

**THE USE OF NONVERBAL COMMUNICATION WITH  
SPECIFIC REFERENCE TO NORTHERN SOTHO DISCOURSE**

By

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(i)

**DECLARATION**

I, the undersigned, MAMOKATO JERIDA MOTHIBA declare that the dissertation **THE USE OF NONVERBAL COMMUNICATION WITH SPECIFIC REFERENCE TO NORTHERN SOTHO DISCOURSE**, has not been previously submitted by me for any degree at this or any other institution, that this is my own work in design and that all material contained therein has been duly acknowledged.



.....  
**SIGNATURE**



.....  
**DATE**

(ii)

## **DEDICATION**

This dissertation is dedicated to my late son Malope Mothiba.

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## **ABSTRACT**

This study explores the use of nonverbal communication in Northern Sotho discourse. The paper serves as an introduction to the study of nonverbal communication in African languages. The concept of nonverbal communication is as equally important in a communication system as verbal communication. Therefore, this paper focuses on some of the various forms of nonverbal communication such as facial expressions, proxemics, haptics, personal appearance, and most importantly, the concept of time. This study is done mainly in comparison with the Western way of doing things and how the social changes affect the use of these cues.

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# CHAPTER 1

## 1.1 INTRODUCTION

Excellent communication skills are a basic need for every person. It is, therefore, important for every individual to take care of how he or she communicates his or her thoughts, ideas and feelings to others, and how these will be understood. While verbal communication is a means of sending messages by using verbal codes or words, “nonverbal communication involves the use of nonverbal stimuli in a communication setting that are generated by both the source (speaker) and his or her use of the environment and that potential message value for the source or receiver” (www.andrews.edu, nd:1). Through nonverbal communication, messages are sent and received without the use of verbal codes.

It is not only what a person says that is important, but how it is said can also make a difference to the listeners. People may not have time to hear and learn a language, but taking time to learn the signals is a powerful communication tool. That is why it is sometimes said that what one does, speaks as loudly as what one says but cannot be heard. A large number of people cross cultural borders, and it is, therefore, necessary to understand more about the effective, yet powerful silent language of gestures. People all over the world use their hands, heads, and bodies to communicate effectively in various cultures.

Gestures and body language communicate as effectively as words, maybe even more effectively. People are constantly communicating in one way or another, even if they say nothing at all. Whereas language seems to be the obvious form of communication, much more information is communicated beyond the pure words that are exchanged during a conversation. Body language is used daily, from acknowledging one’s presence to greetings and even bringing a taxi to a stop. Because of nonverbal communication people can also communicate effectively, in other words, verbal communication on its own will not achieve much without the assistance of nonverbal codes.

## 1.2 PROBLEM STATEMENT

Like verbal communication, nonverbal communication is a key aspect of communication. People are senders and receivers of both types of communication. All nonverbal behaviour has a communicative value since no matter what people do, they reveal information about themselves. Nonverbal communication is culture bound, as some forms of nonverbal behaviour have different meanings across various cultures.

Northern Sotho, like every language in the world, also uses nonverbal communication in everyday life. Nonverbal communication plays a pivotal role in the Northern Sotho discourse as people sometimes pay more attention to what one does more than what he or she says. When verbal and nonverbal communication contradict each other, people often believe the nonverbal side of the communication.

Like with any form of communication, there are sometimes problems with understanding nonverbal communication. Difficulties may arise if the communicators are unaware of the types of messages they are sending and how the receiver is interpreting those messages. Divergence may also arise if the sender's message does not match the receiver's perception of social norms for the particular situation. All parties involved must desire interaction in order for reciprocal communication to occur.

Cleary (2003:19) states that: "some nonverbal communication messages convey the feelings on their own - a smile for example, while others function in conjunction with verbal messages". These nonverbal communication cues can also be used to complement, repeat, substitute, or contradict. The problem of misconception that results from the misunderstandings between the speaker and the listener may give rise to communicative failure or even embarrassment. When communication is blocked, misunderstood or mixed-up, relationships eventually become weak and die. On the

other hand, all these can be conquered through effective communication. When open, clear communication takes place, relationships and cooperation thrive. Research in nonverbal communication would thus provide awareness and possible solutions to many communication problems.

Various problems may also arise because the nonverbal communication codes are ambiguous, continuous, and multichannel.

The following major problem areas of nonverbal behaviour have been identified:

### 1.2.1 Proximity

Proximity can be interpreted in a number of ways. Every culture has rules about the correct use of space. These rules may not be written or taught but are very powerful and known to all members of a specific culture. Cultural norms dictate a comfortable distance of interaction with other people. According to Webb and Kembo-Sure (2000:276), “the physical distance or proximity between participants in a communication interaction is determined by rank or social hierarchy or differentiation”.

In Northern Sotho, for example, it may not be appropriate for a child to be too close to an adult in a discussion, or for a subordinate to be too close to a chief or for a pupil to be too close to the teacher unless they are authorized to come closer. If the distance is not taken into account people may assume that the two are intimately involved. This is mainly because everyone erects invisible but real boundaries around oneself. Since people get distressed if their personal space is invaded without permission or initiation, the cultural background plays a role in the use of nonverbal communication.

### 1.2.2 Eye-contact

In the Western culture, in a communication situation eyes are seen as the “windows of the soul” (Stewart, 1999:82), and help in regulating the flow of communication. Eye-contact with the audience increases speaker credibility. Furthermore, maintaining eye-contact during a conversation indicates that the receiver is listening. In addition, Stewart argues that, since different cultures have different estimates of what constitutes good eye contact, it is important to become aware of and to learn to manage one’s own eye behaviour.

Eye-contact between a child and an elder is also of great importance. In Northern Sotho culture children are not expected to look their elders in the eyes when talking to them as this may show disrespect of the elder by the child. If this norm is not taken into consideration, an adult may shout at the offending child, ordering him/her not to stare the adult in the face. If reprimanded in this way, the child should immediately look down. The same goes for a woman, who may not be expected to look directly at the face of a man, particularly one she is not familiar with. If she does so, he may misinterpret her intentions.

Unlike in Northern Sotho culture, eye contact in Western culture is seen as an important tool for fruitful communication. According to McKenna (1997:30), “the eyes are an important part of nonverbal communication, speakers who stare off into space or keep their eyes glued to their feet do not inspire much attention or confidence”.

### 1.2.3 Facial expressions

The face is seen as the organ of emotion and people constantly read facial expressions to understand what others are feeling. People’s identity is captured in their features, and the eyes reveal important truths about them, even those that they may choose to conceal.

Many scholars, such as Stewart (1999) and Frost, Vos and Dreyer (1997), agree that facial expressions are identical, but the meaning attached to them may differ. These scholars are of the opinion that smiling, crying or showing anger, sorrow, or disgust do not have similar meanings worldwide as the intensity of these codes may vary from culture to culture.

#### 1.2.4 Touch

Touch is culturally determined, but each culture has a clear concept of what parts of the body one may or may not touch. It is generally perceived that Africans, Asians and Chinese are not touch oriented and they avoid any public display of intimacy (www.intranet.csupomona.edu, 1990:01). In many African societies, people do not kiss in public. Women may only kiss young children, especially young babies. Despite the cultural manner of avoiding any public display of intimacy, the Africans are steadily but surely moving away from that idea and embracing Western culture of showing emotions.

According to Frost, *et. al.* (1997:54), “there are many good rules and customs concerning touch”. They argue that there are many taboo zones or parts of the body that others may not touch. An example here may be that of the members of the same family (parents and children) who may not touch some parts of other members of the family at their own will. The only relationship where there are virtually no taboo zones in African culture is the one between mothers and their babies, even though the same does not go for fathers and their babies. This is possibly because of prohibitions caused by the fear of being accused of incest.

#### 1.2.5 Gestures

It is a well-known fact that the possibility exists that what is acceptable in one culture may be offensive in another, for instance, the amount of gesturing differs from culture to culture and in Western culture if one does not make use of gestures while

speaking, one may be perceived as boring, stiff, and unanimated. Head nods, as a form of gesture, communicate positive reinforcement to the receiver of the message and indicate that one is listening.

Some of the gestures are used accompanied by the words people utter. It is argued that these gestures reveal a good deal about a person's emotional state as they convey messages to other people. It is interesting to observe that people sometimes use gestures even when the receiver of the message may not see them. This is evident in cases where people speak to the blind or talking on the phone. Despite the use of gestures as a form of communication, some of them are not acceptable in Northern Sotho discourse. Unlike handshaking and bowing that are the most acceptable forms of gestures when greeting, touching someone else's head may not be acceptable in Northern Sotho culture.

From the foregoing exposition, it is evident that nonverbal communication cannot be taken for granted in any discourse as what is acceptable in one culture may not necessarily be acceptable in any other culture. A study of this nature is thus necessary as it would assist interlocutors to employ nonverbal communication strategies in a proper manner.

### **1.3 AIM OF THE STUDY**

The main purpose of this research study is to investigate the impact of the use of nonverbal communication in Northern Sotho Discourse. In order to reach the desired goal, the focus will mainly be on the following factors:

- 1 Definition of nonverbal communication.
- 2 Key differences between verbal and nonverbal communication.
- 3 Importance of nonverbal communication in a language.
- 4 Problems associated with nonverbal communication.

#### **1.4 RATIONALE FOR THE STUDY**

Since the use of nonverbal codes varies across cultures, this study is aimed at examining the use of this phenomenon. Although languages are different in some cases, there are nonverbal codes that are peculiar to all languages. Codes such as a smile and a frown are present in almost all languages. Therefore, the rationale for this study is to investigate the different ways in which the Northern Sotho speaking people use and interpret the nonverbal communication system and to clarify the issue of ambiguity and confusion that sometimes occurs during the use of nonverbal communication.

#### **1.5 SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY**

The significance of this study lies in the fact that it is aimed at:

- Revealing why people sometimes rely more on nonverbal communication than on verbal communication.
- The use of nonverbal communication in Northern Sotho discourse as compared to Western cultures.
- Adding to the existing literature and body of knowledge in nonverbal communication.

#### **1.6 METHODOLOGY**

In this research study, the qualitative method will be used to compare the use of nonverbal communication in Northern Sotho with general conventions in Western culture.

## **1.6.1 Collection of information**

### *1.6.1.1 Primary sources*

Information will be obtained through consultations with the appropriate people in the field. This will necessitate purposive or stratified sampling as thirty teachers, thirty lecturers, and fifty members of the community who are Northern Sotho first language speakers, will be consulted. In addition, unstructured questions will be invoked for this purpose.

