

ON THE CLASSIFICATION OF PARALINGUISTIC MEANS

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Annotation This article discusses the classification of paralinguistic means. It provides a definition of paralinguistics. The nonverbal means of communication commonly used by people in everyday interactions are explained. The article also examines scientific research conducted by scholars on the classification of paralinguistic means.

Keywords: paralinguistics, linguistics, speech, communication, verbal interaction, nonverbal means, kinesics, facial expressions, pantomime, gestures.

Paralinguistics (*para... + linguistics*) – 1) a branch of linguistics that studies nonverbal (non-linguistic) means included in the structure of speech messages and conveys information about the speaker (or writer) along with verbal means; 2) a set of nonverbal means involved in verbal communication¹.

In everyday communication, most people make use of nonverbal means studied by the following disciplines:

kinesics (the external expression of human emotions),

facial expressions (movements of facial muscles),

gestures (meaningful movements of body parts),

pantomime (movements of the entire body, including posture, body position, bending, walking, etc.),

tactile communication (haptics) (physical contact in communication situations, such as handshakes, kisses, touching, stroking, pushing, etc.), and

proxemics (the spatial distance between people during interaction).

In human communication, the following proxemic zones are typically distinguished:

– intimate zone (15–45 cm),

– personal zone (45–120 cm),

– social zone (120–400 cm),

– public zone (over 400 cm).

Facial expressions, eye contact, and gestures are considered the most informative types of nonverbal communication.

The forehead, eyebrows, mouth, eyes, nose, and chin are parts of the face that express a person's key emotions such as grief, anger, joy, surprise, fear, disgust, happiness, interest, sadness, and other feelings.

Gestures are shaped by the communicative practices of specific societies and reflect the influence of social group, space, and time. For example, today, a thumbs-up gesture is considered a positive sign in many countries, conveying meanings such as “everything is fine,”

¹ Николаева Т.М. Большая российская энциклопедия. – М., 2004. – 1007 с.

“excellent,” or “great.” In contrast, a thumbs-down gesture implies disapproval or negativity, indicating that something is bad or undesirable.

Interestingly, these two gestures date back to Ancient Rome, where they were used to determine the fate of gladiators (enslaved fighters) — whether they would live or die.

Therefore, it is not entirely accurate to claim that nonverbal elements have the same meaning everywhere. This is because paralinguistic means should be studied in relation to space and time, as well as through the lens of national mentality, language, and culture.

Here are certain gestures that have a conventional nature and may reflect national or cultural characteristics. That is, a gesture that carries a specific meaning in one ethnic group may have no communicative function or an entirely different meaning in another.

For example, in the United States, United Kingdom, Australia, and New Zealand, the thumbs-up gesture is commonly used to hitchhike—to signal and stop a passing vehicle. However, in Greece, the same gesture can mean "Shut up!" or "Stop it!", carrying a completely different and even offensive connotation.

Various researchers have proposed different approaches to the classification of paralinguistic means. For instance, in the “Great Russian Encyclopedia” (*Большая российская энциклопедия*), authored by Russian linguist and Doctor of Philology, Professor T.M. Nikolayeva, three main types of paralinguistics are identified:

1. Phonational means – such as timbre, tempo, tone of voice, and filled pauses (e.g., "uh", "mm", etc.);
2. Kinetic means – including gestures, body posture, and facial expressions;
3. Graphic means – such as handwriting, graphic techniques, modifications to letters, and symbol substitutions².

These are considered crucial elements in organizing effective verbal communication, as they provide additional layers of meaning to the spoken message.

The renowned Russian linguist and philosopher G.V. Kolshansky dedicated his monograph to paralinguistics, which he regarded as one of the most complex fields of linguistics — the study of the use of non-linguistic means in verbal interaction.

In his work, he described the functions of paralinguistic means within the language system and classified their types. The term "paralinguistics" is derived from Latin and literally means "alongside language."

According to Kolshansky, communication cannot occur through kinetic nonverbal means without any natural physical activity associated with human movement — in other words, paralinguistic communication inherently involves bodily actions that accompany speech³.

The scholar also emphasizes that paralinguistics is a “rich source of information”, as it is realized through general auditory signals such as speech form, intonation patterns, volume of voice, speech tempo (slowness or speed), and pauses.

One of the least used forms of paralinguistics is silence.

Through silence, it is possible to express emotions such as respect, hatred, hostility, or strictness.

² Ярцева В. Большой энциклопедический словарь. 2-ое издание. – М.: Большая русская энциклопедия, 1998. – С 367.

³ Колшанский Г.В. Паралингвистика. – М.: Наука, 1974.

Another Russian linguist, G.E. Kreidlin, also explored the nature of nonverbal behavior in communication in his monograph⁴. His research focuses on the Russian system of gestures and kinesic behavior, providing a detailed analysis of their features in communicative contexts.

Furthermore, the study examines the semantic, pragmatic, and syntactic relationships between nonverbal and verbal elements, analyzing them in parallel.

Another young researcher, M. Odiljonova, has conducted a study on the concept of paralinguistics and its various types⁵. In her work, nonverbal means of communication are explained with the help of examples, making the subject more accessible and comprehensible.

In conclusion, it can be stated that paralinguistic means are among the key factors that enliven speech and enhance its effectiveness.

As a form of nonverbal communication, gestures serve to reveal a person's mentality, worldview, and cultural identity. They help to clarify ambiguous messages, which in turn leads to a more economical use of linguistic resources in communicative situations.

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⁴ Крейдлин Г.Е. Невербальная семиотика: Язык тела и естественный язык. – М.: Новое лит. обозрение, 2004. – 581 с. – Библиогр.: с. 486–520.

⁵ Odilzhonova M. Concept of paralinguistics and its origin. "Мировая наука" №4(25) 2019. –P.97-99. science-j.com