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Applying Non-Verbal Implicature in Short Stories to Improve Communication Skills

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Abstract:

Reading is a successful tool for exercising the mind. It offers much scope to refresh the reader's mind and to indulge in language activity. Especially when used to develop language skills, certain innovative experiments can evoke the interest of students to learn a text rigorously. Often, information is conveyed indirectly, beyond what is said by the conventional meaning of words uttered, inferred mainly from the context of utterance. Conversations offer scope for such implicatures. But information is conveyed not only through the words uttered but also through nonverbal cues as they speak out louder than words. Such an analysis of nonverbal implicatures would enable learners to understand the importance of nonverbal communication in social relationships and enable them to employ such cues aptly. It also greatly aids in understanding that nonverbal communication also denotes cultural differences. The present study undertakes to study how non-verbal communication can be gleaned from the short story "Winter Cruise" written by Somerset Maugham.

Keywords: communication skills, implicature, nonverbal cues.

Introduction

Communication is possible not only by words emanating from the mouth. It is widely accepted that a lot more is inferred from what is not said; i.e. what is conveyed through non-verbal cues. In both formal and informal communication, the wordless meaning is more important, as what is said can be misconstrued or can mislead, but non-verbal communication definitely does not. Various surveys have shown that 7% of communication is through words, 38% is vocal (pause, intonation and pitch) and 55% of communication is through body language. To be successful in both personal and professional relationship, it is necessary that there should be the ability to understand how non-verbal communication acts as a powerful tool to convey meaning. When both words and signs are used, the receiver can surely rely on the non-verbal, because it transmits the speaker's true intentions and mental state unconsciously. Thus, words and their matching non-verbal signals enable the two people to increase rapport, clarity and mutual trust. Even when a person does not talk, his gestures send strong cues continuously. The way a person looks, listens, moves and reacts reveals blatantly what he feels and thus studying the nonverbal cues enables the receiver to understand if he can trust the spoken communication. When the words and expressions do not match, they increase confusion and mistrust.

Charles Darwin's book titled *The Expression of the Emotions in Man and Animals* (1872) contained the scientific research done on behaviour and nonverbal communication. Two researchers, UCLA Professor Albert Mehrabian and Susan R. Ferris, in a paper published in 1967 in the *Journal of Consulting Psychology*, emphasized the importance of words, body language, and tone of voice in conveying an emotional message. They confirmed that unspoken communication is very subtle in creating effects and impacts on people. In *A Primer on Communication Studies* (Chapter 4, 2015) it is proved that non-verbal communication can never be faked, as no person can voluntarily and successfully send signals contrary to their feeling and thinking. Haiyan Wang (2009) in the article "Nonverbal Communication and the Effect on Interpersonal Communication" studied how people try to understand others and make important judgements by thoroughly assessing their nonverbal behaviours.

Such an exercise can be done in *Winter Cruise*, a short story, where the middle aged Miss Reid remains the lady who knew too much. William Somerset Maugham, called the grand old man of letters, made brutal, unstinting use of material available to him personally in his writing. This compact story contains exciting bits for delightful reading and with the precision of a fiction exhilarates the readers. Miss Reid travelled due west to the West Indies on a holiday trip, but the attitude of the fellow passengers, who were Germans remained hostile, eager to pull her leg. She lived true to her character and her fellow passengers carried a sense of regret after playing a cruel trick on her. As Shakespeare's Jacques pictured the fifth stage of man – justice of peace – with wise saws and instances, Miss Reid too was full of quotable quotes. "Travel is a great education" is one such cliché – but what kind of education she had is left vague and uncertain.

The readers are left confused whether the joke of the crew succeeded and if she really did have love with the radio-operator. These questions remain unresolved to the end. The simple, prosaic style of Maugham can be studied in the light of nonverbal implicatures conveyed through nonverbal signals, which help to reflect the character traits of the major characters.

2. Types of Non-Verbal Communication

Researchers have identified several types of nonverbal communication, which can facilitate identification of implicature in the use of them:

2.1. Kinesics

Kinesics makes up the class of bodily communication including gestures and facial expressions. Ray Birdwhistell in his book *Kinesics and Context* (1952) popularized the term 'body language'. He was an anthropologist and studied the way people communicated through their movements, gestures, postures and stance. He filmed people in social situations and analysed them to show clearly how nonverbal cues result in communication. He evinced that such communication has a grammar like a spoken language. He estimated that more than 65% of communication was done through kinesics displays.

