

Elżbieta Goździak, Mariusz Kairski *

NONVERBAL COMMUNICATION IN THE ANTHROPOLOGICAL FIELD STUDY
THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVE

"Nothing never happens"

Ray L. Birdwhistell

The adjectives "verbal" and "nonverbal" suggest a "natural" dichotomy if not an antinomy of communicative behavior which makes use of words and that which applies means of expression other than spoken words. There is not, however, such an activity which would exclusively confine itself to words, for even written language consists of patterns of words and a system of codified signs. Spoken language, on the other hand, is additionally characterized by codified systems of variables comprising accent, intervals and tone of voice. Most gestures, for example, are accompanied by verbal messages, therefore it is scarcely possible and justifiable to make a clear distinction between these two categories: verbal and nonverbal communication. Just as verbal communication is dependent upon context, including elements of nonverbal context, so also nonverbal communication takes place within a context which includes language. If, after all, we have decided to use the term "nonverbal communication", we have done it to point out nonverbal aspects of communicative behavior and emphasize their importance in anthropological fieldwork, especially that carried out among primitive peoples.

There has been a variety of approaches employed in the study

* Adam Mickiewicz University, Poznań.

of nonverbal communication and, as yet, there has been no proposition which would discuss nonverbal behavior in relation to a general theory of culture. Most researchers are still using a linguistic model that has helped to shape early paralinguistic and kinesic studies and focus their attention on the formal analysis of nonverbal communication processes, isolation of phenome-like units of behavior, for instance. And thus the mechanism which controls human nonverbal behavior is discussed not only apart from its cultural context but also apart from the social consciousness of the individual. In this structural approach nonverbal communication is studied as a tightly organized and self-contained social system like language and as such is described in terms of syntactic rules and rules of stylistic contraction and emphasis similar to those of spoken language. In our paper we would like to make a shift in emphasis from behaviorally and psychologically oriented analysis to a concern with the more abstract and not directly observable rules of competence, a characterizable knowledge and ability, in terms of which human beings can accomplish and interpret various nonverbal behaviors as a mode of communication integrated with language in social interactions. Moreover, we would like to deal with the phenomenon of nonverbal communication from a point of view of anthropology and discuss it in the light of a more general theory of culture.

Ordinary observation demonstrates that there is practically no individual human action or gesture of any kind, conscious or unconscious, which is not capable of conveying information to an interested observer. Our own concern, however, is not with a very vast range of such potential signals but only with those which are patterned in accordance with cultural convention. As professional anthropologists we are concerned with customary behavior rather than with purely random idiosyncratic actions.

Cultural conventions constitute a "generative grammar" which underlies the sender-receiver's actual performance in the production and interpretation of symbolic signs. Just as one of the most characteristic features of human speech is that any speaker of a language is capable of producing and understanding an indefinitely large number of utterances he has never previously encountered, so also, in our everyday interactions with our neighbors, we are constantly devising new sequences of nonverbal communicative behavior

which the audience is able to understand despite the lack of previous experience.

To borrow from the linguist's vocabulary, the anthropologist's concern is to outline a framework of cultural competence in terms of which the individual's symbolic behavior can be seen to make sense, i.e. be meaningful. We can only interpret individual performance in the light of what we have already deduced about competence, but in order to make out original inferences about competence, we have to abstract a standardized pattern which is not necessarily apparent in the data which are directly accessible to observation. In this regard everything what linguists say about "treating language as a model", "idealization", "regularization" and "normalization" has direct relevance for the anthropological treatment of nonverbal communication.

When anthropologists claim that "culture consists of messages" they presuppose that a preliminary sorting out of the "raw data" has already been made. They are referring to customary behavior rather than to idiosyncratic actions. But although the message bearing part of culture must necessarily conform to some degree of standardization, this standardization may not be immediately obvious. It may need quite considerable idealization on the part of both actor and observer before syntactic order can be imposed upon what might otherwise seem to be just a random sequence of separate events. The rites which an anthropologist sees performed before his eyes are very often recognizable as enactments of the drama which has been described to him in spoken words only a few hours before. Similarly, gestures of salutation, prayer, respect and so on as directly observed, are often so perfunctory as to be quite indecipherable without reference to some more elaborated ideal model. Only a confrontation of an action of an individual, as it is seen from a point of view of an idealizational humanistic interpretation, with the action as it is actually performed by the individual, reveals the nature and complexity of human behavior and its relationships with other aspects of culture; moreover, it enables the researcher to discover its sense.

