrony*, the bigger *the quantity of practical information* obtained by the interlocutor. The first is, on its turn, related both to *the concordance / discordance of the participants' ethnical origin* and to their ability of finding common experiences, able to build and sustain the *interaction*: “*The research on the conversational synchrony highlights the role played by the automatic answers at nonverbal indexes. If we can prove that the fluid and synchronized verbal exchanges enable the establishment of some common interpretation setting, we are allowed to believe that measuring the answering rhythms between the*

speakers authorizes the establishment of some communicative efficacy indexes, independent from the lexical content”(Erikson, Schultz, 1982:42).

The hypothesis of this independence between the verbal and the nonverbal can be, in fact, taken into account when interpreting *arts* as a *universal language* : the reception channels: visual, auditive, kinaesthetic/ tactile or olfactive/gustative (in case of the “cuisine”) are common and belong, *ab initio*, to the *trans-cultural history of the body*. G. Durand analyses the unconscious determinations between motility and representation highlighting with. Piaget – the lack of all discontinuity between *sensorial motility and the symbolic representation* (including the linguistic one): “*Without intending to become referees in the debate between the partisans of a purely central theory and those of a largely peripheral theory regarding the mechanism of the symbolization, we shall adopt as a work hypothesis the fact that there is a tight concomitancy between the gestures of the body, the nervous centres and the symbolic representations*”(Durand, 1998:45).

III. The space in communication

E.T.Hall, in *The Silent Language* and, respectively, *Proxemics*, expands these determinations, enclosing the spatial and temporal dimension to them and sustaining the manner in which *the time and the space* are perceived and represented constitutes two essential features of each culture. Thus, he finds a new subject: **proxemics**, defined as the study of the social space in bio-communication, or, in other words, as the study of the micro-space in the interpersonal communication relationship. In R. Birdwhistell’s opinion, who uses, in his study on gestures, a dismountable model in micro-units of movement: *kinemorpheme*, Hall approaches culture as a global communication system (including all the others), and being decomposable in three levels of gradual complexity: thus, in *The Silent Language*, he differentiates “the notes” or the indivisible units” (isolates) of the “sets”, both of them grouped in culturally interiorized patterns and interacting according to different rules and codes: paraphrasing Sapir, Hall states that we can decipher the hieroglyphs of a culture only when we are aware of its “silent language”, *space and time* mainly.

In 1966, in *The Hidden Dimension*, he suggests a scale of interpersonal distances: 1. *intimate*; 2. *personal*; 3. *social*; and 4. *public*, each

supposing two distinct “means”, which are in a rapport of dichotomy: a. *close* vs. b. *remote*. These distances are considered to be difficult to measure, because they are not the same – from one culture to another: “There is no *fix* mechanism of assessing the distances that is universal and valid for all cultures. (...) Certain distances grow or diminish according to the circumstances. The interpersonal distance results from a multitude of sensorial signals encoded in a determined manner. (...) the visual interaction of the Arabs is intense: their involvement, total and direct. They stare at their interlocutor; the Americans do not act in the same manner. (...) All the senses are involved in setting the distance: they are for the *proxemics* what the vocal apparatus is for the *phonetics*.”(Hall, 1981: 219) He specifies that this type of classification differs within each culture, delineating three space categories: *fix*, *semi-fix* and *dynamic*. Thus, although the walls and the territorial frontiers are generally attributed, a *fix* character, in the case of the Syrian Bedouins’ nomadic life, or of the European transhumance, the territory may be seasonal, that is *semi-fix*, or even *dynamic*; if the furniture is *fix* or *semi-fix*, the boat, the carriage, the car etc., any vehicle in general – transhistorically and trans-culturally experienced as a prolongation or safe substitute of the body- is naturally characterized by *dynamism*. In as far as the interpersonal distance is concerned, varying as we have seen, on a scale of the intimacy degree, it is considered informal, situational, imprecise: it is *dynamic* for most cultures, especially since the perception over the *sociopetal* space (favouring the communication between the interlocutors) and *sociofugal* (favouring, on the contrary, their isolation) is not uniform: “These distinctions are highly important for the intercultural meetings. Taking for mobile what others believe it is fixed may be at the origin of some serious problems. Thus, a German immigrant in the United States, who believed that the furniture is immobile element, nailed the armchair destined for his guests, on the floor of his office, which perplexed his American guests. One of my Chinese subjects told me that in his country, one would never move the pieces of furniture to make it fit his own definition of the interaction distance, except for the cases when the host asks them to do so.”(Hall, 1981:215).

IV. The time as actor of the communication relationship

Next to the *spatial* component, the *temporal one* is perceived-equally or even more as a direct determiner of the body, directly determined by the perpetual hesitation and contradictory between emergency and irreversibility; regardless of the culture, *the time* is assimilated to the corporal perishability and to the *death*, “the euphemizing of the time” – that G. Durand recalls in *The Anthropological structures of the imaginary* – being synonymous with the euphemizing of the death fear. Analyzing the *time* concept – as a cultural element, whose communicative power, as in case of the *space*, is similar to that of the language, Hall introduces the complementary notions of *monochronism/ polychronism* in the temporal perception and representation: thus, in the author’s opinion, the *monochronism* expresses the idea of performing one action at a time – which constitutes a feature of the American and West Europeans cultures- while the *polychronism*, specific to those cultures where time is not intensely valorised, expresses the contrary case, of the concomitance of certain different and superposed actions,, a concept marked by lack of punctuality, postponing and tergiversation, true social East-European or oriental *maladies*, in which we recognize ourselves so well.