Body movements vary according to culture, and they help in controlling the pace and flow of communication and also enable to release emotional or physical tension. Kinesics includes many factors like facial expressions, eye contact, gestures, body shape and posture and appearance.

According to Knapps, appearance comprises of personal characteristics such as skin color, hair, physique, weight, height, breath and odour. *Survey of Communication Study* (Wiki Books) mentions that choice of clothing, its colour and even hairstyles are means of nonverbal communication, as they convey meanings about what one values. Colours demonstrate different moods and play a major role in job interviews. Appearance triggers physiological reactions, interpretations and judgements; they also indicate personality, income, occupation and status.

2.2. Para Language

George L. Trager invented the study of Paralinguistics in the 1950's, through his publications in 1958, 1960 and 1961. His colleagues, who worked with him worked on other nonverbal communication like Edward T. Hall on proxemics and Ray Birdwhistell on kinesics.

Para Language or paralinguistic systematically studies how a speaker utters or verbalizes. It closely accompanies verbal and nonverbal communication. Humans communicate a lot not through what is said, but how it is said. They intuitively read our voices while listening to our words. The tone of voice conveys a whole gamut of information and conveys the state of mind a person is in. Thus, a person's emotions like anger, confidence, disinterestedness, enthusiasm,

sarcasm and affection are easily conveyed through their tone of voice. Particular emphasis should be placed on pitch, volume, pronunciation, articulation, pauses and the rate of delivery. All these non-verbal communications remain verbally communicated in Maugham's writing with implicature of their own. By carefully working out these nonverbal implications, the attitudes of various characters can be delineated and it can also help to establish that nonverbal cues are very important in revealing cultural leanings.

3. Discussion

3.1. Miss Reid

Kinesics – Gestures

Gestures are explicit body language signals and are useful to emphasize an opinion, and a successful communicator can use them to increase rapport and trust in a relationship. A careful perusal of the text for such cues would help to understand the character of Miss. Reid.

On board the cruiser, Miss. Reid had to share her cabin with another woman, Mrs. Bollin. Mrs. Bollin was French and,

“She was only very slightly disconcerted when she found that Madame Bollin was coal-black. She told herself that one had to accept the rough with the smooth and that it takes all sorts to make a world.”

(286)

At a time when racial conflict is blistering relationships, this attitude implies that Miss Reid was not bothered with class-consciousness and so did not feel uncomfortable with her cabin mate. Racial perceptions often affect communication as people develop an expectation even before interacting. Ramasubramanian (2010) found that “expectations can change based on the race of the person”. But Miss. Reid here through her acceptance portrays a decidedly humane outlook to cultural difference.

She was sophisticated, had the poise of confident people, though she was not rich, and revealed it through her gestures.

Her movements were deliberate, elegant, and self-assured.

(288)

Once the doctor was not feeling very well and was lying on the deck chair when Miss Reid came up for her regular walk. He feigned to sleep but with her discerning eye she found that he was unwell and for once silently sat beside him knitting to keep him company in his discomfort.

“She never said a word. And strangely enough the doctor found her company a solace. No one else on board had even noticed that he was ill, he had felt lonely, and the sympathy of that crashing bore was grateful to him. It

soothed him to see her silently working and presently he fell asleep. When he awoke she was still working. She gave him a little smile, but did not speak. His pain had left him and he felt much better.” (293)

Miss Reid, who aggravated everyone’s irritation with her talkativeness, was just for once able to really give comfort to a sick man and also earn his gratitude for her mute gesture. Thus, through these gestures she revokes her image as an inconsiderate woman.

Unable to bear her snobbish behaviour anymore, the captain ordered the radio-operator to approach her with a love message. When the radio operator wrote a radio message that he loved her and wanted to speak to her,

“Miss Reid read this through twice. Then she slowly took off her Spectacles and hid them under a scarf. She opened the door. ‘Come in,’ she said.” (300)

Her reading through the message twice implies her befuddlement, as she could not seriously comprehend why the young man had written a love message to her. Her taking off her glasses and opening the door to the radio operator shows that she was either resigned to berate the man for disturbing her two days in a row in the wee hours, or that she was impressed and wanted to talk to him without letting him see that she was old and needed glasses for reading.

On the New Year’s Eve, Miss Reid happily participated in the revelry and
“The doctor noticed that Miss Reid’s eyes from time to time rested on the radio-operator, and in them he read an expression of some bewilderment.” (302)

Her frequent glances imply that she was perplexed and that she had serious misgivings about the actions of the young man. It nonverbally communicates that she was striving to decipher his intentions.

