

Body Language in August Strindberg's *The Stronger*

Hayat Hassan Kadhim^{a*}, Hussain Hameed Mayuuf^b, Ahmed Fadhil^c,
^{a,b,c}University of Babylon / College of Education for Human Science, Email:
^{a*}Husm56@gmail.com

This paper deals with body language and its significance in communication. Communication denotes all the ways used by human beings to convey information and integrate their feelings and emotions. In other words, it encompasses not merely verbal codes but also varieties of nonverbal forms which send an enormous number of messages in an interaction. This paper is an analytical study of the use of body language in August Strindberg's play *The Stronger*. Thus, this study examines the way body language is used in communication and role it plays in *The Stronger*, demonstrating that meaning can be achieved not only with words but via body language within the Play. Besides, it clarifies how body language functions in *The Stronger* using verbal and non-verbal expressions.

Key words: *Body language, Communication, The Stronger, August Strindberg.*

Introduction

The Problem of the Study

Communication denotes all the ways used by human beings to convey information and integrate their feelings and emotions. In other words, it encompasses not merely verbal codes but also varieties of nonverbal forms which send countless levels of messages in human interaction. This paper is an analytical study of the use of body language in August Strindberg's play *The Stronger*. This study raises some of the following questions:

1. What is body language ?
2. What is the role of the body language in *The Stronger* and how it is achieved within the play ?
3. How does body language in *The Stronger* operate and interact with verbal expressions ?

The Aims of the Study

The study aims at:

1. Investigating how body language works to communicate the thoughts, emotions, stands and viewpoints, the attitudes and the intended meanings of the characters.
2. Discovering and describing the following nonverbal codes in Austin's Strindberg's play *The Stronger*, concerning space, scene, head movement, eye contact, silence, and lip reading .
3. Differentiating between verbal and non-verbal types of communication.

Hypothesis

The study hypothesises the following :

1. Body language is one of the main devices of communication whereby thoughts and intended meanings are conveyed to the person addressed.
2. Non-verbal communication works in a more powerful way than verbal expression in *The Stronger*.

The Procedures

The procedures will be as follows :

1. Presenting a theoretical framework about body language and nonverbal communication.
2. Analysing selected speeches of *The Stronger* to explore the role of the body language in the play.

The Limits

The present study is limited to study the body language in *The Stronger* by August Strindberg in English.

The Value

It is hoped that the study will be of value to those who study Linguistics and also to those who study the ways human beings communicate.

Theoretical Framework

What is Body Language

Everyone knows someone who can walk into a room full of people and, within minutes, give an accurate description about the relationships between those people and what they are

feeling. The ability to read a person's attitudes and thoughts by their behaviour was the original communication system used by humans before spoken language evolved. (Allan, Barbara, 2004).

Body language is nonverbal communication that involves body movement. "Gesturing" can also be seen as a form of body language, being an absolutely non-verbal means of communication. It is well known that people in the workplace can convey a great deal of information without even speaking. This is termed nonverbal communication. Not all of our values, beliefs, thoughts and intentions are communicated verbally. In an ongoing communication, most of those are communicated non-verbally. In non-verbal communication, our human body expresses our feelings and intentions through conscious and unconscious movements and postures accompanied by gestures, facial expressions, eye contact and touch. This collectively forms a separate language of the body within the ongoing communication. This is called body language. (Al Noaimi, 2005)

Our human body speaks through the conscious and unconscious movements and postures, hand gestures facial expressions, eye movements and touch. Each of these physical movements of the body parts could be seen as separate words and can be interpreted differently by other human beings within a given context of communication. Since interpretations of body language differ from people to people and cultures to countries it is important to learn about and understand these contexts. Body language alone comprises 55% of total communication whereas spoken words comprise of 7% and tone of voice comprises 38%. (Ibid).

Body language is a type of nonverbal communication in which physical behavior, as opposed to words, is used to express or convey information. Such behaviour includes 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. The study of the way in which certain body movements and gestures serve as a form of non-verbal communication is called kinesics. Body language must not be confused with sign language, as sign languages work 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 system 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 its use in popular culture. In a community, there are agreed-upon interpretations of particular behaviour. 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. Hahn et al. (2011) It helps to establish the relationship between two people and regulates interaction, but can be ambiguous. (Wikipedia/ body language).

