

A SOCIO-PRAGMATIC APPROACH
TO NONVERBAL COMMUNICATION
WITH REFERENCE TO THE FORMAL CLASSROOM SETTING

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I. Introduction

The main purpose of the article has been to carry out an analysis of nonverbal communication from the perspective of the two sociological theories: the Social Exchange Theory and the Social Impact Theory, and in the context of teacher-student interaction, with English as both a target language and a language of instruction.

In the article the following assumptions have been presented:

1. The effectiveness of teaching a foreign language (for example, English) depends, among other factors, on nonverbal communication accompanying verbal communication and also taking place in the classroom context.
2. The individual teacher's skill of perceiving the student's use of nonverbal elements (signals) together with verbal messages co-decides about successful didactic communication.
3. Nonverbal immediacy of the teacher has an impact on the learning process.
4. The greater is the impact of the teacher's use of nonverbal elements in the didactic process, the more effective are the general results of learning a foreign language.

II. Multi-factor model of communication in the formal classroom setting

Communication which takes place in the teaching – learning process very much resembles natural communication (i.e. not artificial). One may look at it from the point of view of communication models proposed by researchers such as Lasswell (1948), Shannon and Weaver (1949), Schramm (1954), Gerbner (1956), and Meyer-Eppler (1959). One may quite safely posit that communication in the formal classroom setting

is more complex than one may assume, for it not only involves interaction between the teacher and the student but also between the communicative environment and the didactic material. Figure 1. shows a multi-factor model of communication which takes place in the formal classroom setting.

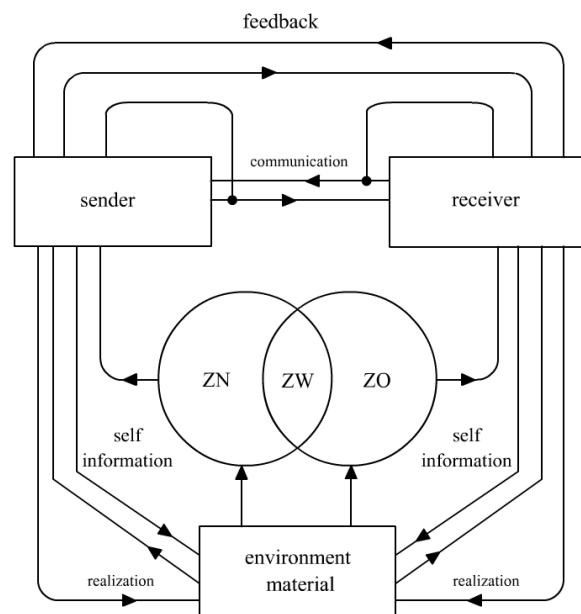


Figure nr 1

Where:

ZN – the sender's lexicon

ZW – lexicon mutual for the sender and the receiver

ZO – the receiver's lexicon

Self-information – information gained about the environment

Realization – action on the environment

This model suggests that the most important factor of the whole communicative process which takes place in a classroom setting is the teacher - student interaction. The interaction has a character of input/intake, in this case relating to a foreign language, e.g.

foreign language acquisition (Krashen 1981, 1982). Krashen's input hypothesis tries to identify what it is that makes input comprehensible (or incomprehensible) to the learner, as well as identify its role in the language-learning process. Of particular interest has been the effect of the input that is provided to the learners, the interactions which the learners engage in, and how the input and interactions facilitate comprehension and foster a foreign language acquisition process. Bearing it in mind, we can state that the acquisition of a foreign language is enhanced thanks to nonverbal behaviors of a language instructor. Thus, foreign language acquisition also takes place due to appropriate nonverbal information, that is, input from the teacher as an adequate element of the process of social exchange. I will evaluate this process later on in this article.

III. Nonverbal communication in the light of the Social Exchange Theory and the Social Impact Theory

The human actions serve specific purposes. Therefore, human behaviors can be weighed in terms of particular aims. Nonverbal communication, although it differs from consciously generated verbal communication, also subordinates the principle of realization of human aims. In that sense we may talk about nonverbal communication as subservient to the aim. Thus, in the communicative act, nonverbal behaviors are assumed to serve in exchanging information as a form of social exchange.

