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The role of nonverbal communication in Beginners’ EFL Classrooms

Salé Junior high schools as a case



(Axtell, 1995)

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Introduction

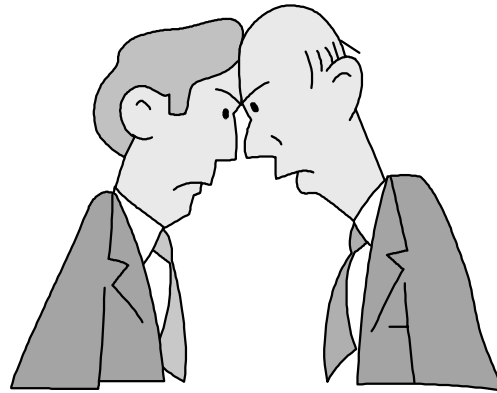
Nonverbal communication has long been neglected in the domain of teaching and learning, especially prior to the advent of Communicative Language Teaching in the 70s and early 80s. This new trend brought changes all over the teaching and learning process. Among these changes are the roles of both teacher and learner. The role of the teacher is of concern here because he/she became a facilitator, counsellor, and animator. These new roles require a change in the classroom discourse. More importance is given to visual techniques and body language. Another change brought by the new trend is the focus of the EFL classroom. Communication became the pivotal focus of the teaching practice, that is to say more importance is given to interaction in the target language over grammatical formalism. This importance of interaction calls upon the communicative competence of both the teacher and learners. All these reasons taken together brought nonverbal communication to the surface. Thus, the choice of this particular topic rises from the awareness of its importance to both teaching and learning.

This study aims at probing the different media of nonverbal communication, and clarifying their usefulness to teaching and learning. To achieve this goal, a field study was conducted in Tabriquet junior high school in Salé, Morocco. The major participants are students, but teachers were also involved, either in observation or in interviews. Three main techniques were used to collect data, namely questionnaires, observation, and interviews. The data collected was then coded, analyzed, and interpreted according to the principles of both qualitative and quantitative research. An important point that should be mentioned in this regard is that, contrary to most studies which adopt one perspective, either teaching or learning, the current study adopts a more eclectic approach that combines both perspectives. The reason for this is to give a full view of the issue of nonverbal communication in the EFL classroom.

Concerning the organization of this paper, the first part is about nonverbal communication, seen as a global means of human communication. This part includes four sections, each one deals with one aspect of nonverbal communication, namely Kinesics, Proxemics, Oculistics, and facial expressions. The second part is devoted to nonverbal communication in the Moroccan school, its findings, and implications.

Part one:

Nonverbal Communication



Introduction

I have learned to depend more on what people do than what they say in response to a direct question, to pay close attention to that which cannot be consciously manipulated, and to look for patterns rather than content.

Edward T. Hall (1968 p83)

Communication in general is the process of sending and receiving messages that enable humans to share knowledge, attitudes, and emotions. Although we usually identify communication with speech, communication is composed of two dimensions: verbal and nonverbal. Nonverbal communication has often been defined as communication without words. There have been various definitions of this term depending on the researchers' theoretical background and level of focus. However, most scholars tend to use this term to refer to the use of paralinguistic expressions and bodily movements such as body posture and orientation, gestures, eye contact, body contact, and facial expressions in daily interactions. In fact one might even suggest that every nonverbal signal of human beings is a potential medium of communication. Everything communicates, including what people wear, the way they handle their bodies, the way they stand or sit, the pitch and tone of their voice, and the way they manage space during a conversation. Thus, the idea that when a person keeps silent communication breaks is no longer a valid one, for the simple reason that, if used appropriately, silence can be a perfect means of communication. The point here is that humans cannot stop the flow of communication just by ceasing to use words.

Contrary to verbal communication, nonverbal communication is much more universal in that many gestures and body movements are understood and used by a wide number of people, even if those people belong to different cultures. The smile would be a good example of these. Roger E. Axtell (1998, p118) calls it the "Ultimate Gesture", because it is used everywhere and almost in every situation. It is even more surprising to learn that eighty facial muscles are responsible for producing the smile (Axtell,1998, p118). Though some features of nonverbal communication are universal, others are culturally-bound. Just as other people's languages are different, their nonverbal signals are equally different. In addition to that, language mistakes can be tolerated from a foreigner whereas a mistake in body gestures is hardly pardonable, especially if the person masters the target language. This aspect will be elaborated further in the following sections.

Nonverbal communication involves the possibility of misunderstanding and still humans rely on it a lot. There are, at least, four reasons behind this fact. First, words tend to have limitations and in some situations people need a stronger medium of communication, such as when explaining shapes or giving directions. Nonverbal signs can also save the individual who needs to communicate in a foreign country. The second reason is that nonverbal cues are usually more powerful than words. In situations when a person wants to communicate extreme feelings such as disgust or even an insult, a gesture would be much more expressive. The third reason for opting for nonverbal communication is that verbal language can be manipulated by the speaker to deceive the interlocutor; conversely, nonverbal language is difficult to manipulate. Nonverbal signs are, thus, more genuine than words. A popular example is a fake smile that almost no one fails to detect. A fourth reason is that body language tends to be more spontaneous than words. Native speakers might fail to find the right word but they rarely fail to use the right gesture. Nonverbal communication is a system that humans learn since childhood just as they learn verbal language. One might even go further as to say that nonverbal language is the first system of communication that children learn. A child normally communicates with his mother through cries, eye contact, and touch. It is only at a later stage that verbal language is introduced. Research in the domain of nonverbal communication reveals that human communication is mostly nonverbal. The social anthropologist Edward T. Hall (1959) claims that 60% of human communication is nonverbal. This would not sound strange if we examine thoroughly our everyday interactions.

Nonverbal communications shares common characteristics with verbal language. It is as large, complicated, and articulated as language. Hence comes the difficulty to categorize the main components of this system. For the sake of clarity, a tentative classification of the major components of nonverbal communication is presented in the following figure. It is adapted from Steven Darn's (Internet TESL Journal, 2005) classification.

Component	Description
Kinesics	Body movements and gestures
Proxemics	Space management in relation to social and physical environment
Haptics	Use of touch
Oculesics	Use of eye contact
Vocalics	Tone, pitch, timber, volume, and speed of the

	voice
Facial Expressions	Gestures produced by the muscles of the face
Posture	The position and orientation of the body
Olfactics	Use of smell
Silence	Absence of linguistic words or forms
Adornment	Clothes, jewelry, and hairstyle
Chronemics	Time management

Table.1: Components of nonverbal communication

The major components of nonverbal communication, namely Kinesics, Proxemics, Oculistics, and Facial expressions will be discussed in separate sections. Less frequently used components, however, will be dealt with in brief.

Section one: kinesics

The world is a giddy montage of vivid gestures – traffic police, street vendors expressway drivers, teachers, children on play grounds, athletes, with their exuberant hugging and clenched fists, and high fives. People all over the world use their hands, heads, and bodies to communicate expressively.

Roger A. Axtell, 1998 p2

In the Literature about nonverbal communication, Kinesics refers to the use of body movements and gestures. In fact gestures are part and parcel of the human nonverbal communication system. Sometimes, they are referred to as “the silent language”. Apart from gestures, body movements and postures are considered effective means of communication that enliven interactions. That is probably why a telephone conversation is much more difficult to hold than a normal face-to-face conversation. In the first one the interlocutors have access only to verbal language. This obliges them to make more effort to transmit their messages and to check whether their addressee received their own. In a face-to-face conversation, however, interlocutors have access to a wide range of means of communication, including gestures and body movements.

1.1.1: Gestures



Photo 1

<http://stephan.dahl.at/nonverbal/kinesics.html>

Gestures are important in human communication in that they animate conversations, clarify misunderstandings, and express feelings deeply. Roger E. Axtell (1998 p4) classifies gestures into three main categories: Instinctive, Coded, and Acquired.

Instinctive gestures are the kind of gestures that we perform almost unconsciously. For example when a person crosses his/her arms, this is usually a sign of defensiveness. People also tend to slap the back of their heads unconsciously when they are suddenly surprised or shocked. This category of gestures is more universal than any of the other categories.

Coded or technical gestures are more specialized gestures. They are agreed upon by groups of individuals sharing the same activity. Examples of these are hand signals used by football referees, umpires, film makers, stock brokers, and airport attendants. These gestures are often used and understood only by exclusive groups of individuals. They can be compared to jargon or specialized vocabulary in verbal language.

Acquired gestures are socially generated gestures. They differentiate societies and communities. The origin of these gestures is quite difficult to trace. Examples are the "O.K" sign, the hand wave as in Hello or Goodbye. Just like language, the relationship between these gestures and their meaning is usually arbitrary. These gestures tend to outnumber the other categories.

It is only recently that research in the domain of gestures has flourished. In fact, what makes this field of research a fertile one is that the study of gestures has become the topic of a number of different disciplines such as anthropology, cognitive psychology, linguistics, sociology, semiotics, and communication studies. The study of gestures has long ago been a major path for scholars dealing with the origin of language, because of the idea that verbal and nonverbal languages share a number of aspects.