Miss Reid did not speak at dinner and was very silent.
“Miss Reid did not come in till the officers were seated, and when they bade her good morning she did not speak but merely bowed. They looked at her curiously. She ate a good dinner, but uttered never a word. Her silence was uncanny.” (301)

They were surprised and the captain asked her the reason. She said that she was thinking and did not wish to tell them. When he doctor teasingly asked if she could not tell her thoughts,

“She gave him a cool, you might almost have called it a supercilious look.” (301)
This look implies her knowledge that they had played a malicious joke on her.

For the rest of the journey, they fawned over Miss Reid to make her comfortable and tried to draw her into conversation, but

“She seemed to regard them with something very like disdain; you might almost have thought that she looked upon those men and their efforts to be amiable as pleasantly ridiculous. She seldom spoke unless spoken to.” (304)

Her complete turn of character implies that she had realized through the radio operator that the men were hounded by her chattiness. She also now looked down upon them for they had tried to set her up with a young boy. It also implies that she now hated their overtures at friendliness for they had effectively killed her innate goodness.

Thus, a study of kinesics reveals that Miss Reid is a round character, as she definitely shows a character transformation, from being an inconsiderate, ostentatious person to a mellow character. This shift in character is easily garnered from her nonverbal behaviours. It also proves what Deepika Phutela (2015) noted: “Non-verbal communication has a great influence over our social environment and the whole communication process.”

Para Language

Emotions and attitudes usually tinge the voice and the way one speaks. Since attitudes are expressed intentionally, expressive variation in tone is central to paralanguage. It affects the pitch, speaking rate, loudness, and also frequencies. This aspect is exhibited in Miss Reid’s speech as she was never at a loss for words. She was well read and moved amicably with people. When her friend Miss Prince said that it was her asset,

‘Well, I think if you’re interested in everyone, everyone will be interested in you,’ Miss Reid answered modestly. (287)

Her modest tone implies that Miss Reid was proud and complacent with her skill and took it for granted that she had practised her speaking skills well. However, later we find that she was blind to the effects it had on others, as she was a crashing bore. She always manipulated the conversation,

She talked rather slowly, in a refined voice, and her vocabulary was extensive. (288)

Ironically she did not realize that the pitch of her voice was boring the men.

When the journey came to an end

“She spoke rather shakily, she tried to smile, but her lips quivered, and tears ran down her cheeks.” (304)

Although it appears that she had found out their cruel joke on her, her tremulous voice implies that she was touched by their companionship and was truly regretful at her parting. This rather

makes one to pity Miss. Reid and it is a sign that she would never bore people in future as she had learnt a hard lesson.

As a woman, Miss. Reid behaves true to David Matsumoto's (2005) analysis. He had distinguished significant sex differences, where he found that females exerted more control on anger, contempt, and disgust than men did. Miss. Reid had been insulted publicly on board the ship, but her sophistication enabled her to regain her composure and behave in a dignified manner. Her nonverbal cues aid in showing her unique composure. They also establish that her outer veneer of loquaciousness actually masked a very caring, and astute woman

3.2. The Doctor

Kinesics

The doctor did not care much for intrusion into his private space and was once sitting alone on the deck reading a book. Since Miss Reid was determined to put up a fight for his attention, she persisted in her conversation:

“He gave her a brief look and pursing his lips went on reading.” (291)

Ekman and Friesen categorize this nonverbal gesture of disgust under *affect display*, as such gestures serve to embellish a person's attitude. Paul Ekman (1980) studied how specific facial expressions were linked with experience of disgust in people. This implies that the doctor was a man who did not hesitate to show his displeasure openly and did not even attempt to be polite. But when Miss Reid failed to read the implication and disconcertingly continued her conversation,

“The doctor got up.” (292)

His gesture implies that he was at the end of his tether and did not feign to hide his aversion. Here Miss. Reid was so pompous that she failed to understand the reticence and disgust of the doctor.