Before we will proceed with a more detailed analysis of nonverbal communication and its application in anthropological field study, let us sketch a brief outline of our notion of culture.

For the purpose of the present paper as well as other studies of social phenomena we have adopted a definition of culture which was proposed by the so-called "Poznań methodological school"; according to this definition culture of a given social group resolves itself into all forms of social consciousness functioning in various practices of this group, i.e. material, linguistic, moral, artistic, scientific, religious, magical, philosophical ones and so on¹. These practices create a functional structure - which is both diachronical and hierarchical - and each type of these practices is subjectively regulated by a complex of commonly recognized convictions which are a part of social consciousness of this group.

There are two kinds of convictions and beliefs composing these socio-subjective regulators of particular practices, i.e. norms appointing values and goals to be achieved and directives indicating actions which ought to be undertaken (in given cultural circumstances) to achieve a certain goal.

Idealistically, we assume that the individual is usually aware that, for instance, he should show respect to his mother's brother (normative judgement), and that squatting in his presence in public he is realizing this norm (directive judgement). Of course, we are aware that most actions of this type are of an impulsive character.

Further dividing normative convictions we can distinguish two types of norms, i.e. norms appointing practically perceptible or practically unperceptible values, and, on the other hand, norms assigning "supreme" values. Having some money saved up in the bank or notification of affiliation to a certain social group fall under the category of practically perceptible values, while a norm regarding the spirits of the dead crossing the Styx comes within the category of practically unperceptible values. The second category, namely the norms assigning "supreme" values, is represented, for example, by a norm appointing the salvation of the soul as a goal to be achieved. Thus, we can distinguish two spheres of

¹ For obvious reasons we are not able to give a detailed and thorough review of all assumption and premises of the applied theory of culture and explain all its concepts in the present paper. Interested readers would refer to the works of Jerzy Kmita and Anna Pałubińska.

culture: culture of practically perceptible values and culture of "supreme" values. This distinction overlaps another one - based on the difference between actions meant to be interpreted by observers and actions which are not to be interpreted by observers - which recognizes technological and symbolic (comprising communicative and ideological levels) domains of culture.

These distinctions are quite clear in the case of our own society. However, if we examine symbolic behavior of the members of some primitive tribe we will find out that most of their actions realize both communicative and ideological as well as technological sense.

To get a better notion of what we are talking about, consider two morphologically similar behaviors: according to the Polish etiquette if a man wants to show respect to a woman-aquaintance or his superior while meeting her or him in the street he raises his hat and bows. Similarly, the Triobrand Islanders while in the presence of a headman ought to bow and keep their backs bent to recognize his superiority and leadership. But whereas observing the etiquette rule Polish gentleman act on the pure communicative level and do not know the signification of the "raising-a-hat" gesture itself, the Triobranders are fully aware of the semantics of their behavior and asked about its meaning quote an appropriate myth prescribing and explaining such behavior.

Analysing the above-described example it is evident that the communicative sphere of both cultural acts differs considerably. The intuition which underlies this statement indicates that different behaviors realize different senses; moreover, certain cultural acts realize more than one sense at a time. For example, most actions of a magical character realize technological values in conjunction with communicative and suprapractical (ideological) values.

Having given a brief outline of our notion of culture, we would like to turn now to the second major concern of our paper: the application of nonverbal communication research to the field studies.

Nonverbal behavior analyses are important aspects of a field-work for two crucial reasons: Firstly, the field-working anthropologists regularly finds that, if the is to reconstruct normative and directive regulators of given social practices effectively he

has to participate actively in the life of the investigated people; the argument that participant observation is the only justifiable fieldwork method is beyond a discussion nowadays, we believe. So, if the anthropologist is to achieve his objective of becoming a participant observer, he must not only learn to "speak like a native" but also must learn to "act like a native". The two skills are interdependent; until he knows the language he cannot use appropriate gestures correctly, but, on the other hand, until he is fully sensitive to the gestural and kinesic context he cannot communicate properly. Secondly, the knowledge of rules prescribing certain ways of behavior will enable him not only to function properly and establish his own position in the social structure of the investigated group, but will also help him considerably to understand differences of behavior of its members. A thorough analysis of nonverbal behavior of various members of a given social group will eventually lead to the reconstruction of kinship relations between them.