In general, gestures can be either local or universal. Local gestures are used and are understood by people of specific countries or regions. Thus, American Sign Language (ASL), for example, is used in North America as a means of communication among deaf people. It was developed by Thomas Hopkins Gallaudet after traveling to France and learning the French sign system. ASL is the third most popular language in the United States after English and Spanish. Signs of the ASL are local in the sense that users of other sign languages may not understand them. For example, the upraised middle finger is a rude gesture for the users of ASL, whereas it means "brother" in Thai sign language, "mountain" in Korea, and "holiday" in England (Axtell, 1998 p55). Universal gestures on the other hand are used by a wide population across the globe. The hand shake and the hand wave for farewell are examples of

universal gestures. Differences between local gestures and failure to recognize these differences often cause serious misunderstandings.

1.1.2: Body movements and postures

The human body consists of a jointed skeleton moved by muscles. The individual communicates numerous messages by the way he or she walks, stands, and sits. Teachers standing erect, but not rigid, and leaning forwards, are more open and approachable than the ones who stand rigid and cross their arms. The whole body is sometimes performing gestures that are either deliberate or unconscious. This involves postures and the way one handles his or her body. The way people sit, for example, is very expressive. In fact there are four distinct styles of sitting with legs crossed:

1. Legs crossed at the ankles.
2. Legs crossed at the knee.
3. One ankle resting on the knee of the other leg.
4. Legs crossed at the knees and upper foot curled around the calf of the lower leg

Some cultures, however do not tolerate that adults sit cross-legged. In Thailand, for example, a woman reformer and journalist was once physically removed from the parliament when she refused to uncross her legs (Axtell. 1998p112). Males and females use the four ways of sitting mentioned in different ways. Thus it is normal for a man to sit legs crossed at the ankles or one ankle resting on the knee of the other leg; but it is rare that a man sits with his legs crossed at his knees. Nowadays this way of sitting is adopted by both males and females in Europe and the Arab world. It is almost the only way of sitting on a chair common between males and females. Women, on the other hand, sit using the latter position or legs crossed at the knees and the foot entwined around the lower leg. The latter is hardly used by males. It is worth mentioning that attitude towards gestures and body movements, in general, have changed throughout history. What a given culture considered unacceptable in the past may tolerate in the present. Moroccan women, as a case in point, were not supposed to sit with their legs crossed, no matter how, a couple of decades ago; but today it is almost a normal practice.

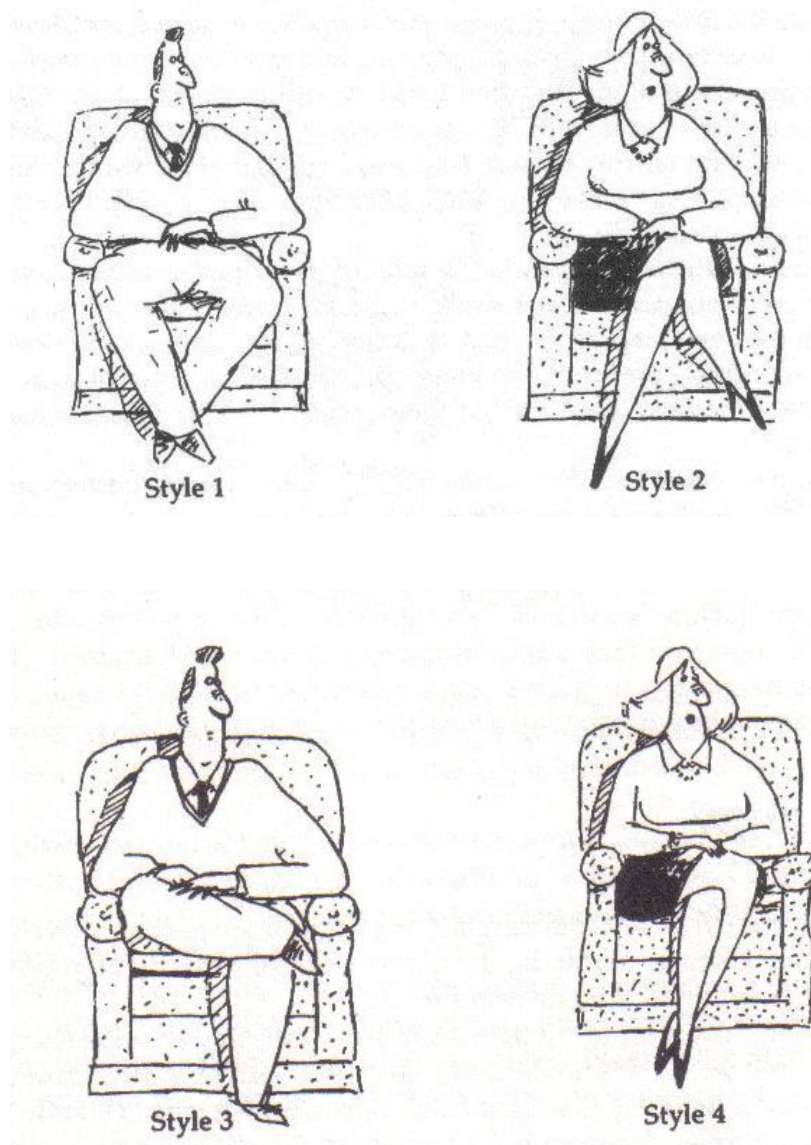


Photo 2

Axtell, 1998 p. 113

Section two: Proxemics

The term Proxemics was first coined by Edward T. Hall (1959). It usually refers to the way humans manage space during interaction. The way people stand from their interlocutor conveys something about their personality, attitude and relationship with the interlocutor. Moreover, the sense of territoriality that humans instinctively entertain does have an impact on the way they communicate. To understand fully how Proxemics works and how it affects communication, a distinction should be made between personal space and territoriality.

1.2.1: Personal Space

Humans manage space during an interaction according to different variables that range from the social status of the interlocutor to the nature of the interaction itself. The personal space is not a fixed or static zone. It is often compared to “an invisible bubble” that surrounds the individual and moves with him or her. This bubble gets smaller or bigger depending on different variables such as gender, age, and the degree of intimacy with the interlocutor. People usually like to stand closer to someone they like or they know well, whereas someone they do not know or they do not like is kept at a further distance. People tend to secure their personal space using all means. They can sit far apart of the others in a meeting or they sometimes use objects, like chairs and tables, as a barrier to prevent any intrusion or violation of their personal space. When personal space is violated, people react differently. Their reaction may vary from withdrawing from the place to verbal or even physical violence. The personal space can also differ according to the place in which the individual is located: a lift, a restaurant, home, an office, or a park. Space can be analyzed in terms of horizontal distance and vertical distance. The first category denotes the type of distance at which people stand from their interlocutors. In this regard, Hall classifies personal space in North American culture in terms of zones. Each of these zones applies to a specific context.

Intimate distance: ranges from actual touching to eighteen inches. This zone is reserved for very intimate interactions. At this distance the physical presence of the interlocutor is overwhelming.

Personal distance: from eighteen inches to four feet. This is the distance of interaction of good friends. This would also seem to be a most appropriate distance for teacher and student to discuss personal affairs such as grades, conduct, private problems, etc.

Social distance: from four to twelve feet. It seems to be an appropriate distance for casual friends and acquaintances to interact. It is the usual distance at which the individual communicates with people met for the first time.

Public distance: from ten feet and beyond. This distance is used in very formal interactions. It is also often used in public gatherings and lectures (Hall, 1959).

Though these zones are reported to be the convention of interaction in North America, other western cultures manage space in quite a similar way. People in other cultures tend to manage space differently. Arabs, for example, are known to favour dealing with people at a closer distance even if they are met for the first time. This claim is supported by the study of Watson & Graves, (1966) in which sixteen Arab and sixteen American students were compared. The students were asked to converse in a room, and they were secretly recorded. The study showed that Arab students sat closer to their interlocutor. They were even more likely to touch each other (reported in Hudson, 1980).

The second category of space concerns vertical space. It refers, basically, to how a person is elevated. It is used to show dominance in the relationship between the individual and his or her interlocutor. This can be noticed in courtrooms, classrooms, and houses of parliament. The more the individual is raised, the more authority he or she is supposed to exert.

1.2.2: Territoriality

One of the most shared aspects between human beings and animals is the instinct to secure space for oneself and to defend that space against potential intruders. Scientific research on how humans communicate in private and public spaces began with studies of animal behavior (ethology) and territoriality in the 19th and early 20th centuries. The social anthropologist Edward Hall is considered a pioneer in this domain. People's sense of

territoriality becomes evident in certain places like an elevator, an office, a parking lot, or even a library. The experience of using the lift is, in fact, more interesting of all. Researchers in the domain noticed that when there is only one person or two in an elevator, they usually lean against the walls of the elevator. If there are four people, they occupy the four corners of the elevator. However, if there are five or six people, they all turn to face the door and stand tall and thin. It is almost like a ritual or a dance (Axtell, 1998 p6). In a restaurant, corner tables and wall tables are occupied first and then tables in the middle. Another instinctive behaviour is that after coming back home – usually after hours of absence – people tend to wander all around the house as if looking for intruders who might violate their domain (Ewer, 1968 p66).

