

**Aspects of Nonverbal Communication in Mildred Okwo and Rita
Dominic's *The Meeting***

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Abstract

Since one of the factors that contribute to the success of a film is the ability of the actors and actresses to have a thorough interpretation of the script/story to appear as real as possible, this study aims to describe the aspects of nonverbal communication in the film –The Meeting (2012) by Mildred Okwo and Rita Dominic. This paper analyses the aspects of nonverbal communication in conveying intercultural meaning. It argues that aside the transfer of cultural meanings, nonverbal communication aspects perform specific functions which strengthen and lend greater significance to conveying meaning to other characters. In addition to this, nonverbal communication cues abound in the Nigerian film industry productions, informally called Nollywood. The aim of a film has continued to be how to creatively bring the script/story to life through different communication channels that would elicit viewers' emotions. The major aspects of nonverbal communication in the film are physical appearance, kinesics, vocal behaviour and cultural sign. The data for this study are some purposively selected sampled scenes in the minister of Lands office which was also a major setting in the film. The scenes were studied and analyzed. The results imply that nonverbal communication in the movie functions as a powerful tool to add depth and authenticity to the story, enabling viewers to relate to the characters more deeply. It should be noted that aspects of nonverbal

communication can create an air of confusion when the receiver of a message fails to understand it as seen in some scenes in The Meeting.

Key words: Aspects, Nonverbal, Communication, Film, *The Meeting*

Introduction

When nonverbal communication is mentioned, one may need to understand the concept of communication itself. Hasan (2013:3) sees communication as a process of sharing or exchange of ideas, information, knowledge, attitude or feeling among two or more persons through certain signs and symbols. Communication is all about who said or produced a message through which medium, and to whom (receiver). It also includes the outcome or reaction of the message on the recipient. Nonverbal communication on the other hand is a relatively new area of study, yet writers have for centuries recognised its importance in everyday activities of the human communication. Scholars have continued discussions and researches on what nonverbal is all about or what is so unique about it that verbal communication is not. (Portch, 1985; Korte, 1997; Hazard 2000), agree that gesture and other aspects of nonverbal communication reveal much of our inner motivations without writers having to spell out those motivations.

Since not all communication uses words, nonverbal communication involves using body components such as facial expression, hand gesture, eye contact, touch, smell, paralanguage and much more to make a specific point during communication. Silence could be seen as a nonverbal communication going by Payne's (2001:100) definition which says that nonverbal communication is communication without the use of words. It relies on gestures, body movement, facial expressions...; even silence. Nonverbal behaviours (e.g. a gesture or eye movements) are sometimes referred to as tells because they tell us about a person's true state of mind (Navarro 2011). To add to Navarro's explanations, Barthes (1973) says:

Nonverbal communication could be defined as behaviours other than words themselves (non-linguistic phenomena) which form a socio-culturally shared coding system. These behaviours are typically used with intent, typically interpreted as intentional as deployed constantly among members of a socio-cultural community. These behaviours additionally have consensually recognizable interpretations.

Albert Mehrabian (cited in Blake), conducted several studies on nonverbal communication through which he found that only 7% of any message is conveyed through linguistic indices (words) while, 38% of message content is communicated through certain vocal elements, and 55% through nonverbal elements (facial expressions, gestures and posture among others)

Vareba et al 2017, say that Nonverbal communication is facilitated in media text construction by a multitude of tools including subliminal manipulation, structuralism, semiotics and symbolism among others.

Dickson and Hargie (2003, p. 50) opine that we use nonverbal communication in order to:

- Replace verbal communication in situations where it may be impossible or inappropriate to talk;
- Complement verbal communication, thereby enhancing the overall message;
- Modify the spoken word;
- Contradict, either intentionally or unintentionally, what is said;
- Regulate conversation by helping to mark speech turns;
- Express emotions and interpersonal attitudes;
- Negotiate relationships in respect of, for instance, dominance, control and liking;
- Convey personal and social identity through such features as dress and adornments;

Contextualise interaction by creating a particular social setting.

Eunsun (2012:276) says, isolated nonverbal behaviours are not necessarily significant, but we may be able to make reasoned inferences about another person's behaviour or state of mind from consistent clusters of such behaviours.