III.1. Nonverbal communication in the light of the Social Exchange Theory

The phenomenon of social exchange is fully described by the Social Exchange Theory proposed by Thibault and Kelly (1952). The theory analyses the social process as an exchange of rewards and costs an individual gains or expects to gain from his/her interaction partner. According to this theory, social exchange e.g. a communicative act, is a mutual action where two or more participants strive to minimize costs and maximize rewards and then base the likeliness of developing a relationship with someone on the perceived possible outcomes. When these outcomes are perceived as benefits, interlocutors disclose more information and develop a closer relationship with the communicator. A simple formula is proposed in this respect:

$$\text{BEHAVIOR (PROFIT)} = \text{AWARDS OF INTERACTION} - \text{COST(S) OF INTERACTION}$$

The theory is of a humanistic nature and it refers to gaining acts of rewards during which the interlocutors offer each other help, advice and acceptance. It is a reciprocal action and it is accomplished without consciously negotiating knowledge and without knowing whether a given reward will be returned or not. In interactions rewards are those elements which are positively implemented (e.g. happiness, love, loyalty, self-acceptance), whereas costs are those elements in the interaction which have a negative value for an agent taking part in a social exchange (e.g. time, energy, attention).

In the light of the social exchange theory, it is assumed that nonverbal communication also takes place in the social exchange process, and that it has positive

or/and negative features. Those features are looked upon through universal (global) categories of interlocutors' feelings. The positive aspect of nonverbal communication engages feelings of happiness, enthusiasm, excitement and, above all, interest in further interaction. The negative aspect of nonverbal communication, on the other hand, engages the opposite feelings, the feeling of sadness, discontent, tension, and it generally causes the lack of further interest in communication.

Nonverbal communication in the process of social exchange also includes "awarding" and/or "punishing" stimuli which each member of an interaction sends or receives depending on the communicative context, and also depending on the interlocutor's awareness of their power of the influence. Additionally, actors taking part in a given social exchange strive to maintain mental comfort of the relationship through positive nonverbal behaviors, the so-called 'nonverbal immediacy'. The concept of immediacy was first advanced by Mehrabian (cf. Wiener and Mehrabian 1968). The concept was described as: "People are drawn toward persons and things they like, evaluate highly, and prefer; they avoid or move away from things they dislike, evaluate negatively, or do not prefer" (Mehrabian 1971:1). In other words, nonverbal immediacy is the degree of perceived physical or psychological closeness between the individuals involved in the process of social exchange.

III.2. Nonverbal communication in the light of the Social Impact Theory

Nonverbal communication has a great impact both on the reception of actors taking part in the communicative process as well as on the transmission of the message. It is usually an unintentional and at the same time unconscious process. Although in the classroom setting the use of nonverbal elements ought to be a rational process and thus the teacher should be fully aware of their power of impact. However, we all know that the social impact is a mutual process; thus both parties of a communicative act influence each other through the use of nonverbal behaviors.

Mehrabian's (1971) research shows that:

- 7% of meaning is contained in the words that are spoken,
- 38% of meaning is paralinguistic (the way that the words are said), and
- 55% of meaning is contained in facial expression.

Birdwhistell (1970) has carried out similar research where he has observed that 65% of a message is conveyed nonverbally and only 35% has meaning located in the verbal modality. In the light of the above findings, it is crucial to emphasize that nonverbal communication has a great impact on every communicative act, including communicative acts which take place in a formal classroom setting, particularly in a language teaching context.

The above can help us to formulate the following dependencies and statements:

1. Each nonverbal behavior influences the participants of a given communicative act in either a positive or negative way.

2. The more positive are the nonverbal elements which take part in a verbal message, the more effective the message is and the greater is its impact on a particular member of a communicative act.
3. We are more prone to listen to the communicators who use positive and immediate nonverbal elements.
4. We are more prone to listen to those communicators whose influencing powers are greater.
5. The greater are the influencing powers, the better we are as communicators.

IV. Teaching and learning in the context of nonverbal communication as forms of social exchange and social impact

There is no doubt that communicative acts with the use of vocal-auditory modality are accompanied by nonverbal behaviors. Despite that, teachers very often underestimate the role of nonverbal elements in their teaching practices. What is more, these elements can provide very meaningful information about students and/or about teachers themselves. During a language class, teachers (i.e. instructors) scrutinize the linguistic elements of a student's discourse forgetting that communication is multi-channeled and that it does not utilize a single modality. Von Raffler-Engel (1980) observed that "man communicates both verbally and nonverbally and (...) the total message lies in the combination of the two modalities". She also asserts that in order to reduce communication "to the sole channel of verbalization is not communicating in full". The formal classroom setting is an example of such communication. Thus, it is crucial to look at the teacher – student interaction as a form of social exchange combining two modalities, as well as to look at how students evaluate communication where the teacher puts more effort to his/her nonverbal message.

The acquisition of a foreign language focuses on gaining specific skills in the context of social exchange, acquisition is never context free. In that sense, we learn 'something' in order to be able to exchange it socially. Acquisition is said to help to establish cooperation between interlocutors, and each cooperation is based on two rules which guarantee the existence of social exchange, namely:

1. "I am right"
2. "I want to be liked".

