

Chapter-18

Kinesics: The Concept, Typology, Application and Management in Non-Verbal Communication

What is Kinesics?

It is the study of body movements, gestures, facial expressions, etc., as a means of communication.

Kinesics is the interpretation of body motion communication such as facial expressions and gestures, nonverbal behavior related to movement of any part of the body or the body as a whole. The equivalent popular culture term is body language, a term Ray Birdwhistell, considered the founder of this area of study, neither used nor liked (on the grounds that what can be conveyed with the body does not meet the linguist's definition of language). Even so, many people use the term.

Birdwhistell's Work

Kinesics was first used (in 1952) by Ray Birdwhistell, an anthropologist who wished to study how people communicate through posture, gesture, stance, and movement. His ideas over several decades were synthesized and resulted in the book, *Kinesics and Context*. Interest in kinesics specifically and nonverbal behavior generally was popularized in the late 1960s and early 1970s by such popular mass market (non academic) publications as *How to Read a Person Like a Book*.

Part of Birdwhistell's work involved filming people in social situations and analyzing them to show elements of communication that were not clearly seen otherwise. One of his most important projects was *The*

Natural History of an Interview, a long-term interdisciplinary collaboration including Gregory Bateson, Frieda Fromm-Reichmann, Norman A. McQueen, Henry W. Brosin, and others.

Drawing heavily on descriptive linguistics, Birdwhistell argued that all movements of the body have meaning and that nonverbal behavior has a grammar that can be analyzed in similar terms to spoken language. Thus, a "kineme" is "similar to a phoneme because it consists of a group of movements which are not identical, but which may be used interchangeably without affecting social meaning.

Birdwhistell estimated that no more than 30 to 35 percent of the social meaning of a conversation or an interaction is carried by the words. He also concluded that there were no universals in these kinesics displays, a claim that was disputed by Paul Ekman, who was interested in analysis of universals, especially in facial expression.

Facial Expression:

A **facial expression** is one or more motions or positions of the muscles beneath the skin of the face. According to one set of controversial theories, these movements convey the emotional state of an individual to observers. Facial expressions are a form of nonverbal communication. They are a primary means of conveying social information between humans, but they also occur in most of the mammals and some other animal species. (For a discussion of the controversies on these claims (Fridlund and Russell & Fernandez Dols.) Humans can adopt a facial expression voluntarily or involuntarily, and the neural mechanisms responsible for controlling the expression differ in each case. Voluntary facial expressions are often socially conditioned and follow a cortical route in the brain. Conversely, involuntary facial expressions are believed to be innate and follow a sub-cortical route in the brain.

Facial recognition is often an emotional experience for the brain and the amygdale is highly involved in the recognition process.

The eyes are often viewed as important features of facial expressions. Aspects such as blinking rate can be used to indicate whether or not a person is nervous or whether or not he or she is lying. Also, eye contact is considered an important aspect of interpersonal communication. However, there are cultural differences regarding the social propriety of maintaining eye contact or not.

Beyond the accessory nature of facial expressions in spoken communication between people, they play a significant role in communication with sign language. Many phrases in sign language include facial expressions in the display.

There is controversy surrounding the question of whether or not facial expressions are worldwide and universal displays among humans. Supporters of the Universality Hypothesis claim that many facial expressions are innate and have roots in evolutionary ancestors. Opponents of this view question the accuracy of the studies used to test this claim and instead believe that facial expressions are conditioned and that people view and understand facial expressions in large part from the social situations around them.

Body language

Body language is a kind of nonverbal communication, where thoughts, intentions, or feelings are expressed by physical behaviors, such as facial expressions, body posture, gestures, eye movement, touch and the use of space. Body language exists in both animals and humans, but this article focuses on interpretations of human body language. It is also known as kinesics.

Body language must not be confused with sign language, as sign languages are full languages like spoken languages and have their own

complex grammar systems, as well as being able to exhibit the fundamental properties that exist in all languages. Body language, on the other hand, does not have a grammar and must be interpreted broadly, instead of having an absolute meaning corresponding with a certain movement, so it is not a language like sign language, and is simply termed as a "language" due to popular culture.