Body language is the process of using facial expressions, gestures, gaze, tone of voice and postures in order to send and receive wordless messages. Body language is a powerful communicator. A large percentage of what we deliver is derived from our speech tones, our gestures, movements, mannerisms, expressions and idiosyncrasies. It is without doubt the stronger communicator, with so much emphasis being placed on how statements and stories are delivered rather than relying on actual words to get our statements across. The concept of body language is such a broad statement as it covers almost everything in the realms of Kinesics, from negative clusters such as arm folding, leg folding and contemptuous facial movements, to more positive head nods, oculosics (eye behaviour), tactilics (touching), proxemics (personal space), physiognomy (interpretation of character and temperament based on features of the face), micro expressions (43 muscles of the face that combine to make over 10,000 facial expressions, 7 of which are considered universal), paralinguistics (speed, tone, volume, pitch of voice), mirroring gestures and sign language. We use all of the above daily, often without us even being consciously aware that we are doing so. From this, we can work out whether a person is being honest, is lying, or is feeling happy, sad, fearful, surprised, angry, disgusted or is full of contempt for something. The more we know about someone's movements, the more we understand the person's inner feelings." (<http://www.all-about-body-language.com/what-is-body-language.html>)

Verbal and Non-Verbal Communication Systems

To obtain a deeper understanding of nonverbal communication, we can compare it with a verbal one. The subject of interaction of verbal and nonverbal communication has been tackled by many linguists including Knapp and Hall (2013) who mention the ways of such interaction between the two. They argue that verbal communication, unlike the nonverbal one, is characterised by the rapid feedback that has resulted from the fast interchange of the message. Depending on understanding, nonverbal communication takes time and hence is comparatively slow. Additionally, the absence of one of the parties at the place of communication is possible in verbal communication but not with a nonverbal one. Further, the nonverbal communication, in contrast to a verbal one, lacks conclusive evidence. In her article, Zhan (2012) explains other differences in the light of grammaticality, arbitrariness, and the sense organs. First, language is characterised by its tight organisation. In other words, individual words are constructed into a well-formed sentence according to specific grammatical rules. However, nonverbal codes cannot be combined in the same way. There is no logical connection between sound and meaning in language and in this sense it is arbitrary. Though nonverbal symbols, like the verbal forms, are chosen arbitrarily they are

nevertheless linked to the intended message. Zhan (ibid)mentions the act of pointing as an example. She argues that the way of pointing is arbitrary but the act itself is not, as physically pointing differs from one culture to another. Some cultures point with fingers, other with lips or head. Lastly, different sense organs are used at the same time to receive the nonverbal cues for one can feel, see, and hear messages at the same time. In verbal communication, on the other hand, one either sees written language or hears oral messages. Consequently, one may receive and comprehend two verbal messages simultaneously whereas different messages are received through nonverbal channels. Hence verbal communication involves far fewer types of sense receptors.

In this regard, Johnston (2008) argues that an enormous number of communication studies have largely focused on language as it is the first means of communication involving both sound and meaning. However, communicative means encompass both verbal channels and varieties of nonverbal forms. Verbal communication refers not only to the spoken or written transmitted messages but also to the behaviourally or visually communicated ones . He argues that the articulatory organs and muscles are used to produce sound in face-to-face oral communication which in its turn converts to neural impulses via ear. The term ‘nonverbal’ refers to all forms of the transmitted cues which are not purely linguistic in content. In their book *Nonverbal Communication*, Eisenberg and Smith (1971) mention that all communication which is not coded in words is known as nonverbal one. Similarly, Levine and Adelman (1982) support the view that states that people sometimes express more non verbally than verbally. For Morreale, Spritzberg and Brage (2007), nonverbal communication covers the physical behaviours that are commonly referred to as body language, gestures, use of voice , intonation , and use of space. Knapp and Hall (2013) explain that during an interaction ,messages carried by verbal forms account for no more than (30%) where as the rest are all conveyed through nonverbal means. In sociology, the mastery of nonverbal and verbal forms refers to strategic competence which is the second category of the communicative language along with language competence. Such fact reveals clearly the importance of non verbal communication.