### *1.6.1.2 Secondary sources*

This method will be used to obtain existing information about the topic. Information will, therefore, be collected from library sources such as books, journals, magazines, dissertations, and theses as well as from the internet.

## **1.7 SCOPE AND DELIMITATION**

Even though there will be constant reference to the work already done by other scholars, the researcher's emphasis will be on the use of nonverbal communication in Northern Sotho.

## **1.8 LITERATURE REVIEW**

The main objective of the literature review is to study work done by other scholars on the subject under discussion. The following are some of the scholars who have contributed to the study of nonverbal communication.



### 1.8.1 **Frost, Vos, and Dreyer (1997)**

Frost, Vos, and Dreyer (1997:49) define nonverbal communication as “communication between people without the use of words” (1997:49). These authors emphasise the various forms of nonverbal communication such as proxemics, kinesics, eye contact, and gestures. While this is a worthwhile study it, however, has some shortcomings as these authors do not mention anything about silence as a form of nonverbal communication.

### 1.8.2 **Cleary (2003)**

According to Cleary (2003:18), nonverbal communication “uses relational symbols and is also spontaneous as it discloses the sender’s inner emotional state, and the receiver’s immediate awareness of, and response, to that state”. Communicators sometimes rely heavily on the use of nonverbal codes to fine-tune the messages they are sending. This is because the words in the message are interpreted differently by the participants in the communicative situation.

Cleary also emphasizes the main functions of nonverbal communication, such as to express meaning, modify verbal messages, and to regulate the flow of interaction. Like Frost, Vos, and Dreyer she also highlights the different forms of nonverbal codes such as proxemics, facial expressions, kinesics, and physical appearance.

### 1.8.3 **Webb and Kembo-Sure (2000)**

These authors define nonverbal communication as those factors at work in intercultural communication that are not exposed in linguistic form. They too stress the importance of taking factors of nonverbal communication into consideration. They mention factors such as proxemics, posture, eye contact, and physical contact. They also include the dress factor as a means of identifying a person. They mention that people dress to suit the occasion, and that these dress codes are determined by culture.

Their study is mainly on African societies, especially those which are practised in Northern Sotho culture. These authors, however, too do not mention anything about the use of silence in communication even though it is regularly employed in African culture.

#### **1.8.4 Steinberg (2002)**

According to Steinberg, nonverbal communication is “the form of communication that does not use written or spoken signs’ (2002:07). The author mentions different types of nonverbal communication such as kinesics, proxemics, personal appearance, touch, and chronemics, which is the field of study that is concerned with the use of time. The author also emphasizes the importance of culture in nonverbal communication. This study is, however, one dimensional as it only focuses on Western culture. There is hardly any mention of any other culture concerning nonverbal communication.

#### **1.8.5 Erasmus-Kritzinger, Bowler, and Goliath (2001)**

These authors define nonverbal communication as a form a communication using means other than words to communicate. They also state that people use different forms of nonverbal communication such as facial expressions, gestures, sign language or objects to get the messages across. Erasmus-Kritzinger, Bowler, and Goliath too emphasize the importance of using and understanding the different forms of nonverbal communication, which are among others to complement, contradict or substitute a verbal message. As types of nonverbal communication cues they mention kinesics, proxemics, general appearance, touch, and most importantly, silence.

The above-given authors mention that using silence at a strategic moment can convey a positive, negative or neutral message. Silence can also indicate respect for the speaker, indicate that one is expecting a response from the receiver, and that one is ready to listen which is really evident in Northern Sotho culture.

### 1.8.6 Stewart (1999)

Stewart as well defines nonverbal communication as a form of communication whereby verbal codes are not used. He also mentions the difference between mixed cues and primarily nonverbal cues. He, however, mentions silence as another form of nonverbal communication. In his work silence is referred to as a mixed cue that is significant in the context of talk: “Silence is not an interval ... but the bridge that unites sounds” (1999:78). Other mixed cues in his study are voice, face and words, and gestures and words. The primarily nonverbal cues are the face, eye contact and gaze, space, touch, movement, and gesture.

Stewart compares the use of facial expressions across cultures, for example between Japanese and North Americans. He states that, historically, the Japanese have been taught to mask negative facial expressions with smiles and laughter and to display little facial emotion. Expressions have for instance, contributed to misunderstandings between the Japanese and the North American people who do not interpret the expressions the same way as the Japanese do.

Silence as another form of nonverbal communication has not received enough attention from the scholars whose work the researcher examined. This is one of the least understood nonverbal behaviours, because people use and interpret it in many different ways. Silence sends nonverbal cues during a communication situation, and functions as a feedback mechanism. Silence can be interpreted to express apathy, patience, boredom, fear, sadness, anger, and intimidation. It can also be used to express the most varied and conflicting states, sometimes thoughts and desires. The use of silence is culturally determined.

A fascinating point about Stewart’s (1999) and Erasmus-Kritzinger’s (2001) studies is that they have treated silence as a part of nonverbal communication. Their studies will, therefore, play a crucial role in this research as silence forms an integral part of nonverbal communication in Northern Sotho.

### **1.8.7 Tubbs and Human (1994)**

Tubbs and Human define nonverbal communication as a way of conveying nonlinguistic messages. They go further to stress the importance of nonverbal communication by stating that “it must be viewed as a whole that is greater than the sum of its parts” (1994:103). They mention the forms of nonverbal communication such as spatial and temporal cues, visual cues, and the vocal cues. They also stress the crucial part played by culture as they mention that “culture has an even subtle and pervasive influence on nonverbal communication” (1994:107).

### **1.8.8 Gamble and Gamble (1999)**

Gamble and Gamble, define nonverbal communication as “the designation of all the kinds of human responses not expressed in words” (1999:134). These authors state that nonverbal communication is perpetual and frequently involuntary; people unconsciously display body behaviours that reveal their emotional conditions.

These authors also mention that in order to arrive at a better understanding of communication and develop skills that will permit both the senders and the receivers of cues to conduct the process more accurately, there are specific areas to be examined. These areas are among others, kinesics, clothing and artifacts, paralanguage, proxemics, chronemics, and haptics.

### **1.8.9 Barker and Gaut (1996)**

Barker and Gaut state that nonverbal communication plays a vital role in every communication setting. As such, no element of nonverbal behaviour can be interpreted in isolation. Barker and Gaut state that “verbal and nonverbal communication are complementary, neither is really complete without the other” (1996: 73). They mention the types of nonverbal communication such as facial expressions, kinesics and body movement, personal appearance, clothing, touching, proxemics, and paralanguage.

#### 1.8.10 **Berko, Wolvin and Wolvin (1998)**

These authors state that nonverbal communication is “all those messages that people exchange beyond the words themselves” (1998:103). They further define the different categories of nonverbal communication, such as the kinesics, paravocalics, proxemics, chronemics, artifacts, and olfatics. Like the other scholars these authors emphasize the importance of the correct and acceptable use of nonverbal communication and its importance in a communication situation. They state that every culture has its own body language, which different cultures operate under different action chains. This stresses the fact that nonverbal communication is culture bound.

#### 1.8.11 **Adler, Rosenfeld and Towne (1989)**

Adler, Rosenfeld and Towne define nonverbal communication as “messages expressed by nonlinguistic terms” (1989:135). They emphasize the importance of nonverbal communication as they state that what a person does often conveys more meaning than what that person says. The face and eyes, posture, gestures, touch, voice, proxemics, and territoriality are mentioned as the different types of nonverbal communication. Like Webb and Kembo-Sure, these authors mention dress code as a means of nonverbal communication. They mention that clothing conveys various types of messages to others. Clothing can say much about a person’s social background, level of success, social position, and moral character. They also mention that assumptions are often made on people’s style of dressing.

#### 1.8.12 **De Wet (1991)**

De Wet states that although nonverbal messages often carry much more weight than verbal messages, people are generally less aware of that. He thus mentions that the overall idea is that nonverbal messages should complement verbal messages. According to this author, nonverbal messages frequently have an iconic relationship

with their meanings, which means that an example such as a raised fist gesture may look hostile probably because of its similarity to punching someone. On the other hand, words have an arbitrary relationship with their meanings because the way in which a word looks or sounds usually has no bearing on its meaning.

Like most of the authors in this area of study, De Wet also states that nonverbal communication is culture bound; therefore, nonverbal messages employed for a specific purpose in one culture may not be applied as effectively in or at all in another culture. Proxemics, chronemics, haptics, and kinesics are among De Wet's areas of study.

#### 1.8.13 McKenna (1997)

According to McKenna, "how you say something is often more powerful than what you say" (1997:29). She continues to mention that nonverbal messages account for about 93% of one's speech while the remaining 7% is for the actual words, and that one does not need a tertiary education or a big vocabulary to communicate assertively and to make oneself heard.

McKenna mentions that nonverbal communication can both enhance and supplement what one is saying, or detract or even oppose what one is saying. She mentions as the key components of nonverbal communication eye-contact, body posture, distance and physical contact, and gestures.

### 1.9 BACKGROUND OF THE NORTHERN SOTHO LANGUAGE

South Africa is a country where the intense hold of apartheid was removed a decade ago but economic success is still sharply divided among colour lines. Nevertheless, some of the most progressive policies dealing with language have been constructed. After the long reign of apartheid ended in 1994, the new government of South Africa transformed its language policy to include the indigenous languages. The policy that was created made way for eleven official languages, namely, Sesotho, Northern

Sotho, Setswana, Siswati, IsiNdebele, Xitsonga, Tshivenda, Isizulu, Isixhosa, Afrikaans, and English. The nine indigenous languages were thus included instead of solely supporting the languages of the previous colonizers.

Under the National Language Policy Framework (NLPF) framed in 2003, salience was placed on languages other than those of the previous European colonizers. Before 1994, the language policy in South Africa allowed only for two official languages, Afrikaans and English. These were thus the only languages of instruction. As stated in the National Language Services (2004:18):

In cases where government documents will not be made available in all 11 official languages, national government departments must publish documents simultaneously in at least six languages.

The selection of languages will be made as follows:

- At least one from the Nguni group (isiNdebele, isiXhosa, isiZulu, and siSwati)
- At least one from the Sotho group (Sepedi, Sesotho, Setswana),
- Tshivenda,
- Xitsonga,
- English, and
- Afrikaans.

