

SCTCMG 2021
**International Scientific Conference «Social and Cultural Transformations in the Context of
Modern Globalism»**

**BODY LANGUAGE IN CONTEMPORARY RUSSIAN
EDUCATIONAL COMMUNICATION**

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Abstract

This paper considers the question of body language used during teaching Russian. Importance of body signals in formation of communicative competence of student has been analyzed. It has been proven that body signals express a message encoded by teacher. Studies of lesson video recordings showed that during the lesson, visualized gesture, facial expression, look, posture, movement most often serve as a substitute of a typical situation. Often they serve as a primary communication means at the initial lesson for groups studying Russian as a Foreign Language. A conclusion is drawn that body language communication makes a foundation for understanding and creates a local situation of success, when there is no knowledge of language yet, but there is already some understanding. Body language communication means between a teacher and a pupil appear as markers of hidden psychological state of communication participants. It helps correcting the pace of work and achieving acquisition of material with the help of correctly selected communicative stimuli. A modern teacher shall not only have a command of factual knowledge of their subject, speech tools, elocution, but also skills in non-verbal behavior, acting. Effectiveness of acquisition of new subject matter increases, if a teacher regularly uses elements of body language. An emphasis is made on skills in use of body language communication means while teaching Russian language, both as a native and as a foreign language in different institutions in accordance with basic and additional education curricula.

2357-1330 © 2021 Published by European Publisher.

Keywords: Body language, educational discourse, facial expressions, gesture, meaning of sign



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1. Introduction

Body language accompanies any human communicative activity. Facial expressions, look, gestures, position of arms and legs demonstrate attitude to recipient and topic of communication, allowing speaker to express their assessment. At every lesson, teacher builds communication with students using both verbal and non-verbal means. This fact determines relevance of studying body language in the Russian educational discourse. Despite features of teacher's personality, physiology and character, student may adequately interpret a message transmitted with a body signal. Even after changing teacher, class or school, a student still perceives the information identically, on condition of knowledge of national specific of gestures. Recently, features of body language of small people of Russia have become a subject of study (Araeva et al., 2017), especially in the context of intercultural communication (Larin, 2015; Molchanova, 2014).

2. Problem Statement

Studies of the problem of body language and its adequate interpretation were conducted by such scholars as (Kreidlin & Krongauz, 2018; Mehrabian, 1982; Pease, 2020) and others. In the second half of the 20th century, non-verbal semiotic systems in communication have become object of study of many researchers (Birdwhistell, 1982; Borg, 2013; Hall, 1969). Scientists started to include non-verbal studies in linguistic. Voice is the principal tool in teacher's activities. Oral speech dominates during the lesson, even when written exercises are being done in a Russian language class. Teacher uses their voice to emphasize, praise, point to a mistake. Distance learning in 2020–2021 demonstrated to the whole society the importance of visual and sound contact with a teacher explaining new topics, adjusting acquisition rate, monitoring mastering of a rule by each and every student. "Gesture, facial expression, look, posture are often more expressive and effectual than words", as rightfully state Petrova (1998, p. 173).

Despite the fact that non-verbal communication precedes words, Russian scholars started systematic studies of body signals only during 1980s. Building on experience of their foreign colleagues, they attempted defining the terms and approaches to such concepts as "non-verbal behavior", "non-verbal communication", "non-verbal communication means". Vereshchagin and Kostomarov (1981) analyzed mutual relations between verbal and non-verbal communication means. Labunskaya (1986) presented the currently most comprehensive classification of body language means of communication. In order to attain maximum results during the learning process, educator shall know the specifics of functioning of body language in professional discourse.

Studies of educational communication traditionally declare the importance of understanding the expressions of student states and a necessity for adequate expression of states and attitudes, while emphasizing dependence of the results of educational activity on skills and experience of a teacher to interact by means of expression (Akhyamova, 2009, p. 123).