Thus, these two rules while used interchangeably, force members of a given social exchange to certain forms of negotiation and openness to each other.

V. The research methodology

The present study was aimed at two groups: teachers and students of English as a foreign language. The study was conducted at two universities, the University of Nijmegen, Holland and Adam Mickiewicz University, Poznań, Poland. In the research,

an equal number of participants took part: 40 teachers (20 teachers from Holland (5 men, and 15 women), and 20 teachers from Poland (4 men and 16 women), and 40 students (20 students from Holland (2 men and 18 women), and 20 students from Poland (4 men and 16 women)). The average age of the students was 21,8 years, and the average age of the teachers was 36,8 years. Additionally, the average years of learning English was estimated (9,05), and the average number of years of teaching English was 11,7.

The research was conducted with the help of a questionnaire which gathered information on:

- self-evaluation of nonverbal elements of teachers and students,
- evaluation of student's nonverbal elements by teachers,
- evaluation of teacher's nonverbal elements by students,
- self-awareness of the existence of nonverbal communication both in the teachers and students.

V. The analysis of the material

V.1. The perception of nonverbal behaviors

The first task directed to the respondents was to find out whether the nonverbal behaviors are perceived as pleasant, neutral or unpleasant. In the questionnaire for both groups, teachers and students were asked to answer a question connected with perception of nonverbal elements. The question was: "Do you perceive nonverbal behaviors as only pleasant, neutral or only unpleasant?"

Teachers perceived nonverbal behaviors in 90% as neutral (see Table nr 1 and Figure nr 2).

Only pleasant	7,50%
Neutral	90%
Only unpleasant	2,50%

Table nr 1

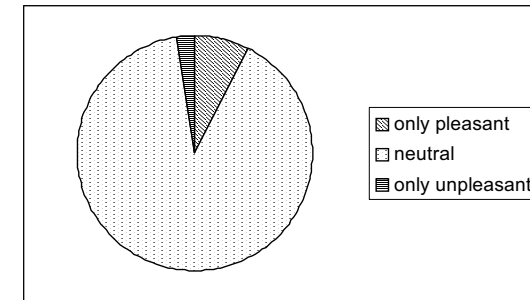


Figure nr 2

Whereas, students perceived nonverbal elements mainly as neutral behaviors (72,5%) and also as pleasant (27,5%) (see Table nr 2 and Figure nr 3).

Only pleasant	27,50%
Neutral	72,50%
Only unpleasant	0,00%

Table nr 2

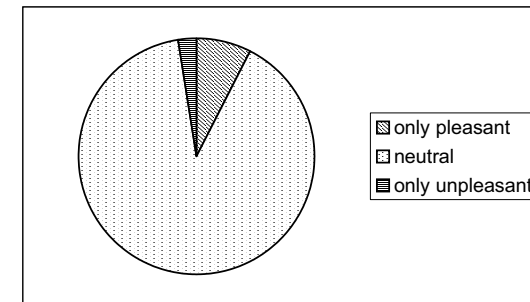


Figure nr 3

V.2. Nonverbal communication in the formal classroom setting

The main question of the research project was connected with the perception of particular nonverbal behaviors in the formal classroom setting from the point of view of

two researched groups – teachers and students. All nonverbal behaviors were arranged into the following six categories: body posture, gestures, facial expressions, eye contact, voice and intonation, and personal distance.

V.2.1. The teachers' nonverbal communication in the formal classroom setting

Below are presented nonverbal elements teachers favor most and least in their students' communicative behavior:

(A) Body posture

Nonverbal behavior:	Pleasant	Neutral	Unpleasant
Sitting posture	35%	65%	0
Walking posture	12,50%	57,50%	30%
Relaxed posture	52,50%	42,50%	5%
Tensed posture	0	7,50%	92,50%

Table nr 3

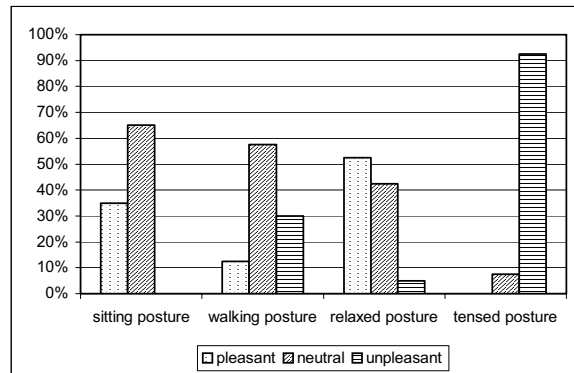


Figure nr 4

It follows from the above that teachers prefer relaxed (52,5%) and sitting body posture (35%). On the contrary, tensed body posture (92,5%) is perceived very clearly as an unpleasant nonverbal element.