People in some cultures have a stronger sense of territoriality than others. Thus, Americans are known more for the use of fences around their houses. The sense of territoriality is manifested by the individual but it can take a national aspect. This is reflected in the fact that most countries have border conflicts and sometimes fail to reach a compromise.

Section three: Oculesics

Oculesics refers to the use of eye contact in communication. The eyes are important organs in the human body, not only for sight but for communication as well. Due to their communicative importance, the eyes are sometimes referred to as “mirrors of the soul”. In addition to that, many myths have been knitted around the human eyes to show their power. The eyes converse as much as the tongue; and when there is a conflict between what a person’s tongue and eyes say, it is always the eyes which are trusted. Through the eyes, people can communicate fear, joy, and anger. It is amazing how humans communicate with their eyes. Whereas people in some cultures teach their children to avoid looking directly in adults’ eyes as a sign of respect, others keep telling them “look me in the eyes, son!”, During a conversation, the messages of the eyes might sometimes be misleading, that is why the general context of the conversation and the accompanying gestures should be taken into consideration.

1.3.1: Eye contact and social interaction.

It is a commonsense observation that a person looks more frequently at his interlocutor when he listens to him than when he talks to him. In general, when two people get involved in a conversation, they look at each other or to a third person, if there is any. Eye contact, in this regard, plays the role of turn organizer. The speaker usually looks at his interlocutor in the eyes when he wants to stop or when he wants him to take the next turn. However, it happens that the speaker averts his eyes when he wants to talk longer or when he feels that his talk is unclear. In addition, the listener tends to look at the speaker’s eyes when he speaks fluently, and he avoids his eyes when the latter stammers (Kendon, 1981). A good use of eye contact is often necessary for some professionals, such as TV presenters, animator, actors, and teachers. When we look at the speaker’s eyes, we usually communicate interest in what he or she says. Avoiding eye contact, on the other hand, might be a sign of boredom or embarrassment. However, this should not be taken as a rule, especially when dealing with people from other cultures.

1.3.2: Eye contact as a sign of dominance.

Eye contact can serve as a facilitator of social interaction, and it shows the relationship between the speaker and the listener and their social status. Research (Argyle1983, kendon1981) has proved that when the interlocutors belong to different statuses, it is often the one who has a lower status who looks at the other. The person with the high status does not look at his inferior interlocutor when he himself talks or listens. Conversely, direct eye contact can also show dominance as in the case of adult-child interaction. Eye contact can also have negative consequences when it is persistent, or when it is directed to a stranger or to a person of the opposite sex. The present situation may cause embarrassment or may even provoke a violent reaction.

Section four: Facial Expressions

The face is the most complex part of the human body. Through the configuration of the face people communicate silently but perfectly. Though the whole face is used in facial communication, much of the information is carried out by the eyebrows and the mouth. Many researchers embarked on this topic for its prominence in human communication. The pioneer of this field of research is doubtlessly Charles Darwin in his book *The Expression of Emotions Man and Animals* (1872). The area around the eyes and the mouth is so important that when we look at a person's photo, we scan the face but we concentrate on the eyes and the mouth. A piece of evidence is 'emoticons' used in emails. The term is the result of blending the two words: 'emotion' and 'icon'. Emoticons suggest emotions simply by representing the eyes and the mouth. Examples of these are: happiness :-), and sadness :-(. Facial expressions are essential means of communication, not only within the same community, but throughout the whole world. Evidence in support of this claim is provided by Paul Ekman's study conducted in 1960. The experiment consists of checking whether or not people who isolated themselves from western culture can recognize and interpret the facial expressions performed by people belonging to that culture. The results were positive in that those people managed to recognize the facial expressions of Berkley students and,

conversely, their facial expressions were recognized by the students. One may then, legitimately, conclude that facial expressions are universal.

Physiologists estimate that humans can produce up to 2000 different facial expressions (Hall, 1980). This may be true, but, definitely, not all people can produce this wide variety of expressions. That is to say, some people cannot produce a variety of facial expressions because of problems with facial muscles. Hence, some people are incapable of smiling because of some brain lesions, autism, or nerve disorder (Axtell, 1998). Depending on their complexity and role in communication, Haller and Rambaud (1980) classified these expressions into five basic categories.

The basic expressions are the primary facial expressions that all humans, including very young children can produce. These can be either positive expressions, like tenderness, curiosity, and frankness; negative expressions like anger, disgust, and terror; or mixed expressions such as astonishment, impatience, and submission.

Secondary expressions are more complex facial expressions that only adults, normally, can produce. They are also subdivided into negative expressions such as admiration, relief, and bravery, and negative ones like disdain, challenge, and despair.

Reinforcing expressions are those that reinforce the meaning of what the person expresses verbally. Examples of these are familiarity, humility, reflections.

Relative expressions have the function of relating different other expressions or giving them a distinct characteristic like remembrance, helplessness, satiety.

Complementary expressions function in very particular situations. This makes them delicate to interpret. Examples are boredom, and extreme fatigue.

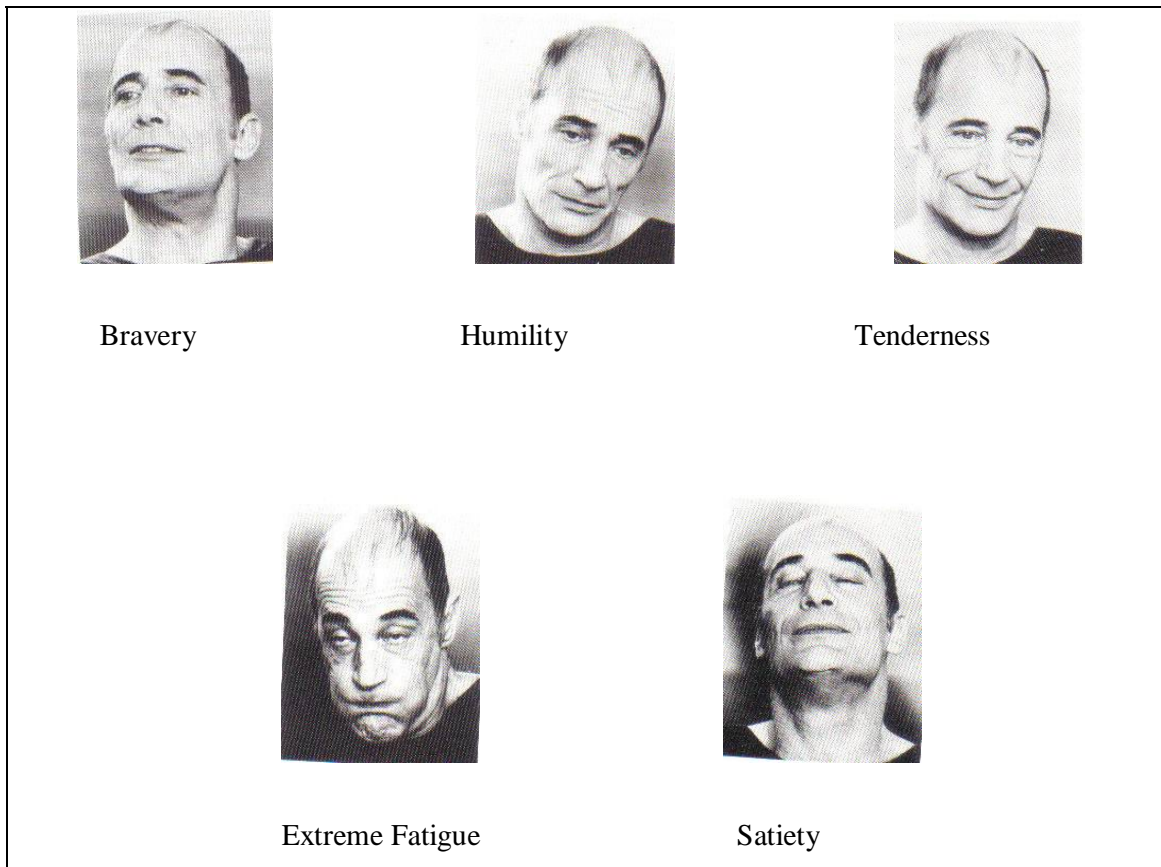


Photo 3

(Haller and Rambaud, 1981 pp 26,31,35,37)

There is no doubt that the facial expressions are the most important elements that are considered in understanding the interlocutor's personality and state of mind. Many of us temporarily fail to control their nonverbal communication, especially facial expressions, and thus emotions that we struggle to hide show up. A shy individual delivering a talk in front of an audience may not be able to wipe the expression of embarrassment out of his face. Just as it is the case for the eye contact medium, when there is a conflict between the speaker's verbal language and his facial expressions, the facial expressions are given more credence. The point here is that facial expressions often betray the individual. Another phenomenon related to facial expressions is the act of feigning emotions through facial expressions. It is true that the main use of

nonverbal communication is to convey or conceal emotions, but people often need to feign emotions. In our everyday life we often need to pretend to be interested in things that do not actually interest us, or amused by something that is not amusing, or even concerned with something that does not really concern us. It may be a question of morality or social decorum, but we do this to make life easier.

To conclude, nonverbal communication media are part and parcel of human communication. They either complete the verbal communication, or replace it in some circumstances. These media are investigated in classroom environment in the next part.

Part Two:

Nonverbal Communication in Beginners' EFL Classroom

Section one: Research Methodology and Data Collection.

