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NONVERBAL MEANS IN VIRTUAL TEXTS

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Introduction. In contemporary communication, the rise of digital technologies and social media has fundamentally transformed the way people interact. While traditional face-to-face communication relies heavily on both verbal and nonverbal cues, computer-mediated communication (CMC) presents unique challenges and opportunities for expressing meaning. Nonverbal communication, which includes gestures, facial expressions, tone of voice, posture, and spatial behavior, plays a crucial role in conveying emotions, attitudes, and social relationships in interpersonal interactions. Studies suggest that 60-70% of human communication occurs through nonverbal channels, highlighting the importance of understanding these mechanisms in any communicative context.

In virtual environments, however, these nonverbal cues are largely absent, prompting users to adapt and develop alternative forms of expression. Written analogs such as emojis, emoticons, capitalization, punctuation, and onomatopoeic words serve as symbolic substitutes, allowing communicators to convey affective and pragmatic meanings. These digital representations of nonverbal behavior not only enhance the clarity of the message but also contribute to the richness of interaction in online discourse.[1]

This article examines the theoretical foundations and practical applications of nonverbal communication in virtual texts. It investigates how traditional nonverbal cues are transformed into textual forms, analyzes their semiotic and cultural dimensions, and explores their role in facilitating effective online communication. By studying these adaptations, the research aims to contribute to a deeper understanding of digital pragmatics, highlighting the ways in which emotions, intentions, and social cues are communicated in the evolving landscape of virtual interaction. For many years, linguists studying the phenomenon of speech focused mainly on words, that is, on verbal means of communication. However, in recent years, linguists have acknowledged the necessity of studying the nonverbal components of speech as well. Communication is not limited to words alone; it also includes gestures, facial expressions, body movements, eye contact, tone of voice, and other nonverbal cues.

In human interaction, nonverbal means play a crucial role in constructing meaning. Verbal speech does not always fully express the intended meaning; therefore, nonverbal means serve to fill semantic gaps during communication. In everyday speech, these are often referred to as gestures, while in scientific literature, they are treated as part of a broader system of nonverbal communication[2].

Literature Review. Nonverbal communication has long been recognized as an essential component of human interaction, complementing and often enhancing verbal communication. Early studies by Ekman and Friesen demonstrated that facial expressions, gestures, and posture serve as universal channels for conveying emotions, while Hall emphasized the importance of proxemics-the study of spatial distance-in social interactions. Research by Knapp and Hall further revealed that approximately 60-70% of interpersonal communication occurs nonverbally, highlighting the critical role of gestures, facial expressions, eye contact, and tone in conveying meaning beyond words[3].

In the context of computer-mediated communication, the absence of face-to-face interaction introduces challenges in expressing nonverbal cues. Walther emphasized that in online interactions, communicators develop alternative strategies to replicate nonverbal effects, giving rise to what he called "social information processing" theory. Emojis, emoticons, capitalization, punctuation, and onomatopoeic words function as textual analogs of nonverbal cues, enabling users to express emotions, attitudes, and pragmatic intentions in digital discourse.

[1] Derks D., Fischer A. H. & Bos A. E. R. (2008). The role of emotion in computer-mediated communication: A review. Computers in Human Behavior, 24(3), 766–785.

[2] Knapp M. L., Hall J. A., & Horgan T. G. (2014). Nonverbal communication in human interaction (8th ed.)Wadsworth.

[3] G'afurova N.S. Ingliz tili matnlarida apostrof (') tinish belgisining ishlatilishi. Innovative Development in Educational Activities. 8 (Apr. 2023) 281–286.

Recent studies have also examined the semiotic and cultural dimensions of virtual nonverbal communication. Danesi argues that emojis act as a semiotic system with cultural nuances, where interpretation depends on social context and shared norms. Similarly, Ge and Herring emphasize that digital nonverbal cues are often intentionally constructed, contrasting with the spontaneous nature of face-to-face nonverbal behavior. This intentionality affects how emotions and attitudes are perceived, demonstrating the complex interplay between linguistic and nonverbal elements in online communication[1].