(B) Use of gestures

Nonverbal behavior:	pleasant	neutral	unpleasant
Use of the index finger	2,5%	42,5%	55%
Manual gestures	35%	60%	5%
Hand stroking a hand	2,5%	40%	57,5%
Touching the cheeks	5%	57,5%	37,5%
Arms crossed on the chest	0	40%	60%
Changing the body position on the chair	5%	77,5%	17,5%
Scratching the back of the head	2,5%	65%	32,5%

Table nr 4

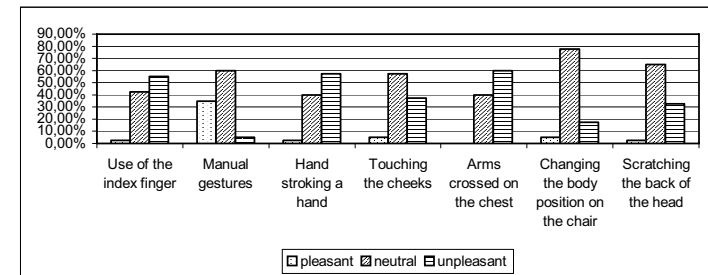


Figure nr 5

It is evident that manual gestures made up 35% of pleasant nonverbal behaviors of the total researched population of teachers. The teachers perceive arms crossed on the chest (60%) and hand stroking a hand (57,5%) as unpleasant nonverbal behaviors.

(C) Facial expressions

Nonverbal behavior:	pleasant	neutral	unpleasant
Brow movements	17,50%	62,50%	20%
Smile	90%	10%	0
Mouth tightened	0	22,50%	77,50%
Mouth wideopen	0	37,50%	62,50%
Wide open eyes	10%	50%	40%

Table nr 5

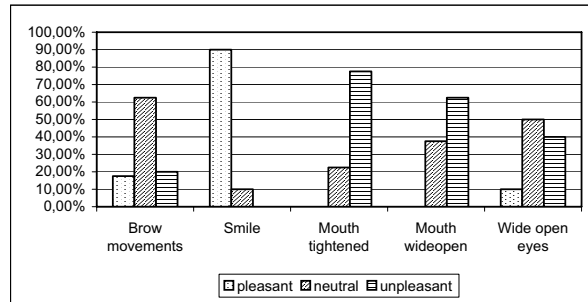


Figure nr 6

In the nonverbal category of 'facial expression', 90% of respondents perceived smile as the most pleasant nonverbal behavior, whereas mouth tightened (77,5%) and mouth wideopen (62,5%) were perceived as the most unpleasant behaviors.

(D) Eye contact

Nonverbal behavior:	pleasant	neutral	unpleasant
Frequent eye contact	80%	20%	0
Avoiding eye contact	0	7,50%	92,50%
Lack of eye contact	0	5%	95%
Dispersed gaze	0	22,50%	77,50%

Table nr 6

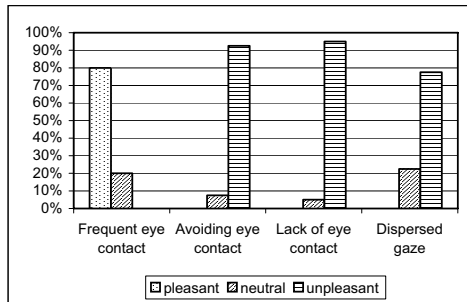


Figure nr 7

Frequent eye contact has been evaluated by the teachers in 80% as a pleasant nonverbal element, and the lack of eye contact in 95% was perceived as unpleasant. Therefore, the impact of nonverbal communication based on avoiding eye contact has been evaluated in a definitely negative way.

(E) Voice and intonation

Nonverbal behavior:	pleasant	neutral	unpleasant
Quiet voice	22,50%	32,50%	45%
Mild voice	60%	40%	0
Loud voice	17,50%	50%	32,50%
Monotone intonation	0	40%	60%
Rising intonation	22,50%	67,50%	10%
Falling intonation	10%	72,50%	17,50%
Rising-falling intonation	20%	72,50%	7,50%
Falling-rising intonation	17,50%	77,50%	5%