In a community, there are agreed-upon interpretations of particular behavior. Interpretations may vary from country to country, or culture to culture. On this note, there is controversy on whether body language is universal. Body language, a subset of nonverbal communication, complements verbal communication in social interaction. In fact some researchers conclude that nonverbal communication accounts for the majority of information transmitted during interpersonal interactions.^[4] It helps to establish the relationship between two people and regulates interaction, but can be ambiguous. Hence, it is crucial to accurately read body language to avoid misunderstanding in social interactions.

Body postures[edit]

Emotions can also be detected through body postures. Research has shown that body postures are more accurately recognised when an emotion is compared with a different or neutral emotion.^[8] For example, a person feeling angry would portray dominance over the other, and his/her posture displays approach tendencies. Comparing this to a person feeling fearful: he/she would feel weak, submissive and his/her posture would display avoidance tendencies,^[8] the opposite of an angry person.

Sitting or standing postures also indicate one's emotions. A person sitting till the back of his/her chair, leans forward with his/her head nodding along with the discussion implies that he/she is open, relaxed

and generally ready to listen. On the other hand, a person who has his/her legs and arms crossed with the foot kicking slightly implies that he/she is feeling impatient and emotionally detached from the discussion.^[5]

In a standing discussion, a person stands with arms akimbo with feet pointed towards the speaker could suggest that he/she is attentive and is interested in the conversation. However, a small difference in this posture could mean a lot. For example, if the same person has his/her leg crossed over the other, and places his/her entire balance on one leg, this suggests a more casual attitude.^[5] Standing with arms akimbo is considered rude in Bali.

Open and expansive nonverbal posturing can also have downstream effects on testosterone and cortisol levels, which have clear implications for the study of human behavior^[9]

Gestures

Gestures are movements made with body parts (e.g. hands, arms, fingers, head, legs) and they may be voluntary or involuntary.^[5] Arm gestures can be interpreted in several ways. In a discussion, when one stands, sits or even walks with folded arms, this is normally not a welcoming gesture. It could mean that he/she has a closed mind and is most likely unwilling to listen to the speaker's viewpoint. Another type of arm gesture also includes an arm crossed over the other, demonstrating insecurity and a lack of confidence.^[5]

Hand gestures often signify the state of well-being of the person making them. Relaxed hands indicate confidence and self-assurance, while clenched hands may be interpreted as signs of stress or anger. If a person is wringing his/her hands, this demonstrates nervousness and anxiety.^[5]

Finger gestures are also commonly used to exemplify one's speech as well as denote the state of well-being of the person making them. In certain cultures, pointing using one's index finger is deemed acceptable. However, pointing at a person may be viewed as aggressive in other cultures—for example, people who share Hindu beliefs consider finger pointing offensive. Instead, they point with their thumbs.^[10] Likewise, the thumbs up gesture could show "OK" or "good" in countries like the US, France and Germany. But this same gesture is insulting in other countries like Iran, Bangladesh and Thailand, where it is the equivalent of showing the middle finger in the US.^[10]

Handshakes[edit]

Handshakes are regular greeting rituals and are commonly done on meeting, greeting, offering congratulations or after the completion of an agreement. They usually indicate the level of confidence and emotion level in people.^[5] Studies have also categorised several handshake styles,^[10] e.g. the finger squeeze, the bone crusher (shaking hands too strongly), the limp fish (shaking hands too weakly), etc. Handshakes are popular in the US and are appropriate for use between men and women. However, in Muslim cultures, men may not shake hands or touch women in any way and vice versa. Likewise, in Hindu cultures, Hindu men may never shake hands with women. Instead, they greet women by placing their hands as if praying.

A firm, friendly handshake has long been recommended in the business world as a way to make a good first impression, and the greeting is thought to date to ancient times as a way of showing a stranger you had no weapons.^[11]

Other types of physical movements[edit]

Covering one's mouth suggests suppression of feeling and perhaps uncertainty. This could also mean that he/she is thinking hard and may be unsure of what to say next.^[5] What you communicate through your body language and nonverbal signals affects how others see you, how well they like and respect you, and whether or not they trust you.

Unfortunately, many people send confusing or negative nonverbal signals without even knowing it. When this happens, both connection and trust are damaged.

