

COMPORTAMENTOS NÃO-VERBAIS EM SALAS DE AULA BRASILEIRAS

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RESUMO

Quando alguém fala sobre comportamentos não-verbais, uma pessoa pensa em comportamentos que não incluem palavras. Entretanto, esses comportamentos não-verbais tais como: caretas, silêncio, o modo de como uma pessoa olha para a outra, a entonação de voz e etc, podem significar centenas de palavras. Depende da intenção da mensagem. No contexto de sala de aula, esses comportamentos são muitos, e tanto professores quanto alunos estão envolvidos. Esta pesquisa estará focada nos comportamentos não-verbais de alunos e professores nos contextos de ensino médio e faculdade no Brasil. O objetivo é discutir e tentar mostrar as diferenças entre estes dois contextos diferentes tanto para os professores quanto para os alunos.

PALAVRAS-CHAVES: não-verbais, comportamentos, sala de aula brasileira, interação, comunicação, cultura.

KEY WORDS: nonverbal, behaviors, Brazilian classroom, interaction, communication, culture.

Nonverbal Behaviors in the Brazilian Classroom.

When someone talks about nonverbal behaviors, one thinks about behaviors which include no words. However, those nonverbal behaviors such as faces, silence, the way one looks at someone, the intonation of one's voice and so forth, may mean hundreds of words. It depends on the intention of the message.

Specifically in the classroom context, nonverbal behaviors communicate relational messages, status and deception (Martin & Nakayama, 1996). The relational aspect of messages are often communicated by nonverbal behaviors when they form the basis of our judgments about people we meet for the first time. Moreover, facial expression, eye contact and posture communicate how we feel about others nonverbally. Status and power are also communicated by nonverbal behavior, mainly by the teacher in class. Deception is also communicated through nonverbal behaviors and each individual may have his or her own unique way of communicating deception on personality, motivation, planning, and age (Burgoon, Buller, & Woodall, 1989; Zuckerman, DePaulo, &

Rosenthal, 1981).

Most nonverbal communication about affect, status, and deception happens at an unconscious level. This way, it plays an important role in intercultural interactions. It is pervasive and unconscious. It communicates how we feel about each other and about our cultural groups (Martin & Nakayama, 1996). It is interesting and important to know and recognize all these traits in our classrooms in order to help ourselves as teachers to improve our capacity to understand our students and teach them in an effective way. In the Brazilian classroom context, those behaviors are many, and both professors and students are involved. This research will be focused on the professors' and students' nonverbal behaviors in high school and college contexts in Brazil. The goal is to discuss and try to show the differences between these two different contexts for both professors and students.

Nevertheless, culture strongly influences how we learn and teach, and it is a significant factor in shaping how students and teachers communicate to accomplish teaching and learning (Skow & Stephan, 1999). Before presenting the high school and college contexts in Brazil, I propose to overview other countries non-verbal behaviors to confirm that the cultural environment influences greatly the way people communicate themselves and make themselves understood.

Powell & Andersen (1997), said that ritual and patterns of classroom interaction vary from culture to culture and that it depends on the students' and the teachers' background. In Jamaica, for instance, primary students flap or snap their fingers to signal that they know the answer. In addition to that, students show respect to teachers by not looking at them when teachers talk to them. In Trinidad, students put their index fingers to their forehead with the inside facing out to ask permission to be excused. There are cultures, however, such as Vietnamese and Mexican, where students do not have a way for them to signal a desire to talk to the teacher; consequently the students speak only after the teacher has spoken to them. In these cultures most classroom interaction is tightly controlled by the teacher.

Additionally, Powell & Andersen (1997), argued that, the classroom in an Israeli kibbutz is very noisy and

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interaction is spontaneous. On the contrary, Chinese classrooms are quiet. It's because Chinese culture tends to reflect a Buddhist tradition which holds that knowledge, truth, and wisdom come to those whose quiet silence allows the spirit to enter. The United States classrooms tend to reflect a Socratic ideal where student-teacher interaction plays a central role in the pursuit of knowledge. Moreover, American students show respect to their teachers by looking at them when they talk to their students.

In Italian classrooms, according to Powell & Andersen (1997), teachers and students touch each other frequently, and children greet teacher with a kiss on both cheeks while putting their arms around the teacher. On the other hand Chinese and Japanese children show complete emotional restraint in classrooms. In Western cultures it is common to show affection by patting children on the head. For Hmong children, a pat on the head is considered a significant transgression.