The Pan South African Language Board (PanSALB) was established in terms of Act No. 59 of 1995, and is expected to monitor the observance of the constitutional provisions and principles relating to the use of languages, as well as the content and observance of any existing and new legislation, practice and policy dealing with language matters. PanSALB is mandated by the law to investigate complaints about language rights violations from any individual, organization or institution and its responsibilities are to create the conditions for the development of and equal use of all official languages” (www.dac.gov.za:04). This means that it must act in a manner

which initiates, facilitates, and empowers agencies both within state structures and civil society to contribute towards the development and use of all the official languages.

Another body that has been established to monitor the development of languages in South Africa is the Language Plan Task Group, known as LANGTAG. It has been instituted by the former Minister of Arts, Culture, Science and Technology, Dr Ben Ngubane. It has to advise the Minister who is responsible for language matters on devising a rational National Language Plan for South Africa. Following the recommendations of LANGTAG, which were submitted to the Minister of Arts, Culture, Science, and Technology, the State Language Services and the National Terminology Service which initially focused mainly on the development of English and Afrikaans, LANGTAG set out to transform the State Language Services and the National Terminology Services into a National Language Services (NLS) with the Department of Arts and Culture, in order to coordinate and monitor all language facilitation activities in the Public Service and to render such services as required.

The main task of the NLS is to meet constitutional obligations by facilitating, promoting and providing services in all the official languages and by managing language diversity through language planning and terminology projects.

Today English is considered as the language of upward mobility and Afrikaans as the language of instruction in many schools, while the mother tongues of most of the population are the indigenous languages of Southern Africa.

After the legislation expanding the official languages, was passed, the masses who had been labeled inferior during the apartheid era, have been free to speak and be served in their "inferior" languages under the present government system.

Northern Sotho or *Sesotho sa Leboa* as it is commonly referred to, is one of the eleven official languages and is spoken mostly in the Limpopo Province of South



Africa. Northern Sotho is also taught at schools as a subject and offered at tertiary institutions such as universities. The national broadcaster, the South African Broadcasting Corporation (SABC) plays a crucial role in promoting the equal use of all these languages. Thobela FM is the Northern Sotho radio station broadcasting within South Africa, the Limpopo Province, and beyond.

This language is often (as in the Constitution of South Africa) wrongly referred to as "Sepedi", while in actual fact the Sepedi is considered but a dialect of the language Northern Sotho. It is a member of the Sotho language group. According to Webb and Kembo-Sure (2000:50), Northern Sotho is known to about 12.6 million people. Different dialect clusters such as Selobedu, Sehananwa, Setlokwa, and Sethoka are found in the Northern Sotho speaking areas.

#### 1.10 DEFINITION OF CONCEPTS

1. **Language** is defined as a communication of thoughts and feelings through a system of arbitrary signals, such as voice sounds, gestures or written symbols, a system used by a nation, people or other distinct communities.
2. **Communication** is derived from the Latin word *communare* which means to share communication is thus the sharing of knowledge and feelings; it is the link between people, communities, and countries.
3. **Verbal communication** is the communication mode which people rely on most often to carry meaning from one person to another through the use of verbal codes.
4. **Nonverbal communication** involves those stimuli in a communication setting that are generated by both the source (speaker) and his/her use of the environment and that have potential message value for the sources or receiver (listener). Basically, it is sending and receiving messages in a variety of ways without the use of verbal codes (words).

5. **Speech** is the act of uttering articulate sounds or words, or the act of expressing thoughts by means of words or articulate sounds, the power of speaking.
6. **Rituals** refers to a formalised, predetermined set of symbolic actions generally performed in a particular environment at regular, recurring intervals.
7. **Proxemics** is the study of man's transactions, as he/she perceives and uses intimate, personal, and public space in various settings while following out of awareness the dictates of cultural paradigms.
8. **Haptics** is the science of applying touch sensation and control to interaction.
9. **Chronemics** refers to how people use and interpret time.
10. **Paralanguage** refers to all vocally-produced sound that is not a direct form of linguistic communication.
11. **Kinesics** indicates body movements which convey information in the absence of speech.
12. **Double bind** refers to special paradoxes in which the individual's relationship with the person creating the paradox is such that it is impossible to comment about or withdraw from the paradox.
13. **Culture** is the system of shared beliefs, values, customs, behaviours, and artifacts that the members of a society use to cope with their world and with one another, and that are transmitted from generation to generation through learning.
14. **Artifacts** are any material that was made, modified and utilized by past human behaviour.

It is not only important to understand what behaviours are included in nonverbal communication, but also to understand what their purpose is. Nonverbal communication is perfectly natural but not simple. Nonverbal cues can be sent by any arrangeable material and received by all five senses, and can again be innate or learned, but most importantly, nonverbal cues are extremely context-sensitive.

Verbal and nonverbal communication combine to form a personal style of communication that is unique to every communicator. Careful and reliable applications of nonverbal communication can enrich and enlighten one's understanding and control of communication in a variety of situations and cultural settings.

The importance of being aware of nonverbal behaviour allows one to become a better receiver of messages, a better sender of signals, and this mode of conversation increases the degree of the perceived closeness between people involved in a conversation. It is for this reason that the researcher sees this study as a necessity.

## 1.11 ORGANISATION OF THE STUDY

**Chapter One** serves as an introductory chapter to this paper and gives the different views from various nonverbal communication scholars.

**Chapter Two** explores the use of proxemics and haptics in the Northern Sotho culture as compared to how they are used in Western cultures.

**Chapter Three** is an attempt to analyse facial expressions in a communication situation. Together with the use of facial expressions is the use of gestures and posture and how these are defined differently across cultures.

**Chapter Four** deals with how personal appearance and the use of artifacts can be used to communicate positively or negatively.

**Chapter Five** is the concluding chapter to this study and presents the findings and recommendations.

## CHAPTER 2

### THE USE OF PROXEMICS AND HAPTICS AS FORMS OF NONVERBAL COMMUNICATION

#### 2.1 INTRODUCTION

The main aim of this chapter is to examine the use of proxemics and haptics as forms of nonverbal communication. In the light of this, the researcher will compare the various uses of these forms of nonverbal cues as they are used by interlocutors in Northern Sotho culture. As an attempt to establish what is acceptable and what is not in Northern Sotho, the researcher will attempt to answer the following questions:

- The concept of social change and the use of proxemics and haptics,
- What is the importance of using and understanding nonverbal cues in a communication situation?
- Why are some of the practices no longer adhered to?

Proxemics and haptics are predominantly universal, though they are not practiced in the same manner across cultures. Every culture employs the use of these cues in its own peculiar way although there may be similarities between two or more cultures. This chapter will examine different ways of interpreting the use of space and touch in Northern Sotho.

Since the body is the sounding board for the subconscious mind and the subconscious mind is only capable of expressing what is true, “people can tell you anything, but their body will tell you the truth” ([www.designedthinking.com](http://www.designedthinking.com):01). Space and distance are used to define and negotiate the interface between private and public, particularly during the moments leading up to contact.

Misconceptions are widespread about how people persuade and influence others, and it would be simplistic to believe that everything one hears is accurate. Yet people have to rely on what their eyes tell them, to be aware of the random collection of information they are sending to others.

## 2.2 PROXEMICS

The word proxemics, which is a derivative of the word proximity, “refers to how different groups of people use and perceive their social and personal space” ([www.allfreeessays.com](http://www.allfreeessays.com):01). The distance between individuals during, for example, a conversation, a meeting or a shared activity differs across cultures. People often feel possessive about some spaces, perhaps their rooms, yard or even a car. Differences can be observed in the distance that is acceptable to be penetrated by the other person across cultures.

### 2.2.1 Culture and the use of space

According to Mortesen (1972:299), considerable evidence has been gathered to indicate that people in primitive cultures tend to avoid orientations that place them in close proximity with others regardless of how many are present. He too mentions that their preference is always to be in the centre of whatever space is available. Part of the explanation for the pull toward central space seems to rest in the orientation of particular cultures.

When people from different cultural backgrounds come into contact, they often assume they have the same concept of the use of space. This is not always true, as cultures can be distinguished by the distances at which members interact and how frequently they touch. Every person is surrounded by a psychological “bubble” of space and this bubble contracts and expands depending on the person’s cultural background, emotional state, and the activity in which he/she is participating. This sense of distance is not only visual but also acoustic and forms a sensory envelope of

sensitivity that varies from person to person and from culture to culture. This sensory envelope is flexible enough to enable people to articulate a whole range of different behavioural possibilities within social situations such as meetings, initiating contact and attracting attention, all of which involve the intuitive negotiation of different levels of privacy. It provides people with layers of protection in public situations. Space acts in a particular way upon man's behaviour. The amount of space that 'belongs' to a person depends entirely upon the nature and the requirements of the situation and the unique frame of reference of each person.

An example of this situation was given by a respondent to correspond with culture and the use of space. She mentioned that in a case where a person wishes to approach the *kgoši* of his or her tribe or of another tribe, that person will have to call on the intervention of the official intermediary in the form of *mokgoma* for his or her tribe into the tribe of that *kgoši*. *Mokgoma* is the highest rank of nobility and Mönnig (1967:273) defines him as "the man who by virtue of his rank and status is the leader of the class of nobles". A commoner is not allowed to invade the *kgoši's* space, no matter how urgent the matter may be.

### 2.2.2 Status implications of space

Degrees of status are also communicated with space. According to Mortensen "status is a uniquely human concept both defined and sustained by long standing cultural conventions which ensure that 'best people' are entitled to the 'best places'" (1972:303). Those who are less fortunate usually assign themselves to other domains in the social hierarchy - some gradation of the middle or the lower class.

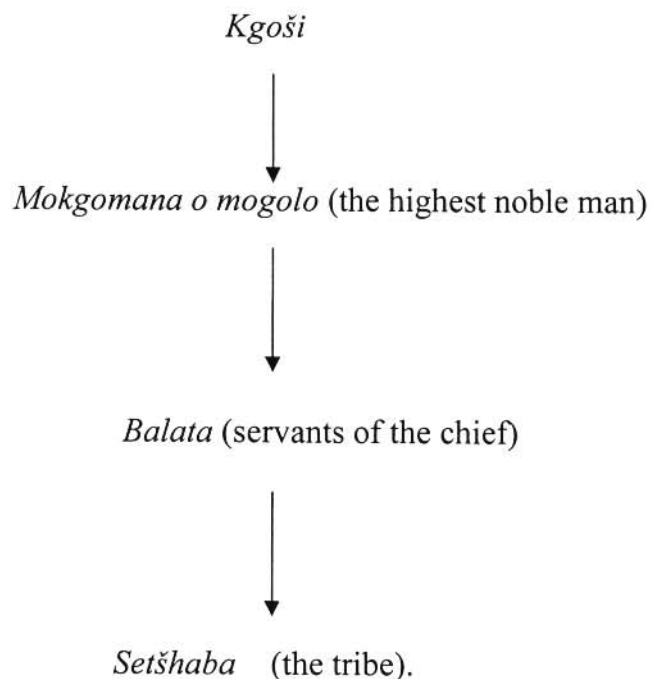
Mortensen (1972:303) mentions that "the African protocol preserves the superior status of guests, chiefs and speakers by assigning them to spatial positions 'up front' or at the head of the line".

