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## **Theory of Information and Communication**

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### **3.1 Concepts and Types of Communication: Verbal and Nonverbal**



## Types of Communication: Verbal and Non-Verbal

Section 2.1 introduced the basic communication concepts, highlighting the different types and their distinctive characteristics. In this section, we delve deeper into verbal and non-verbal communication, exploring their definitions, characteristics, and key examples, such as the role of non-verbal communication in politics.

**Verbal communication** can be defined as a process that allows participants to exchange meanings and build a shared understanding of a specific task or fact. It is noted that verbal language has two specific functions in the collaborative process:

1. **Communicative Function:** It enables the exchange of meanings and the construction of a shared field of significance regarding the task (Mortimer & Wertsch, 2003).
2. **Psychological Function:** It refers to the regulation and planning of one's activity and thought and that of a work partner (Mortimer & Wertsch, 2003).

Additionally, it is emphasized that intersubjectivity, fundamental for effective communication, requires a genuine connection between the participants' individual interpretations, leading to a shared understanding of a common situation.

Ridao (2017) defines verbal communication as the component of discourse that pertains to using words and articulated language to convey a message. However, this definition is complemented by the idea that verbal communication is just one part of a broader set that includes paraverbal communication (encompassing aspects such as tone, rhythm, and intonation of voice) and non-verbal communication (including body language, gestures, and facial expressions).

According to Castellaro, M. A., & Roselli, N. D. (2015), the development of verbal communication evolves with age. For example, four-year-old children, who typically have a communication matrix more oriented toward interaction with adults, face challenges when interacting with other children of their age, limiting their ability to engage in equitable interactions. As children participate in these interactions, they learn to regulate their actions and those of their peers, contributing to their cognitive growth. Over time, this evolution allows for the development of awareness in adolescence and adulthood.

Verbal communication facilitates the construction of shared meanings in collaborative contexts. This process of co-construction is fundamental to cognitive development, as it allows participants to confront and reconcile different perspectives, thus promoting cognitive decentering and the creation of new knowledge schemas. Therefore, verbal communication is not only a means of exchanging information but also an essential component of cognitive development, facilitating regulation, creating shared meanings, and collaborative learning.

However, verbal communication can only be effectively evaluated with considering its complement in paralanguage and non-verbal communication. The disconnect between these elements can lead to misunderstandings or misinterpretations of the message. The effectiveness of verbal communication largely depends on how the receivers interpret the message, underscoring the importance of speakers being aware of how the audience perceives and understands their speech. If this aspect is not adequately considered, verbal communication may lose its effectiveness, as the message might not achieve the desired impact or could be misinterpreted.

This suggests that verbal communication alone may not capture the audience's attention or interest. Therefore, it is essential to complement the speech with non-verbal communication and body language elements to convey the message effectively.

According to Ridao (2017), **non-verbal communication** encompasses a set of signals and behaviors that do not involve words, such as body language, gestures, facial expressions, and other visual aspects accompanying verbal communication. In other words, non-verbal communication complements and influences the perception of verbal

and paraverbal communication. This means it can reinforce or contradict the verbal message, affecting how the receiver interprets it.

For Domínguez (2009), the interpretation of non-verbal signals is deeply influenced by culture. What is considered appropriate or has a specific meaning in one culture may be perceived differently in another. For example, a person's physical distance during a conversation varies according to cultural norms, just as gestures and expressions can have positive or negative connotations depending on the context. Touch, as a form of non-verbal communication, is essential for human development and interpersonal relationships. The lack of physical contact can negatively affect emotional and social well-being. However, the interpretation of touch also differs between cultures, making it important to be aware of social norms in various contexts. The four disciplines that make up the study of non-verbal communication are:

- Kinesics: The study of body movements, including posture, gestures, facial expressions, and gaze.
- Proxemics: The study of how people use and perceive space in communication. This includes both physical and psychological space.
- Tactics: The study of physical contact as a form of communication.
- Paralanguage: The study of vocal qualities in communication, such as tone, timbre, rhythm, and pauses.

