

KINESICS AND PROXEMICS IN ENGLISH LANGUAGE CLASSROOMS: AN ANALYSIS

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ABSTRACT

Communicating effectively is the basis of human sustainable development. Verbal communication has been given importance in all sectors of life including the field of education. How much efficiency the teacher depicts in transacting the skill of communication in English language classroom lies the success of the development of fourfold skills of English language among students. Being a second language in India, teaching of English language, seeks much importance with meaningful verbal and nonverbal communication. This paper deals with the importance of kinesics and proxemics in English language classrooms. Use of nonverbal communication in teaching of prose and poetry along with teaching of grammatical structures in English language is described in the paper. An in-depth analysis of importance of nonverbal communication in building achievement motivation and building self confidence among students is done by the investigator. The paper is also making an attempt to give certain criteria and cues to understand and interpret body language of students in the English language classroom. Use of proxemics in English language classroom is also highlighted in the study.

Introduction

Importance of nonverbal communication (NVC), generally termed as Kinesics has been recognized from the time immemorial. Our communication covers 65% nonverbal and the rest is Verbal. This implies the importance of NVC in the process of communication. The history of the use of nonverbal signals is far longer than the use of verbal means. In the 1950s, nonverbal communication made a breakthrough development. Gestures and actions, we use in the process of communication give the picture of our innate drive, confidence and even personality. According to Knap (1980), "the term non-verbal communication refers to non-verbal behavior that people perform with the value of message, and the signals to which meaning will be attributed". It can be used to describe all human communication events that transcend spoken or written words. In general, nonverbal communication has its own importance which everyone knows. This paper is analyzing the importance of NVC in English language classrooms. As termed as foreign language or second language, English is still foreign for students in India. Many reasons are identified to be associated with the challenges faced by school students in learning English language in India. Among them the major reasons are found to be the lack of confidence and lack of internal motivation among our students. Irregularities in the spelling and grammar compared to the mother tongue are said to be the other reasons. Difference in the syntactic arrangement and concord of English language and mother tongue is also acting as a hindrance in language acquisition. Teachers are trying lot to withheld the Pull of mother tongue in the English language classroom as students are mainly focusing on direct translation of sentences in English to mother tongue.

Use of nonverbal communication in teaching of content and grammar

Teaching of prose, poetry and grammatical structures in English language is always a challenge in front of the teachers. Nonverbal communication plays a pivotal role in teaching of content as we need a nonthreatening

atmosphere in the classroom. The body movements, facial expressions and eye contact play a major role in understanding the meaning of vocabulary and also to familiarize with the structure of sentence. The only best way to develop the skill of English language communication is to communicate itself. Our students are finding it difficult at the thought that they will commit mistake and will be teased in front of the teacher and the peers. They are reluctant to give answers to the question in a sentence, instead use one-word answers for the questions. Here, the positive nod of the teachers and their pleasant facial expressions at the time of question answer session will be a great reinforcement for the students. Every student should feel that their teacher is talking them. For this eye contact of the teacher is very important to develop intrinsic motivation among students. According to Harrison (1974), “besides looking, eye can serve to seek, feedback or to monitor fellow interactions and to exercise control over communication channel”. Gestures of teacher at the time of explanation of difficult words will help a lot to attain meaning of the words by the student. Translation of the words in to mother tongue can be avoided to some extent and thereby decreasing the mother tongue influence. It cannot be neglected that, a simple nod, smile or a tap on the shoulders from the teacher can make significant influence on the learners in their academics. Likewise, their frown, head shaking and confused facial expression will negatively affect the students and hinder them in expressing freely in the classroom. This in turn, makes serious negative consequences as far as English language learners are concerned.

Learning of grammatical structures and constructing them is always a nightmare for students in India. The reason is they could not correlate the grammatical structures of second language with their mother tongue. The 26 alphabets, making 44 sounds and the exemptions in using the parts of speech in language is making dilemmic situations in grammar classrooms. Giving situations to the students with proper inductive method will make grammar teaching and learning more enjoyable. Stories and situations delivered by the teacher with proper nonverbal communication will serve as an effective technique for understanding grammatical concepts. The smile and touch of the teacher will display warmth of appreciation among students in the grammar classrooms. Usually students say that they feel much nervous in English grammar classrooms. Looking directly to the students with a pleasant smile may promote attentiveness and will open channels of communication in the grammar classrooms.

Motivating and building self confidence in English language classroom

“The use of eyes, mimics and gestures are also believed to help establish rapport; a teacher who never looks students in the eye seems to lack confidence and gives the students a sense of insecurity” (Gower and Walters, 1983). Similarly, Pollitt (2006) also indicates that “eye contact is an important key in the sense that if a teacher does not look the students in the eye when speaking to them, it may show a lack of confidence in oneself hence, the teacher is likely to have problems with discipline”. Rossman (1989) also added that “teachers need to coordinate their body language, speaking voice, eye contact and wardrobe to create a convincing, but not confusing impact on the learner”. Personal appearance and posture of the teacher itself delivers message on their type of interaction with the students. The development of the four- fold skills of language is said to be the base of attaining fluency in communication. Once the student attains the proficiency in these four skills, he/she equips with confidence and motivation for communication. In the beginning our students attains listening and reading skill. When these basic receptive skills are not acquired by the students, then the productive skill of writing and reading will not be properly built among students. Proper listening can be enhanced from the primary classroom with proper NVC from the teachers. Stories depicted with actions and the smiling pleasant face of the teacher is a motivation for the students. Students make much mistake in their pronunciation while reading. Timely reinforcement is essential for their good pronunciation. An encouraging gesture and facial expression from the teacher with nodding in between will make the students fill with joy and will motivate them to read even if their pronunciation is improper. While correcting mistakes and using corrective feedback, instead saying ‘No’ verbally, the teacher can shake head gently or use lip rounding. This would help the student to find the right answer. Sometimes an unconscious frown can make sensitive student correct their mistake while reading and speaking. Touch can also be used as a medium to increase the level of confidence among students in English language classroom. This may give a warmth of encouragement when combined with words.