Table nr 7

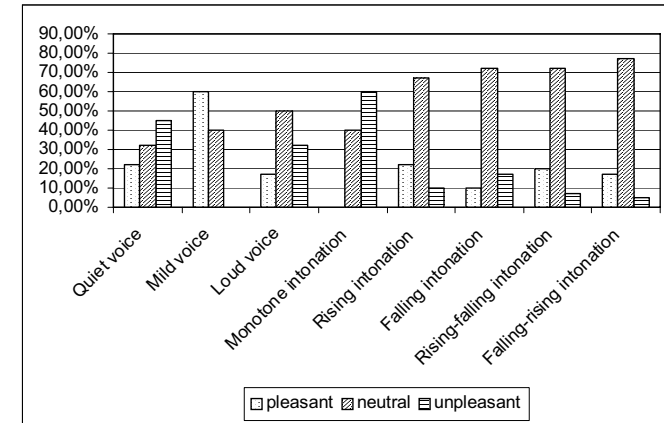


Figure nr 8

In this category the most preferred type of nonverbal behavior was the teacher's mild voice (60%), and the least preferred one was monotone intonation (60%).

(F) Use of personal distance

Four types of personal distance have been considered in the present study. Namely: intimate distance, defined as 0 - 45 cm; individual distance, defined as 45 cm - 1,2 m; social distance, defined as 1,2 m - 3,6 m; public distance, defined as 3,6 m - infinity.

Nonverbal behavior:	pleasant	neutral	unpleasant
Intimate distance	0	10%	90%
Individual distance	35%	45%	20%
Social distance	50%	50%	0
Public distance	22,50%	52,50%	25%

Table nr 8

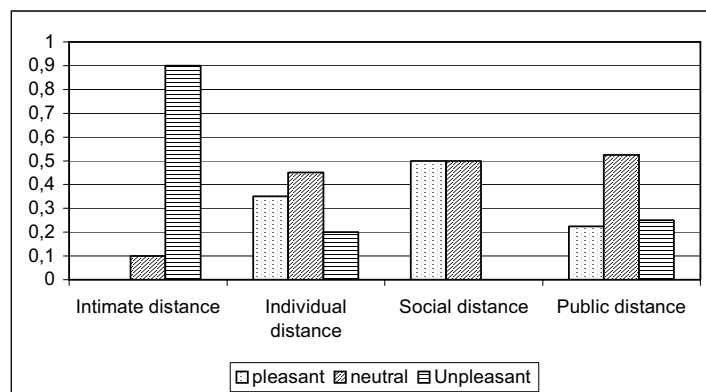


Figure nr 9

From the obtained results it follows that social distance (50%) has been perceived as the most pleasant nonverbal behavior, while intimate personal distance in 90% as the most unpleasant one.

To make all the findings more clear, they have been organized in the table showing the most valuable (i.e. most pleasant) behaviors and the least favored ones in the teacher-student interaction.

Positive type of nonverbal behavior in the formal classroom setting	The acceptance of the importance of the nonverbal behaviors in the communicative process in teacher-student dyad by the teacher
1. Smile	90%
2. Frequent eye contact	80%
3. mild voice	60%
4. relaxed body posture	52,5%
5. social personal distance	50%
6. sitting body posture	35%
7. manual gestures	35%
8. individual personal distance	35%
9. rising intonation	22,5%
10. quiet voice	22,5%
11. public personal distance	22,5%
12. rising-falling intonation	20%
13. walking body posture	12,5%
14. brow movement	17,5%
15. falling-rising intonation	17,5%
16. loud voice	17,5%
17. falling intonation	10%
18. wideopen eyes	10%
19. touching the cheeks	5%
20. changing the body position on the chair	5%
21. use of the index finger	2,5%
22. scratching the back of the head	2,5%
23. hand stroking a hand	2,5%
24. tensed body posture	0%
25. arms crossed on the chest	0%
26. mouth tightened	0%
27. mouth wide open	0%
28. avoiding eye contact	0%
29. lack of eye contact	0%
30. dispersed eye contact	0%
31. monotone intonation	0%
32. intimate personal distance	0%

Table nr 9

The above ranking may serve as a summing up of the findings related to the teachers' perception of nonverbal communication.

V.2.2. Students' nonverbal communication in the formal classroom setting

As indicated earlier in the paper, the second group of respondents was a group of students. They were asked to point out nonverbal behaviors of teachers which they may perceive as pleasant, unpleasant and neutral in the instructor's message.