To liven up our discussion a little and also to point out some methodological procedures of how this goal can be achieved, let us consider the example - drawn from the male author's own experience of doing fieldwork in Venezuela - of the Amazonian group of Panare Indians whose nonverbal behavior, delimited by kinship system, is highly formalized.

Kinship terms directly reflect social relations of any tribal group, but in order to capture and understand them one has to know the native language. However, an effective verbal communication is not always possible, at least at the early stage of fieldwork. So, to establish and reconstruct the social system of the investigated group, the anthropologist, has, at first, to operate on the level of nonverbal communication, namely he is to get a glimpse of the local etiquette for it reflects kinship relations distinctively. Differences of nonverbal behavior between various members of the investigated group - resulting, as we have already mentioned, from kinship system - make the anthropologist aware of the differences in their social status. Moreover, comprehension of the social structure of the group enables him to establish and define his own position within it.

In the case of Panare Indians an open type of social classification has been used. It is based on the distinction of two major

categories of people in the local community: relatives and non-relatives. The first category, however, is further divided into two sub-groups: close relatives and distant relatives. This division in turn is based on the principle of marriage preference. In the Panare tribe cross-cousin marriages are preferred, cross-cousins are thus potential spouses for the ego while uncles and aunts are potential parents-in-law. For the male ego the group of close relatives includes the following persons: father, mother, father's brother and his wife, mother's sister and her husband (these people are considered parents) as well as parallel cousins (who are considered siblings); mother's brother and his wife, father's sister and her husband (uncles and aunts) and cross-cousins (cousins) constitute a subgroup of distant relatives, while all other people living in the same village fall under the category of non-relatives. Local etiquette provides different ways of behavior, nonverbal especially, towards particular group of people ranging from solidarity and intimacy (relatives) to strict formalization and social distance (non-relatives). In such a system of social classification the anthropologist is treated as a non-relative, thus the behavior of the natives towards him and vice versa should follow the rules applying to the group of non-relatives. As a non-relative he is not allowed, for instance, to communicate personally with women from the group of relatives or even meet tête-à-tête with them; he will never get a negative answer, nobody will look straight into his eyes, exchange jokes with him or laugh loudly in his presence simply because cultural norms do not permit such behavior.

Thus, it might seem from what we have just said that participant observation is impossible in such a community as the Panare Indians. So, what is the anthropologist to do to overcome such an impasse? He has to work his way into the moral system of kinship and become a member of the investigated society. Napoleon Chagnon managed to do that when he first went to study Yanomamö. In his brilliant book "Studying Yanomamö" he described this very problem in the following words: "Karina (the headman of one of the Yanomamö villages) had told me that I should address him as either »shoriwa« (brother-in-law) or »shocabe« (father-in-law, grandfather or mother's brother). This would relate us-to each other in the best possible way according to the Yanomamö kinship practice. It

would automatically create between us a kinship bond that implied certain modes of behavior and mutual obligations that the other kinship terms did not convey".

In order to carry out a successful long-term fieldwork and adequate reconstruction of culture, the anthropologist has no other choice than become a member of the investigated group. Obviously, he does not become a native himself - that is neither possible nor necessary - but rather a member of the community who has specific obligations and responsibilities.

To return to our discussion on nonverbal communicative behavior, consider again the examples of Polish gentleman raising his hat to show respect to a woman-friend and Tricbrand Islanders bowing and bending their backs in the presence of a headman to recognize his superiority, in which we have tried to point out differences between the semantics of nonverbal behavior of "civilized" and "primitive" people.

To explain the behavior of Polish gentleman, the anthropologist has to establish norms regulating it. These norms assign certain effect which in turn has a specific value in given culture. This effect is a practically perceptible goal and consists in manifesting respect to the elders: additionally, it communicates recognition of a given social order. Then, the anthropologist ought to reconstruct directives appointing syntactic order of given cultural acts and defining circumstances in which they are to be undertaken and who is to undertake them.

As far as the semantics of such actions is concerned, it belongs to the communicative sphere of culture, for mentioned-above acts is highly conventional. It means that the individual is not able to determine its original meaning, he can only assign its final communicative sense, because in the course of history most conventional behaviors had lost their original sense. In order to communicate a given state of affairs one does not have to be aware of the premises underlying given action.

Also, we have already tried to point out that in case of tribal communities semantics of communicative behavior regarding social relationships differs considerably from that of modern European societies, for primitive cultures are synthetic and there is not a clear distinction between technological, communicative and ideological spheres of culture and thus every act realizes diffe-

rent senses at the same time. Therefore reconstruction of their meanings is much "deeper".