Moreover, researchers have highlighted the pragmatic function of digital nonverbal cues. Emoticons, for instance, serve not only to express emotions but also to regulate conversation, signal irony or sarcasm, and mitigate potential misunderstandings. Capitalization, repeated punctuation, and text-based gestures act as additional markers of emphasis, mood, and social stance, illustrating the adaptive strategies users employ to overcome the limitations of text-only communication.

Research Methodology. This study employs a qualitative approach to analyze nonverbal communication in virtual texts, focusing on emojis, emoticons, punctuation, capitalization, and onomatopoeic words as textual equivalents of face-to-face nonverbal cues. A content analysis was conducted, coding and categorizing nonverbal cues by their pragmatic functions, such as expressing emotions, irony, emphasis, or regulating interaction. Reliability was ensured through pattern analysis and peer review, while validity was grounded in established theories of nonverbal communication and digital pragmatics. All data were anonymized to maintain ethical standards.

Analysis and Results. Nonverbal means are signs that express a person's emotional state, attitude, intentions, or social status. Combined with verbal language, they enrich communication and ensure that information is delivered more completely. Nonverbal communication represents a multi-level semiotic system that reflects human emotions, intentions, and social identity[2]. Together with verbal elements, it determines the pragmatic effectiveness of communication.

Types of Nonverbal Means:

Kinesics (movements) – gestures, facial expressions, body movements.

Gestures – movements of the hands, head, or body that express meaning. For example, bowing one's head may signal respect, while nodding may indicate agreement. Facial expressions – movements of facial muscles that reflect emotions such as anger, joy, surprise, or sadness.

Body posture – conveys internal attitudes; leaning back may indicate indifference, while leaning forward may express interest.

Proxemics (spatial distance) – the physical distance between interlocutors and their spatial orientation. For example, standing very close can suggest intimacy or friendship, whereas maintaining distance can signal formality or detachment[3].

Paralinguistics (vocal features) – intonation, pitch, tone, and pauses. These do not change the literal meaning of words but add emotional coloring. For instance, the word "yes" can express agreement, sarcasm, or doubt depending on the tone.

Tactile communication (touch) – physical contact such as handshakes, hugs, or pats on the back.

Although these elements are not part of the linguistic system itself, they directly participate in meaning construction. Therefore, they are sometimes referred to as "extralinguistic factors."

Nonverbal means allow individuals to express feelings, attitudes, moods, and social positions. They are essential in conveying meanings that are difficult to articulate verbally. In linguistic studies, these means are regarded as nonlinguistic yet communicatively significant tools. They enrich the communicative process, reinforce verbal meaning, and help reveal the speaker's emotional state.

One key characteristic of nonverbal communication is that it often occurs involuntarily, unlike verbal communication, which is typically deliberate. For example, when we suddenly feel pain and exclaim "ouch," it is a spontaneous response. Verbal expressions are consciously produced, while nonverbal cues often emerge subconsciously or instinctively. Verbal units possess clear semantic meaning and are governed by linguistic rules, whereas nonverbal means do not follow fixed grammatical structures. They are context-dependent and may carry different meanings in different situations. For instance, winking can have multiple interpretations - it may express affection in one context but sarcasm in another. This demonstrates that nonverbal communication cannot

[1] Knapp M. L., Hall J. A. & Horgan T. G. (2014). Nonverbal communication in human interaction (8th ed.)Wadsworth.

[2] G'afurova N.S. Ingliz tili matnlarida apostrof (') tinish belgisining ishlatilishi. Innovative Development in Educational Activities. 8 (Apr. 2023) 281–286.

[3] G'afurova N.S. (2025). Theory of metaphor and visual-expressive means as an integral component of the language. Journal of Multidisciplinary Sciences and Innovations, 1(2), 9–11.

be regarded as a universal semantic system; rather, it must be studied as a culture-specific semiotic system[1].

Unlike verbal language, nonverbal communication does not possess a grammatical framework but instead follows socially established semiotic conventions. Its linguistic characteristics are connotative rather than denotative, expressing emotional, social, and psychological meanings.