2.1.1: Research objectives

With the advent of Communicative Language Teaching, the practice of teaching languages changed. Thus, more focus is put on interaction and genuine communication in the classroom. One of the major aspects of classroom communication is the nonverbal aspect. In fact, many previous studies like Burk and Leblanc (1993), capitalized on the importance of this aspect, for it improves the teaching practice and enhances the learning process, especially in beginners' classes. Not only is the nonverbal communication part of the teacher's professional competence but part of the strategic competence of the learner as well. For this reason, nonverbal communication should not only be a channel used by the teacher to transmit language but, sometimes, it should be itself taught to learners as part of their communicative competence. The present study aims at analysing nonverbal communication in beginners' EFL classroom. The ultimate goal is to observe, describe, and analyse nonverbal communication in beginners' EFL classrooms; and see how it can be used to foster learning and improve the teaching practice. Two main hypotheses are the basis of this study:

1. Teacher-students interaction in an EFL beginners' classroom is mainly based on nonverbal communication.
2. The nonverbal communication channel can, if used instructively, foster learning and improve the teaching practice.

In an attempt to investigate these hypotheses the following research questions will be the signposts of the study.

1. Is nonverbal communication used in teacher-student interaction in the classroom?
2. What are the major features of nonverbal communication used in this context?
3. How are these features used and for what purpose?
4. How can these features be used to enhance learning and improve the teaching practice?

2.1.2: Research methodology and data collection

The current study makes use of the principles of both qualitative and quantitative research. In order to obtain reliable results, different techniques are used ranging from spontaneous observation and interviews to close ended questionnaires. The use of these techniques has a double fold benefit. First, it allows the researcher to collect a maximum of data. Second, it helps control the undesirable variables. This makes the findings more credible and valid. This study was conducted mainly in Tabriquet junior high school in Salé, Morocco, and the target respondents are the third grade (9th form) students who study English for the first year at school. The age of the respondents ranges from 15 to 19 years. The sample of respondents is composed of 240 students, 51% of whom are female students. The research techniques used are mainly classroom observation, questionnaires, and interviews. The data collection procedure started with the observation of EFL classrooms in Tabriquet junior high school and other neighbour schools. The observation scheme consists of the following elements:

1. The nonverbal communication features used by the teacher.
2. The frequency of use of these features.
3. The purpose of using these features.
4. The reaction of students to these features.
5. The nonverbal communication features used by the students.
6. The frequency of use of the students' nonverbal communication.
7. The purpose of the students' use of nonverbal communication.

After each observation session, which usually lasted for two hours, a short interview was conducted with the EFL teacher about his/her use of nonverbal communication. It is important to note that teachers were not informed about the real objective of the observation beforehand. It is only at the time of the interview that the real objective was revealed. This measure was thought to be necessary to guarantee that the teachers would not alter their behaviour to suit the observer's objective. The

information collected during the observations served to design a questionnaire which is addressed to third grade students. The piloting of the questionnaire was done with a sample of 45 students. And then, a final questionnaire of 15 questions was designed and administered to the target sample which is, as mentioned before, composed of 240 students. The questionnaire was written in Arabic because the target respondents are beginners, and they do not have a full command of English to answer the questionnaire in the target language. Two main points should be mentioned as far as the questionnaire is concerned. The first is the fact that only close ended questions were used. The reason behind this is to limit the scope of the data elicited. In fact, this might be seen as a pitfall since a large bulk of potentially relevant data might have been eliminated. But, thanks to the interviews, it was possible to make up for this. The second point is that the students were not required to write their names on the questionnaires. The choice of making the questionnaires anonymous is due to the fact that the respondents are the researcher's own students, and it might make them more comfortable to answer the questionnaires without writing their names. Moreover, when respondents were asked to provide their names during the piloting of the questionnaire, some of them preferred not to do so. The last step in the procedure of collecting data was interviews with some students. Volunteers were invited to comment on their answers.

Section Two: Kinesics in the classroom.

2.2.1: The teacher's gestures

The EFL classroom is an environment where the most prevalent activity, if not the ultimate goal, is to communicate. Classroom communication shares some characteristics with common everyday communication in that it requires the same components (addresser, addressee, message, channel, code, and context). However, it has its specificities. Unlike common everyday communication, classroom communication is between an individual, the teacher, on one hand, and a group, the students, on the other hand. Of course there is a one-to-one communication as well, especially when the teacher addresses individuals; but the most used type of

communication is the first one. This is due to the fact that the teacher is supposed to teach a group of students; and also because it is the way students learn. Another characteristic of classroom communication is that it is highly organized in order to achieve objectives set in advance and with the most economic means. Moreover, the objective of an EFL classroom interaction is learning a foreign language of which students have little or no command yet, especially beginners. Given all these aspects, nonverbal communication seems to have reason to exist in the EFL classroom. Teachers use nonverbal communication, especially gestures, either consciously or unconsciously. Observation of the EFL teachers revealed that novice teachers are more conscious of their use of gestures, whereas more experienced teachers tend to use gestures quite unconsciously. In fact, both practices need improvement. The novice teachers need to use gestures more spontaneously to avoid being artificial and boring. The experienced teachers, however, need to develop some sort of heuristic awareness of gestures, because just like speech, gestures can enhance communication, but can also impede it. This means that the use of the right gesture may save many words, but the use of the wrong one may break the flow of communication.

The teachers observed use a wide variety of gestures, but the ones used more consistently are the hand gestures and the head gestures. These gestures punctuate the teacher's presentation and make it lively. What is striking about the teachers hand gestures is that they are idiosyncratic. Every teacher has his own repertoire of hand gestures different from the other teachers. More interesting is that the teacher can create his system of gestures and have the student agree on it at the beginning of the year. The following illustrations show some of the hand gestures used by the observed teachers.

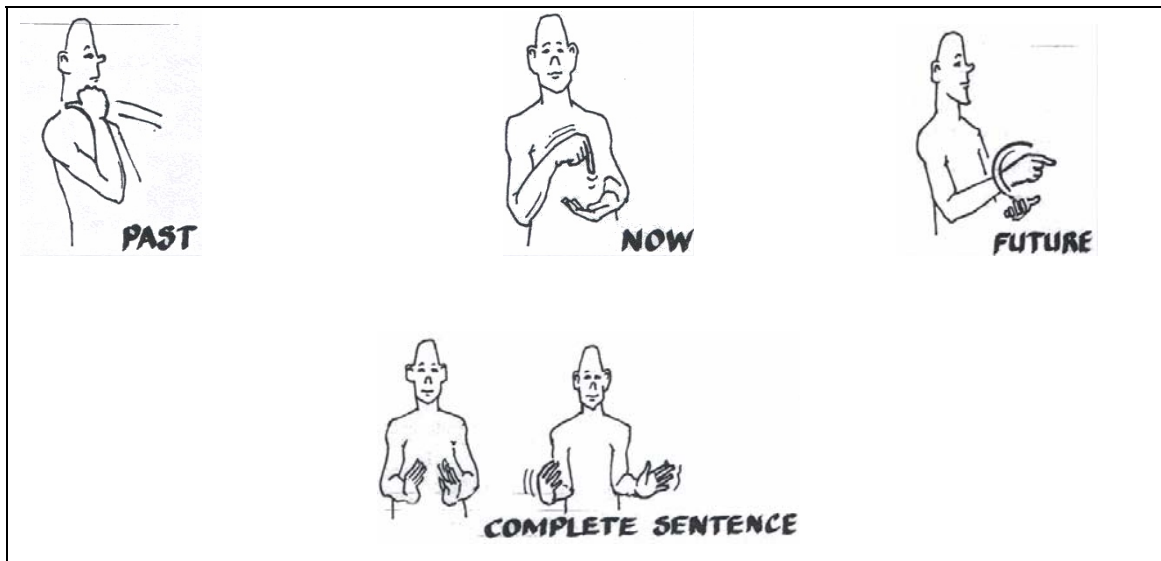


Photo 4

(Moran, 1984p257)

In addition to the hand gestures, the head gestures are also widely used by the teachers. The most common of these are the head nods and head shakes. The purpose of using gestures is, of course, to achieve an effective degree of communication, but there are very specific objectives for using gestures in the EFL classroom. Three main objectives can be highlighted in this regard: presenting language items, providing feedback to the students, and managing the classroom.

2.2.1. A Presenting language items

Gestures are very helpful in presenting language items such as vocabulary and grammar. An example of vocabulary is the verb “fly” which can be presented by imitating a bird with one’s hands. More difficult words require the use of the whole body. The verbs “sleep”, “wake up”, “brush”, “bathe”,...etc are presented by acting them out. Imagine how a teacher would present the subject pronouns *I, you, he...*etc without the use of gestures. An example of grammar is verb tense represented by the gestures in photo 4 above. As a matter of fact, the teacher’s gestures do also help students understand better. Thus, the majority of the students taking part in this study said that the teacher’s gestures help them understand the language items presented (see figure1). More interesting is the fact that what is needed, in teaching beginners, is a

good combination of speech and gestures. When asked whether the teacher should use gestures, speech or both when explaining the lesson, 94% of the respondents chose 'both' (figure2).