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a) Proxemics :

Main article: Proxemics

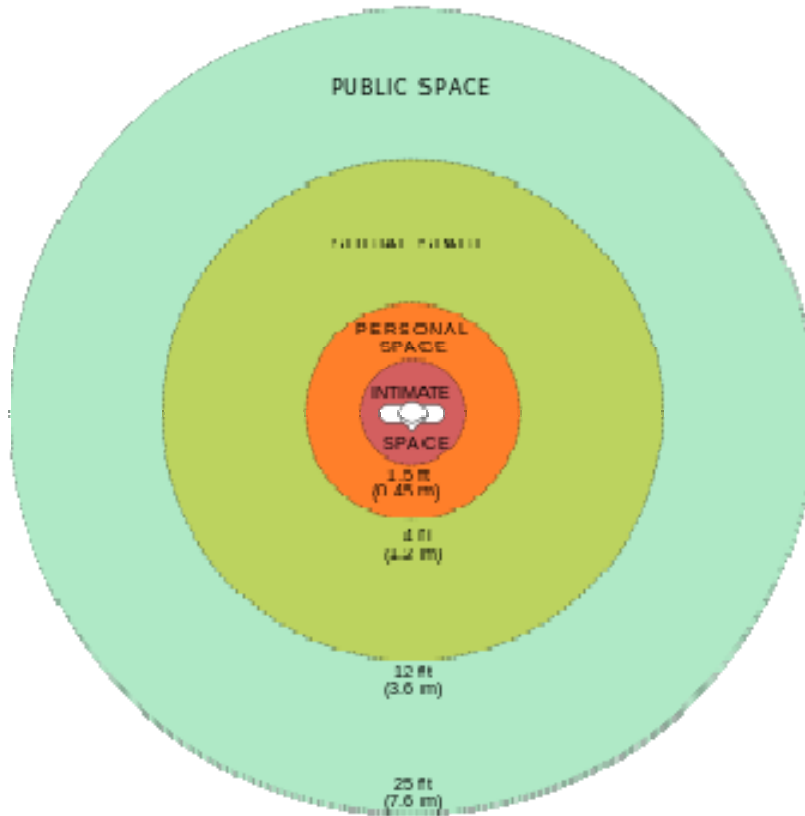


Diagram of Edward T. Hall's personal **reaction bubbles**(1966), showing radius in feet

Another notable area in the nonverbal world of body language is that of spatial relationships, which is also known as Proxemics. Introduced by Edward T. Hall in 1966, proxemics is the study of measurable distances between people as they interact with one another. In the book, *Body Language*, Julius Fast mentioned that the signals that we send or receive to others through body language are reactions to others' invasions of our personal territories, which links Proxemics an important part of Body Language.

Hall also came up with four distinct zones in which most men operate:

Intimate distance for embracing, touching or whispering

Close phase – less than 6 inches (15 cm)

Far phase – 6 to 18 inches (15 to 46 cm)

Personal distance for interactions among good friends or family members

Close phase – 1.5 to 2.5 feet (46 to 76 cm)

Far phase – 2.5 to 4 feet (76 to 122 cm)

Social distance for interactions among acquaintances

Close phase – 4 to 7 feet (1.2 to 2.1 m)

Far phase – 7 to 12 feet (2.1 to 3.7 m)

Public Distance used for public speaking

Close phase – 12 to 25 feet (3.7 to 7.6 m)

Far phase – 25 feet (7.6 m) or more.

In addition to physical distance, the level of intimacy between conversants can be determined by "socio-petal socio-fugal axis", or the "angle formed by the axis of the conversants' shoulders".

Changing the distance between two people can convey a desire for intimacy, declare a lack of interest, or increase/decrease domination. It can also influence the body language that is used. For example, when people talk they like to face each other. If forced to sit side by side, their body language will try to compensate for this lack of eye-to-eye contact by leaning in shoulder-to-shoulder.

It is important to note that as with other types of Body Language, proximity range varies with culture. Hall suggested that "physical contact between two people ... can be perfectly correct in one culture, and absolutely taboo in another". In Latin America, people who may be complete strangers may engage in very close contact. They often greet one another by kissing on the cheeks. North Americans, on

the other hand, prefer to shake hands. While they have made some physical contact with the shaking of the hand, they still maintain a certain amount of physical space between the other people.

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