In the Brazilian classrooms, teachers and students take turns in the classroom. Teachers explain the content and students ask their questions when they need something to become clearer for them. Powell & Andersen (1997), stated that culture helps to shape and structure the "learning style" of the student. There are two cultural orientations to learning - an analytic style and a relational style. The analytic style breaks things down into their component parts while the relational style is more holistic; where meaning and knowledge are situated in global constructs. In terms of communication in the classroom according to my observations in Brazil, specifically in high schools, teachers tend to be more affiliative. They show they care about their students' learning by touching them and by making eye contact. This kind of treatment helps students to develop their self-esteem and feel more self-confident in class. This way the teaching-learning process might happen successfully.

Understanding non-verbal behaviors is critical to creating an effective classroom learning environment. According to Oaks (1998), non-verbal signals (a cocked head and raised eyebrow), or the absence of a signal are measures teachers employ to control the direction of discourse. It happens because teachers are in charge of promoting an ideal environment for the learning process to be enjoyable and also effective for both teachers and students. Through constant observation, teachers are able to understand students' expectations by their non-verbal codes. For instance, when students are not enjoying the classroom and/or understanding the content, they show it through their facial expressions and body posture. Teachers need to know how to decode these kinds of behaviors quickly to change their teaching strategies.

In decoding non-verbal behaviors however, it is

important not to stereotype students. Non-verbal behaviors also communicate cultural, ethnic, racial, and regional identity (Martin & Nakayama, 1996). In Brazil, in a classroom context we observe students from different backgrounds. For instance, a Japanese student is easily stereotyped as timid and/or intelligent. But a very important thing everybody should know, is that there are cultural variations in non-verbal codes and understand these variations. People should neither stereotype nor have prejudice based on non-verbal aspects of behavior.

Non-verbal communication includes proxemics, chronemics, silence, eye contact and facial expression (Martin & Nakayama, 1996). All these characteristics help teachers and students know and understand each other. Proxemics can be described as the study of how people use personal space in different cultures. In Brazil, for instance, we don't have a specific personal space, I mean, we talk to each other without worrying about this space. Chronemics is the concept of time and the rules that govern its use. Brazilian people are polychronic. It means that Brazilians are not sick about time. And silence can be as meaningful as language.

According to Basso's (1970) hypothesis, silence is associated with social situations of ambiguity and/or unequal distribution of power. Therefore, the hypotheses set forth by Basso concerning the general features of silence - such as its association with ambiguity in relationships - is supported, yet needs extended. Basso's hypothesis provides a fundamental relational basis for silence that crosses some cultural boundaries, but must be extended to include recognizable differences in power and status in addition to the presence of uncertainty, ambiguity and unpredictability. Silence can be viewed as a way of dissolving, breaking or refusing to recognize social bonds among participants, or as a way of displaying nonreciprocal influence, (Braithwaite, 1990). As in any other place, silence in Brazil can have hundreds of meanings. In the classroom, for instance it may mean both the students are interested in the content and understanding it and or they are not really understanding or listening to teacher, but they simply do not interact and participate. So, silence sometimes can be a trap and the teacher needs another resource to find out if the student is in or out of his/her classroom. And one efficient means is the eye contact.

Martin & Nakayama, (1996), said that eye contact regulates interpersonal distance and that direct eye contact shortens the distance between two people, whereas less contact increases the distance. Eye contact communicates meanings about respect and status and often regulates turn-talking. Teacher's eye contact, for instance, can say to his/her students he/she is self-confident or that he/she is arrogant or that he/she wants you to talk right after him/her. My observation in my English classrooms is that the way I look at my students

is very important because through my eye contact I express my passion for teaching English and I transmit my self-confidence to them creating a warm atmosphere for the teaching-learning process. In response to this they look at me as if they wanted to tell me verbally that they share the same ideas and that they understand (or not) what I am saying.

Some of the basic human emotions are expressed in a fairly finite number of facial expressions and these expressions can be recognized and identified universally (Boucher & Carlson, 1980; Ekman & Friesen, 1987 in Martin & Nakayama, 1996). Many cross-cultural studies support the notion that facial expressions are universal, to some extent. Six basic emotions are communicated by facial expressions. They include happiness, sadness, disgust, fear, anger, and surprise. Expressions for these emotions are recognized by most cultural groups as having the same meaning (Ekman, 1973; Ekman & Friesen, 1987; Ekman, Friesen, & Ellsworth, 1972). David Matsumoto, (1990, in Martin & Nakayama, 1996), linked cultural patterns in facial expressions with cultural values of power distance and individualism and collectivism. To illustrate Matsumoto's theory we can talk about Japanese facial expression. The Japanese, who belong to a reserved cultural way of behaving, rarely show their emotions through facial expressions. On the other hand, Brazilians tend to show their emotions openly through obvious facial expressions by enthusiastic smiling or angry looks.