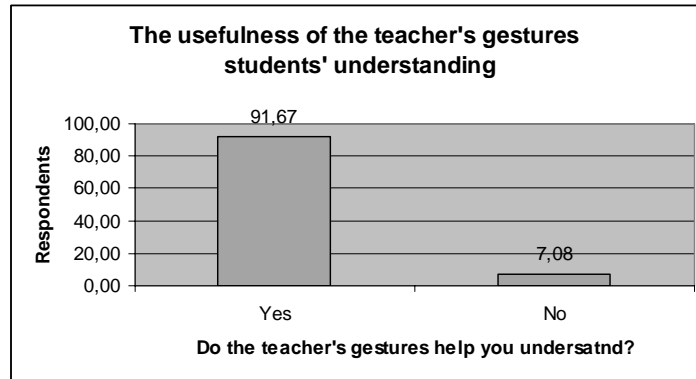


Figure 1

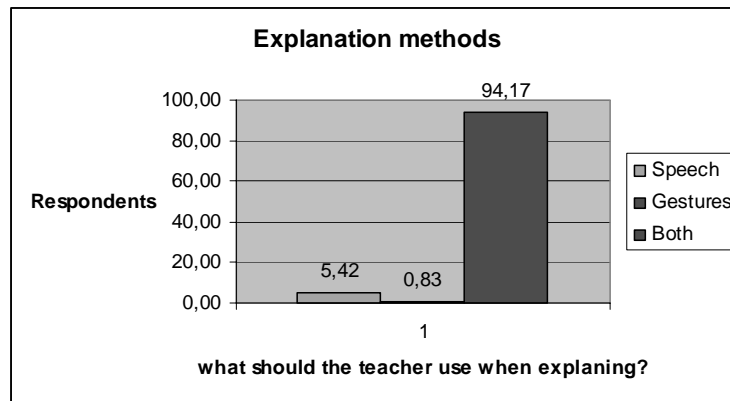


Figure 2

2.2.1. B Providing feedback for the students

Feedback can be either positive like the “thumb up” for a correct answer, or negative in the form of correction. In fact a significant bulk of literature has been written to support the idea that negative feedback should be given nonverbally. In her article entitled “The hand Signal system” (1981), Jacquelyn Schachter proved through concrete examples how verbal feedback misleads the students. The following example is given by the author to illustrate this point.

T: It's blue

S1: It blue

T: It's blue

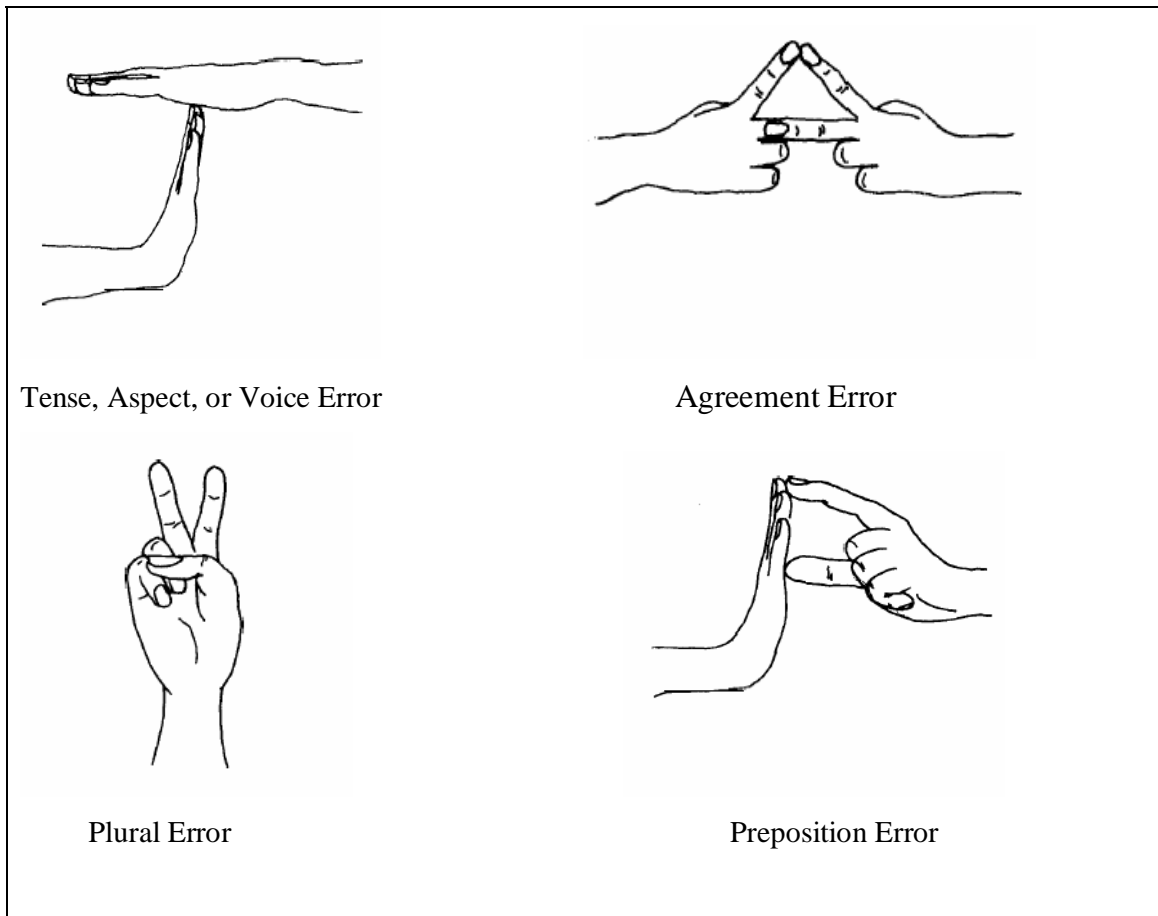
S1: It's blue

T: It's blue

S1: It blue

(**T:** teacher. **S1:** student)

In this example, the teacher attempted to correct the student by modelling the correct form. But the fact that he used modelling twice, once to give the correct form and another time to confirm it, misled the student. As an alternative method of giving negative feedback, Schachter, suggests a set of gestures, each of which standing for a particular type of mistake. The following figures, adapted from Schachter (1981), illustrate gestures standing for grammatical mistakes.



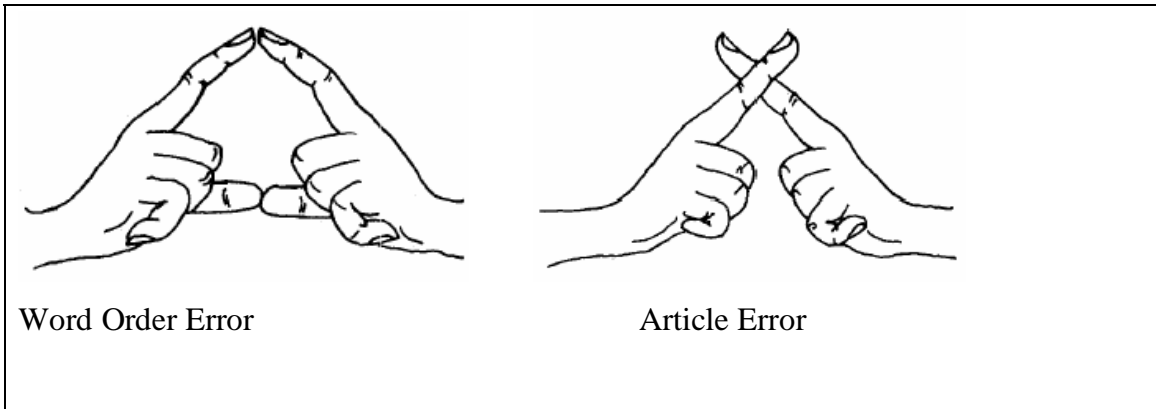


Photo 5

(Schachter, 1981)

These gestures are thought to be more effective when giving negative feedback during an oral activity. They are thought to make the learner less confused.

2.2.1.C Classroom management

One cannot talk about classroom management without referring to the use of gestures. As mentioned earlier, classroom communication has its own specificities; especially that it involves an individual, the teacher, and a group of students. When dealing with large classes, the task of managing a classroom becomes arduous and tiresome. A more specific example is issuing instructions or commands to a large class, such as paying attention, listening to a classmate who is giving an answer, or else signaling the 'time over' for an activity or task. Some students may understand the instruction quickly but others may not, especially if the target language is used. The use of gestures, thus, may be a good solution. Examples of gestures that teachers can use in giving instructions or commands are illustrated below.