3.3. The Radio operator

Kinesics

Everyone was happily planning New Year Eve's celebration. But unable to sustain the torture Miss Reid subject them to, the men groaned that there was nothing short of throwing her overboard to escape from her. Surprisingly the doctor said that what she needed was a lover at her age. To try out the doctor's remedy to make Miss Reid silent, they insisted the radio-operator to do the role of her lover. They interviewed the radio-operator to test his potentiality to become Miss Reid's lover. But when they asked him if he was engaged,

“The radio-operator chuckled. There was an engaging boyishness in his laugh.” (296)

Dirk Wildgruber et al (2013) studied how the brain functions while a person laughs. Laughter is an old communication signal in evolution and has high significance in social interactions. Laughter has highly complex social functions and nonverbally reflects a wide variety of social situations. In this story, the appealing laughter implies that the radio operator was too immature for his age and that he was struck by the absurdness of their questioning. His laughter was unconscious but it nonverbally succeeded in influencing and modifying the attitude of the captain and made him insist that the radio operator should try to become Miss Reid's lover,

“The radio-operator blushed scarlet and then began to giggle, but quickly composed himself when he saw the set faces of the three men who confronted him.” (297)

His giggling shows that the young man found the idea ludicrous. However, when the men's face showed no mirth, he realized that they were actually serious. It also implies that he suddenly realized his position and restrained himself from laughing at the captain of the ship.

That night the radio operator knocked on her door. When she had opened the door, he asked if she wanted to send a radio and bewildered she said no.

“He stood there, looking so funny, as if he was quite embarrassed.” (299)

This nonverbal gesture implies that he was flustered and did not know how to continue the conversation with an elderly woman, who was thrust on him. Through the nonverbal cue of laughter, we can understand the character of the radio operator as an immature, shy, young man.

3.4. The Crew

Melissa Gross et al (2010) state “Implicit in the study of bodily expression in individuals experiencing an emotion is the assumption that there is a neurobiological basis for emotion to affect body movements in some characteristic way.” This is obviously identified in the attitude of the men after Miss. Reid had been silenced.

On New Year's Eve, Miss Reid gave presents to everyone on board for all the kindness they had shown her. After she left the room,

“The officers looked at one another uncomfortably. The mate fiddled with the cigar-case she had given him.... The captain was pensive and it was plain that he too was a trifle uneasy.” (303)

Their pensive look and flustered gesture implies that they belatedly realized with compunction that she was a kind soul and that they were ashamed for playing a dirty trick on her. Such an analysis of nonverbal gestures that reveal shame would stimulate the reader to understand that one should never play underhand tricks with their companions.

Miss Reid was very emotional when she bade farewell and thanked them for giving her a memorable time.

“The captain got very red. He smiled awkwardly.” (304)

This implies that the gruff captain himself was moved and blushed with shame for the way he had treated her. When they all kissed her she dried her eyes and walked down the companion way. The captain was truly moved and

“The captain’s eyes were wet.” (304)

‘Oculesics’ is a subcategory in kinesics and studies the movement of eyes as nonverbal communication. Tears in eyes indicate sadness and also indicate that men in many cultures feel shy to openly acknowledge emotion but rather allow a dampness in eyes to indicate their emotion. Thus, this implies that the man who had wanted to throw her overboard to get away from her chattering was now truly miserable at seeing her go.

Results

Short stories are miniature novels and never fail to whet the readers’ interest in them. Usually, characters of a story are studied based on their actions in the plot. However, such a reading by analyzing the nonverbal communication helps to describe the characters and brings out their unique features. Miss Reid, a woman despised by the crew becomes a woman respected through her nonverbal gestures, and the other men in the story also show their good turn in attitude through their nonverbal communication. Thus, such a reading activity becomes a delight to learn a short story and also learn how to manage social behaviour by controlling nonverbal communication. This study proved that nonverbal communication is an effective way to understand human behaviour, as emotions are expressed through different modalities. Decoding such nonverbal behaviour would impress the importance of emotional expression through bodily expression. As Robert M. Krauss et al (2016) say, “symbolic gestures are used intentionally and serve a clear communicative function. “

Conclusion

Knowledge of communication skills has become paramount in today’s industry, and mastering it would enable students to indulge in an amicable communication. Nonverbal communication enables the participants to carefully manage the expression on their face to prevent offensive situations. Moreover, according to Judith N. Martin (2013), in the present era of globalization, it is very essential to have a perception of cultural differences to overcome religious, ethnic and cultural conflicts. It would be an exhilarating experience to cull out such cultural implications through nonverbal cues. Trying to identify such instances from short stories would be beneficial as short stories improve students’ imagination and interpretation of cultural differences. Using nonverbal impicature in short stories to learn language and to do character study would help them to improve their language proficiency and their critical thinking ability. Using nonverbal

implicature as a reading strategy would enable students to be more self-directed and depend less on the teacher. Such a study in a classroom situation would enable the students to realize the benefits of good nonverbal communication to improve their reflection on cultural understanding. The various non-verbal implicatures in this short story are successful in exposing the prejudices of the society and highlights the significance of the saying “Don’t judge a book by its cover.”

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