An example of this in a Western perspective may be that heads of companies, university principals and high government officials usually occupy larger, well-furnished offices, drive bigger cars, and occupy big houses. Unlike their counterparts,

the junior staff members usually do not have these luxuries. From a Northern Sotho point of view, *magoši* are regarded as superior beings and they have bigger kraals, a number of bigger huts, their yards were always the biggest and so was his farming area. This was done as an attempt to show that the *kgoši* is superior. The supreme status of the *kgoši* is bolstered by various factors which enforce the centralized power that he exerts in his various roles.

In an attempt to augment the subject of status and the use of space, the following diagram will illuminate the matter.

**Figure 1:** The hierarchical presentation of the Chief's status



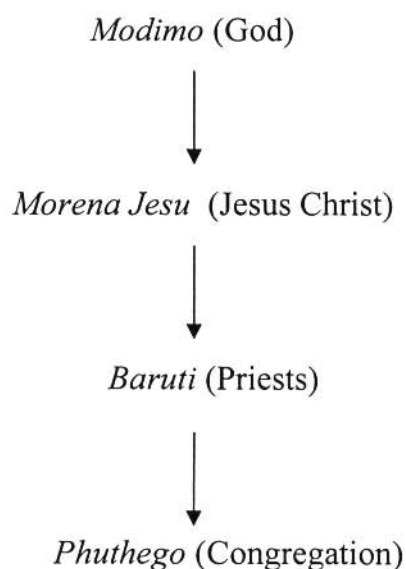
Mbiti (1989:77) supports this statement on the superiority of the *kgoši* by mentioning that “they hold a special place in African life and concepts”. It is this superiority that makes the *kgoši* to be seen as playing the role of mediator between God and the people. Mbiti (1989:67) also mentions that “out of widespread of feelings of respect which African people show in various ways towards God, some feel at certain times that man should not, or is unworthy to approach God alone”. *Magoši* are therefore,

seen as the earthly viceroys, considered to be holy and people must therefore, speak well of them, respect and even bow or kneel before them. This is supported by the Northern Sotho proverb: *go nyatša kgoši ke go tloga*, meaning he/she who does not respect the chief will be cast out.

Even in death the *magoši* spaces are still respected. They are not buried in the same graveyard as commoners but they are usually buried in sacred graves. The area is normally well-fenced and people cannot enter or cross it without consent. An example given by an elderly respondent around Ga Mothiba, Dipelaneng area, was that of the royal graveyard that is situated very closely to the *mošate* or *kgoši's* home. The graveyard has a high wall around it and the gate is always locked. There is a board notice on which is written *Motse woo go robetšego Magoši a Ga Mothiba*, which literally means a place where the Mothiba chiefs are buried. This supports the fact that whether dead or alive, the *kgošis* space should be respected.

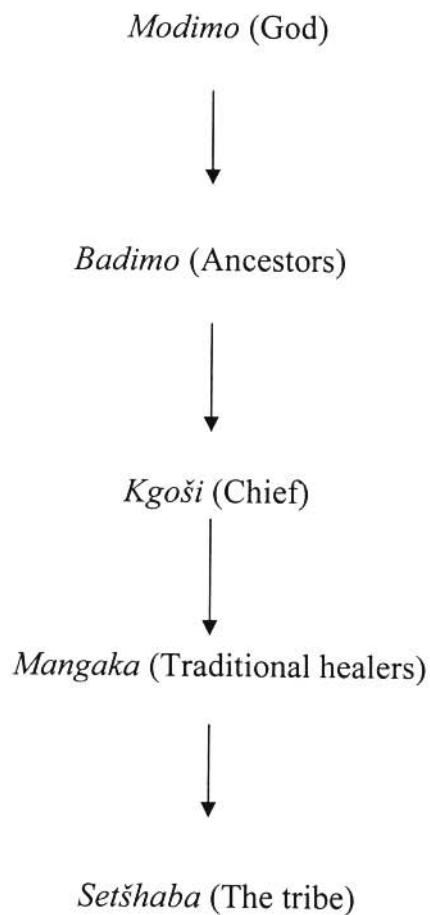
The concept of respecting the space of the superior persons in African culture can be shown in two different ways, namely, the Christian and the Traditional hierarchies of status between God and man. This can be illustrated as follows:

**Figure 2:** The Christian hierarchy





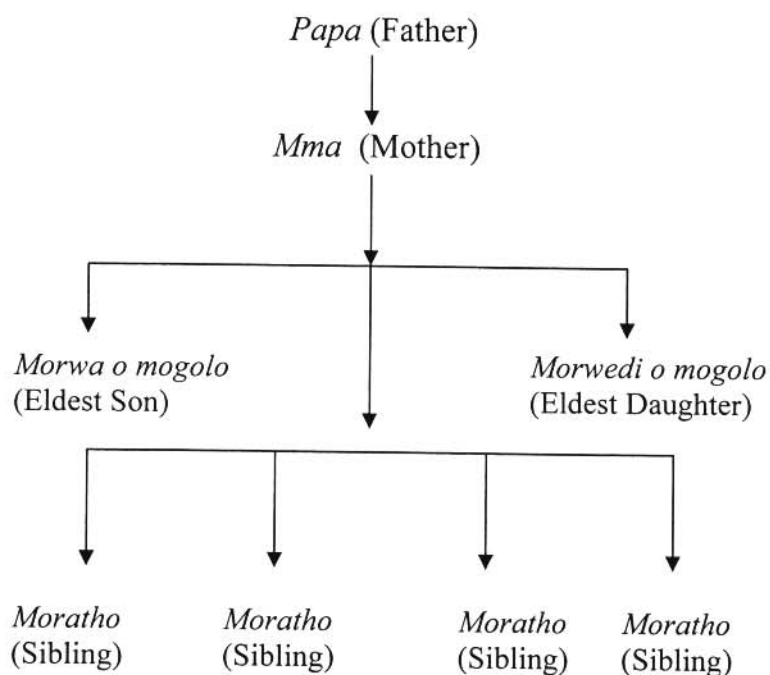
**Figure 3:** The Traditional hierarchy



These diagrams show how the Northern Sotho people view God's status as different from that of the ancestors. This is mainly between Christians and non-Christians.

Similar to the situation with the *kgoši*, in a traditional family situation in most African societies including the Northern Sotho, it is the custom for children to speak to their fathers through their mothers, older brothers or sisters. This situation can be shown in the following diagram:

**Figure 4:** The hierarchical presentation of a family unit



Prophets and religious founders are regarded as the chief mediaries. They stand between God and men. Mbiti (1989:182) mentions that “just as the king is the political symbol of God’s presence, so the priest is the religious symbol of God among His people”. An example in this case was given by an elderly member of the renowned Zion Christian Church (ZCC). She mentioned that one cannot directly approach their Bishop B.E. Lekganyane on his or her own. There are set channels to be followed in order to get the message through the bishop.

Another example given by a respondent who is a teacher by profession was that in a classroom situation; learners who normally occupied the head chairs in class talked more and were perceived to exert greater influence during the course of the lesson. Unlike their counterparts, those who normally occupy the back seats seem distant or withdrawn.

### *2.2.3 Space also influences what people talk about with others*

It would be considered odd or rather rude to have a conversation of a personal nature with someone at a social distance from oneself. Apart from the fact that everyone in the vicinity would overhear the conversation, the distance is too great to provide a setting for a personal conversation. This is evident in Northern Sotho culture where by if a wife wishes to have a fruitful conversation with the head of the house, she should kneel down close to the husband in order not to shout at him. This is usually done with eyes glued to the ground as a sign of respect.

There are important cultural rules and boundaries between the sexes, which mean that people cannot move in and out of other people's spaces as they wish. People have to observe others' norms and rules that may be hidden at times, or risk facing the consequences. There are norms to be observed when in formal communication situations. More intimate communications have different norms. If a person breaks the norm in a given situation, this will be interpreted as threatening or unfriendly.

According to Steinberg, "the distance between people in a communication conveys information about their relationship" (2002:34). If the personal space is violated, or an inappropriate distance is adopted between the sender and the receiver of the message during a conversation, a barrier could occur.

An example of this from a Northern Sotho perspective is the situation where a young man is in the process of proposing love to a young woman. He will intentionally invade her personal space. The young woman will move back in an attempt to send him the message that he should not come any closer than he already has. Sometimes people try to dominate others through such territorial moves. The explanation of social change is recognized as a difficulty for students of haptics and proxemics. As forms of nonverbal communication, these cues are steadily but surely changing with time. They are also associated with ideas about tradition and order across generations. Often, the only justification by the elders is that this is the way things have always been done.

Steinberg (2002:34 ) mentions that “people choose a particular distance depending on how they feel towards others at a given time, and that by reading which distance people take, people can get insight into their feelings.” According to Cleary (2003:21), Hall, a pioneer in the study of proxemics, specifies four spatial zones of interpersonal communication.

- 1 Intimate zone (0-0.4m)
- 2 Personal zone (0.4m-1.2m)
- 3 Social zone (1.2m-4m)
- 4 Public zone (4m-8m).

#### Intimate Zone (0-0.4m)

According to Cleary (2003:21) the intimate distance ranges from the point of touch to the other person. She mentions that it is at this distance that physical contact is natural. People can wrestle and they can make love. At this distance people’s senses are in full operation, they are easily stimulated, and again easily offended if found in an uncomfortable situation. Sometimes people find themselves being forced to endure an intimate distance between themselves and strangers in crowded buses, trains, and taxis. This situation is also experienced at some social gatherings such as funerals and weddings. At a funeral, people may invade others’ intimate space unknowingly, in an attempt to have a glimpse at the coffin. In some instances, the invasion of one’s intimate zone may be considered a sign of abusiveness that may even lead to sexual harassment.