Synopsis of the Plot (*The Meeting, 2012*)

Makinde Esho a (young widower and) top official of Techmast Nigeria, a company that installs communication masts has just arrived Abuja on a Monday morning from Lagos to meet the Minister of lands for a key critical appointment that would in turn determine the fate of his company. Mr. Esho plans to meet the Minister at 9:30 am after which he would take the next available flight back to Lagos same day, but his plan met some unforeseen circumstances. He was constantly reminded by his MD on the importance of his meeting with the Minister.

At first, it looks like that his journey is already meeting some challenges so early when he meets a young female youth corps member, Ejura who is desperately in need of a free ride from the airport into the city as she is short of cash. He reluctantly agreed to help her but she fails to keep to her promise that she will not disturb him on transit as she keeps eavesdropping Mr, Esho's conversation and peeping through his electronic tablet, together with persistent irritating questions.

Mr. Esho arrives the Minister's office at the Ministry of land in Abuja and is greeted with a heartbreaking scene of a man called Mr. Ugo who is being escorted out of the building under security direction. Furious and angry Mr. Ugo complained of what he says is man's inhumanity to man, which was the demolition of his multimillion-naira property for going against the Abuja master plan. He complains that his property

was approved, yet the government demolished it. The short-framed man was thrown out for constituting nuisance on a government facility. In the office, Mr. Esho is greeted by the rude and domineering secretary, Clara Ikemba. She wields enormous power in deciding who sees the minister. She unapologetically informs him that his 9:30 appointment with the minister has been moved to 4:30 pm. He accepts his fate after an unpleasant altercation with the secretary, and steps back to join other guests in waiting for their turn to see the Minister. As Mr. Esho waits, some conflicts among the guests take place in the office. When it was finally 4:30, he asks Clara if the Minister is not yet ready to see him, she reluctantly, without remorse informed him that the Minister has gone to the presidential villa and he is not due back. She reschedules him the following day.

Mr. Esho is forced to spend an unplanned night in an Abuja hotel. So, he later invites the corps member, Ejura, whom he gave a ride in the morning, to keep him company for few hours at the hotel's bar. Here starts a love story that metamorphosed in few days. As his appointment with the minister is continuously rescheduled over the next four days, Ejura was always around to keep him company in the night while they talk about varying social issues. There was a time they kiss and curdle till morning.

Mr. Esho is in desperate need to see the Minister, so that he can return to Lagos the next day, moreover, he needs to attend his daughter's graduation from the University of Lagos on Friday. Time is of the essence, as Techmast's competitors are also submitting similar proposal to the Minister and are also in waiting to see the Minister. He watches as people who did not have prolonged appointments like him go straight to see the Minister, including Techmast's major rival, the Daewon Brothers (Lebanese expatriates). He could not take it anymore as people bribe their way in, so he takes laws into his hand. It was a tough decision as he meets the tigress in Clara Ikemba, the secretary. He is later able to force himself on Minister and makes his presentation

which the Minister approves. He catches up with his daughter's graduation and flies back to Abuja to spend his holiday with Ejura. The film ends as they kiss.

Aspects of Non-Verbal Communication in Film

A film is a means of communication that uses audiovisual medium and the art of photography to convey a message. A film can also be called a movie or motion picture. The film is a motion picture that tells a story through multimodal means of communication. It is an audiovisual technological device that relies on the combinative use of sound and light waves to present its messages. The different media it uses are:

Verbal auditory channel, including dialogue, background voices and sometimes lyrics, non-verbal auditory channel, including music, natural sound and sound effects, verbal visual channel, including superimposed titles and written signs on the screen and the non-verbal visual channel including picture composition and flow (Gottlieb, 1998:245).

Okunna and Omenugha (2012) are of the opinion that film is considered a mass medium because it reaches a large audience. But in distinguishing film from other mass media, the authors opine that film is not as immediate as newspaper, television or radio, but reaches a number of people over a long period of time. In explaining film as a medium of communication, Owuamalam (2007) says:

Film is a communication tool. It provides an idea from an identifiable source, using its specific format and medium to share experience with persons serving as its audience or consumers of its content. It transmits a process message from a source to its consumers. It is the information, education or entertainment content of the films that is sought after and consumed by the audience.

Nze (2020:388) discloses that although the film medium has been subordinated to television in many respects, it has also become more integrated in other media, especially book publishing, popular music and television itself. Film prioritizes the existence and interest of stories that can invite many people to get involved. It combines entertainment and education, in other words, it can be used as media in education (Benny, 2020; Novianto, 2017).

Eweta (2006:5) says that the nonverbal cues used in films are germane to a thorough understanding of the films particularly for the multicultural viewers that the films are addressed to. In films productions, environment, colour, lighting and other nonverbal channels add to a films cinematography, which can be defined as the art or science of motion picture photography.