My experience suggests that facial expressions are a signal of acceptance/rejection or sympathy/antipathy — especially in first impressions. Of course, we can not base our relationships through facial expressions, but it can tell us in a subtle way how people are feeling. Decoding facial expressions demands sensitivity and time to confirm information, mainly in high school classrooms, where teenagers try to compete and mix up the teacher in order to get power.

Touching students, depending on the culture and contexts can be misinterpreted. According to the students' background and culture, touching is seen as an affiliative treatment or lack of respect. As mentioned previously, Powell & Andersen (1997), asserted that in Italian classrooms, teachers and students touch each other frequently. On the other hand, Chinese and Japanese children show complete emotional restraint in the classroom. In Brazil, for instance, we touch our students to show our affection and they feel comfortable being touched. In other words, classroom affection differs cross-cultures, as do interpretations of these behaviors. In the Brazilian context, our students frequently show their emotions and when they can not do it in public, that is, in front of others, they ask to talk in private. Although as Powell & Andersen (1997) said... "teachers tend to teach the way they were taught. The entire educational

system, together with the rules and procedures for effective classroom interaction, reflects a cultural dictate rather than a universal mandate".

Personally I defend the idea that a classroom is a "small, big universe", where teachers and students are involved and the rules and the educational system may stay out of it when they start impairing the teaching-learning process. Actually the effective rules are constituted in class, when the situations ask for them. In fact, the rules must not be ready, but they can be constructed according to the necessity of them. Skow & Stephan (1999), asserted that communication in any classroom setting requires people to work together to reach understandings, and sometimes that work is a bit more challenging when people are trying to negotiate their own cultural notions of teaching and learning. How can a survey on nonverbal behavior could help in the teaching-learning process? To assert how a survey on nonverbal behavior can help to work in the classroom context, I suggest direct observation, taking notes after class and in a second moment video tape some classes for at least six months. After this period, give them an interval and then perform the whole process again to make comparisons and or also observe the evolution and other new nonverbal behaviors, if there is any.

From this point on I will talk about two different scenarios: high school and college in Brazil. I will also present my English students' non-verbal behaviors and also mine. Afterwards, I am going to suggest two methodologies for my attempt to perform this study.

In the first context, that is, in a private high school classroom. The sample consists of 30 students aged sixteen. 12 of them are girls and 18 are boys. All these students come from an average middle-class family. They study in the morning. The teaching-learning process in this classroom is a little careworn, and sometimes unbearable, because teenagers are always trying to impair the teaching-learning process. My attempt in the context of this classroom is to use a direct observation and video tape the nonverbal behaviors by analyzing the students' nonverbal behavior in my English classes for six months.

They have a specific way of looking at each other as a code. For instance, if the teacher is explaining something that is not their cup of tea, they look at each other and they start talking among themselves about their things as if the teacher was not in the classroom. Actually the students simply ignore the teacher starting to do something else to impair the class. In response to that, the teacher watches everything happening under her/his eyes and her/his attitude is normally to call the student to participate by asking him/her questions about the subject. Actually, teachers of students at this age need to struggle against their indifference.

In fact when students misbehave in class,

teachers need to know more about their background, because they generally are trying to call attention on them. The best way to deal with it is to give love and attention to them, and of course try to get their confident. Most of the times if the teacher feels their needs, the teaching-learning process will improve and develop well. On the contrary, if the teacher does not show interest on their problems and conflicts, they will not cooperate and the teaching-learning process, simply will not happen.

It is not difficult to understand such behaviors nowadays, because those teenagers were grown up without their mothers' and fathers' attention. It is not their fault, but the society's. And when they come to school they love their teachers or they hate them. If the teachers behave like their parents, that is, not giving them attention, love and care, they can rebel against the teachers and/or the school. So, love, attention and care may provide their emotional scarcity and when the emotional problem is solved they feel more confident and they are free to learn. Teachers in this case function as a bridge to lead the students to find their way in life and for sure they conquer their students' respect and love forever. Besides, the teachers reach their maximum goal that is teaching. In this human process of evolution, not only the students, but also the teachers learn a lot, because a teacher gives, but also receives a lot in return. In this specific case a teacher is not a mere teacher but also an educator. I feel myself like this.