P. Watzlawick analyses – in *How real is real? Communication, Disinformation, Confusion* – the *emotional* significance of the time- the time of the subjective experience, dilated or compressed under the impact of the emotion- without denying, however, Einstein’s understanding of the time as “*the fourth dimension*”: “*The time is not as one would often think, a simple dimension of the human intelligence, an illusion that the human conscience needs. Physics has plentifully proved it. The continuum **space-time** (...) has been, up to the present, the most modern representation and the most precise of our physical reality. There is no doubt that the universe is four-dimensional, even if the fourth dimension – the Time - has different features from the three spatial dimensions, being inaccessible directly*” (Watzlawick, 1978:214).

The author isolates - within the analysis *time/individual* –a special category of the experienced time- *the pure time*, conferring it an unexpected property- as author of the axiom ”we cannot communicate what cannot be communicated: “All those who tried to express the experience of the pure moment have not found, for this purpose, but an

extremely distressing language. The wisdom that can be expressed is not true wisdom, Lao Tzu used to write 2500 years ago. E.T.Hall adds to the classifications he made, the dichotomy *formal /informal* applicable differently to the temporal schemes from one culture or another, but differing within the same nation, according to the region, the social-cultural standard or even sex: *We cannot dilate or contract continuously the limits or the schedules, even if certain activities recall such a flexibility. These schemes of time immutability are applied to most of the situations, even to the long periods. There are differences between different families and differences between men and women; they are reported to activities, to the social status ad to the regional peculiarities. In America there two basic schemes: "the scheme of the diffuse time" and the "scheme of the traced time".* Taken diachronically- as the first form of human communication, the nonverbal language (conditioned/ by *space & time*), predecessor of words, it encompasses, in Guy Barrier's opinion (*La communication non verbale – aspects pragmatiques et gestuels des interactions*) a crucible of paradoxes, among which the one of the coexistence between its *universality and specificity*: nothing more personal than one's print of the voice or one's smile and sight, nothing more common and more recognizable than the universal expression of the main five emotions: **the fear, the obsession, the joy, the surprise and the pain.**

At a closer look, the verbal language involves, however, the same polarity: *general/private*: the quasi-universal phonetic system- divided in consonants or vowels, whose sonority is familiar – in its pure stage- to all the cultures, matches with the singularity of the idiolects, the unique combination of the words in complex sentences and of the complex sentences in a discourse; in their turn, the gesture-related, postural or mimicry-expressive "vowels" and "the consonants" form the "words" by means of which the body communicates, regardless of the absence or the presence of the linguistic. Darwin had stated, back to 1872 (*The manifestation of emotions in humans and animals*) that the manifestation of the emotional states are inborn and universal, difficult to adjust culturally (except for those recommended by the politeness codes, which belong, however, to a "ritual" strongly marked by intentionality, very much like the verbal language and assembled on rules and conveniences known, recognized and valued socially); his observations stop however, to the *spontaneous moves*, distinct from those that include- even in a fragmented manner – the intention to communicate. A special type of "gesture

semiology” was approached subsequently by S. Freud, in *Die Traumdeutung*, revealing *the mainly visual and gestural support of the oneiric*, difficult or impossible to be translated in a “diurnal linguistics” – without being completely separated from the verbal and completely dependent on its initial context; long before the School of Palo Alto – the founder of the psychoanalysis indicates, indirectly, *the analogical language* as a possible common denominator of the oniric and of the nonverbal, a premise of their *language consubstantiality*: “Aristotle (*De divinatione per somnum*) sustains that the best dream interpreter is the one who catches the best the resemblances; since the dream images as well as the water images destroy each other movement and the one who succeeds the best is the one who can recognize the truth in the destroyed image”(Freud, 2003); he cites the most beautiful example of dream interpretation that the Ancient time provides to us, based on a pun. **Artemidoros** tells (...) that Alexandre of , besieging the Tyr and surrounding it, being mad because of the time lost, dreamt that he saw a Satyr dancing on his bucler. Artemidoros (...) divided the name Satyros in **sa tiros = the Tyr is yours**, and made the king fight even more bravely, conquering thus the fortress” (Freud, 2003:112)

The paradoxical position – detached from the arbitrariness of the linguistic sign, but reducing itself, finally, still to the linguistic sign – of the non verbal communication within the interpersonal processes constitutes one of the central meditation and cross curricular topics for the forefathers of the New Communication, long before the “candid camera” method was patented gestural spontaneity (compulsory condition of the non verbal authenticity) – with all its inevitable tragic and comic connotations – captivated E. Goffman, up to the point of studying (on his own risk) the unpremeditated behaviour and the natural reactions, honest reactions of the lodgers of a psychiatric hospital or of an old people’s home, not hesitating to take, at the bar, the chair temporarily abandoned by one of them, or even drink his/her coffee, watching and analysing he “victim” ’s reaction - to note down and compare the extent to which they can cope with the paradox.

In conclusion, the deference, the detachment, the embarrassment, the sense of decency etc. constitutes as many sides of the *interaction rites*²¹, “engagements” that are inherent to the social

interactions, masks “unconscious or fixed, applied temporarily, according to the situation or definitively, identified with the face of the speakers (“*perdre la face ou faire bonne figure?*”), the equivalent of what C.G.Jung had called *persona*. Goffman makes a rigorous inventory of the socially codified gestures and whose communicative potential (latent or manifest) only half conscious, constitutes a “*corporal dialect*”, symbolism of the mutually shared attitudes by the members of the same society; thus, the movements and the attitudes, the posture, the clothes, the voice intensity, the salutation, the signs made with the hand, the face make up and the emotional expression, in general, are all susceptible of becoming the object of the rules, being attached a common signify, so deeply interiorized and mutually shared, that any discordance that slips into this corporal message is promptly perceived and correctly decoded.

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