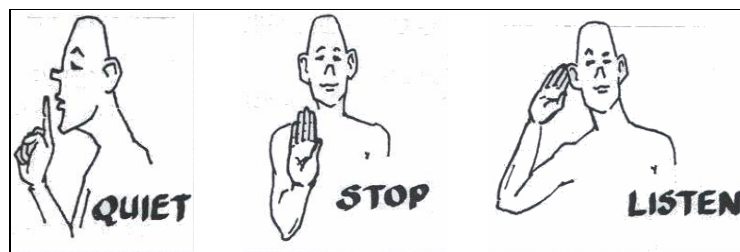


Photo 6

(Moran, 1984p257)

In addition to giving instructions, gestures can also serve as teaching techniques. The reference here is made to Total physical Response (TPR) which flourished in the 1960s. According to this method, learning is carried basically through the execution of sets of commands issued by the teacher. This is built upon the assumption that students learn more effectively by doing things. Apparently, this method gives priority to the sensory-motor aspect of learning over the cognitive and affective ones. Though this method does no longer enjoy the same popularity today as in the past, one cannot deny its advantages with beginners. Examples of typical commands used with beginners are:

Stand up

Sit down

Raise your hand

Touch your ear

Point to the door/window

Another gesture that is part and parcel of classroom management is pointing to students, either asking them to talk or designating individuals to take part in a task. The way the teacher points to his students is often considered of minor importance. Surprisingly enough, the current study revealed the opposite. Teachers usually, and thoughtlessly, point to students using the direct index finger. Though done over and over, students object to that gesture. The majority of respondents in this study said that they do not like to be pointed to by the finger, but they prefer an open palm instead (see figure 3 below). When asked to explain why, students stated that pointing to a student with a finger, not only downgrades them, but it shows that the teacher is bossy and arrogant. The open palm, however, gives the student more comfort and value.

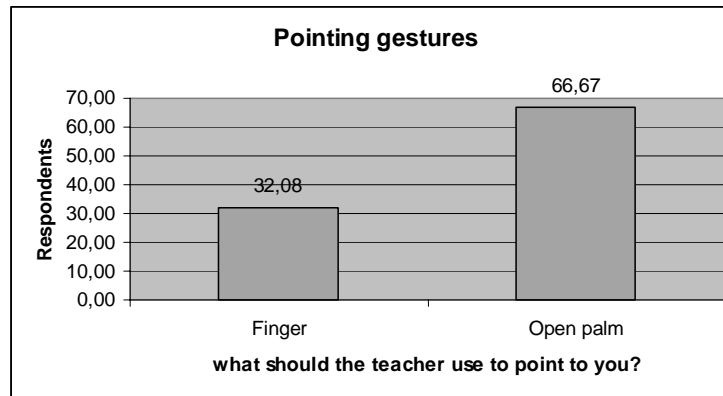


Figure 3

Classroom management requires a good management of the teacher talking time so as to keep lively and energetic. This can only be achieved if there is an instructive use of gestures. In an EFL classroom it is important that the students do most of the talking. The teacher is normally a sort of monitor, guide, or counsellor. The teacher should only content himself/herself with modelling, and let the learners do the job. Gone are the days when the teacher monopolised the talk, since most of the new teaching methods take for granted that the learner should be the center of the teaching/learning process. Apart from managing the teacher talking time, gestures can serve to create a warm and positive atmosphere where learning can take place.

2.2.2: The teacher's movements

As mentioned in the first part of this paper, Kinesics includes, at least, three main categories: gestures, body movements or postures. After dealing with gestures in the preceding section, body movements will be discussed in this section. Through body movements and postures the teacher sends messages and receives feedback. Different meanings can be assigned to different postures, or different messages can be sent through different postures. The way a person stands or holds his/her body tells something about his/her personality. Argyle (1975) and Hollander (1981) made an attempt to link different postures to different moods.



Photo 7: Showing emotions through postures

(Argyle, 1975 p.p. 273-275; and Hollander, 1981 p.395. Reported in Moussa, 1996)

(1) nosy (2) hesitant (3)careless, doubtful (4) resistant (5) viewer (6) self-satisfied (7) welcoming (8) determined (9) sneaking (10) scrutinizing (11) vigilant (12)awake (13) angry (14) furious (15) (16)surprised (17) sneaking) (18) shy (19) meditative (20) affected

The teacher's body movements and postures can communicate interest, fatigue, or encouragement. Moreover, He/she can analyse the students' attitudes and interests through their body movements and postures. A student who fidgets, slouches, or leans backwards usually shows signs of boredom and disinterest. The teachers observed in this study showed different body movements and posture patterns, can be classified into two major categories. The first category is that of teachers who use dynamic and lively body movements and postures. This category, as revealed by the respondents' answers, motivates learners, encourages them, and makes them involved in the classroom work. The second category, on the other hand, is that of teachers who use body movements and postures in a rigid and stiff way. Teachers like these would usually lean on their desk and cross their arm, or put their hands in their pockets for

quite a long time. Or else, they may keep one posture during the whole session. No doubt, this makes the students demotivated and, above all, bored. In fact, changing posture may be used as a smooth transition between the different activities of a lesson. This means that when the teacher changes posture, the students, automatically, know that they are about to start a new task or activity. Postures can also be used to present vocabulary items such as: *walk*, *stand*, or *haste*. By and large, body movements and postures are potential means of communication that teachers need to use cautiously and cleverly to show interest in their students' learning and to motivate them.

Section three: Proxemics and seating arrangement in the classroom

The kind of distance between students, and between students and the teacher, and also the way seats are arranged play a significant role in the teaching-learning process. Though these aspects are often considered of minor importance in the literature about classroom management, the findings of this study revealed some interesting facts about them.

2.3.1: Proxemics

Proxemics, as mentioned in the first part of this paper, refers to the use of distance as a means of communication. Proxemics in the classroom can be divided into two categories. The first one is proxemics between students. This refers to how students manage distance between each other. The second category is the use of distance between students and the teacher. As far as the first category is concerned, students, in general, like to sit close to each other to help each other, or exchange comments and jokes. This is probably why some teachers, as a kind of punishment, ask disruptive students to sit alone. However, an important issue which may provide food for thought is how students choose their seat mates. In spite of this general tendency, there are some exceptions to this rule. The first one may be that of some students who like to sit alone, and who consider themselves independent from others. Those students feel embarrassed when another classmate sits next to them. The second exception is that of the silent and isolated students who sit in a corner in the classroom

and send nonverbal warnings to those who attempt to violate their space. The two categories of students mentioned favour the classical seating arrangement, as we shall see in the following section. More important is the way distance is managed between students and the teacher. Its importance stems from the importance of the role of the teacher in the classroom. Instead of being the source of knowledge, the teacher, in communicative language teaching is a kind of monitor, guide or counsellor. The change of the role of the teacher necessitates a change in his/her 'proxemic' position in the classroom. In the traditional classroom, where the teacher was considered the unique source of knowledge, he/she sits or stands at the head of the classroom and delivers his 'lecture'. But the new roles that the teacher acquired necessitate that he/she should move around the classroom to help individual students and answer their inquiries. From this came the concept of 'teacher visibility' in the classroom, which is a major practice and requirement in the domain of teacher training. Not less important is 'class coverage' which means that the teacher should cover and know all that happens in the classroom. These two aspects of classroom management can be achieved through a good use of proxemics. The most important remark here is that students usually like the teacher to be within reach but not too close to them. Respondents in this study were asked whether they like the teacher to stand 'near', 'not far', or 'far' from them, and the majority chose 'not far'.

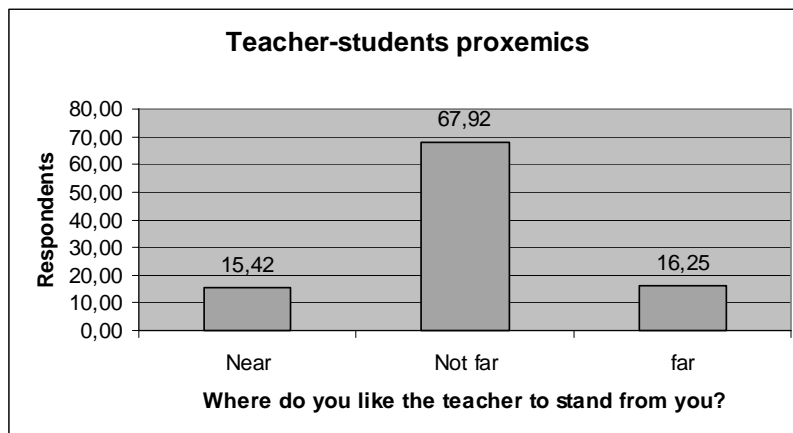


Figure 4

This might seem contradictory at first, but when they were interviewed, students said that they like the teacher to be close to them so as to make them feel that he/she is interested in what they do, and also to answer their inquiries. But they do not like to be

too close because they often like to exchange comments and jokes that they do not want him/her to hear. Closely related to proxemics is the teacher's movement in the classroom. As mentioned earlier, in order to achieve teacher's visibility and class coverage, the teacher needs to move around the classroom. Concerning their reaction to the teacher's movement in the classroom, students were asked two questions. The first is "Do you like the teacher to move around the classroom?" And the second is "How often do you like the teacher to move around the classroom?" The following graph shows that the majority of respondents like the teacher to move around the classroom, but the frequency of the teacher's movement should not distract them. This is certainly why most of the respondents answered question two with 'sometimes'.