Classification of Nonverbal Communication

According to Augustine (1995) and Burrow (2002), the two types of nonverbal communication are the natural sign and the given one. The first kind is used by living beings to convey something while the natural sign refers to those signs that signify something such as “ smoke “ which denotes “a fire”. Hahn et al. (2011) present another categorization. They classify nonverbal communication in to eight types: kinesics (body movement), hap tics (study of touch), appearance (personal appearance, objects, and artifacts), proxemics (space), environment (room, automobile, office space), chronemics (time), paralanguage (vocal qualities), and silence. Other comprehensive categorisation for nonverbal communication

are put forward by Zhan (2012). She mentions the following types: body language (movement of either the whole body or parts of it), paralanguage (pitch, turn taking, intonation, silence, volume), object language (clothes, furniture) and environmental language (crowdedness, proxemics, time, seating arrangement, lighting, color).

Analysing Body Language in "The Stronger"

The Stronger is a *quart d'heure* play that revolves about one situation. Two women meet accidentally at a café on Christmas Eve. The two women are not given any meaningful names by the author, they simply called Mrs X and Miss Y. Mrs X is a married woman and Miss Y is unmarried. The whole situation consists no more than a single conversation by Mrs X. Apparently, the two women have known each other from before. Mrs X's problem concerns her husband whom she thinks had an affair with Miss Y in the past and now she has been given the chance to take revenge. Although the Mrs X's speech is very effective and loaded with bitter and hard feelings towards Miss Y, Miss Y never utters a word. The play demonstrates the power of the language body. The reader or the audience is easily getting the meaning and understanding the story despite the fact that Miss Y is silent. The signals and the gestures are more than enough for the audience to apprehend the play.

August Strindberg demonstrates a great capacity in understanding human nature and their psychological state. He utilises the whole situation to convey the message of his play. However, Strindberg relies greatly on non-verbal communication. Right from the beginning, the setting conveys much about Miss Y. The place is "A corner of a women's café" and Miss Y "is sitting at a table with a half-empty beer bottle on it; she is reading an illustrated paper, which she exchanges for others from time to time later on." Strindberg directly deals with the effect of sense of territory which relates strongly to the language of body.

Miss Y, symbolically separates herself from other people by sitting far in the corner. She apparently has no inclination to mix with others. Moreover, Strindberg chooses the time of Christmas Eve for the meeting of the two women to emphasise the meaning of the scene. Although the occasion is blissful, Miss Y does not seem happy. She is alone, sitting in one of the restaurant corners reading and drinking. Then, silently the audience will understand the message of the scene. Miss Y has gone through some troubled times. When Mrs X enters the café and meets Miss Y, she confirms the situation, "Hello, Amelia darling! You look as lonely on Christmas Eve as a poor bachelor." However, Miss X sits at the same table as Miss Y. and of course, Mrs X is deliberately intending to violate the area that Miss Y is trying to keep for herself. Right from the beginning, Mrs X demonstrates a basic move in body language or in non-verbal communication.

Ordinarily, the audience would expect Miss Y to have some conversation with Mrs X. However, Miss Y only, "looks up from her paper, nods and goes on reading." Clearly, the

response of Miss Y indicates her uneasiness and disturbance. However, nodding plays an integral role in communication and encouraging the conversation. The listener is suggesting that she is paying attention to the speaker but she does not want to talk. Further more, ke without the move of this nod the listener would think that Miss Y is not interested in the conversation. Generally speaking, the head is used to mean “yes” or “no” or to greet someone.

With the silence and nodding of Miss Y, Mrs X feels free to talk about her problem. It must be remembered too that conversation is not only what is said but also what is not said. Mrs X does not ask Miss Y to speak because she is able to understand the body language of Miss Y, which of course tells the audience a lot about the character. When Mrs X, who is severely injured by Miss Y, reminds Miss Y of her failure to have a family and tells her, “you know what Amelia! I think you would have been better off if you had kept him! Remember I was the first one who told you to forgive him! Remember? You could be married and have a home.” Miss Y assumes a contemptuous look on her face and of course eye contact is one of the effective way to communicate with others. Yet, not all gazes are friendly and amiable. Sometimes, the gazes are uncomfortable, critical, hostile or “contemptuous” as when Miss Y looks at Mrs X. In fact, by looking “contemptuously” at Mrs X, Miss Y shows her disapproval and disagreement about what is said by Mrs X.