It is believed that film can be inspired by social life by providing an overview of the reflection of the real world (Andalas, 2017). The data for this study are some purposively selected sampled scenes in the minister's office which was a major setting in the film (*The Meeting*, 2012), a production that satirises the daily drama in a Nigerian public office. It addresses the usual Nigerian issues at government offices.

The following nonverbal signals and cues constitute the primary tools of analysis in this paper.

Physical appearance

A person's attire, grooming, and body type all contribute to their physical appearance. It consists of things like body language, accessories, cosmetics, and hairstyles. A person's physical appearance can reveal a variety of information about them, including their social standing, personality, attitude, and cultural background. It is a crucial component of nonverbal communication because it has the power to affect how others see and judge a person. Biological theories have continued to suggest that the body is not merely the medium used to convey meaning, but in fact may have itself been shaped by deeper

forces, and that there-fore much nonverbal communication can best be understood as the expression of basic biological drives. These theories build on the original work of Charles Darwin, who published a study in 1872 on ‘the expression of emotions in man and animals’ (Darwin 2002). Eunsun (2012) discloses that Evolutionary psychology, suggests that relatively minor characteristics such as physical attractiveness reveal deeper phenomena, with the ‘survival of the prettiest’ demonstrating that conventional physical attractiveness and symmetry may be adaptive.

Physical appearance discusses size and form of the body, the colour of skin and hair, height, weight and personal appearances of the actor or actress including their clothes and body atonements and make up. In *The meeting*, Clara Ikemba, the Honourable Minister’s infamous Secretary exhibited and wielded an authoritative power in deciding who sees the Minister on appointments. With heavy facial make up that glitters while she chews a chewing gum, her physical appearance sends a clear message that she does not entertain nuisance from guests. She has an imposing figure to compliment her status as a secretary that has power and authority. She is an unrelenting gatekeeper in the minister’s office. This was clearly seen on her first encounter with MakindeEsho from Techmast Nigeria when she unapologetically shows that she is practically in charge of the ministry of lands. Other characters’ (including the minister, the visiting Oba, and Ejura) physical appearance also sent non-verbal cues on the type of person they are, especially the Minister’s mistress, Bolarinwa who dresses indecently to the amazement of others in all her scenes to see the Minister. One would have expected modesty from the secretary in public, but we see her complementing Bolarinwa’s dressing that exposes almost all her body parts in public glare. Clara’s hairstyle and make up provided an insight into her economic status and interest in fashion. According to Bambaeroo and Shokrpou (2017), our choice of clothing, hairstyle, and other appearance factors are also considered a means of nonverbal

communication. Even when the Minister tells Mr. Esho that Bolarinwa is his over pampered and ‘spoilt’ niece, he did not sound convincing to himself (Minister). The ways we dress ourselves tell others whether we belong to a particular group, class, organisation or religion.

Kinesics

This is study of body movement, posture, facial expressions and gesture. Kinesics entails posture, gestures, and face and body motions. Kinesics is an effective kind of communication because it allows people to express feelings, attitudes, intentions, and social position without using words. For instance, a smile might convey joy or friendship, whereas crossed arms can convey animosity or defensiveness. Understanding and interpreting these nonverbal cues can significantly improve communication effectiveness. Kinesics differs among cultures.

Colman (2003:392) says kinesics refers to the study of the role of gestures and other body movements in a nonverbal communication. Gestures are deliberate movements and signals that are an important way to communicate meaning without words. Gesture entails movement of the body to “transfer symbolic messages on the orator’s attitude or intention with regard to the message” (Colta, 2010, p. 778). Kinesics include *emblems* (signs that are used frequently, such as thumbs up sign, waving the hand for ‘good bye’ putting a finger to the lips for ‘silence’); *illustrators* (signs that are directly related to verbal messages or what is being said, such as spreading the hands to beckon on God, or illustrate the size, quantity or frequency of something); *regulators* (nonverbal cues like gazes, nods, raised eyebrows, etc.); *facial expression* Face and eyes behaviour mirror the other person(s) state of mind and helps in determining social signals and in displaying dominance, power and status (Vinciarelli & Mohammadi). A lot of Kinesics took place in the Ministers office scenes, from Mr. Ugo’s humiliation to other incidents. Clara the secretary orders the Minister’s