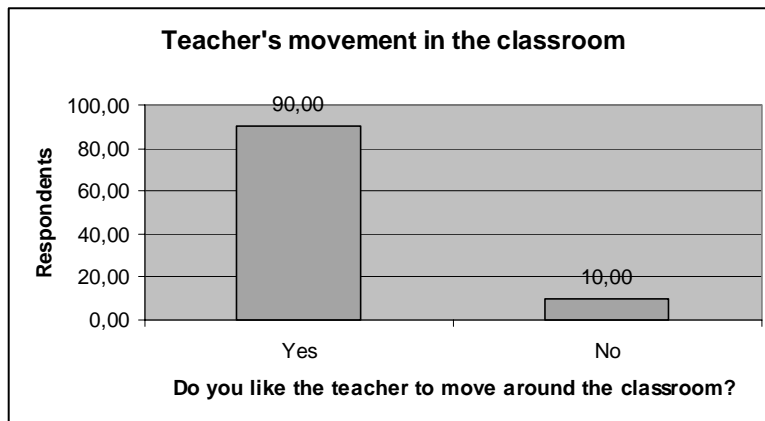


Figure 5

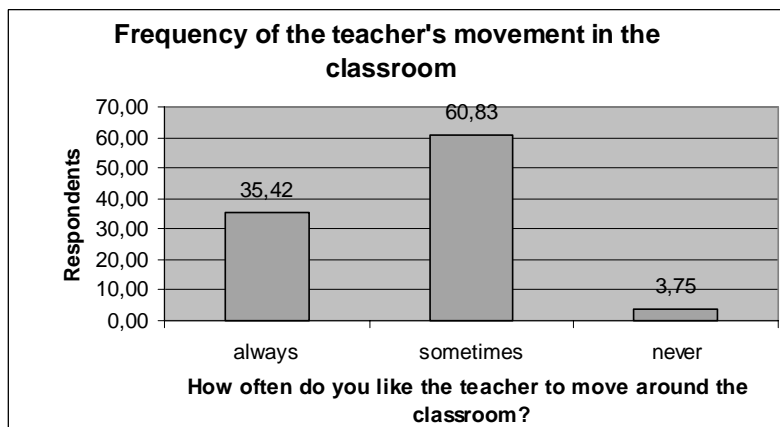


Figure 6

2.3.2: Seating arrangement

The physical arrangement of the classroom is considered an important variable in the teaching-learning process, because each activity requires a particular seating arrangement. For example, the seating for a test is usually different from that of a communication-based activity, and is different from the seating for a lecture. The seating arrangement is not done at random, but some rational is supposed to be behind the choice of one arrangement instead of the other. Different options are available for the EFL teacher, who is supposed to choose one arrangement depending on a number of variables. The first of these variables is the nature of the activity to be carried out. The second is the role that the students are supposed to play in the activity. The last, but not least, is the kind of students involved in the activity. These variables will be clarified further when dealing with the types of seating arrangements. What we should bear in mind here is that there is not one possible arrangement for the classroom. If one arrangement works for an activity, it may not suit another activity. And if it suits one type of students, it may not necessarily suit other types of students. It is only the variables mentioned that dictate the kind of arrangement to be used. More interesting is the fact that the teacher may work with different seating arrangements in one class. In general, four arrangements are recognized and used by EFL teachers.

1. Desk rows

This is the traditional seating arrangement adopted in many schools for a number of reasons. In this arrangement, all the students' desks are arranged in a way that they



all face the teacher. This is a perfect arrangement for testing because it minimizes talk between students and obliges each student to work individually. It is also suitable for classes in which the objective is that students receive the same instructions but perform

individually. Moreover, it enables the teacher to have full control of his/her class, since it minimizes the students' non-productive talk. Notwithstanding, this kind of arrangement does not allow interaction between students nor does it suit communicative tasks or activities.

2. Semi-circle

Some would call it a 'horseshoe arrangement' because it resembles the shape of a horseshoe. This arrangement is ideal for classroom discussion and community learning. It gives the teacher a full access to his/her students and vice versa. It enables



students to share work and information. However, this is not a suitable seating arrangement for testing, except if the teacher designed two or three tests for the same class. Among the advantages of this seating arrangement is that students are treated equally. There is no front seat or back seat.

One variation of this arrangement is the full circle which does not differ much from the first arrangement.

3. Pairs

It is the type of arrangement that is used in most Moroccan public classrooms. In this arrangement, each pair of students share one desk. This works a lot when the objective is pair learning. It enhances cooperation between students, and sometimes it



encourages competition. This arrangement shares some characteristics with the first arrangement, desk rows, since all the pairs face the board and teacher. Again, this arrangement is not perfect for testing because classmates are accessible. One remark

about this type of arrangement concerns who should sit next to whom. Or, is it the teacher who decides who should sit with whom or the students? Normally, students choose their partners, but in some cases, especially when there is too much disruptive behaviour, the teacher takes this decision.

4. Table rows or groups

This can be done with groups of four or more. Students in each group should necessarily face each other. Teachers opt for this arrangement when their aim is group discussion or group work. The problem with this type of



arrangement is that it cannot be implemented in large classes.

In this study the students' reaction to three of these seating arrangements is measured. The students were asked to choose the arrangement they like from the three types, namely the pairs, the table rows, and the circle. The choice of these is due to the fact they are the most known in the Moroccan schools.

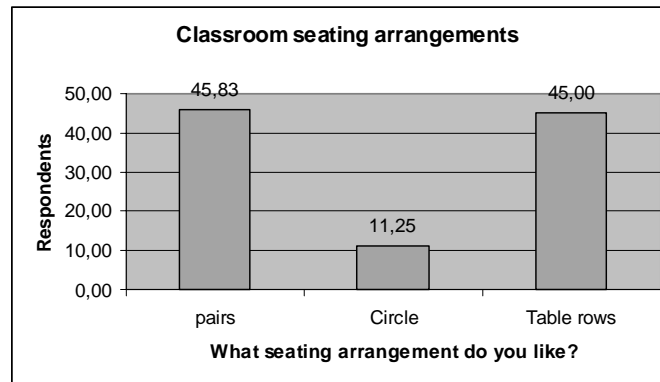


Figure 7

The results showed that students favour either the pairs or table rows, but not many opted for the circle. This is due to a number of reasons, among which is the fact students do not want to have a permanent eye contact with the teacher, especially when they do not have an answer to his/her questions. More important is the fact that students are not accustomed to this arrangement at school.

Section Four: Eye contact and facial expressions in the classroom

Eye contact and facial expressions are two media of nonverbal communication that are important for an effective classroom interaction. They can have several functions as far as classroom management is concerned.

2.4.1: Eye contact

One might argue that eye contact is an essential means of nonverbal communication used in the classroom, because the first thing that the teacher and students do before starting any lesson is to look at each other. This exchange of eye contact establishes a kind of background for later communication. Three major functions can be attributed to eye contact in the classroom. The first function is

comprehension checking. Thus, an effective way the teacher can check students' comprehension is through eye contact, especially if it is combined with eyebrow movements. Asking students, especially beginners, "Do you understand?" does not seem a good idea since even if they did not understand, most of them would answer "Yes". In this case eye contact can be an efficient way to check comprehension. Usually, students, involuntarily, tend to raise their eyebrow when they understand what is being explained. However, when they lower their eyebrows they give sign that they did not understand. In addition, students tend to maintain eye contact when they do not understand, and drop it when they understand. This fact is corroborated by the findings of this study. Students were asked when they look at the teacher, and the majority answered "When I want to understand" (see the figure 8 bellow). This means that as long as the students maintain eye contact, they do not understand. But when they divert their eye contact, they usually give a sign of comprehension. One important point that is worth mentioning here is that eye contact alone is not a valid measure to check comprehension. It should be combined with the eyebrow movement to get the proof of comprehension.

Apart from comprehension checking, eye contact can also serve to motivate students and maintain their interest. The teacher, like any other public speaker, needs to maintain the interest of his audience until the end of the session. Most students feel

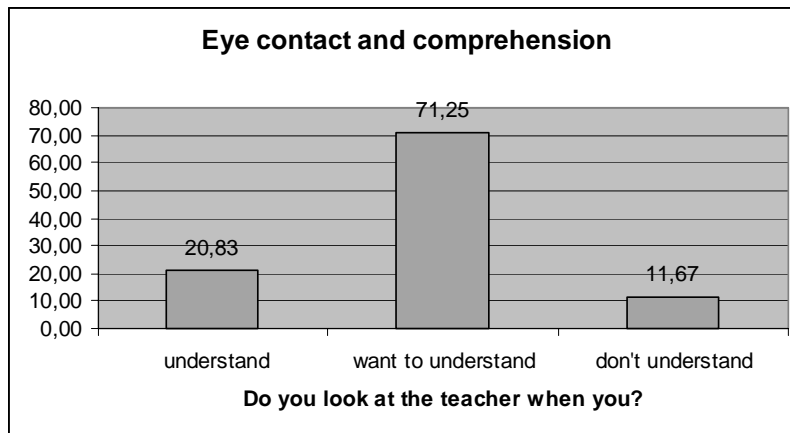


Figure 8

motivated when the teacher looks at them. Of course, eye contact should not be permanent since this would make the student embarrassed. Respondents said that they

like the teacher to look at them sometimes but not always (see figure 9). When asked to justify their answers, some students said that they do not like the teacher to look at them when they are involved in a task or talking with their classmates. This will be elaborated more in the last function of eye contact.