(A) Body posture

Nonverbal behavior:	pleasant	neutral	unpleasant
Sitting posture	27,50%	52,50%	20%
Walking posture	40%	52,50%	7,50%
Relaxed posture	80%	12,50%	7,50%
Tensed posture	0	5%	95%

Table nr 10

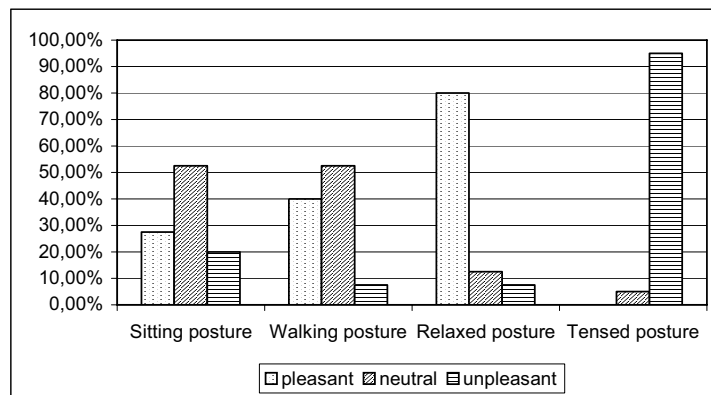


Figure nr 10

The above findings show that the students prefer the teachers' relaxed body posture (80%) and that they also perceive the teachers' walking posture as pleasant (40%).

(B) Use of gestures

Nonverbal behavior:	pleasant	neutral	unpleasant
Use of the index finger	15%	20%	65%
Manual gestures	65%	27,50%	7,50%
Hand stroking a hand	7,50%	45%	47,50%
Touching the cheeks	0	40%	40%
Arms crossed on the chest	0	47,50%	52,50%
Changing the body position on the chair	2,50%	60%	37,50%
Scratching the back of the head	0	47,50%	52,50%

Table nr 11

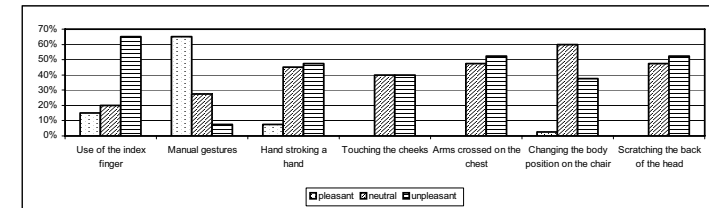


Figure nr 11

In the category of nonverbal behaviors 'Use of gestures', manual gestures used in the formal classroom setting by the teachers have been perceived as basically pleasant nonverbal elements (65%). Moreover, the use of the index finger has been perceived as unpleasant by 65% of the student population.

(C) Facial expressions

Nonverbal behavior:	pleasant	neutral	unpleasant
Brow movements	37,50%	45%	17,50%
Smile	85%	7,50%	7,50%
Mouth tightened	0	27,50%	72,50%
Mouth wideopen	0	30%	70%
Wide open eyes	0	32,50%	67,50%

Table nr 12

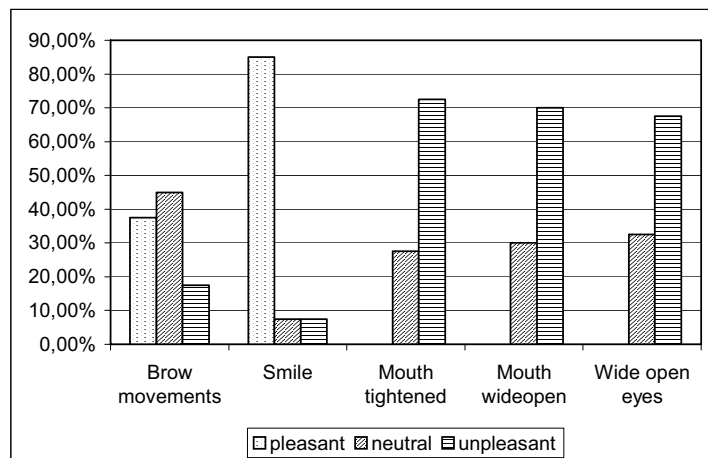


Figure nr 12

It follows that the teachers' smile has been perceived by researched students as a very clearly pleasant nonverbal element (85%). On the other hand, mouth tightened, mouth wideopen and wide open eyes were perceived as unpleasant behaviors, as shown in Fig. nr 12.

