

"A Study of Non- Verbal Codes in August Strindberg's *The Stronger* " Stylistic Study

**لغة الجسد في مسرحية " الاقوى " للكاتب اوغست ستريندبرغ
دراسة اسلوبية**

Asst.prof. Azhar Hassan

Asst.lec. Maali Abdulhussain

**Department of English, Kerbela University, College of Education for
Humanities, Iraq**

ABSTRACT:

Communication denotes all the ways used via human beings to convey information and integrate their feelings and emotions . In other words , it encompasses not merely verbal codes but also varieties of nonverbal forms which send enormous number of messages in an interaction. This paper is an analytical study of the body language in August Strindberg's play *The Stronger*. It explores how the body language in *The Stronger* operates with verbal expressions. By focusing on individual body parts, within the context of the play of course, the researchers try to explain the role these body parts play in communicating the thoughts, emotions, standpoints or attitudes of the characters. Consequently, interpreting the body language of the characters correctly, enables the audience to have an insight about the mental state of the characters. Although, *The Stronger* is written almost like a monologue said by Mrs. X , the reactions of Miss .Y, who uses only her body language, are an integral part to understand the women's mental problem in the play. Actually, it is an attempt to reveal how nonverbal signs have their own active impact in molding the characters and implementing successfully the interaction among them, developing the plot, and finally revealing the themes of the play.

Key Words : Nonverbal Codes , Body language , Non-Verbal Communication

الخلاصة:

يشير التواصل الى كل الطرق المستخدمة من قبل الكائنات الحية لنقل المعلومات و العواطف والاحاسيس فهي ، بكلمات اخرى ، تتضمن ليس فقط الرموز الكلامية ولكن ايضا مجموعة من الاشكال الغير كلامية التي تقوم بأرسال رسائل لا تعد في التواصل . ان البحث الحالي هو دراسة تحليلية للغة الجسد في مسرحية " الاقوى " للكاتب اوغست ستريندبرغ و يبين البحث كيفية تجانس لغة الجسد مع التعابير الكلامية بتلك المسرحية . من خلال التركيز على حركة اعضاء جسم شخصيات المسرحية وبضوء سياقها ، يحاول الباحثان شرح الدور الذي تلعبه تلك الاعضاء بنقل افكار ومشاعر ووجهات نظر الشخصيات وبالنتيجة فان التفسير الصحيح للغة الجسد يمكن الجمهور من فهم الحالة الفكرية لهم. على الرغم من حقيقة كون مسرحية " الاقوى " هي عبارة عن محاكاة الشخصية "السيدة اكس" لنفسها ، فان ردود فعل الانسة " الانسة واي " والتي تستخدم فقط لغة الجسد تعد جزء مكمل لفهم المشكلة الفكرية للنساء في تلك المسرحية . ان تلك الدراسة بالحقيقة هي محاولة لبيان كيف ان الرموز الغير كلامية تملك التأثير الفعال في تصميم الشخصية ،تحقيق التواصل بنجاح بين الشخصيات ، تطوير حبكة واحداث وبالتالي عكس افكار تلك المسرحية .

1- INTRODUCTION

Enormous number of communication studies have largely focused on language as it is the first means of communication that involves both sound and meaning. However, communicative means encompass verbal channel and varieties of non verbal forms as well .Verbal communication refers not only to the spoken or written transmitted messages but also to the behaviorally or visually ones .In this regard,[1] Johnstone (2008:208) argues that the articulatory organs and muscles are used to produce sound in face-to –face oral communication which in its turn converts to neural impulses via ear .The term ‘non verbal’ refers to all forms of the transmitted cues which are not purely linguistic in content. In their book “ Nonverbal Communication”, [2] Eisenberg and Smith (1971:20) mention that all communication which is not coded in words is known as non verbal one. Similarly, [3] Levine and Adelman (1982:43) support the attitude which states that people sometimes express more non verbally than verbally . To [4] Morreale, Sp ritzberg & Brage(2007:43), non verbal communication covers the physical behaviors that are commonly referred to as body language, gestures, use of voice , intonation , and use of space . [5] Knapp&Hall (2013:3) explain that during an interaction , messages carried by verbal forms account for no more than (30%) where as the rest is all conveyed through nonverbal means. In sociology, the mastery of nonverbal and verbal forms refers to strategic competence which is the second category of the communicative language along with language competence. Such fact reveals clearly the importance of non verbal communication. In reality , both verbal and non verbal communication are closely interconnected to the extent that they almost do not occur separately. That is , all verbal communication will relatively involve some non verbal cues such as hand gestures , eye movements , smile , etc. In our daily life , such non verbal cues accompany verbal expressions in almost any interaction .For instance, a person whose face seems sad may be considered as being lying when he utters that he is happy . However, in some cases , without the help of verbal forms a single non verbal form may convey no definite message .For example, a friend may feel angry when his close friend refuses to speak while his eyes are full of tears. The present paper is an analytical study of the dramatic work *The Stronger*. It highlights how nonverbal codes operate with verbal expressions in transmitting massive messages that reveal a lot about the two characters in the play and explore the active role played by these codes in the implementation of a successful interaction between them.

