

## COMMUNICATIVE FUNCTIONS OF NONVERBAL UNITS IN THE SPEECH PROCESS: ANALYSIS AND CLASSIFICATION

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**Abstract:** Nonverbal communication units function as essential complements to verbal language, often providing additional layers of meaning or regulating the flow of conversation. This study aims to classify the communicative functions of nonverbal units within the speech process. Through discourse analysis of recorded dialogues and presentations, the study identifies primary roles such as emphasis, emotional expression, turn-taking, and contradiction. The classification system developed highlights the multifunctional nature of nonverbal elements and emphasizes their relevance in effective communication.

**Keywords:** speech process, nonverbal communication, function analysis, gesture classification, discourse.

### Introduction

While spoken words convey content, nonverbal units often convey emotion, attitude, and intent. Understanding how these units operate functionally within the speech process is essential for improving clarity, engagement, and rapport in both formal and informal communication contexts.

### Literature Review

Birdwhistell (1970) was among the first to assert that over 65% of communication is nonverbal. Ekman and Friesen's typology (1969) has become foundational in identifying gesture functions. McNeill (1992) introduced the idea that gestures form a unified system with speech rather than operating separately. Recent discourse-based studies have emphasized the regulatory and interactional nature of nonverbal cues (Kendon, 2004).

### Methods

This research applies a **mixed-methods approach**, primarily qualitative but supported by frequency-based quantitative data. The aim is to examine and classify the communicative functions of nonverbal units within various types of speech events.

#### 3.1. Research Design

A **functional discourse analysis** was conducted to observe and categorize the roles played by nonverbal units in real-time communication. The study emphasizes contextually grounded interaction.

#### 3.2. Data Corpus

The data corpus consisted of **40 recorded speech events**, including:

- 10 classroom lectures
- 10 job interview simulations
- 10 casual peer conversations
- 10 televised or online public speeches

Each sample lasted 3–5 minutes and involved speakers from diverse linguistic backgrounds (L1 English, Uzbek, Russian).

### 3.3. Annotation and Transcription

All recordings were transcribed using **multimodal annotation conventions** that marked:

- Kinesic signals (hand, arm, head, body gestures)
- Facial expressions (eyebrows, eye movement, mouth positioning)
- Paralinguistic cues (pauses, intonation patterns)

The transcription also included timestamps to capture the timing of gestures relative to verbal content.

### 3.4. Classification Framework

Nonverbal units were analyzed and categorized based on the **Ekman-Friesen five-function model**:

1. Emblems
2. Illustrators
3. Affect displays
4. Regulators
5. Adaptors

Functional coding was performed manually and reviewed with support from discourse analysis software (**ELAN** and **NVivo**) to ensure coding consistency and trace gesture-speech co-occurrence.

### 3.5. Validation and Reliability

Triangulation was used to ensure data validity:

- Comparison across different contexts (formal vs. informal)
- Peer review of gesture classification
- Participant feedback for accuracy in gesture interpretation

Inter-coder reliability was achieved through parallel coding by two analysts, reaching over **90% agreement** on gesture functions.

## Results

Five core communicative functions of nonverbal units were confirmed:

1. **Emphasis**: Stressing particular verbal points (e.g., fist when saying "very important").
2. **Emotional Display**: Displaying internal states (e.g., raised eyebrows = surprise).
3. **Regulation**: Managing turn-taking (e.g., hand raise = desire to speak).
4. **Illustration**: Depicting concepts (e.g., outlining size/shape with hands).
5. **Contradiction**: Disagreeing with verbal content (e.g., saying "I'm fine" while looking down).

Notably, regulatory gestures were most frequent in formal settings, while emotional and adaptor gestures were dominant in informal contexts.

## Discussion

Nonverbal units are deeply integrated into the speech process. They not only reflect speaker intent but also serve metacommunicative purposes—commenting on the communication itself. Misinterpretation of these cues, especially across cultures, can lead to breakdowns in communication. The multifunctionality of gestures underscores the need for multimodal competence in education and public speaking.

## Conclusion

Understanding the communicative functions of nonverbal units enhances both comprehension and expression in spoken discourse. Classifying these functions aids educators,

translators, and communicators in better adapting their strategies to audience needs. Nonverbal literacy should be taught alongside verbal skills in modern communication training.

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