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FUNCTIONS OF TOUCH COMMUNICATION

Стаття висвітлює питання функціональної значущості тактильної поведінки у процесі соціальної взаємодії. Пропонується класифікація рукоштовкань за різними параметрами дотику на п'ять комунікативних типів. Ілюструється різниця використання дотиків у комунікації жінками та чоловіками, чим окреслюється гендерний аспект гаптики.

Ключові слова: невербальна комунікація, гаптика, дотик, рукоштовкання.

The article highlights the functional value of tactile behavior in the process of social interaction. It presents a framework for classifying handshakes into five communicative types in terms of touch parameters. Finally, some differences in touch communication of men and women are illustrated, thus outlining the gender aspect of haptics.

Key words: nonverbal communication, haptics, touch, handshake.

Introduction. Along with verbal means (words, sentences), we use voice, gestures, facial expression, and many other nonverbal means of communication to convey our meaning to persons around us. Communication researchers claim that we communicate far more nonverbally than we do verbally [2; 4]. An awareness of body language – the subtle messages conveyed by kinesic, paralinguistic, proxemic, tactile signs – are among the ways to improved communication.

During the last two decades, nonverbal communication has become a topic of interest to communication scholars. The theory of nonverbal behavior is a rapidly expanding linguistic field, providing insights into the problems of discourse analysis, cross-cultural communication and linguistic competence.

This article **aims** to consider touching as a category of nonverbal communication, to highlight its main functions, to offer a classification of handshakes, and to outline the gender aspect of touch communication.

The object of research is the nominative units of the English language used to designate touch behaviours in fictional discourse.

General information. There are probably as many categories of nonverbal communication as in verbal communication, with additional variations according to the culture people belong to. Experts in nonverbal communication tend to outline the system of nonverbal behaviors and single out its main subdivisions.

Nonverbal code systems are often classed according to the type of activity used in the code. For example, K. Burgoon suggests seven types of nonverbal behaviors: kinesics or bodily activity, proxemics or use of space, physical appearance, haptics or use of touch, vocalics or use of voice, chronemics or use of time, and artifacts or use of objects. M. Knapp and J. Hall also organize nonverbal behaviors into seven major groups: body motion, physical

characteristics, touching behavior, paralanguage, proxemics, artifacts, and environment. M. Argile claims that the main nonverbal aspects involved in communication can be grouped in the following eight categories: body contact or touch, physical proximity, orientation, body posture, gestures of hands, arms and head, head nodding, facial expressions, eye movement or gaze [5, p. 50-51]. We see that all these scholars single out the category of touch communication as a subdivision of nonverbal activity, no matter how they coin it – haptics, use of touch, body contact or touching behavior.

Touch communication, also referred to as haptics, is perhaps the most primitive form of nonverbal communication. Developmentally, touch is probably the first sense to be used; even in the womb the child is stimulated by touch. Soon after birth the child is caressed, patted, and stroked. In turn, the child explores its world through touch. In a very short time, the child learns to communicate a wide variety of meanings through touch.

There exist many forms of touching behavior such as patting, slapping, pinching, punching, smacking, nudging, tickling, kissing, hugging, cuddling, handshaking, handholding etc.

Some management theorists have warned about appropriate uses of touching in social interaction. They differentiate between positive and negative touch and point out, that managers should only touch others when they are communicating something positive, such as encouragement, reassurance or support. They view negative touching, associated with criticizing, admonishment or disciplining as quite inappropriate in business communication.

Research results. Six of the major functional meanings of touch, identified in an extensive study by Stanley Jones and Elaine Yarborough, are considered in *Academic Encounter* by B. Seal [4, p. 158-160]. These functions are connected with the communication of emotions, attitudes and intentions.

Touch may communicate positive or negative emotional attitudes. Such kinds of touching occur mainly between people who have a relatively close relationship. D. Morris notes that touch is such a powerful signaling system, and it's so closely related to emotional feelings we have for one another that in casual encounters it is kept to a minimum [3, p. 47]. When the relationship develops, the touching follows along with it. Among the most important positive attitudes are support, which indicates nurturing, reassurance, or protection; appreciation, which expresses gratitude; inclusion, which suggests psychological closeness; and affection, which expresses a generalized positive regard for the other person. E. g. "*What an honor*". *She smiled and gave him a hug.* [Johansen, p. 108]. The aggressive emotional attitudes, indicated by such touching behaviors as attacking or fighting, express a generalized negative regard for the other person. E. g. "*Get up!*" *Lina landed a stinging slap on Steve's bare rump as he lay peacefully snoring on her bed* [Burford, p. 155].

Touch may also serve to direct the behaviors or feelings of the other person. Such tactile actions may communicate a number of messages. In attention-

getting, we touch the person to gain his or her attention, as if to say “*look at me*” or “*look over here*”. In compliance, for example, we touch the other person to communicate “*move over,*” “*hurry,*” “*do it*”, and “*stay here*”. E. g. “*Fascinating. Let’s go*”. *Lina started to signal the waitress for the check, and Joy grabbed her arm.* “*We can’t leave yet. You haven’t met Eric*” [Burford, p. 7].

Touching may also communicate dominance. To understand the social value of this function, we have to consider who would touch whom – for instance, by putting an arm on the other person’s shoulder or by putting a hand on the other person’s back – in the following social dyads: teacher and student, doctor and patient, manager and worker, police officer and accused, business person and secretary. Most people brought up in the English-speaking culture would say the first-named person in each dyad would be more likely to touch the second-named person than the other way around. In other words, it is the higher status person who is permitted to touch the lower status person.