2- Literature Review

Verbal and Nonverbal Communication Systems

To obtain a deeper understanding of nonverbal communication , we can compare it with the verbal one. The interaction subject of verbal and nonverbal communication has been tackled by many linguists including Knapp &Hall (2013:12-17) who mention the ways of such interaction between the two. They argue that verbal communication , unlike the nonverbal one , is characterized by the rapid feedback resulted from the fast interchange of the message . Depending on understanding ,nonverbal communication takes time and hence it is comparatively slow. Additionally ,the absence of one of the parties at the place of communication is possible in verbal communication but it is not with nonverbal one. Further, the nonverbal communication ,in contrast to verbal one, lacks the conclusive evidence .In her article , [6] Zhan (2012:1621) mentions other differences in the light of grammaticality ,arbitrariness , and sense organs. First, Language is characterized by its tightly organization .That is , individual words are constructed in to a well – formed sentence according to specific grammatical rules .However, nonverbal codes cannot be

combined in the same way. There is no logical connection between sound and meaning in language and in this sense it is arbitrary. Though Nonverbal symbols, like the verbal forms, are chosen arbitrarily yet they are linked to the intended message. Zhan (ibid) mentions the act of pointing as an example. She argues that the way of pointing is arbitrary but the act itself is not as it differs from one culture to another. Some cultures point with fingers, other with lips or head. Lastly, different sense organs are used at the same time to receive the nonverbal cues for one can feel, see, and hear messages at the same time. In non verbal communication, on the other hand, one either sees written language or hears oral messages. Consequently, one may receive and comprehend two verbal messages simultaneously whereas different messages are received through nonverbal channels. Hence, verbal communication involves far fewer types of sense receptors.

Classification of Nonverbal Communication

Some studies like those conducted by [7] Augustine (1995), [8] Burrow (2002), [9] Zoric et al (2007), [10] Hahn et al. (2011) and Zhan (2012) deal with classification of nonverbal behaviors. According to Augustine (1995:1-7) and Burrow (2002: 1-2), the two types of nonverbal communication are the natural sign and the given one. The first kind is used by the living beings to convey something while the natural sign refers to those signs that signify something such as “smoke” which denotes “a fire”. Hahn et al (2011:21) show another categorization. They classify nonverbal communication into eight types: kinesics (body movement), haptics (study of touch), appearance (personal appearance, objects, and artifacts), proxemics (space), environment (room, automobile, office space), chronemics (time), paralanguage (vocal qualities), and silence. Other comprehensive categorization for nonverbal communication relates to Zhan (2012:1621). She mentions the following types: body language (movement of either the whole or part of body), paralanguage (pitch, turn taking, intonation, silence, volume), object language (clothes, furniture) and environmental language (crowdedness, proxemics, time, seating arrangement, lighting, color).

3- Methodology

3.1 The Tool

The only tool used in this paper is the text of August Strindberg's play *The Stronger*. The researchers intend to investigate merely the following nonverbal codes in August's play: **space, scene, head movement, eye contact, silence, and lip reading**.

3.2 The Procedure

The play is examined carefully to identify the non verbal cues and their various types such as space, scene, organs movements, eye contacts, silence, etc. Then, the selected non-verbal codes are explained with reference to specific quotations of the play that highly reveal the psychology as well as the emotions of the two characters available in the play.