Kinesics and paralanguage are primary non-verbal communication systems due to their direct role in human interaction. In contrast, proxemics and tactics are classified as secondary systems because they typically modify or reinforce the meaning of elements present in the primary systems.

Paralanguage is an important part of non-verbal communication, encompassing aspects such as voice tone, rhythm, and pauses, which convey emotional information and can significantly influence the perception of the message. A confident voice and an appropriate rhythm can inspire trust in the interlocutor, while a monotonous or hesitant tone can create doubts or disinterest. Facial expressions, especially gaze, are fundamental channels for expressing emotions and regulating interaction. Gaze can reflect interest, attention, discomfort, or even reveal a person's true feelings. Body posture and gestures also play a crucial role in non-verbal communication. An open posture can denote confidence and receptivity, while a closed posture may indicate disinterest or insecurity.

Castro (2013) describes a variety of important non-verbal codes in interpersonal communication, highlighting the cultural influence on their interpretation and use:

- Physical Contact: This code, which includes hugs, kisses, caresses, and touches, varies significantly between cultures. What is considered appropriate in one culture may be offensive in another.
- Proximity (Proxemics): The physical distance people maintain during interactions is also culturally influenced. Contact cultures prefer close distances, while non-contact cultures maintain greater physical distance.
- Positioning: The arrangement of people in a space, including the height and orientation of their bodies, can intentionally communicate positions of relevance or social categories.
- Gestures: Movements of the hands, feet, and head convey emotions, emphasize speech, or even replace words. Their interpretation also depends on the cultural context.
- Body Posture: How a person sits, stands, or walks can reflect social roles, self-confidence, or emotional states.
- Facial Expression: Facial expressions, especially those involving the forehead, eyes, eyebrows, and mouth, reveal emotions and attitudes, and some expressions, such as joy, sadness, and fear, are considered universal.
- Gaze: Eye contact, its direction, and duration play crucial roles in communication. Depending on the culture and context, it can indicate interest, respect, disinterest, or even aggression.
- Microexpressions: Subtle, involuntary facial movements that reveal fleeting emotions, especially in moments of high emotion, and can be used to detect deceit.

- Appearance: Clothing, hairstyle, and accessories are part of nonverbal communication, conveying information about a person's social status and intentions.
- Paralanguage: This code refers to the vocal elements of non-verbal communication, such as tone, volume, speed, and pauses, which can modulate the meaning of speech and reveal emotional states.

The author emphasizes that understanding these non-verbal codes and verbal language is essential for effective interpersonal communication and navigating the complexities of social relationships.

### **Importance of Non-Verbal Communication in Politics**

Non-verbal communication has been a key element in political discourse throughout history, playing a fundamental role in the public's perception of leaders and their messages. Effective non-verbal communication allows speakers to convey confidence and authority, essential aspects of the political context. How a leader presents themselves through gestures, facial expressions, and tone of voice can significantly influence how they are perceived by the public, thereby impacting their credibility and the reception of their messages.

As mentioned, cultural factors remain a central pillar. For example, Western countries tend to be more expressive in their nonverbal communication than China, where communication can be more subtle and reserved. This difference is due to cultural history, values, and each nation's personality.

Communication strategies are crucial for influencing public perception and ensuring a compelling message in political campaigns. Political leaders plan the non-verbal elements of their speeches, such as body language and paralinguistic aspects, which include the rhythm and intonation of their voice. These components of non-verbal communication are used deliberately to reinforce the verbal message and establish an emotional connection with the audience.

A politician may adopt a firm posture and use open gestures to project confidence and authority, while a carefully modulated intonation can convey sincerity or determination. These strategies aim not only to communicate a message but also to influence how that message is received and interpreted by the public. By effectively managing their non-verbal communication, political leaders can enhance their ability to persuade voters, generate empathy, and establish a more impactful presence in the political arena.

Here, we present some examples of non-verbal communication in politics:

**Vladimir Vladimirovich Putin** is a lawyer, politician, and former Russian intelligence agent, de facto leader of the United Russia political party. He is currently the President of the Russian Federation, a position he has held since 2012, and from 2000 to 2008.