The problem in teaching encoding and decoding information expressed in body signals is practically unresolved in professional training of future teachers of the Russian language, which

determines relevance of this article. Analyzing acquisition of English in class, Valdes made a good point that "those who acquired language without activating non-verbal component experience serious issues in communication" (Valdes, 1986, p. 137). The same may be said about any language: mastering exclusively verbal, or, vice versa, exclusively non-verbal means may lead to communication failures and mistakes.

3. Research Questions

Material of the research is formed by a system of gesture, facial expressions, body movements of teachers of the Russian language during lessons. In total, 30 video recording of lessons in Russian as a Native Language, and 30 lessons of Russian as a Foreign Language were analyzed; video recordings were obtained through www.youtube.com.

4. Purpose of the Study

The purpose of the study is to analyze use of body language in educational discourse, identifying its semantics and functions.

5. Research Methods

In order to attain the objectives, a set of methods and techniques were employed: observation, description, quantitative, semiotic and component analysis.

6. Findings

Specifics of functioning of body signals lies in the possibility to provide supporting or contradicting information. For example, a teacher may say "Good job!" either as a praise, or as a reproach. In addition, body signals may be unrelated to a specific dialog, or be connected to the surrounding environment. It may be an incentive to look out of the window, a request to speak in a lower voice, various signals with respect to other subjects not participating in this dialog (answering greetings from passer-byes). As practice shows, body language messages enjoy relative autonomy and may be used independently of verbal speech. Thus, body language may not be limited not only being a supplementary means with respect to verbal speech, but it may exist separately, independently of the former.

Causes for autonomy of may be situations related to limited channel for voice communication (communicating through a glazed window, loud noise, etc.), psychological state of communicants, (e.g., common joy), or with such situations when verbal and non-verbal speech are identical.

Use of body language in Russian language lessons provides intensity of perception of new learning material, activates student attention, form communicative skills of children. All this facilitates adaptation of schoolchildren to interpersonal contacts, opening additional possibilities for personal development trajectory.

Inclusion of body language into the learning situation translates a degree of professionalism of the instructor. Of specific importance in this area are special skills in directing schoolchildren to cognitive activity: formulation of questions, simultaneous communication with the whole class, not just a single

pupil, observation, controlling one's own behavior as communicative leader in the audience (disposition, voice, facial expressions, movements). Among the means of non-verbal communication, it is possible to identify the following principal components and their characteristics: facial expression (static/dynamic/expressive); eye contact (kept/not kept); gesture (moderate/reserved/excessive); posture (relaxed/contained/free); appearance (school dress code). Learning session is a one-person theater, where communication leader—the teacher—plays the leading role.

Methods of non-verbal impression also include spacial organization of the communication. If students are looking attentively at the teacher, it is an indicator of their interest to the class, positive attitude to the teacher and what they speak and do, and vice versa. In educational practice, facial expressions are widely used as a factor of impression. One of such impressions is cheerful and sympathetic facial expression (a smile). It performs the function of self-impression (raises the spirits of the speaker), brings up positive emotions in partners in conversation (the smile is easily reflected), stimulates continuing contact, characterizing the smiling person as a bearer of positive characteristics. The smile shall be justified by situation, otherwise, in the Russian communication space speaker's cheerfulness is often perceived with caution.

Gestures are dynamic, expressive body movements. The nature of gestures of a teacher sets up a certain atmosphere in the classroom from the first minutes of a lesson. If teacher's movements are sudden and nervous, then, instead of readiness to the lesson, children may experience a state of tense expectation of problems. A large role in the educational process is played by demonstrative, emphasizing and imitating gestures. They are one of the most important aspects of effective learning, as their principal function is activation of various cognitive processes: perception, memorization, cognition, imagination. They may be used to illustrate teacher's speech, thus, involving visual perception, memory and visual thinking in students. For example, explanation of a synonymic chain "smile – laugh – roar" is easiest to perform with facial expressions.