4- Non- Verbal Codes in *The Stronger*

The Stronger is a quart d'heure play that revolves about one situation. Two women meet accidentally at a café in Christmas Eve. The two women are not given any meaningful names by the author, they are simply called Mrs. X and Miss. Y. Mrs. X is a married woman and Miss. Y is unmarried. The whole situation is no more than a single conversation by Mrs. X. Apparently, the two women knew each other before. The problem of Mrs. X is about her husband who has had an affair with Miss. Y in the past and now she has been given the chance to revenge. Although the speech of Mrs. X is very effective and loaded with bitter and hard feelings towards Miss. Y. Yet, Miss. Y never utters a word. The play demonstrates the power of the language body. The reader or the audience is easily getting the meaning and understanding the story despite the fact that Miss. Y is silent. The signals and the gestures are very enough for the audience to apprehend the play.

August Strindberg demonstrates a great capacity in understanding the human nature and his psychology state. He utilizes the whole situation to convey the message of his play. However, he relies greatly on non-verbal codes. Right from the beginning, the setting conveys much about Miss. Y. The place is “**A corner of a women’s café**” and Miss. Y “**is sitting at a table with a half-empty beer bottle on it; she is reading an illustrated paper, which she exchanges for others from time to time later on.**” Strindberg directly deals with the effect of territory which relates strongly to the body language. Robert Ardrey has written a great book titled *The Territorial Imperative* in which he proves that man, like animals, needs a shelter of territory around him to defend himself and to have some privacy. Dr. Edward T. Hall, professor of anthropology at North Western University, coined the word *proxemics* to describe “**man’s reaction to the space about him and how his spatial use communicates certain facts and**

signals to other men.” Dr. Hall believes that “**Man's use of space has a bearing on his ability to relate to other people, to sense them as being close or far away. Every man, he says, has his own territorial needs.**” Miss. Y, symbolically separates herself from other people by sitting far in the corner. She apparently has no inclination to mix with others. Moreover, Strindberg chooses the day of Christmas Eve for the meeting of the two women to emphasize the meaning of the scene. Although the occasion is blissful, Miss. Y does not seem happy. She is alone, sitting in one of the restaurant corners reading and drinking. Then, silently the audience will understand the message of the scene. Miss. Y passes some troubled times. When Mrs. X enters the café and meets Miss. Y, she confirms the situation, “**Hello, Amelia darling! You look as lonely on Christmas Eve as a poor bachelor.**” However, Ms. X sits at the same table with Miss. Y. of course, Mrs. X deliberately intends to violate the area that Miss. Y tries to keep for herself according to the theory of Robert Ardrey. Till the end of the play, Mrs. X reveals a basic move in body language or in non-verbal codes [11] (Pease, 2007 : 53).

Ordinarily, the audience would expect Miss. Y to have some conversation with Mrs. X. However, Miss. Y is content by only, “**looks up from her paper, nods and goes on reading.**” Clearly, the response of Miss. Y indicates her uneasiness and disturbance. However, Nodding plays an integral role in communication and encouraging the conversation. The listener is suggesting that she is paying attention to the speaker but she does not want to talk. Furthermore, keeping moveless without this nod, the speaker will think to cut the conversation as he realizes that the listener is not interested in the conversation. Generally speaking, head is universally used to mean “yes” or “no” or to greet someone, however there are other different meanings relating to different cultures, in India for example this signal is used differently [12] (Fast, 2002: 12). With the silence and nodding of Miss. Y, Mrs. X feels free to tell her problem.

Actually, conversation is not only what is said but also what is not said. Mrs. X does not ask Miss. Y to speak because she is able to understand the body language of Miss. Y. which of course tells the audience a lot about the character. When Mrs. X, who is severely injured by Miss. Y, reminds Miss. Y of her failure to make a family and tells her; “**you know what Amelia! I think you would have been better off if you had kept him! Remember I was the first one who told you to forgive him! Remember? You could be married and have a home.**”Miss.Y (gets a contemptuous look on her face) of course the eye contact is one of the effective way to communicate with others. Yet, not all gazes are friendly and amiable. Sometimes, the gazes look uncomfortable, critical, hostile or “contemptuous” as Miss. Y looks at Mrs. X. In fact, by looking “contemptuously” to Mrs. X, Miss. Y shows her disapproval and disagreement to what is said by Mrs. X. [13] (Kuhnke, 2007 : 56).