orderlies to throw him out for constituting nuisance in a government facility. As the mobile police officers lead him away, Mr. Ugo uses his hands to beckon on God to come to his rescue and deal with his enemies (the federal government that has ordered demolition of his property for not following Abuja master plan). He also used a tip of his index finger and touched the ground which he raised up to the sky to signify 'oath'. Mr. Ugo did this after he said he would fight with the last drop of his blood over what he termed man's inhumanity to man and daylight robbery. Similarly, When Clara informed Mr, Esho that his appointment with the Minister has been moved from 9:30am to 4:30am, he asks to know if she was serious about it and why he was not informed of the adjustment, but received a cold stare and shaking of head from Clara which interprets as 'you must be joking for asking such question'. Mr. Esho understands the hostile situation immediately from the frustration written on the faces of the guests, as he retires his stance and joins them in waiting for his turn to see the Minister. Also when Mrs. Kachukwu was narrating her ordeals and attempts to see the minister, she uses her hand to describe the frequency and extent her pastor's prayer is sending 'fire' to the Minister's seat that would change his mind and make him attend to her as soon as possible. Mrs. Kachukwu's upright posture and radiant smile anytime Clara looks or talks to the guests send a nonverbal cue that she begs for attention and mercy. She flees at the snap of Clara's fingers in a bid to show her obedience and allegiance to her rules. Mrs Kachukwu used kinesics to warn Prof. Akpan about the dangers inherent in have anything to do with people like the Minister's mistress.

When Prof. Akpan Udofia laments bitterly on how Clara deprived him of the opportunity of being on the Minister's entourage to Akwa Ibom state, and accuses her of exhibiting behaviours that are unbecoming of a civil servant, Mr. Esho places his own finger on his mouth signalling Prof. Udofia to remain silent or witness the wrath of Clara. While this happens, she gives Prof. inquisitive stare at intervals while busy with

her computer work, as the Professor fumes until she alerts the security men to throw him out through a nonverbal means she termed ‘code red’.

On two occasions in the minister’s office, while Mr. Esho and other guests relentlessly wait for their turn to see the minister, Clara starts combing her hair which sends a nonverbal cue to Mr. Esho that she is closing for the day. Also, when the minister’s kinsmen, whom Clara referred as co-constituencies, came to see him Mrs. Ikomi and Retired Colonel Danfodiyo stared at each other with hand demonstration asking who the men are and the meaning of their loud display in a public office. Clara’s facial expressions to the guests’ questions and actions give cues to her verbal messages that followed the expressions. When Mr. Esho insisted that he sees the Minister before a Whiteman (his company’s rival) which Clara refused to grant. He raises his voice to the amazement of other guests who used their facial expressions and hands to encourage Mr. Esho to rage on and teach the secretary a lesson.

Vocal behaviour

Vocal behaviour is the use of vocal cues in nonverbal communication, such as voice tone, pitch, loudness, and speech patterns. Silence, rhythm, tempo, and intonation are among its components. Vocal conduct can affect how a message is perceived and processed and is essential for communicating meaning and emotions. For instance, a quiet and soothing voice can imply consolation or empathy, but a strong voice and rapid speech can imply enthusiasm or rage. Cultural standards also have an impact on vocal conduct, which can range between different cultures.

Vocal behaviour is sometimes referred to as Para-linguistics which is a nonverbal element used to modify meaning and convey emotions. It is the behaviour through which our verbal expression is let out. It includes factors such as tone of voice, loudness, inflection, pitch intensity of a

spoken statement. Clara used Mr. Esho interchangeably used high tempo, in the speeches to signify the importance of the statement. When Mr. Esho emphasizes that he supposed to have seen the Minister and returned to Lagos on day one, Clara replied with ‘ee-eh’, which signifies that his problem does not concern her, moreover there is nothing she could do about his predicament in Abuja. This was followed by her remark that she supposed to have closed the office about thirty minutes ago. Though it was said in a low tone, but it was sarcastic. Out of frustrations on the fact that he is over staying in Abuja, Mr. Esho raises the pitch of his voice to ask Clara some questions and rebuke her, but his statement was also met with a harsh rebuttal. Peculiar scenes in the office include when Mr. Esho insists he must see the Minister as Clara packs her things for close of work. Clara on the other hand insists that the Minister has closed for the day that he should go home and come back the next day. This makes him to exclaim that Clara’s reply is just ‘Bullshit’ thereby provoking her to caution him to watch the words he uses before a married woman like her. On day five in the Minister’s office when Mr. Esho thinks he is in Clara’s good book after presenting her a wine in commemoration of his daughter’s graduation ceremony in Lagos, expecting a favourable and kind gesture in seeing the Minister, but Clara denied him entrance because the Minister’s mistress just arrived. Mr. Esho angrily insists that his 11:00 AM appointment has been taken over by the Minister’s mistress, and that he has a 1:00 PM flight to Lagos for his daughter’s graduation from the university same day. At first Clara calmly explained to him that the mistress will not take long but when she notices that he is not interested in her plea, changed her tone and pitch, and angrily shouted at him to sit down and stop stressing her on a Friday afternoon or else she would direct her orderlies to vamoose him from the office. Vocal behaviour is not about what is said but how it was said. Vocal behaviour also played out in Mrs Kachukwu and Hajia’s struggle over who gets a fair treatment from Clara by showing her kind gestures as they insist she