Understanding nonverbal communication of students in English classroom

In order to attain mastery over a language, understanding verbal and nonverbal aspect of that language is essential and both should go hand in hand in order to avoid disequilibrium. Understanding nonverbal communication of students in classroom is also highly important along with NVC of teachers. Students use type of

gestures like adaptors and regulators in the classroom. The unconscious gestures used by the students to adapt to certain conditions need to be noticed by the teachers in the classroom. At this juncture, it is essential to find out the cause of these adaptors in the language classroom. Children may also show some typical gestures like shrugging their shoulders, throwing their hands up in the air or storm off with heavy feet. These gestures usually give the hint that they are either angry or upset. It is highly important to be with the student to identify their gestures and their related meaning. Posture of the students, the way they hold themselves while standing and standing, clearly gives us an indication whether they are interested in the class or not. Students who are leaning back or showing a catapult posture clearly indicates that they are not interested in your class. Interested students may have a good posture and will be leaning a little forward in the class. Head nodding of the students in the classroom seeks much importance. The mechanical nodding of the students in the class can easily be identified by the teachers that they are present only physically in the class. The gestures of the students, like adaptors and regulators are perfect signs for the teachers that their students are nervous or not. In certain cases the adaptors of the students should be taken with special consideration in English classroom, so that the root cause of their nervousness could be resolved effectively on time. It is very much needed to analyse whether the students are maintaining proper eye contact with the teacher. Inappropriate way of maintaining eye contact by the students is a clear indication that they are hiding something. The position of hands of the students also gives much explanation on the presence of mind of students. Holding face in hands indicates that the student is lost in thought. The interpretation of these nonverbal cues will help a lot in the English language classroom so as to clear out all the anxiety and lack of confidence faced by the students in the classroom and lead to better achievement.

Use of proxemics in English language classroom

Proxemics and related aspects need to be pondered more when the students of our country are moving to some other countries. As far as the schools of India, we hardly have students from other countries in our schools, even though we have many students at higher Education in Universities and reputed Institutions. Proxemics gives importance to space distancing in communication. Every person need their own privacy and it matters a lot. This space of privacy is different in different cultures. For example, Latin American people are less bothered about their privacy in communication, but North Americans are much concerned about this. People from different cultures use intimate space in a different manner.

Distance maintained in communication is a "relational concept, typically measured in terms of how far one individual is from the other" (Leather, 1978). Everyone shows their own pattern of delimiting distance while communicating. It may directly or indirectly depend on their culture and social settings. Intimate, personal, social, and public are the four types of distance being identified by Hall. "These distances can vary according to personality and environmental factors, since an abnormal situation could bring people closer than they usually are" (Hall, 1959). Intimate distance, as the name indicate is maintained while communicating with intimate people which is less than a half meter. In India, there is less difference in the people of different cultures while maintaining intimate distance. But while moving outside the country, even our students should be aware about how to maintain distance while communicating with native English speakers. North Americans may feel physical discomfort when someone does not keep the proper distance from them; and this feeling may be aggravated considerably if the person they feel is "too close" is of the opposite sex (Arias, 1996). Hall (1959), also mentions that "some English expressions such as, 'get your face out of mine' and 'he shook his fist in my face' show how important body boundaries are for Americans". By contrast, the Costa Rican expression, "I don't bite" shows the discomfort people from this culture feel when others are too far from them. Hall affirms that, "the use of intimate distance is not proper in public places in the United States. However, this distance is common among members of other cultures (e.g. Latin Americans and Arabs)".

Apart from Intimate and Personal distance, there is Social distance which is maintained during casual interactions, especially in meetings, classrooms etc. it is approximately around four to 12 feet. To illustrate, Nydell (1987) mentions that "it is normal for Arabs to be close to the strangers and also to touch them while conversing". This is what western people do in their intimate conversation. It is also seen that people from north America and British always seeks pardon or excuse if they touch a stranger. In India, also we hardly touch a stranger in the process of communication and instead maintain a proper distance. Public Distance is generally desired among strangers which is between 15 to 25 feet.

Unlike other foreign countries or the countries of native English speakers, in India, distance in communication was maintained on the basis of caste and religion which should be avoided and is avoided in the

present situation as the law is not pertaining to it. In the classrooms we could see the distance maintained by students of opposite sex is different from that of the students with same sex, which is a part of their culture. This varies from culture to culture and also from one state of residence to another. There are many methods and techniques that could be used by the teachers in an English language classroom to teach the students about proxemics in English language communication. Role plays, videos, observation, discussion, setting of class library are a few.

Conclusion

As far as English language is concerned, it is very much essential to give a proper base to the students for their language acquisition. Nonverbal communication plays a pivotal role here as English is a second language. Proper gestures and body movements will definitely help learners in constructing sentences, enriching their active and passive vocabulary and there by developing language fluency. Identification of nonverbal communication of students is also essential in understanding their span of attention and attentiveness in the classroom. Mode of gestures used by the learners in the classroom will help to understand their emotional status also. A proper understanding of proxemics leads to get acquaint with different cultures and space distancing followed by different people in different cultures.

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