Miss Y’s response with this gaze of contempt makes the audience believe that Mrs X is not innocent. To show that she is socially stronger than Miss Y, because she is a married woman, Mrs X , “opens her basket and shows Miss Y the Christmas gifts,” she has bought – a doll for her daughter and a pistol for her son. Moreover, and to make the situation worse, Mrs X , “takes out a pair of embroidered slippers,” which belong to her husband. When Mrs X displays the “slippers” she comments, "Do you see what small feet Bob has? See? And you should see how elegantly he walks! You’ve never seen him in slippers! (Miss Y laughs aloud). Look and you will see, says Mrs X (She pretends to walk with the slippers on the table.)"

Again Miss Y laughs so it can be heard, laughs uproariously. Whatever the type of laugh is, “a giggle, a snort, a snicker, or a good old fashioned hee-haw – the depth of the sound, where it is placed, and how much of it you allow to come out, indicate your mood and feelings.” In the case of Miss Y, she laughs “uproariously” which signifies that she laughs from the depths of her being and that, as Elizabeth Kuhnke observes, indicates that: “ A person who laughs from his boots is willing to release. He’s not afraid to hold back. When he laughs, the world laughs with him.”

Apparently, Miss Y is now getting the chance to relieve or free herself from some tension, almost certainly a psychological pressure caused by Mrs X. Since Mrs X is a married woman

this gives her much power over Miss Y . Mrs X intends to show Miss Y how family and husband is essential in the life of any woman. But the meaning of the laughter of Miss Y is getting closer to the fact when Mrs X, angrily under the passive effect of the Miss Y's laughter in front of her, releases all the pain that dwells in her breast. It is as if both women are now having their moment of truth but using different language to express themselves.

Mrs X is a mother and a wife who is ready to guard her family against any threats. She represents the traditional woman. She is the one who is allowed to speak about what is going on her mind. The fact that Mrs X becomes nervous and agitated because the laughter of Miss Y may mean that she is laughing at Mrs X's ignorance of the situation which of course makes Mrs X bursts out:

“what are you laughing at? Eh? Eh? And I know he is faithful to me, you see – yes I do know! He told me so himself. What are you grinning about? That when I was on that tour in Norway that nasty Frederique tried to seduce him – can you imagine?(pause) But I'd have torn out her eyes if she had come around when I was at home!(pause)...I don't know why, but women are absolutely crazy about my husband. They must think he has something to say about contracts at the theatre because he's in the office aybe you have been after him too!”

Clearly, Mrs X is suffering from a serious psychological problem. She is the woman who should accept her traditional role in her patriarchal society. After Mrs X accuses Miss Y of being one of these women who; “have been after him too,” (Pause they look to each other with embarrassment) and then Miss Y stares at Mrs X with curiosity. Again the look of curiosity of Miss Y stimulates Mrs X to say what is in her depths. When Miss Y (has an expression as if she wanted to speak), Mrs X either refuses to allow her to say a word or defends herself, “Quiet! you don't need to say anything – now I understand everything...that's I had to wear your colors, read your authors, eat your favorite dishes, drink your drinks,...it is terrible! Everything came to me from you even your passions.” Mrs X is a broken woman deprived from her simplest rights to be a real human being. Mrs X has to act in front of her husband the role of the happy wife: “Maybe when all is said I'm the stronger right now...Thank you Amelia for teaching my husband how to make love.”



Conclusion

Most of us know the proverb that says actions speak louder than words. In many cases we can communicate our ideas to others without even using a single word. Even when we communicate with each other verbally, our body language is very essential to accompany our speech; it reinforces and supports what we say. We believe that *The Stronger* would have not been an interesting play had the author made the two characters communicate verbally. The story of the play is very moving and unforgettable because of that witty interaction between the verbal and non-verbal communication. This harmony between the languages of the two women contributes a lot in revealing the psychological state, the deep emotional conflicts, the points of view of the character. Miss Y's and Mrs X's use of body language represented by head movement, eye contact, space, and lip reading makes the audience gain an accurate and deep intuitive understanding of them. This, in its turn, gives a chance for the conversation between the two characters to continue smoothly, and finally, develop the plot. Thus, body language has its own active role in shaping the character and exhibiting the themes of the play.



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