Receptive atmosphere is created by a constant contact with the class, instructor by their behavior demonstrates not only their positive attitude, but their involvement in the process of the lesson. Favorable gestures are primarily descriptive, open ones; a teacher shall be capable of intonationally emphasize especially important parts of the lesson, using pauses to underline the moments requiring additional attention, do not distance oneself from students, but also do not break personal limits, do not hesitate to use special feats for drawing attention.

A need to introduce paralinguistic phenomena into teaching comes primarily from impossibility to artificially isolate them from speech without stripping it of natural sound and a significant part of informative value. By their body language and verbal behavior, Russian language teacher is not only arranging communication, but also demonstrating a reference of Russian linguistic culture: permissible distance, possibility of touch between a teacher and a pupil and between pupils. The instructor forms authentic behavior of students, which will be adequate in this communicative situation. Thus, non-verbal behavior is a set of communicatively significant non-linguistic signals of oral speech (gestures, facial expressions, body movements, postures, locations).

Considering body language in educational communication, it may be concluded that accuracy of movements is of great importance, even more so as they serve as semantic transforms, substituting for

words "Stop", "More quiet", "Yes", "Correct", etc. Such movements interact with words, sometimes completely substituting them. In any case, if in everyday communication semantic movements come out naturally, in the system of professional communication they shall be deliberate and controllable to a maximum degree.

It is especially problematic to set up a favorable emotional communication with schoolchildren in Year 10 and 11, as they undergo a crisis stage of maturation at this age. For schoolchildren in senior high school years, it is typical to be easily excitable, susceptible to mood swings and emotional upheavals. In stress situations, a student hides their anxiety under a mask of indifference, or, vice versa, reacts impulsively. Teenagers are introduced to adult life through an assortment of emotions, communication with peers and expansion of interpersonal borders. Their aspiration to break into adult life is manifested in clothes (and appearance as a whole) and behavior patterns.

Thus, it is possible to identify the main characteristics typical of emotional behavior of teenagers: increased differentiation of emotions, increased capability for understanding emotions of others, appearance of a capability to differentiate expressive means from emotions, transition of reactions from impulsive to deliberate (Petrova, 1998).

Body language signals of closed type complicate relations with students, e.g., laced fingers, index finger gesture, lack of descriptive gestures, unkindly facial expressions, arrogant or berating intonation, very fast speech without sense pauses, monotonous speech without emotional load, emotional distraction of teacher from students, fixed gaze, looking over the top of one's spectacles. The situation in the class may be further complicated by non-verbal elements of domination, supremacy and enmity. In general, people perceive such behavior as aggression, thus, teenagers, having a higher emotional sensitivity, will perceive such behavior as strictly negative, thus complicating the learning process.

Favorable atmosphere is created by a constant contact with the class, teacher translates their positive attitude to students and involvement in the lesson by body signals. Favorable gestures are primarily descriptive, open ones; a teacher shall be capable of intonationally emphasize especially important parts of the lesson, using pauses to underline the moments requiring additional attention, do not distance oneself from students, but also do not break personal limits, do not hesitate to use special feats for drawing attention.

Gestures of openness, assurance and trust, pleasant smile, cocked eyebrows are capable of sparking interest in students and making the lesson memorable. Students always feel teacher's involvement into the learning process and are ready to listen and co-operate. Examples of gestures and their meaning: teacher's movement through the class – monitoring, or reflection on a solution; teacher supports chin with the palm, index finger along the cheek, other fingers are below mouth – critical evaluation of the situation; knocking on the desk with fingers or keys translates dissatisfaction with student behavior; legs or the whole body turned to the exit – a wish to leave the room; teacher tries to avoid looking at the student during their answer – hiding teacher's position; narrowing one's eyes, crinkling one's nose, scowling – disagreement, disapproval.