Frost, Vos and Dreyer (1993: 53) state that there is “a number of categories of socially licensed space invaders and touchers”. Most of these people are usually strangers and yet have the right to invade others’ intimate zones and even touch them at will. These are groomers such as hairdressers and masseurs, and healers including doctors and first aid givers. An example on this in the Northern Sotho perspective may be that one may visit a traditional healer of the opposite sex and be asked to strip

partially or completely. This may not be seen as unusual as it will be considered part of the healing process. Sekhukhune (1988:178) mentions that in Northern Sotho culture there is a concept of *go felegetša sehlare*, literally meaning to accompany the medicine. This is to copulate in order to facilitate conception. This is agreeably carried out in view of the fact that the medicines the woman patient is taking on a daily basis are supposed to promote fertility and if possible speed up ovulation. This is done as a result of the desperation and social pressures put on women who cannot conceive. This is supported by Cloete and Maqadzhe (2004:08) when they mention that “such untrustworthy healers tell the women that they would be able to conceive if they first sleep with them”. Matters such as these often result in cases of sexual harassment being reported.

Most people feel apprehensive when those who have no right to be there intrude into their intimate space. People feel and respond differently to this type of situation. Allowing someone to move into one’s intimate zone, which a person does voluntarily, is usually a sign of trust.

#### Personal Zone (0.4m-1.2m)

In public most couples stand at this distance. This is the distance most often reserved for interaction with friends or family members. Topics discussed within this zone would also be personal. This zone is close enough to see each other’s reactions but far enough away not to intrude on his or her intimate zone. The personal zone rests on complex interaction of forces at work in the immediate surroundings as well as in the dynamics of the interpersonal relationships and the frame of reference of each communicator present. A personal zone is like the shell of a snail, a surrounding extension of oneself. People normally endeavour to enlarge the area of their personal space when confronted with stress-provoking acts by others.

Depending on interpersonal relationships, it may not be wise for a woman to stand too close to a man in a communication interaction. If this should by any chance happen it could lead to misunderstandings that would hamper the smooth running of

the conversation. If a woman stands too close to a man while in a conversation, she may be mistaken for having some time in a foreign country as this is not acceptable in Northern Sotho culture. No African woman will stand that close to a man during a normal conversation.

An example given by a respondent was in a classroom situation when introducing the subject of personal space, he asked one learner of the opposite sex to help demonstrate the importance of respecting other people's space. The learner was asked to stand at one side of the classroom and as the teacher asked about how he or she felt about the distance the learner would normally say that the teacher was too far away. The teacher took several steps towards the learner until he or she is about a meter away from the learner. At this point the other students would normally shout that the distance was fine. When the teacher ignored the words and moved even closer, the learner would start to chuckle, giggle, look away, and try to move back. This shows how people can get upset if their personal space is not respected or their personal bubble burst without permission.

Another example of this may be the distance between people talking informally at a social gathering. If the personal distance is reduced into the intimate distance, the other person may feel uncomfortable. If the personal distance is increased, the other person is likely to feel rejected.

#### Social Zone (1.2m-4m)

It is within this zone that various kinds of communication usually occur, in business situations, social gatherings, and interviews. Sitting at this distance signals a far different and less relaxed type of conversation. This can be experienced in a *kgoro* situation. This is the most important corporate unit within the tribal community that functions as a social and political unit. Mönnig (1967:252) mentions that the *kgoro* "performs the jural activities within the group and guides the economic activities of the group." In this situation if there is somebody to be interrogated about something he or she did, the accused usually occupies the head seat in order to be seen and heard

by everyone present. This is the distance maintained by people who do not know each other very well.

According to Gamble and Gamble (1999:154), “at the social distance we are not likely to share personal concerns”. This is arguably the safer distance, at which one would communicate information and feelings that are not particularly private or revealing. Those who may violate the 4m boundary tend to be surprised if people do not acknowledge their presence, unless they are very busy. According to Tubbs, Moss and Human (1994:109), “humans have extended social distance by means of the walkie-talkie, telephone, radio, and television”.

Stewart (1999:85) states, “this is also the distance we often use with people of significantly higher or lower status”. This is an acceptable sitting arrangement from a superior, and will create a much more formal conversation. It is, therefore, considered more effective to reprimand using social distance and less effective to give praise at this zone. In Northern Sotho culture this is the distance used when singing praises to the *kgoshi*. Again, it is used by people, usually women, who are swearing or insulting one another.

#### Public Zone (4m-8m)

This is the largest of all the zones and it is commonly reserved for strangers with whom people do not wish to interact. Gamble and Gamble (1999:154) state that “distanced at the further end of the range are well beyond the area of personal involvement and make interpersonal communication very unlikely”. An example of the use of this distance is that of a visitor who may choose to use this distance for communicating with the people he or she is visiting. This may be considered a sign of rudeness or feeling unwelcome.

## 2.3 HAPTICS

According to Adler, Rosenfeld and Towne (1989:149), touch is the earliest means that people have as a means of making contact with others and is essential to the body's healthy development. Steinberg (2002:56) mentions that "lack of contact in childhood often may contribute to physical and psychological problems in adulthood". Stewart (1999:85) also highlights the importance of physical contact by mentioning "touch is essential to the physical, emotional, and psychological well-being of human infants and to their intellectual, social, and communication development". Physical contact is as important for adults although taboos in many African cultures make it difficult to accomplish. As with distance, touch communicates information about the relationship between people. Lovers usually touch each other more frequently in conversation than friends do. People who have just been introduced shake hands more formally than relatives do.

In Northern Sotho culture, parents avoid intimate touching in the presence of their children. This is discouraged because of the fear of losing the respect of their children. Another reason given by a respondent was that if parents do touch in front of their children they may attempt to emulate them which may in turn impact negatively on the children.

According to Adler, Rosenfeld and Towne (1989:150), the "marasmus" epidemic that claimed a large number of children's lives, was in a way caused by a lack of physical contact with parents or nurses rather than from the lack of nutrition, medical care or other factors.

In Northern Sotho, most frequently touching occurs during greetings and departures, but can also occur in a variety of circumstances and during a conversation. Some cultures place emphasis on physical contact between people during a conversation. Berko, Wolvin and Wolvin (19989:118) state that "women in the North-American culture tend to engage in more intimate same-sex touch than men do. This statement is also supported by Imai (2000:01) when he mentions that "generally speaking, the



Filipinos are a touch-oriented society, people of the same sex may be seen holding hands in public places, which is simply a gesture of friendship”. They may at regular intervals touch the other person. This behaviour may on the other hand make a person from other societies in which touching is limited feel extremely uncomfortable because of the ever-growing reports of sexual harassment.

While haptics can be hostile, haptic behaviour is frequently used to indicate the degree of intimacy between people in a conversation. The relationship may be professional, social, friendship, or even intimate. Various factors make a given touch more or less intense. Among these factors is the part of the body that is being touched, the part of the body that does the touching, how long the touch lasts, the situation in which the touch occurs or even the relationship between the persons involved. The boundaries between the different levels of intimacy are somewhat indistinct even in one culture. However, across cultures the boundaries may be completely different and what is intended as a social or polite touching behaviour may be interpreted as an intimate haptic behaviour. Touching behaviour can frequently cause irritation and misinterpretation of what is intended with the touch and may cause discomfort. Adler *et al* (1989:138) mention that “less obvious cross-cultural differences can damage relationships without the parties even recognizing what has gone wrong”.

### **2.3.1 Touch is culturally determined**

Whether one often reaches out to touch people or not, is often determined by cultural influences. The amount of touching behaviour that is permissible in interpersonal communication depends largely on the individual’s culture. Aside from handshakes or the occasional pat on the back or touching colleagues, no matter how innocent, this can be misinterpreted as a sign of romantic attraction, and could result in a charge of sexual harassment. Different members of a family are touched differently by other family members. The relationship between parents and their children is normally a very affectionate one as supported by Mönning (1967:217) when he remarks that “the

bond between a mother and her children is usually closer than that with the father”. An example given by a respondent about Northern Sotho speaking people is that one may not touch (or shake hands with) one’s father-in-law or mother-in-law of the opposite sex let alone be with them in the same room.. This is seen as some kind of taboo.

### **2.3.2 Touch can also reflect status**

The person who initiates touch is usually the one with the higher status who usually also controls the interaction. As men worldwide dominate economic, political, and social affairs they normally use touch and space to assert their dominance over women. They are much more likely to touch women than women are to touch them. Women are usually the recipients of the touching action, rather than its initiator.

In Northern Sotho culture, it is quite unlikely for a commoner to go up to the *kgoši* and pat him on the back or on the shoulder. The *kgoši*, however, might put an arm around any member. Again, women in the African culture tend to engage in same sex touch more frequently than men do. Female pairs are more likely to be seen holding hands, exchanging touches, kissing, and even hugging, while in an African setting men who do the same may be considered substandard. Women do so for longer durations than male pairs even though this is currently changing with the increase in gay and lesbian relationships. Men usually touch one another using only behaviours such as handshaking, or in instances of extreme emotion.

### **2.3.3 Touch also functions as an important part of sexual communication**

If people of the opposite sexes are seen holding hands, the assumption is that they have a romantic interest in each other. This may not always be the case. In Northern Sotho culture, adults usually do not touch in the presence of their children. The irony in the use of haptics is that money is spent on creams and other products to make people touchable and then they avoid being touched.

Many Africans have adopted the habit of public display of intimacy, such as kissing. This interaction is mostly unheard of in African cultures and remains forbidden. The closest to this practice is the embracing practice. Men may embrace women, men may embrace men and women may embrace each other during greetings between people who are familiar with each other.

Following an argument by one of the respondents, the use of touch is no longer respected as it was done before. She argued that in the olden days young girls used to put on *mose* (a triangular skin apron) and *legabe* (which was a stringed apron) made for unmarried girls which only covered the lower front and the lower back part of the body, while the breasts were left uncovered. The best part of the body was left uncovered but young men would never abuse that. Today, however, almost every news bulletin carries a rape report while rape did not occur as frequently as it does today. The main reason for this behaviour was the concept of respect and discipline instilled in them.