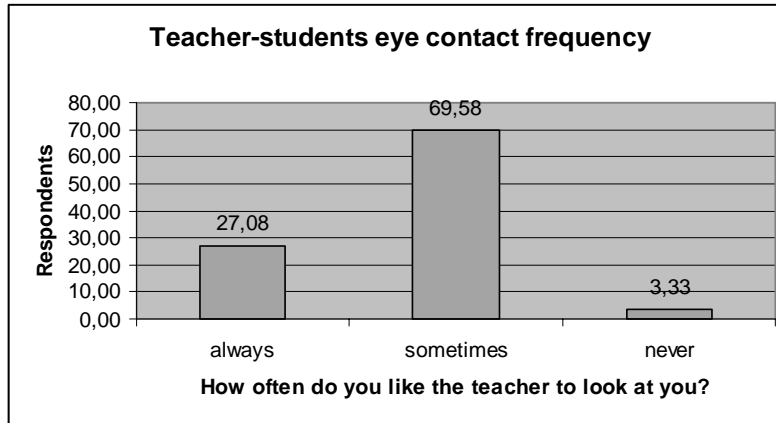


Figure 9

Closely related to comprehension checking is the fact that students like to answer questions when the teacher looks at them. Students normally want the teacher to be interested in their answers, and they also expect feedback from him (see figure 10). The last, but not least, function is class control. In any classroom students are supposed to be occasionally disruptive, that is why the teacher needs to control this behaviour implicitly and make the absent-minded students follow. Eye contact can be used to tell a student that he is making too much noise, or make him stop behaving inappropriately. A stare combined with a frown would certainly do the job.

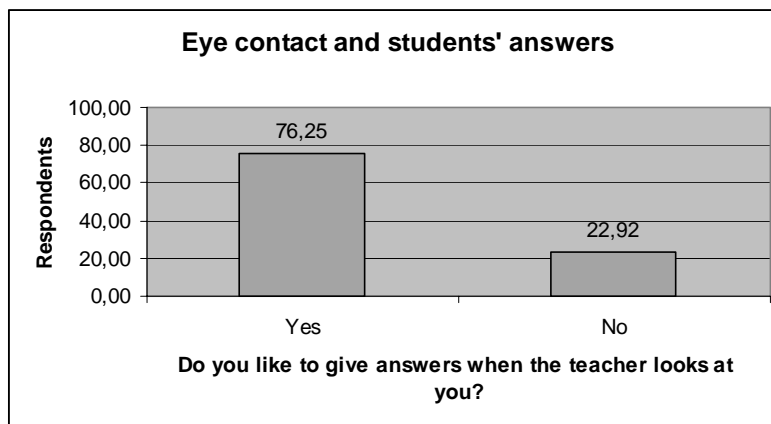


Figure 10

2.4.1: Facial expressions

Closely related to eye contact is the medium of facial expressions. It is probably the richest medium, given the wide variety of expressions that a person can produce through the configuration of the facial muscles. There seems to be a consensus about the fact that the affective aspect is essential in language learning. This aspect is usually reflected in the degree of motivation in the students. To put it in simple terms, the students' feelings and emotions, and the teacher's as well, are very important variables in the teaching-learning process. Many students fail to learn a language because of a negative attitude towards a teacher. The face is considered an outlet for the individual's feelings, and one can hardly prevent his feelings from showing on his/her face. Thus, the teacher's facial expressions should normally be encouraging for the students, since it is the effective way to make them learn. Just as the teacher detects his/her students' attitudes and mood through their faces and eyes, the students tend to do the same. The last question that respondents were asked in this study was: Do you know the teacher's mood from his/her speech, gestures or facial expressions? The majority of respondents answered: from his/her facial expressions.

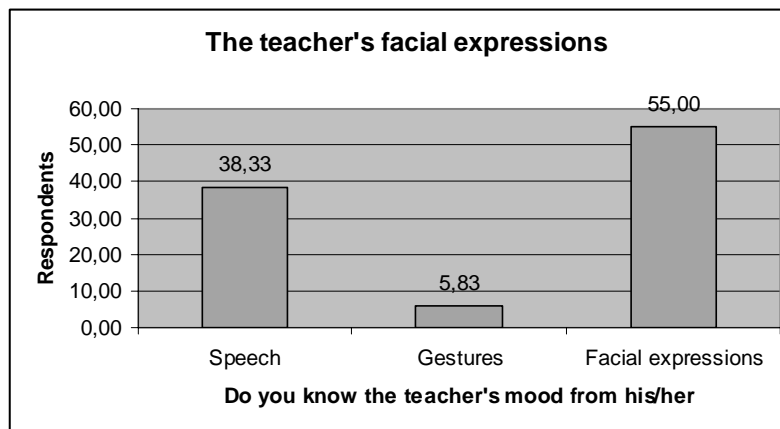


Figure 11

The statistics above show that the majority of students detect the teacher's mood from his facial expressions more than from his gestures or even speech. This implies that even if the teacher tries to feign feelings or pretend to be interested, when he/she is

not, the students are more likely to find out. This also implies that teachers should be aware of the effect of their facial expressions on their students. They can either make or mar their learning progress.

Section five: Implications

Throughout this paper, nonverbal communication in the EFL classroom was the central concern of analysis. After analysing the data collected, it was possible to confirm the two hypotheses set at the beginning. The first hypothesis was that teacher-students interaction is based a great deal on nonverbal communication. This seems to be supported by a number of facts. One of these is that teacher's nonverbal communication helps beginner students understand well. Also, students tend to behave nonverbally to communicate understanding and show attitude towards the teacher or their learning. The second hypothesis was that nonverbal communication can improve teaching and enhance learning, if it is used instructively. This is corroborated by the different findings of the study which seem to give insights into how nonverbal communication should be used to improve one's teaching and help the learner's progress. Examples of these findings are the appropriate way to point to students, the way students behave when they do not understand, the medium of explanation through which students understand well, the way students like the teacher to explain the lesson, the appropriate frequency of the teacher's movement in the classroom, and the most suitable seating arrangements for beginners' classrooms. A set of implications can be drawn from these findings for the purpose of improving the teaching practice and the learning process. These implications concern mainly two parties, the practicing teachers and the teacher trainers.

2.5.1: Implications for the practicing teachers

This study can be useful for the practicing teachers because, after all, they participated in it actively. The findings may be of relevance to them in four ways.

- 1.* They make them aware of the intricacies of nonverbal communication, which they usually take for granted. This awareness will certainly make to use nonverbal communication more instructively. For example, teachers may start giving

attention to the way they use gestures, proxemics, eye contact, and facial expressions in the classroom.

2. Awareness of nonverbal communication will also encourage teachers to develop their professionalism. Thus, they are expected to use nonverbal communication in the classroom to give feedback, to motivate learners, and have a good classroom management. All these professional qualities can be fostered by the positive use on nonverbal communication.
3. Before collecting data, the assumption was that students favour the circle seating arrangement in the classroom. However, the results of the study revealed proved that this seating arrangement is the one that students like less. This will be useful for teachers in that they should never make assumptions, and that they should always check their ideas against genuine data, in order to improve their teaching.
4. The last but not least benefit that that teachers can get out of this study is the fact that EFL beginners are very affective about learning. This means that their attitudes about the teacher, the target language, or the way of learning are based more on their emotions and feelings. This implies that the teacher should pay special attention to this aspect and make use of it when motivating, giving feedback, or teaching new language items.

2.5.2: Implications for teacher trainers

The people in charge of training future EFL teachers can also benefit from this study and its findings. Three main implications can be stated in this regard.

1. Teacher trainers are invited to make their trainees aware of the importance of nonverbal aspect of communication in the EFL classroom either in lectures or practical training. Not only that, but trainee should be encouraged to conduct research in this field to prepare themselves for their future carrier.
2. Related to the first implication is the fact that nonverbal communication should be taken into consideration in the practical training that future teacher undergo. As a matter of fact, some special activities should be implemented to improve the nonverbal communicative abilities of the trainees. For example, some acting sessions or role plays may be used to achieve a good use of nonverbal communication.

Conclusion

In this paper I was trying to present solid arguments to support the two main hypotheses set at the beginning. To state them once again, the first one was that most of the interaction between teacher and students in a beginners' EFL classroom is carried out through nonverbal media. The second hypothesis was the assumption that nonverbal communication can help improve both the teaching practice and learning process. Most of the findings seem to confirm these two hypotheses. Though the study achieved most of its objectives, some limitation could not be avoided. The first one was that the data collected would have been richer and more relevant if video recording was used, because the researcher cannot depend on memory alone, or on note taking, since what is studied is a visual phenomenon. The second limitation is related to the respondents of the study. All the respondents were my own students. Being given a questionnaire by ones teacher puts some burden on the respondent and makes him/her quite embarrassed. I would have liked to work with other students to make the results more objective and valid. The third limitation concerns the interviews. Only a couple of interviews were done with both teachers and students. The number of these interviews is thought to be insufficient to elicit data. So, it would have been more beneficial if more students and teachers were interviewed, but this was not possible because of time constraints. The fourth limitation is related to two variables which could not be prevented. One is gender and the other is the level of the students. By the first I mean that the findings did not discriminate male students from females. And the second means that good students are thought to have some different points of view from the less good ones, and this should normally be taken into account. In spite of all these limitations, which we hope future studies will take into

consideration, the study managed to bring some valuable contributions to the domain of teaching and learning.