The second context is at college. The sample consists of 96 freshmen students in the Letters course. There are 89 women and 7 men. All students work during the day and study at night. They come from nearby towns. Most of the women are single, aged between 20-26 years old, and also the men.

At college the students are older than high school students, but not always mature, yet. College students are not so noisy as high school students. Because when they do not want to listen to the teacher or attend the class, they do not remain in class. They simply go out. Otherwise, the way they show they do not care about the class is to start talking among themselves.

The nonverbal behaviors in this context are subtle and the teacher needs to be alert. Depending on the group, they will not show their discontentment toward the teacher's explanation - they remain in complete silence - but, afterwards they will complain to the course coordinator. It happens when the teacher does not have a good relationship with the group. Because if the teacher understands and knows his/her students' needs and expectations, both the teacher and the students will talk what they want and the way they want it openly through eye contact, body posture or verbally. These are some of the nonverbal behaviors I have noticed along my experience as a teacher. However, my will and my thirst to know more how to cope with these situations

successfully, guided me to study my English students' nonverbal behaviors. Besides, I have already done this kind of observation, but in a more natural manner, that is, without analyzing data.

Before mentioning how, when and why these methodologies will be used, I intend to talk about the Interpretive Approach, which is the one that will guide this research. Martin & Nakayama (1996), said interpretive researchers assume that reality is not just external to humans, but also that humans construct reality. Furthermore, these researchers believe that human experience, including communication, is subjective and that human behavior is creative, not determined or easily predicted. The interpretive approach goal is to understand and describe human behavior. The interpretivist sees culture as created and maintained through communication (Carbaugh, 1996). Besides, the interpretive approach usually focuses on understanding communication patterns from the inside of a particular cultural community or context.

As I have already mentioned before, the context of this study is in a high school classroom and in a college classroom. The way I intend to perform this study is through direct and participative observation and video tape the English classrooms, during six months. I want to use these methodologies, because this way I can be deeply involved in the process. Moreover, I can study my own nonverbal behaviors while teaching and afterwards while observing and watching the videos. Another interesting point to study is if the students' nonverbal behaviors are influenced by me, the teacher or if the teacher's nonverbal behaviors are influenced by the students. What about the nonverbal behaviors among the students? And their interaction? How can gender influence nonverbal behaviors in the classroom? In short, who has the power in class: the teacher or the students? What about power between gender? Nonverbal behaviors may answer these questions.

After having analyzed the data, I would have conditions to compare both contexts of nonverbal behaviors, that is, high school and college classrooms. Moreover, I would study and analyze the way the students show their expectations, anger, happiness, surprise, sadness, fear, and disgust through the nonverbal behaviors in a very careful way. In addition, I might study my own way of behaving toward my students in both contexts and learn how to cope with each context, separately. Besides the contexts, the age of the students and the situations that the teacher faces in these two classrooms are different and the teacher needs to know that the treatment given to a high school student is different from a college student. Of course the environment is the same: a classroom. However, the way of behaving in each context is different. So, my attempt is to study teachers' and students' nonverbal behaviors

in order to improve teachers' and students' relationship to provide an efficient atmosphere for teaching and learning. Understanding each other's nonverbal behaviors is crucial not to create misunderstandings and stereotypes, but acceptance of each other.

I teach for both contexts, high school and college and a curious fact is that it does not matter the age of our students are, the only thing they expect from their teachers is love, patience and attention. That is the receipt of methodology: love and respect. However, it does not mean that the teacher has to carry their students on his or her back. Of course not. The teacher is just supposed to give emotional support to his or her students in order to make them believe in their own capacities and abilities and the rest the students will know how to do. This kind of research answers the question done before. It helps the teacher to improve himself or herself and his or her way of teaching. Because while observing the students, taking notes and video taping them, the teacher is also involved in the whole process.

Sometimes, the teacher pretends that does not understand the students' misbehavior or the situation in the classroom. However, the truth is that in those specific moments the teacher's strategy is to stand back in order to get more knowledge and wisdom, because not only the student but also the teacher is always learning. By observing the students in the two different scenarios using the same methodology, it was evident that the teenagers' and adults' nonverbal behaviors are different for many reasons. For instance, their ages, their psychological moment in life, backgrounds, goals, values and so forth. With all these variations, the nonverbal behaviors could not be the same at all. On the other hand, the teacher that works with both contexts, needs to know how to decode and understand all the situations presented in each scenario. In fact, the teacher needs to adapt himself or herself in the two different contexts and know to distinguish his or her way of behaving in each place, not to take risk of treating his or her college students as high school students and vice-versa.

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