Miss. Y’s response with this gaze of contempt makes the audience believe that Mrs. X is not innocent too. To show that she is socially stronger than Miss. Y, because she is a married woman, Mrs. X, “**opens her basket and shows Miss. Y the Christmas gifts,**” she buys a doll for her daughter and a pistol for her son. Moreover, Mrs. X, “**takes out a pair of embroidered slippers,**”

which belong to her husband to make the situation worst. When Mrs. X displays the “slippers” she comments,

“ Do you see what small feet Bob has? See? And you should see how elegantly he walks! You’ve never seen him in slippers!(Miss. Y laughs aloud) look and you will see (She pretends to walk with the slippers on the table.)”

Again Miss. Y (laughs so it can be heard) and (laughs uproariously) Whatever the type of laugh is, “ a giggle, a snort, a snicker, or a good old fashioned hee-haw – the depth of the sound, where it is placed, and how much of it you allow to come out , indicate your mood and feelings.” In the case of Miss .Y , she laughs “ uproariously” which signifies that she laughs from her bottom and that as Elizabeth Kuhnke says “A person who laughs from his boots is willing to release. He’s not afraid to hold back. When he laughs, the world laughs with him.” Apparently, Miss. Y now is getting the chance to relief or freeing herself from some stress, surely Mrs. X caused her psychological pressure. Since Mrs. X is a married woman , this gives her much power over Miss. Y . Mrs. X intends to show Miss. Y how family and husband are essential in the life of any woman. But the meaning of the laughter of Miss. Y is getting closer to the fact when Mrs. X , angrily under the passive effect of the Miss. Y’s laughter on her, releases all the pain dwells in her breast. As if both women are now having their moment of truth but using different language to express themselves. [14] (Pease etal , 2006 : 34). Mrs. X is a mother and a wife who is ready to guard her family against any threats. She represents the traditional woman. She is the one who is allowed to speak about what is going on her mind. Mrs. X becomes nervous and agitated because the laughter of Miss. Y may mean that she is laughing at Mrs. X’s ignorance of the situation which of course makes Mrs. X bursts:

“what are you laughing at? Eh? Eh? And I know he is faithful to me, you see- yes I do know! He told me so himself. What are you grinning about? That when I was on that tour in Norway that nasty Frederique tried to seduce him- can you imagine?(pause) But I’d have torn out her eyes if she had come around when I was at home!(pause)...I don’t know why, but women are absolutely crazy about my husband. They must think he has something to say about contracts at the theatre because he’s in the office- Maybe you have been after him too!”

clearly, Mrs. X is suffering from a serious psychological problem. She is the women who should accept her traditional role in her patriarchal society. After Mrs. X accuses Miss. Y of being one of these women who;’ “ have been after him too,” (Pause they look to each other with embarrassment) and then Miss. Y (stares at Mrs. X with curiosity).

Again the look of curiosity of Miss. Y stimulates Mrs. X to say what is in her depths. When Miss. Y (**has an expression as if she wanted to speak**), Mrs. X refuses to allow her to say a word or defends herself, “ **Quiet! you don’t need to say anything-now I understand everything...that’s I had to wear your colors, read your authors, eat your favorite dishes, drink your drinks,...it is terrible! Everything came to me from you even your passions.**” Mrs. X is a broken woman deprived from her simplest rights to be a real human being. Mrs. X has to act in front of her husband the role of the happy wife; “**Maybe when all is said I’m the stronger right now...Thank you Amelia for teaching my husband how to make love.**”

Conclusion

Most of us know the proverb that says **actions speak louder than words**. In many cases we can communicate our ideas to others without even using a single word. Even when we communicate with each other verbally, our body language is very essential to accompany our speech; it reinforces and supports what we say. We believe that *the stronger* would have not been an interesting play lest the author made the two characters communicate verbally. The story of the play is very moving and unforgettable because of that witty interaction between the verbal and non-verbal communication. This harmony between the languages of the two women contributes a lot in revealing the psychological state, the deep emotional conflicts, points of view of the character. Miss Y’s and Mrs. X’s use of body language represented by head movement, eye contact, space, and lip reading makes the audience gain an accurate and deep intuitive understanding of them. This, in turn, gives a chance for the conversation between the two characters (Miss X and Mrs. Y) to continue smoothly and finally to develop the plot. Thus, body language has its own active role in shaping the character and exhibiting the themes of the play.

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