In Northern Sotho culture the amount of touching usually decreases with age. Parents usually touch their older children less often than their younger ones. As young children, they receive at least a modest amount of physical contact from their parents. The next time that one can expect this level of physical caring may be when they have chosen a partner. Even then, the nurturing seemingly brought by physical contact will most often only come from that partner (usually the man)

## 2.4 CONCLUSION

Proxemics and haptics forms of nonverbal communication help to carry the impact of a message. These nonlinguistic messages are important because what people do often conveys more meaning than what they say. As people develop a greater sensitivity to body language and its implications, they can be more in tune with the thoughts and feelings of others. People can also become more certain that the messages they are communicating are the ones they intended to convey. Regardless of people's

positions in life, it is important for them to develop sensitivity to nonverbal messages. Cooperation improves as people recognize and respond appropriately to nonverbal cues. Of course people have been aware of non-verbal communication all of their life, but have often neglected to pay due attention to it.

## **CHAPTER 3**

### **FACIAL EXPRESSIONS, GESTURES, AND POSTURE**

#### **3.1 INTRODUCTION**

This chapter is an attempt to review the various uses of facial expressions, gestures, and posture across cultures with special attention to Northern Sotho speakers. Just like the other forms of nonverbal communication, these nonverbal cues are employed and interpreted differently. Nonverbal communication plays a pivotal role in every communication situation, from the amount of eye contact people have with others, to the kinds of gestures and the forms of posture they use. These nonverbal cues send messages that are frequently more compelling and eloquent than any verbal statement. Although people are to some degree aware of the impact of nonverbal communication, they may not be cognizant of the extent to which nonverbal messages function in their everyday lives.

#### **3.2 FACIAL EXPRESSIONS**

According to Stewart (1999:81), the face “is probably the most expressive part of your body and one of the most important focal points for nonverbal communicating”. The face is considered as a visible and transparent focal point of interpersonal events. It is the key to self-identity and the main vehicle for personal recognition. In a human body, the face is one feature that is richly expressive of inner feelings. The varieties of facial expressions result from a composite of minute muscular movements. Facial expressions are learned, culturally defined patterns of behaviour.

People are mostly unaware of how much they rely on faces to give and get information. Certain basic emotions are facially expressed in similar ways across cultures. Every culture includes some conventional facial expressions that people use to communicate joy, or happiness, sadness, surprise, fear, anger and disgust.

There are some culture-specific rules for the display of these emotions, but they are expressed in very similar ways in most cultures. According to Frost *et. al.* (1993:59), “the ‘inborn-ness’ of facial expression may seem obvious, but when we see how much cultural differentiation there is in virtually all other spheres of nonverbal communication, this uniformity becomes interesting in itself”.

### 3.2.1 Eye contact

The face and eyes are the most noticeable parts of the body. According to Frost *et. al.* (1993:60), “eyes can communicate a great deal by means of gaze: where it is directed and for how long it is held.” Eye contact appears to be one of the first behaviours that infants develop. Within a few days of birth, infants seem to recognize the caregivers’ eyes, and this is enough for the infants to produce a smile.

In Western culture, little or no eye contact during a conversation is a sign of insincerity, disinterestedness, lacks confidence or lying. Generally, there are no positive messages conveyed by too little eye-contact in western culture. However, in Northern Sotho culture, eye-contact is usually used in questions of dominance between men and women. Men and women are still educated by society to speak and act differently. There are some acts that are perceived as profanity but because these are mainly done by men, they remain acceptable. Their behaviour is tolerated as normal and not seen as surprising. Contradictory to that, verbally and nonverbally, females are expected to be more restrained than their male counterparts. These differences in the uses of verbal and nonverbal communication often lead to misunderstandings.

During interactions, men are allowed to have eye-contact with any person. An example given by one respondent was that in Northern Sotho culture, keeping eyes glued to the ground (by women) is a sign of respect and discipline. Looking a man straight in the eyes may give him a wrong impression about the woman’s intentions. Women should manage their eye contact carefully when speaking to men in Northern Sotho culture.

The direct eye-to-eye gaze is almost similar to direct physical contact. This is considered as the closest people can get to touch someone from more than an arm's length. The amount of eye-contact between two people can be an indication of intimacy between them. It is because of the intimacy of eye contact, that societies usually develop strict rules about how it should be managed. If eye contact is made for an unacceptable length of time, it usually indicates some specific feeling. This communicative function of eye behaviour allows people not only to collect information, but also to regulate the level of interpersonal intimacy they experience.

Another example given by a respondent teacher was that the question of little or no eye contact during a conversation as a cultural issue is problematic in a classroom situation because it is difficult to have a conversation with a learner who has no eye contact with the teacher as this may mean that the learner is not interested. In African culture, men are expected to exhibit assertive behaviours that demonstrate their power and authority. Visual dominance is measured by comparing the percentage of looking while speaking with the percentage of looking at other person while listening. When compared to women, men display higher levels of looking than women do, and lower levels than women when listening.

According to Mortensen (1972:237), "eye contact is the purest form of reciprocity, the highest form of psychic union." Arguably, no other nonverbal cue is as significant as a gauge of personal and social interaction as eye contact. Eye contact has a more specialized communicative value than most other nonverbal cues.

The concept of eye contact is also complex that there is a specific vocabulary used to distinguish between various ways people look at each other. As stated by Mortensen (1972:238) "we think not of a simple act of looking, but rather of staring, glowering, peeping, piercing, glancing, watching, gazing and so forth". It is within each of these types of eye-contact that there are variations of looking. Looking may be directly or indirectly, critically or kindly, even sternly, or mildly. Various eye movements are associated with emotional expressions: a downward glance may suggest modesty, staring suggests coldness and wide eyes suggest wonder, fright, honesty or naiveté.

Feelings about others are also communicated visually. If a person perceives the other person as being of lower status than he/she are, the tendency will be that the first person may maintain considerable eye-contact. On the other hand, communicators tend to look much less at people of a high status. Generally, people look more at people they like and those who believe as they do. Stewart (1999:82) mentions that one's response to "someone who is appealing is to approach by looking, and one way to avoid a person we dislike is to look away".

Eye-contact and eye-behaviour can also be used to influence credibility judgments. In the African culture, some people are confident that they can spot even the most practised liar if they can look that person in the eye. An example given by a respondent on this concept was that public speakers who avoid eye-contact may be regarded as being not confident. Effective public speakers normally use "eye checks" to ensure that they are not losing their audience. Eye-contact does not only allow one to gain the attention of others, but also to direct the conversational turn-taking system.

A person may be able to hide his or her hands and choose to keep silent, but cannot hide his or her face without making people feel that they are being deceived. Since the face cannot be hidden, people take great pains to control what the facial expressions reveal to others. Since different cultures have different estimates of what constitutes good eye-contact, it is important not to oversimplify gaze and eye behaviour and to remember that it is important to become aware of and to learn to manage one's own eye-behaviour.

According to Adler *et. al.* (1989:146), "people are reasonably successful at disguising or censoring undesired messages". The rapid speed at which expressions can change, and the inability of senders of messages to see their own faces and make sure they send the desired messages, mean that people convey a great deal of their true feelings or information whether they want to or not.



Adler *et. al.* (1989:146) also mention that are three ways in which people falsify messages by controlling their facial expressions and behaviour. Sometimes people choose to falsify their emotions or lack of feelings by simulating. This is the method used to hide the real feeling that is closer to indifference, by creating an upset expression to meet the demands of the social situation. An example may be when somebody is told that a friend he or she knows was involved in a car accident. For the mere reason that the social situation calls for an upset face one may pretend to do just that.

At other times, people avoid expressing an undesired emotion by neutralizing their expressions. This can be experienced when one has just been interrupted in whatever she or he was doing by a person knocking at the door. Just by opening the door, one may neutralize the expression, by toning it down, covering the expression of the real feeling. An example of this given by a respondent was that attending to a traditional healer who has visited the home is one activity that requires no interruption, especially when the traditional healer has thrown the *ditaola* (divination set) to the floor.



*Ditaola*

Another technique of falsifying messages involves masking a true emotion with one that seems more appropriate. People may choose to put on an interested face even when trapped in a boring situation.

### 3.2.2 Pupillary dilation

The pupils of the eyes also communicate a great deal. According to Adler *et. al.* (1989:146), “pupils grow larger in proportion to the degree of interest a person has in an object”. An example is that men’s pupils became grew about 18 percent larger when looking at pictures of a naked woman. The greatest increase in pupil dilation occurs when women looks at a picture of a mother and her infant. The papillary dilation varies with one’s emotional reactions to what one is seeing. If one sees something pleasurable, or exciting, the pupil dilates or expands to allow in more light and to get a more acute image of the object. If the object is unattractive or repulsive the pupil contracts. Frost *et al.* (1993:62) mention that “this physical indication of our emotional state is entirely beyond our control and is therefore a very valuable communicative device” When coming to the pupil’s reaction, the eyes do indeed seem to be the windows of the soul. They reveal truths that people might otherwise try to hide.

### 3.2.3 Functions of eye behaviour

Eyes convey a number of intriguing nonverbal messages and people give considerable weight to eye behaviour and eye contact.

#### *Eyes provide information*

Some of the eye behaviours are associated with definite moods, reactions and attitudes. In this way they provide other people with information about people with whom they interact. There are negative traits that are associated with “small beady

eyes”. People who are born with such eyes are often associated with cheating, lying, and general negativity. This is further supported by Cloete and Madadzhe (2005:10) when they mention that between 1991 and 2001, in Tanzania one of the African countries, a large number of suspected witches were killed. They mention that “red eyes believed to be the mark of a witch, sparked many of these tragic neighbourhood witch-hunts”. This is further supported by Mbiti (1989:197) when he mentions that people in African countries try to keep constant guard against the wicked doings of the evil workers. These evil workers include sorcerers, evil magicians and witches who perform anti-social activities. He furthermore states that these people harm others with their evil eyes. This shows the negative impact that can result from judging people just by looking at them and especially at their eyes.

#### *Eyes regulate interactions*

This can be substantiated by looking at a public speaking setting. Barker and Gant (1996:79) mention that “when public speakers catch the eyes of listeners, they significantly increase the chance of catching the audience’s attention as well”. Normally, effective public speakers who move towards the audience (away from the lectern) and use more direct eye contact, gain the attention of others.

#### *Eyes exercise social control*

Dominant and poised communicators specifically tend to look more at others during conversations than do submissive, uneasy individuals. Eye behaviour is associated with patterns of dominance and submissiveness.

#### *Eyes allow people to express intimacy*

People can express their inner feelings to others through the eyes, especially the interpersonal attitudes and the level of intimacy they are experiencing. Looking into the eyes of a loved one who is turned away or even to the floor may probably mean that something is amiss. If the gaze is responded to in kind,

then a feeling of connection may be associated with that mutual gaze. According to Barker and Gaut (1996:80), “this communicative function of eye behaviour allows us not only to collect information but also to regulate the level of interpersonal intimacy”. It is through the eyes that people can communicate additional and often more meaningful information without the use of words.