Ritualistic touching centres on greetings and departures. Shaking hands to say “hello” or “good-bye” is perhaps the clearest example of ritualistic touching, but we might also hug, kiss, or put our arm around another’s shoulder in meeting someone or in anticipating the person’s departure. E. g. “*Welcome to the Cookhouse, Lina*”. *Eric’s big, callused hand closed around hers* [Burford, p. 9].

Task-related touching is associated with the performance of some function – this ranges from removing a speck of dust from another person’s face or helping someone out of a bus to checking someone’s forehead for a fever, massaging the arm or rubbing the eyes. E. g. *He took a few steps away from Lina and rubbed his eyes, irritated from kitchen smoke and exhaustion* [Burford, p. 25].

Touch often communicates our intention to play either affectionately or aggressively. It is a specific function of touch, when affection or aggression is communicated in a playful manner. The playfulness de-emphasizes the emotion and tells the other person that it is not to be taken seriously. Playful touches serve to lighten an interaction.

Although touching can serve many different functions, including sexual expressions, from a pragmatic perspective two are especially important in discourse management: expressing supportiveness and communicating power or dominance. Touching in a supportive way can take many forms – putting our arms around other people, patting them on the arm or hand, holding their hands in our own. Generally, we do not touch people we dislike (unless we are fighting with them), so the act of touching someone communicates a general message of liking and support. By means of touching we can communicate consolation, empathy, liking, and varying degrees of commitment. In organizational settings (e. g. a business meeting) a common form of touching is the handshake.

Originally exclusively masculine and Western European, the handshake is now used by both sexes and is highly internationalized. The handshake is a symbolic kind of touch of the current relationship between people. It is a sign

of a slightly wary, arm's-length truce and a willingness to abandon hostility in the hope that further exploration may lead to love rather than to hate [1, p. 12]. The handshake is normally symmetrical and egalitarian and, if not abused, a sign of willingness to communicate peacefully.

Because public body contact is so very limited among English speakers and yet handshaking is so common, English sensitivity to this sign of touching is extremely high. And since it is a large part of first impressions, English tend to derive a good deal of information from the handshake. E. g. *He extended his hand*. "You are if you are looking for the cooking class. I'm Eric Reid." "Hi. Amy Dalton". *Her soft hand lightly squeezed his* [Burford, p. 57].

Used for meeting others, greeting others and saying goodbye, the handshake, while expected as a professional gesture for both men and women, is a fairly minor social affair. In general, in casual encounters, we keep touching at a minimum. As relationships develop, the nature and frequency of touching may change dramatically.

Some analysts have identified as many as twelve distinct types of handshakes but it seems the average person commonly distinguishes only five [6, p. 20]: the Firm Handshake, the Bone-Crusher, the Finger Shake, the Dead Fish, and the Politician's Handshake.

The Firm Handshake, man-to-man willingly offers a fully open hand, closed fully, thumb pit to thumb pit, with the other's hand, squeezes firmly enough to hold a tennis racket horizontally, shakes vertically once to three times, and breaks clean. This Firm Handshake is considered an important sign of self-respect and respect for the other. All the other handshakes are felt as either too much or too little from this good-handshake norm.

The Bone-Crusher, as its name suggests, is the too-much handshake of the macho, arm wrestler, or the other would-be hostile, domineering type.

The Finger Shake refuses to offer the fully open hand and does not close fully. It communicates an unwillingness to shake hands fully, and this unwillingness is interpreted as either shyness or lack of self-respect or lack of respect for the other. It is very common among women shaking hands with men, however, and is then usually interpreted as modesty or politeness and is not offensive.

The Dead Fish is almost certainly the worst possibly handshake. The person giving a Dead Fish raises a limp hand to the handshake and merely allows his inert hand to be squeezed by the other, who instantly feels he has given better than he got and has effectively been stolen from.

The Politician's Handshake is the excessively intimate and over-sincere two-handed handshake, which is transparently insincere, and the left hand is the culprit. The left hand is manipulative and pushes or pulls, guides or directs in some way, while at the same time claiming excessive intimacy by grasping the hand, wrist, forearm, shoulder, or even neck of the other while the right hand holds his right hand. Politicians' Handshakes are frequently prolonged for photographers, another aspect of the ritual insincerity of that handshake,

but hand holding among English is largely limited to children and parents/grandparents, husbands and wives, and lovers.

A more specific approach to the study of gender aspects of nonverbal communication focuses on men's and women's use of various signs of nonverbal communication such as touch, facial expressions, the use of space, and position. In a 1989 study, which was about the attitudes toward the touch, the researchers noted that women are much more comfortable with touch than are men and this is related with the level of socialization. However, touching can sometimes be interpreted as sexual harassment.

Researchers found significant gender differences in how one touches the others and how the others receive these touches. When men are embarrassed, they touch their noses. However, when women feel embarrassed, they usually touch their cheeks. Men tend to initiate touching with the opposite gender, but they are less likely to initiate touching with the same gender encounters. While men hesitate touching the other men, women can easily initiate touching with the other women. These touches are mostly a sign of warmth and intimacy. However, touches among men can indicate power, status, and superiority. Also, women react more positively than men do, when the touchee and toucher are of the same status [5, p. 114].

Conclusion. Thus, touch is an important vehicle for conveying warmth, comfort, and reassurance. Even the most casual contact can create positive feelings. Perhaps because it implies intimacy, touching behavior is governed by relatively strict customs that establish who can touch whom, and how, in various circumstances. The accepted norms vary, depending on the gender, age, relative status, and cultural background of the individuals involved. In business situations, touching suggests dominance, and so a higher-status person is more likely to touch a lower-status person than the other way around.

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