Voice. In cases when a teacher has a kind, appealing voice, acquisition of knowledge proceeds better and faster, as the students are not afraid of asking questions, they enjoy listening to the teacher, they do not worry that the teacher may lash out and scream, thus, they are not deflecting any of their

attention to that. In total, it provides maximum acquisition and understanding of material; working capacity of the class with such a teacher is higher. If teacher's speech is too fast or slurred, it reduced the class working capacity. If a teacher is hurrying, interrupts student with "What's next?", "Faster", etc., the student is unable to learn the information.

Facial expressions. In analyzed materials, it has been discovered that positive facial expressions of a teacher invites students to communication. Children came to such teacher for advice, assistance, conversation. Children can easily read such expression and express their attitude in a common phrase "We are not afraid of him/her". Students were wary of a teacher with too fluid facial expressions. A teacher who started screaming while at the same time actively winking, made a frightening impression to the students, thus causing their protective reaction, laughter.

Another teacher disoriented schoolchildren with their facial expression. The teacher's face showed no movements, while the eyebrows were furrowed. Students were afraid to volunteer answering at the blackboard, as the teacher provided not facial or emotional assessment of the answers.

Inadequate facial expressions, such as grin or wide open eyes also cause distrust among the schoolchildren. The research has shown that in cases when children distrust the teacher, their behavior becomes unsatisfactory and their attitude to the teacher becomes disrespectful. This is expression of a protective reaction.

Analysis of lessons in the Russian language showed that teachers rarely use non-verbal means during regular lessons, mainly to organize the learning process. At that, when a lesson is performed for participation in a competition (e.g., for Teacher of the Year award), the very same teacher maximally use body language, such as gestures, facial expressions, movements, intonation. For instance, while explaining the topic of mood in Russian, the teacher accompanies their speech with bows to the left and to the right, accenting the attention on the definition. Meaning of verbal prefixes (от-, пере-, в-, за-, подо-, вы-) is easier mastered thanks to moving objects and directing gestures. Memorization of direction and degree of movement is subsequently projected onto any other verbs with such prefixes (*переехать* – *переписать* – *перерисовать* – *пересказать*). When listening to a student answering the questions concerning case endings of nouns, teacher often gives a clue, by pointing at an object in class (like in Russian word for table, wall, window...).

Observing the work of a teacher of Russian as a Foreign language allowed concluding that non-verbal components of speech are maximally engaged in explanation and commenting. For instance, during the first lesson, dedicated to the topic of Acquaintance, using only gestures to accompany Russian phrases "Здравствуйте! Меня зовут ... Я – учитель. Моя страна – Россия" (*Hello! My name is I am a teacher. I am from Russia*), the instructor achieves acquisition and memorization of a mini-text by learners in 40 minutes. In this situation, there is no other intermediate language but body language. Gestures and facial expressions are also used to encourage students to actions, such as Repeat, Write down, Say, Reply, Remember, Do. After several iterations of gestures and accompanying words, the students naturally remember some expressions, important for subsequent learning. At that, the teacher, having a total command of the Russian language, transmits information in gesture and intonation, while the student, having no command of Russian whatsoever, perceives the information through the gesture. Starting from the first lesson, all the participants are capable of successful communication and mutual

understanding, even if in the simplest of all volitions. Gesture and intonation are used to cover the gap of the lack of knowledge and understanding.

7. Conclusion

It appears that non-verbal communication may serve as an intermediate at any stages of mastering Russian: at higher levels it serves as an assistant for explanations, while at the lowest level it is the foundation for learning and consolidation of knowledge. Body language translates communicative roles of teacher and student, teacher's domination, organizing communication environment, substituting long phrases with a single gesture or facial expression, forming images in students' minds, helping better express one's thought. The problem in teaching encoding and decoding information expressed in body signals is practically unresolved in professional training of future teachers of the Russian language, thus, further studies of body language in the educational discourse appear highly promising.

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