takes their change after purchasing a beverage and recharge card respectively from her.

Cultural Signs

In a specific cultural setting, cultural signs are nonverbal indications and symbols that have distinctive meanings. These indications may take the form of gestures, positions, expressions on the face, or other behaviours that are culture specific. For instance, while the thumbs-up sign may be regarded as favourable in Western nations, it might be disrespectful in other cultures. Effective cross-cultural communication relies on an awareness of cultural signs since improper use or interpretation of these indicators can result in misunderstandings and disputes. When communicating with people from various cultural backgrounds, it's critical to be aware of cultural differences and modify nonverbal communication accordingly.

This involves the meaning attached to some things – objects, artefacts in relation to popular or particular users. When the minister's kinsmen arrived, they wore dressings, caps and beads peculiar to the Igbo. From the guests on the appointment list, one could understand their cultural background especially in the case of Mrs Kachukwu and Hajia, and other guests in the Minister's office. This prompted Mrs. Ikomi to wear Igbo attire in her subsequent visits in order to impress Clara and solicit her mercy. The creatively designed outfits of Chief Omego, the Oba, their neck beads, the Oba's minstrel and their entourage amidst pomp and pageantries, beating loud drums, signify royalty or affluence. Also when Hajia strictly avoids body contacts and interactions with other guests, but willingly and cheerfully greets the National Party Chairman, Alhaji Shettima Danladi who wore a Hausa attire, and perhaps of the same religion with her. Hajia showed sympathy while expecting other guests to understand Retired Major General Uthman Da Fodio's predicament when he angrily stormed out of the Minister's office without uttering words or showing appreciation to the secretary.

Conclusion

Nonverbal cues are vital parts of all human communication efforts. In all, this work has discussed aspects of nonverbal communication in *The Meeting*. The film employed the use of nonverbal cues to drive home messages and points, some of which serve as aid to speech. As Payne (2001:100) says, nonverbal communication is communication without the use of words. It relies on gestures, body movement, facial expressions., even silence. In addition, Ortega (2011), says nonverbal cues aid the interchange between characters in films and helps audience's comprehensibility in the "multilingual and multicultural complexities portrayed" in the film genre. In *The Meeting*, nonverbal cues by the actors and actresses support Burgoon and Swaine's (1978:9-10) claim that attributes or actions of humans, other than the use of words themselves, which have socially shared meaning, are intentionally sent or interpreted as intentional, are consciously sent or consciously received, and have potential for feedback from the receiver. Beyond what is said, nonverbal communication can help to enhance interpersonal communication, but sometimes it could be vague and ambiguous since no words were used to convey a clear meaning. Also, it is impossible to carry on long conversations and essential clarifications through nonverbal communication, thereby making the message difficult to understand. This was clearly seen when Clara informed Mr. Esho that the Minister has gone to inspect some of the Ministry's parastatals in Akwa Ibom state. There was air of confusion, as she could not carry on the conversation after one or two nonverbal expressions in response to his remarks and irritating questions. Sometimes, it was also difficult for the guests to understand or have a clear grasp of some of her nonverbal communication. *The Meeting* effectively utilizes nonverbal communication to enhance the storytelling and character development. The film demonstrates the powerful impact of nonverbal cues such as gestures, facial expressions, and body language in conveying emotions, attitudes, and intentions. Through the use of these nonverbal elements, the film creates a sense

of authenticity and realism, allowing viewers to relate to the characters and their experiences. The scenes analyzed in this study illustrate the significance of nonverbal communication in film as a means of enriching the narrative and creating a deeper connection between the audience and the characters.

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