Božić and Gregić (2023) note that Putin tends to adopt a dominant stance when addressing his subordinates, using his formal attire as a symbol of authority and control. However, they also observe that in his interactions with leaders like Kim Jong-un, Putin may show signs of insecurity, such as adjusting his clothing and displaying nervousness, which contrasts with his confidence toward his collaborators. For instance, the authors mention an incident where Putin openly criticized Denis Valentinovich Manturov, Russia's Deputy Prime Minister, for failures in the aviation sector, demonstrating his willingness to assert his authority decisively.

Additionally, two days before the invasion of Ukraine, Putin held a meeting in which he displayed an authoritarian and dominant demeanor. During this meeting, issues related to the Russian-controlled areas in eastern Ukraine were discussed. The head of the Secret Service, Sergei Naryshkin, was one of the participants and, according to the account, showed signs of nervousness, hesitating several times while speaking. Noticing Naryshkin's indecision, Putin interrupted him and ordered him to communicate clearly and express his opinion, even though it was contrary to his own. This moment is significant because it illustrates not only the pressure Putin exerts on his subordinates but also his expectation that they be clear and decisive in their communications. Putin's reaction to Naryshkin's lack

of clarity suggests that he does not tolerate hesitation and expects loyalty and firmness from his team, reflecting his authoritarian leadership style.

**Barack Obama** is an American politician, who served as the 44th President of the United States from 2009 to 2017. Obama exhibits a more restrained nonverbal communication style, characterized by a controlled demeanor that, while displaying less physical energy, projects an image of self-control and stability—qualities that present him as a reliable presidential leader. His reserved style may give the impression of less emotional engagement, but it reinforces his ability to remain composed under pressure.

Despite his moderate nonverbal communication, Obama compensates with his voice by conveying energy and confidence. His speech is notable for its melodic variation and precise control of rhythm, using well-timed pauses and emphasis to capture the audience's attention. He also employs subtle, distinctive gestures less frequently than other politicians like Clinton. Specific movements, such as raising a finger when responding to accusations, enhance his authority and assertiveness in debates (Gelang & Kjeldsen, 2011).

In presidential debates, his physical movement is limited, which may be a strategy to minimize the risk of nonverbal misinterpretation. For instance, in a Texas debate on February 21, 2008, Obama displayed less facial and bodily expressiveness compared to Hillary Clinton, but his dynamic use of voice and specific gestures allowed him to project confidence and authority.

**Donald John Trump** is an American businessman, television personality, and politician. A member of the Republican Party, he served as the 45th President of the United States from January 20, 2017, to January 20, 2021. He is known for his highly visual and gestural communication style, a key feature of his presence in American politics. His broad gestures and expressive body language aim to capture attention and persuade, reflecting his direct, often controversial approach. For example, Trump frequently uses exaggerated gestures like pointing, thumbs-up, and wide hand movements to emphasize his points and project authority. His open posture, with arms extended, further conveys confidence and dominance.

During presidential debates, Trump's interruptions and dismissive gestures, such as eye-rolling and shrugging, belittled his opponents, reinforcing his "unafraid to speak his mind" persona. The shrug, for instance, often served to deflect criticism, signaling power and disdain without needing a verbal response. Similarly, his subtle but expressive smirk conveyed disapproval or mockery, positioning him as the dominant conversation voice.

Trump also uses body language to engage audiences even when silent, influencing emotions with simple looks or gestures. His nonverbal cues contribute significantly to his image as a strong leader, shaping public perception and impacting his political success. These gestures reinforce his authoritative style rather than a collaborative one, influencing how he's perceived by supporters and critics alike (Muhammed, 2022).

Nonverbal communication plays a significant role in managing public perception, as it can evoke emotions and feelings that are essential for connecting with the audience. Personalizing communication, especially in critical contexts like the pandemic, requires leaders to train their gestural and paralinguistic skills to maximize their persuasive impact.

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