(D) Eye contact

Nonverbal behavior:	pleasant	neutral	unpleasant
Frequent eye contact	72,50%	22,50%	5%
Avoiding eye contact	2,50%	17,50%	80%
Lack of eye contact	0	12,50%	87,50%
Dispersed gaze	5%	20%	75%

Table nr 13

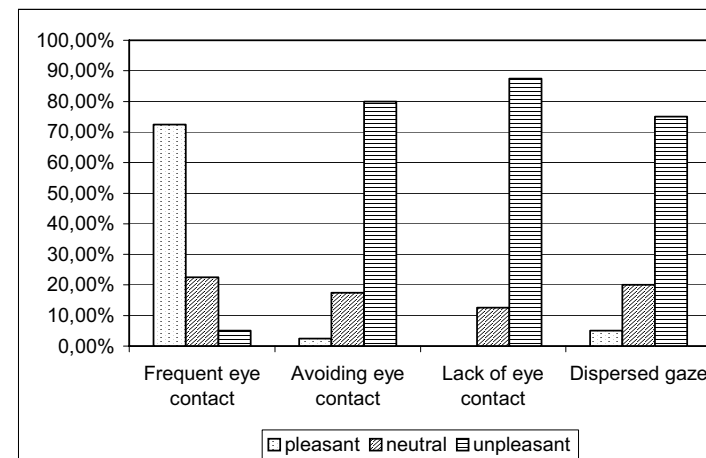


Figure nr 13

The teachers' frequent eye contact has been perceived by researched students as pleasant (75%). Thus, it has without any doubt a very positive impact on teacher-student classroom interaction.

(E) Voice and intonation

Nonverbal behavior:	pleasant	neutral	unpleasant
Quiet voice	10%	20%	70%
Mild voice	72,50%	22,50%	5%
Loud voice	35%	35%	30%
Monotone intonation	0	7,50%	92,50%
Rising intonation	25%	47,50%	27,50%
Falling intonation	15%	5%	35%
Rising-falling intonation	40%	52,50%	75%
Falling-rising intonation	30%	62,50%	7,50%

Table nr 14

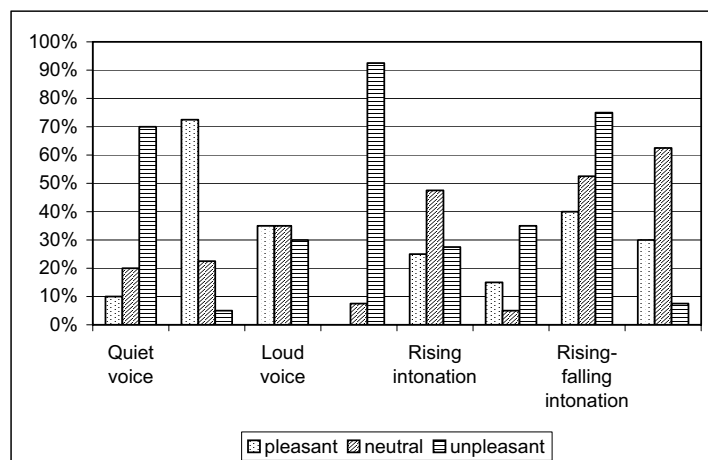


Figure nr 14

From the obtained results, it follows that mild voice has been perceived as the most pleasant nonverbal behavior in the voice and intonation category (72,5%). The result correlates with the results obtained from the researched teachers.

(F) Use of personal distance

Nonverbal behavior:	pleasant	neutral	unpleasant
Intimate distance	2,50%	12,50%	85%
Individual distance	35%	40%	25%
Social distance	77,50%	20%	2,50%
Public distance	32,50%	55%	12,50%

Table nr 15

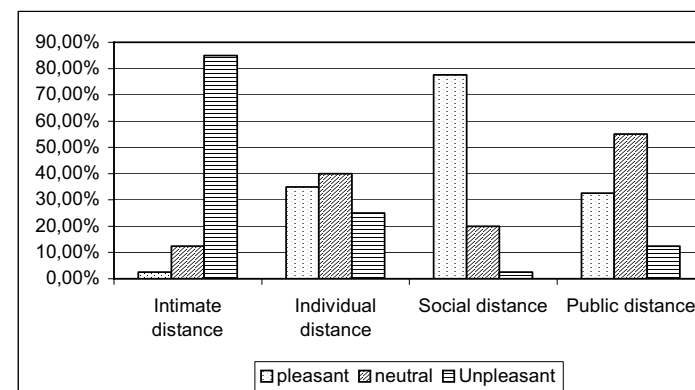


Figure nr 15

In the formal classroom setting students definitely prefer social personal distance (75,5%).

Again, to make all the findings more clear, they have been organized in the table which shows the most valuable (i.e. most pleasant) behaviors and the least favored ones in the student-teacher interaction.