Again, to explain nonverbal behavior of the Panare Indians, the anthropologist has, first, to reconstruct norms controlling it. Effects which are assigned by these norms are practically perceptible and consist in manifesting both the realization of specific ideological values and recognition of specific social system. The directives regulating Indian actions are exactly the same as these directing behavior of Polish gentleman, however the semantics of Panare nonverbal communication is "wider" and "deeper". Social order as well as the behavior maintaining it reflect supranatural world. Different elements of social organization have their explanation in mythical plots. Panare communal house, for instance, reflects the structure of Cosmos, while different social groups and modes of their behavior reflect different categories of supranatural entities. Thus, even the most common behavior regarding social stratification is explainable in reference to some elements of ideology.

Not to make things too complicated we would not go into a lot of details and analyze examples of complex structural relationship between ideological sphere of culture and certain nonverbal actions, instead we will consider a pure technological act. "Indeed, the Panare know that during an eclipse (seen, of course, from the earth), it is the moon which passes below the sun and not the reverse. Both are therefore »stright« in their copulation when compared to the favorite Panare technique for sexual intercourse in which the man stands above the woman. The woman lies on her back in her (rather than his) hammock. The man stands up, the hammock passing between his legs. The legs of the woman pass over the arms of the man where elbow and knee clinch together. The woman lies horizontally and is below the man who stands vertically and is above the woman. Since the Milky Way and the rainbow have commuted along a vertical axis, the moon and the sun should have done the same and... the moon should pass behind the sun!".

It is evident that the described-above act realizes ideological value in conjunction with communicative and technological values. This act, as most actions of primitive people, is not conventional.

Presented-above explanatory procedure we will call a subjecti-

ve reconstruction of culture. In our opinion this humanistic perspective is the only justifiable way of analyzing culture, for it takes into consideration the following, very important, aspects:

- 1) rationality of acting subjects (in context of their competence),
- 2) cultural conditions of behavior (humanistic factor),
- 3) subjective consciousness of regulators of specific social practices.

At the moment we are not dealing with the problem of objective analysis of culture, for that is a topic of its own. However, it is worth mentioning that according to the premises of historical epistemology (theoretical approach we have applied in the present paper) this part of an analysis of culture should follow genetic and functional explanation: a state of given social consciousness is explained in terms of its response to specific objective demands.

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Elżbieta Goździak, Mariusz Kairski

KOMUNIKOWANIE NIEWERBALNE W BADANIU ANTROPOLOGICZNYM
PERSPEKTYWA TEORETYCZNA

Autory rozpatrują możliwości uwzględnienia komunikacji niewerbalnej jako przedmiotu badania antropologii kultury. Teoretyczne podstawy w postaci pojęcia kultury zaczerpnięte są z tzw. Poznańskiej Szkoły Metodologicznej (konceptje Jerzego Kmity). Ilustracje empiryczne dotyczą przede wszystkim komunikacji niewerbalnej wśród Indian Penara (Wenezuela).

The most commonly accepted view of what should be called the concept of repetitive, prescribed symbolic activities addressed to a shared object (see, e.g., F o u l d e r, 1964, p. 10). It is a habit to constitute a unified whole, in which all the relevant non-verbal cues such as time, place, gesture and verbal, pronunciation, arrangements of their succession in time, etc., are subjected to ritual rules that leave no freedom to participants with regard to their modes of behaviour. Deviation from any rule causes the ceremony invalid and hence meaningless. However, many anthropologists agree that the notion of ritual (any be used in relation to any "fixed set of prescribed behaviours" F o u l d e r, 1964, p. 10). However, they stress alternative relations of values that are intrinsically important for a given group (see also K o p e c k a, 1968, p. 10; J o n e s, 1969; V. N. T o u n s e n, 1968; S a n t r o n d, 1970). It is a very significant observation, it allows to apply the concept of ritual to a much broader domain of behaviour, i.e. to all manifestations of the symbolic expression and control of social order. Yet, it continues to imply a limitation in the scope of the term, leading to the exclusion of such activities as gestures, rituals or ceremonies.

Other students tend to be more expansive. They propose to call a ritual not in terms of prescribed ceremony, as a definite type of action, but as a communicative aspect of behavior of almost any kind (see, e.g., 1964, p. 10; J o n e s, 1968, p. 10). This idea seems very close to Goffman's conceptions of the interactive