### *Eyes can be used for goal facilitation*

In a communication situation, the eyes can be used to accomplish some action. They can be used to encourage or discourage behaviour on the part of others. It is familiar for a parent to stop his or her child from talking with a simple straightforward glare. Conversely, one is also capable of encouraging others to talk by offering a warm glance and an encouraging smile.

## **3.3 GESTURES**

Most conversations are conducted face to face, with the body playing a supporting role in communication. In many circumstances people use emblems and gestures that can stand alone however, most of the time people communicate with one another by combining spoken language with body language. People use their entire body to communicate, but they also express feelings with just one body part such as gesturing. Like other forms of nonverbal communication cues, gestures can either reinforce or contradict the speaker’s words.

The movements of people’s arms, legs, hands, and feet constitute an important way of broadcasting nonverbal data. Frost *et. al.* (1993:63) mention that gestures, as aspects of nonverbal communication, are part of kinesics, which is the study of body movements. These authors state that hand gestures are “the semi-formalized language of hand signs and gestures which are used consciously to communicate with other.”

The simple greeting wave is an example of this aspect. This basic gesture is simple enough the arm is raised and extended with the hand open and the palm facing outwards, towards the person being greeted. The hand alone or the entire arm may be waved from side to side. In Northern Sotho culture, women and young girls usually kneel down and put their hands together while their eyes are firmly glued to the floor. This is a way of showing respect when greeting men.

Hand gestures are so widely practised that they are almost universal. Many of these hand movements are culturally determined which means that the same gestures can convey different things to members of different cultures. Gestures too change over time even within the same culture. Although gestures are universal, they do not have universal meanings. "Hand gestures sometimes substitute for verbal communication" Tubbs *et al.* (1994:123). The deaf-mutes use a system of sign language, which is so comprehensive that it literally replaces spoken language. These signals are arbitrary.

"Movements and gestures can also reflect the type of relationship that exists between partners or spouses" Stewart (1993:87). Stewart distinguishes among three general couple types who are identifiable in part by their patterns of movement and gestures. He mentions the traditional, the independent and the separates. According to Stewart (1993:87), the traditionals engage in a high number of meshed movements and actions. Each partner facilitates the other partner's actions. An example may be that of a woman who is struggling to open a tight bottle. The man will usually open it for her. The separates, on the other hand, engage in very few meshed action sequences. They are disengaged from each other. Even though their gestures and movements do not interconnect, they are often parallel. For example, one partner may move towards the door while the other moves to get his or her coat. The gestures of the independents clash more often than they are parallel. If one moves towards the door, the other may sit down or even try to keep the door closed.

People may also communicate dominance and submission with gestures. Both males and females may stand with their hands on their hips in an *akimbo* position, or men may hook their thumbs in their belts. These are unacceptable gestures to be used when addressing an elder in African culture as they are regarded as signs of disrespect.

A forward lean is commonly interpreted as a more involved and usually more positive attitude, while a seated male or female communicator who leans backward and away from others may be perceived as having a negative attitude.

Another common gesture which has a number of different meanings is the “thumbs-up” or “high fives”. This depends entirely on how and to whom it is made. In this gesture, the thumb is projected upwards from a clenched fist. For most South Africans this is either the gesture that may have a positive or a negative meaning. It may be a positive gesture meaning ‘the best or everything is “OK” or as a hitchhiker’s way of asking for a lift from passing cars. Again, to others this gesture may be positive if the hand is held roughly at waist height and is thrust towards another person. This is often accompanied by the verbal expression “sharp”! However, this may be a negative gesture if the thumb is held at arms length and then jerked upwards. This is a gross insult.

Given the view that gestures may be almost universal but their meanings differ, the “OK” gesture made by forming a circle with the thumb and forefinger may be used differently in another culture. According to Gamble and Gamble (1999:146), in Japan this sign is used as a symbol for money, while the French and Belgians, in contrast would interpret the gesture as meaning “You are worth zero”. According to Barker and Gaut (1996:80), there are about five classes of specific body impressions. These are emblems, illustrators, regulators, affect displays, and body manipulators.

### 3.3.1 Emblems

These are “commonly recognized signs that are generally unrelated to an ongoing conversation” (Barker and Gaut, 1996:81). They usually take the form of gestures. For example, if two students suddenly realized that their animated conversation was disturbing the person next to them in class, one might hold an index finger to his or her lips. This is an indication for one to talk more quietly and to reduce the volume of the conversation without interrupting its flow. These emblems are learnt early in life and are used continuously throughout life.

### 3.3.2 Illustrators

These body expressions illustrate the verbal language they accompany. “Illustrators may accent or add emphasis to a phrase, show the direction of thought, point to an object or place, depict spatial relationships or demonstrate shape” (Barker and Gant, 1996:81) people usually use illustrators when pointing at someone across the room, while shouting his or her name, or when they use their hands to estimate the length of the snake that they had killed.

### 3.3.3 Regulators

Regulators such as gazes, nods, and raised eyebrows assist in the exchange of listening and speaking roles between participants in a communication setting. Despite providing smooth transition in conversations regulators also control verbal communication.

### 3.3.4 Affect display

Barker and Gaut (1996:82) define affect display as “body changes that convey our internal emotional states”. These displays can involve facial expressions, such as angry stares or wide-eyed fear, or body movements such as trembling hands, winking, and raising or lowering the eyelids and eyebrows.

**Figure 3 :** Some universal gestures among Northern Sotho Speaking people

Greetings	Hand shake
Farewells	Raise the hand and with the full, open palm wave the hand back and forth; raise the hand and with a full, open palm wave the hand up and down at the wrist
O.K.	Thumb and forefinger making a circle
Good job	Thumbs up
Victory or peace	Holding the index and middle fingers upright
Yes	Nodding the head up and down
No	Shaking the head side to side
Thinking or confused or skeptical	Scratching the head
Sharing a secret or flirtatious	Winking with one eye
Incredible or amazement	Rolling the eyes
I cannot hear you	Cupping the ear
Someone or something is crazy	Rotating the forefinger (index) around in front of the ear
Disgust or What is that smell?	Wrinkling of the nose
Smells bad or stinks	Holding the nose with thumb and forefinger
Contemplation, I am thinking	Chin stroke, tapping the head with forefinger

### 3.4 POSTURE

Posture refers to “the way we carry and arrange our limbs and bodies” (Frost *et. al.* 1993:66). Posture is probably the richest source of first impressions. The way in which people carry their bodies when they are not in direct interaction with others, and when they feel unobserved, usually reveals a good deal about their feelings about themselves. This is called self-image. According to Gamble and Gamble (1994:144), “the bearing with which one presents oneself proclaims one’s position in life. This is often supported by the argument by contrasting the upright bearing of a wealthy person with the submissive shuffle of a servant or the slumped demeanor of a nobody.”



The way in which a person walks can give others a clue about his or her status, mood, ethnic and cultural affiliation and self-perception. When a person has a problem, he or she may walk very slowly with the head down and hands clasped behind his or her back. By contrast, a person who is in a good mood might walk with a long vigorous stride his or her arms relaxed, swinging freely, and his or her head held up.

Another example given by a respondent who is a teacher was that of a student who stands erect, head held upright, shoulders wide and relaxed, appearing confident, secure and at ease with himself or herself. Unlike his or her counterparts who are confident, those who are lacking confidence may have his or her head bowed, shoulders hunched and rounded, and may hold his or her hands close to the chest. Body posture talks and posture helps signal whether one is ready to approach the world or whether one wants to avoid and withdraw from it.

#### **3.4.1 Posture and dominance**

The way a person walks or stands generally reveals more about that person than he or she probably realizes. People have certain expectations regarding what postures they expect others to display.

Dominance plays a significant role about verbal communication in general. Frost *et al.* (1993:67) define dominance as “that characteristic of a person which is perceived as giving them authority, strength or power”. This is frequently seen as a result of positional authority. For instance, a police officer usually adopts an extremely straight and somewhat official posture. Reflections of dominance seem to perpetuate sex role stereotypes Barker and Gaut, 1996:85). This statement is further supported by Frost *et. al.* (1993:67) when they mention that “issues of dominance and submission seem to arise most often between men an women.”

This shows that gender plays a pivotal role in dominance or power struggles. Men usually express dominance by taking up more space in a bed than a woman does while women in turn use submissive gestures when they are with men.

A direct gaze can represent a dominance challenge. One may choose to look directly into the other person's eyes in order to make him or her feel inferior or intimidated. Another example of dominance may be that of people who sit backwards on chairs or even put their feet up on the desk. They may be signalling their feelings of superiority, saying: "I am the dominant person here". Similarly, people who speak with their legs dangling over the arm of a chair might be sending a message such as "I am unconcerned or hostile to your feelings or needs".

#### 3.4.2 Posture and tension

According to Frost *et al.* (1993:70), "the degree of tension in posture is closely related to the dominance-submission dimension". A junior worker who is summoned into the office of the senior manager will normally sit perched on the edge of the chair, with his or her back very straight and the head up. He or she will react very fast to anything said or done by the boss. The boss, meanwhile, might slouch back in the expensive tilt and swivel chair. Some may even look out of the window with their hands clasped behind the head while speaking to the junior worker.

Similarly, if the chief summons a commoner to his kraal, the commoner might sit in the same way, as the junior worker while the chief may be relaxed. The commoner might be the picture of extreme physical tension.

It is a widespread tendency for the more junior person to adopt a physically tense posture while the senior is relaxed. This appears to relate to the need for the lower-status person to acknowledge the power of the higher-status person.

### 3.4.3 Posture and territoriality

Personal space is important to every person. As has been discussed in the previous chapter on proxemics, it is very important to look at some forms of nonverbal communication that people use to protect and maintain their personal spaces.

The leg and arm cross position is, among the best known signals of territoriality. If two strangers are sitting on the same bench at a social gathering, and wish to remain strangers, they will face away from each other and cross their legs so that their knees point away from each other. A similar posture can be adopted in crowded places such as beer halls, where people cannot physically distance themselves from their neighbours so that they try to erect symbolic barriers by using their limbs.