Positive types of nonverbal behavior in the formal classroom setting	The acceptance of the importance of the nonverbal behaviors in the communicative process in teacher-student dyad by students
1. smile	85%
2. relaxed body posture	80%
3. social personal distance	77,5%
4. frequent eye contact	72,5%
5. mild voice	72,5%
6. manual gestures	65%
7. walking body posture	40%
8. rising-falling intonation	40%
9. brow movements	37,5%
10. loud voice	35%
11. individual personal distance	35%
12. public personal distance	32,5%

13. falling-rising intonation	30%
14. sitting posture	27,5%
15. rising intonation	25%
16. the use of the index finger	15%
17. falling intonation	15%
18. quiet voice	10%
19. hand stroking a hand	7,5%
20. dispersed gaze	5%
21. changing the body position on the chair	2,5%
22. avoiding eye contact	2,5%
23. intimate personal distance	2,5%
24. tensed body posture	0%
25. touching the cheeks	0%
26. arms crossed on the chest	0%
27. scratching the back of the head	0%
28. mouth tightened	0%
29. mouth wideopen	0%
30. wide open eyes	0%
31. lack of eye contact	0%
32. monotone intonation	0%

Table nr 16

V.3. The awareness of the existence of nonverbal behaviors in communication

Teachers and students were asked the same question concerning awareness of the existence of nonverbal communication. The question was: "Are you aware of the existence of nonverbal behaviors in communication?"

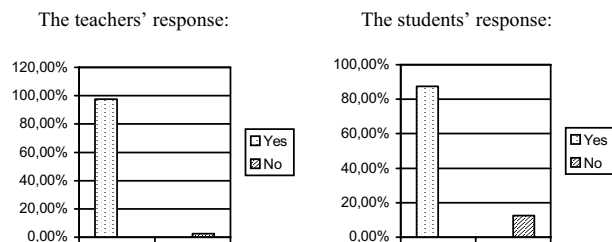


Figure nr 16

Figure nr 17

In 97,5% of the cases the teachers are aware of the existence of nonverbal elements (see Figure no 16). The researched students are aware in 87,5% of the existence of nonverbal behaviors (see Figure no 17). Thus, on the basis of the results obtained we can clearly conclude that both researched groups are strongly aware of the existence and importance of nonverbal behaviors in foreign language teaching practice as a form of the communicative process.

VI. Conclusions

The results obtained suggest that both nonverbal communication and verbal communication in a very clear way are subject to the law of social behavior which has been proposed in the light of the two sociological theories mentioned above. Both theories, that is, the theory of social exchange and the theory of social impact, have been shown to be vital both in the use and analysis of nonverbal communication which constitutes a part of social exchange. It has also been shown that they have gained clear support within applied linguistics, since they have emphasized their significant role in the teaching-learning process. In particular, the following conclusions may be proposed:

1. On the basis of the research conducted by means of a questionnaire for both groups: teachers and students concerning their awareness of the existence of nonverbal elements and their use in the didactic context, we may state that both groups are strongly aware of the existence of nonverbal behaviors in the communicative dyad 'teacher-student'. It means that communication in the formal classroom setting is not one-dimensional, that is, based only on verbal modality, but is clearly supported by various nonverbal elements used by both teachers and students.
2. From the point of view of the social exchange theory and the social impact theory the communicative relationship between teachers and students is seen as a process of mutual dependency and impact where the members depend on each other in order to gain profit in the form of a bilateral satisfaction. Under the circumstances, it simply means gaining success in teaching and gaining success in the form of effective learning.
3. Both groups which take part in the didactic process, exert a certain impact on each other. It means that the teacher's nonverbal communication supports his/her verbal message and the student's nonverbal communication helps the teacher perceive whether his/her message was effective.
4. In the formal classroom setting, both types of communication (that is, verbal and nonverbal) are an integral part of social exchange in the teacher-student dyad.
5. The obtained results show that both groups are aware of the existence of nonverbal communication in the didactic process. In particular, they have helped to acknowledge that:

- (a) nonverbal communication constitutes a significant element of the teachers' impact in the process of teaching and in the anticipation of profits which result in the progress of learning a foreign language by the students, and
- (b) the perception of the teachers' nonverbal communication by the students is a significant element of the students' progress which they make in the process of learning a foreign language. They are aware that these elements may help them to strengthen the teachers' verbal messages and at the same time help them in gaining success (profit) in the form of effective foreign language acquisition.
6. The nonverbal contribution teachers and students make to the classroom communication is highly valued; all nonverbal behaviors can be ranked on a scale "pleasant" (positive) – "unpleasant" (negative).
 7. An increased number of positive nonverbal elements used in the teacher's messages results in increased student affection towards the subject matter.
 8. Students who become motivated to learn a given subject matter because of the presence of positive nonverbal elements in the message, will be expected to continue to learn more effectively.
 9. The teacher who increases his/her message by saturating it with positive nonverbal elements, will be perceived as a more competent communicator and at the same time a more effective teacher.

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