Some researchers suggest that nonverbal communication traces back to ancient forms of writing, such as pictographs, ideograms, and iconic symbols. However, expressing nonverbal communication in virtual texts is more complex.

Since real nonverbal cues are absent in digital environments, social media users rely on text-based substitutes, such as:

1. Onomatopoeic words (e.g., “haha,” “hmm,” “hihi”)
2. Capitalized words (e.g., “WHAT?”)
3. Emoticons (😊 😢 😂 – representing emotions with facial expressions)
4. Pictograms or emoji gestures (e.g., 👍👏✌)
5. Punctuation marks (e.g., “What???!!!”).

These serve as written equivalents of nonverbal means in virtual communication. However, there is a clear difference between face-to-face and virtual communication. In face-to-face interaction, a person smiles or frowns naturally and involuntarily, while in virtual contexts, the speaker intentionally uses symbols or emojis to simulate these expressions.

Therefore, emotional expressions in virtual communication are deliberate and conscious, rather than spontaneous and natural.

Conclusion. This study demonstrates that nonverbal communication plays a crucial role in virtual texts, compensating for the absence of physical gestures, facial expressions, and vocal cues in online interactions. Emojis, emoticons, punctuation, capitalization, and onomatopoeic words act as functional equivalents of face-to-face nonverbal behaviors, allowing users to express emotions, signal attitudes, emphasize messages, and regulate interaction. The analysis revealed that virtual nonverbal cues are often deliberate, context-dependent, and multifunctional, reflecting both emotional states and pragmatic intentions. Informal online communication is richer in expressive cues, whereas formal exchanges favor structured textual signals such as capitalization and punctuation. Overall, digital nonverbal cues enhance the pragmatic effectiveness of online communication, ensuring that meaning and interpersonal intent are transmitted more clearly.

Rezyume. Ushbu maqolada virtual matnlarda noverbal kommunikatsiyaning nazariy va amaliy jihatlari tahlil qilinadi. Unda imo-ishora, mimika, ohang kabi an’anaviy noverbal belgilar kompyuter vositasidagi muloqotda matn shakliga - emoji, emotsiya belgilari, tinish belgisi va harflarning katta-kichik shakllariga - qanday ko‘chirilishi o‘rganiladi. Tadqiqotda shuningdek, real muloqotda tabiiy tarzda namoyon bo‘ladigan noverbal vositalar virtual muloqotda ongli ravishda qo‘llanilishi ta’kidlanadi. Maqola pragmatika va sotsiolingvistika yo‘nalishlariga hissa qo‘shib, internet muloqotidagi noverbal vositalarning semantik va kommunikativ ahamiyatini ochib beradi**.**

Резюме. В статье рассматриваются теоретические и прагматические основы невербальной коммуникации в виртуальных текстах. Автор анализирует, как традиционные невербальные элементы-жесты, мимика, интонация — трансформируются в текстовые формы при компьютерно-опосредованном общении, такие как эмодзи, смайлы, знаки препинания и использование заглавных букв. Отмечается, что если в очном общении невербальные сигналы возникают спонтанно, то в виртуальном пространстве они применяются осознанно для выражения эмоций, иронии или акцента. Работа вносит вклад в развитие прагматики и социолингвистики, раскрывая семиотическую ценность невербальных средств в онлайн-дискурсе.

Resume. This article explores the theoretical and pragmatic aspects of nonverbal communication in virtual texts. It examines how gestures, facial expressions, and tone-traditional features of nonverbal behavior-are transformed into textual equivalents such as emojis, emoticons, punctuation, and capitalization in computer-mediated communication. The study emphasizes that while nonverbal signals in face-to-face interaction often appear unconsciously, in virtual discourse they are used intentionally to express emotional tone, irony, or emphasis. The paper contributes to the development of pragmatics and sociolinguistics by analyzing the semiotic and communicative value of nonverbal cues in online environments.

[1] G‘afurova N.S.(2023). Ijtimoi y tarmoqlar punktuatsiyasining pragmatika. Farg‘ona davlat universiteti,(6), 138.