Humans use nonverbal communication because words have limitations, while nonverbal signs can express feelings and communicate thoughts. Generally, nonverbal communication has various functions in every communication event. According to Barker and Gaut (1996:73), among these functions, nonverbal communication serves to:

- *Substitute*

Barker and Gaut (1996:73) state that ‘when hearing or speaking is impossible, nonverbal communication often replaces verbal messages’. In these instances the nonverbal messages are called substitutes. A person may choose not to say a word, but the person next to him or her may know what he or she is feeling by just looking at the person’s face. The same applies to someone who is asked about a meeting with someone. Without saying a word, that person can make an O.K. gesture to show that everything went well.

For these nonverbal messages to be taken as substitutes they should be recognized, and more importantly, interpreted in the same way by most of the people in a group. This is mainly because one gesture may mean something in one culture and have a completely different meaning in another culture. Misunderstandings do occur when substitutes from one culture are used in another culture.

- *Repeating*

This is a situation wherein a person says something and at the same time uses its nonverbal equivalent. These are in most cases statements of agreement or disagreement. They are frequently those cases accompanied by head nods or a shake of the head to indicate positive or negative feelings. These are often done unconsciously and occur naturally. An example is that of a person replying “no” to a question asked and then at the same time shaking the head.

- *Accenting*

The use of gestures such as nods, blinks, squints, and shrugs to help emphasize or punctuate spoken language is another function of nonverbal communication. Accenting can be achieved by changing the pitch or stress on a word or group of words. Meaning often depends on which are accented:

The boy kicked the ball.

The boy kicked the ball.

The boy kicked the ball.


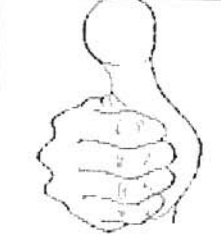


These sentences may look the same but because of the pitch on the underlined words they may mean there is something to tell about the underlined words.

- *Deceiving*

People often say one thing and mean another. People sometimes deliberately tease others and even supply them with false information. It is sometimes done to avoid hurting the other person's feelings.

In general the way a person walks and stands tells more about that person than he or she probably realizes. Nonverbal indicators are most common in almost all cultures, and an individual gesture often performs several tasks simultaneously. According to Darn (2005:01), the following are examples of common gestures which have different functions and meanings in different cultures.

**Figure 4:**

			
<b>Perfect</b>	<b>Thumbs up</b>	<b>Stop</b>	<b>The 'fig'</b>
Commonly everything's all right perfect France worthless Japan money Germany rude Malta, Greece, Brazil obscene	Commonly all OK Australia, Iran rude Nigeria very offensive Japan five Turkey political rightist party	Commonly stop, enough (person, car, action) Turkey You get nothing from me W Africa You have 5 fathers!	Turkey, Greece, Tunisia, Holland obscene Russia you get nothing from me Yugoslavia you can't have it Brazil good luck

Similar to some of the above gestures, the Northern Sotho people consider the thumbs up gesture as the OK one. The fig gesture is considered as a sexually offensive gesture, and the circle made using the thumb and the index finger is usually used to indicate that everything is perfect.

### 3.5 CONCLUSION

The use of gestures is one of the most frequently observed, but least understood modes of communication. Most people use hand movements regularly when talking. While some gestures (e.g. a smile and a frown) may have universal meanings, most of the others are individually learned and peculiar. Gesture and expression, in particular, add an extra dimension to language, and certainly add to the cultural component that verbal communication carries. An awareness of non-verbal cues also helps to avoid some of the misunderstandings that are the inevitable but annoying consequence of cultural interpretation of meaning.

Non-verbal action can be dynamic and spontaneous, but is usually patterned by the respective culture. A successful interpretation of non-verbal elements conveyed by the speaker requires the same understanding of the symbols shared between interpreter and speaker. That means that for the understanding and for the correct interpretation of an utterance and its simultaneously conveyed nonverbal elements, it is crucial that there is a shared knowledge of the rules and codes of nonverbal communication, which are embedded in the participants' culture. Therefore, if the participants have a shared understanding of nonverbal meanings, the receiver can also predict the nonverbal action of the speaker. Nonverbal communication tends to be relatively ambiguous and open to interpretation while its influence often depends on the nature of the listener, particularly when it is unclear whether the messages conveyed are deliberate or unconscious.

## **CHAPTER 4**

### **PHYSICAL APPEARANCE AND CHRONEMICS**

#### **4.1 INTRODUCTION**

The purpose of this chapter is to investigate the use of physical appearance and chronemics in nonverbal communication and their significance to the users. It is very important to take care in interpreting these nonverbal messages and people should not make wild accusations or even judgments based on how a person looks, as the following quotation indicates: “never judge a book by its cover”.

Culture remains a strong influence on the use of nonverbal communication. Cultural conceptions of the importance of time vary widely, and this can lead to confusion and ambiguity. In this chapter the different forms of clothing and the use of artifacts will be examined and to uncover how these have changed over the years. The aspect of time will also be looked into in order to establish the misconceptions and misunderstandings often brought up by the different uses of time. Cultural values of the Northern Sotho speaking people, just like any other community, affect the use of clothing and time.

#### **4.2 PHYSICAL APPEARANCE**

According to Cleary (2003:21), "although physical appearance makes a strong visual impression in any face-to-face communication it is clothing and personal adornments that communicate status, group applications and personality". Physical appearance is important because people often make judgments on others based only on physical appearance cues. Barker and Gaut (1996:85) support this statement by mentioning that “each year Americans spend millions of dollars on cosmetics, weight control and plastic surgery to increase their physical

attractiveness”. It is the same case with the Northern Sotho people who had their traditional ways of increasing physical attractiveness. This is because the importance of beauty has always been emphasized.

Physical appearance is important because people often make judgments of others based only their physical appearance cues. Physical appearance usually provides the first available data about a stranger. People make inferences based on this superficial data daily, whether it is right or wrong. These inferences are made on others height, weight, hairstyle or even artifacts while body type communicates a variety of meanings particularly as it relates to physical attractiveness.

According to Hilgard, Atkinson and Atkinson (1971) there are three types of body shapes. These are the endomorphs, mesomorphs and ectomorphs. They state that endomorphs are usually the short and round, and are often lazier, slower and less intelligent. These are wrong perceptions since they are only based on the physical build of these people. The mesomorphs are said to have the athletic build. They are seen to be active, confident, successful, and intelligent. All cultures favour certain body types and create stereotypes about the characteristics attached to them. However, in Northern Sotho culture body shape was not an issue. This is supported by Sekhukhune (1988:158) who mentions that:

A choice of a marriageable woman in Northern Sotho culture is influenced by a complex of additional attributes. Beauty is one, but probably the least of all her physical attributes which determine her worth This shows that in the Northern Sotho culture physical appearance does not play as crucial role like in the Western cultures. Among the most important qualities of a traditional Northern Sotho woman are hard work, ability to bear children and sound social and moral background which will breed healthy human relations with others.



This is further supported by Pulane (2005:32) who mentions that in African culture a woman's main function is to bear children. According to Northern Sotho proverb, *mosadi ke tšhwene o lewa mabogo*, meaning that the beauty of a nubile woman is weighed in terms of her industriousness and competence. This clearly indicates that an unattractive woman may earn a good reputation with her industriousness and competence and not by having a good-looking body.

#### 4.2.1 Clothing

Clothing fulfils several functions such as indicating, modesty, protection, comfort and even cultural display. Gamble and Gamble (1999:147) mention that style of dress is an important nonverbal cue. The way people choose to dress is extremely crucial in creating a first impression. Although most people are only superficially aware of what others wear, clothing does communicate. It is often dictated by societal norms and indicates a great amount of information about one's self. It serves to identify sex, age, socioeconomic class, role, group membership, and even religion. The appearance, hairstyle, and the mode of dress suggest to others the kind of person one is. In some instances, people's choices meet with or disappoint the expectations of those with whom they interact.

Like every other society, the Northern Sotho society has strict rules regarding what people of the opposite sexes may or may not wear and how they may decorate themselves. An elderly respondent mentioned that initially women wore only *thetho* (which is an apron made of supple animal skin) in front and a *mose* (a triangular skin apron) to cover their buttocks. The young girls wore only *legabe* (apron made of beads worn by uninitiated girls) *le mose*. The upper part of the body was left uncovered. Men and boys wore *setsiba*, which is a drawer also made of supple animal skin. Their upper part was left uncovered too. This changed with time especially with the emergence of the missionaries. Mbiti (1975:107) supports this statement by mentioning that the dresses were "introduced by the

missionaries, but have been adopted by all the Pedi, Christians and non Christians alike”. During this period women were not allowed to wear trousers as it was totally unacceptable.

Unlike the masses, the *kgoši* does not wear the same clothes as them. There are special clothes made especially for *magoši*. These are clothes made of a tiger’s skin which symbolizes kingship. *Letlalo la nkwe* (tiger skin) was seen as a sign of power and royalty. One respondent mentioned that any commoner found wearing the *letlalo la nkwe* was considered disrespectful of the *kgoši*. She further mentioned that *letlalo la nkwe* was not easily found as a tiger is a dangerous animal. It is for this reason that the *magoši* are called “*Maaparannkwe*”, literally meaning those who wear the tiger. It is unusual for a commoner to wear a tiger’s skin as this may be regarded as not respecting the *kgoši*.



*Letlalo la nkwe, kobo ya bogoši* (Tiger skin, royalty clothing)

According to Adler *et. al.* (1989:159), apart from protecting people from various elements, clothing conveys various types of messages to others. Attitudes most often associated with clothing relate to a desire to conform, a desire for self-expression, prestige values, a desire for social participation, and physical comfort. Much empirical evidence supports the view that one who is well dressed is likely to be listened to much better by strangers than when not well-dressed. Adler *et. al.* support this statement by stating that people are “more likely to follow the lead of high status dressers, even when it comes to violating social rules. This is evident

in our present day life in which young girls and boys try to imitate their role models. In doing this they virtually break the clothing taboos of their societies.

Since clothing affects others' perceptions, people often dress to fit the occasion. One respondent mentioned that in the olden days *metšeka* (colourful cloths worn by women on the upper and the lower bodies) were worn when attending social gatherings such as weddings and when going to take part in *serobalela* or *koša ya basadi* (a women only dance). She mentioned that if they attended *dinaka* (a male only dance) and there was a man who danced better than the rest, some of the women would take off one of their *metšeka* and give it to that man but on a temporary basis. That was called *go rufa* (an act of appreciation).

These cues have little effect on those with whom one is familiar, but the opposite is true when regarding situations such as an interview. Making a good first impression is of crucial importance to both the candidate and the potential employer.

A teacher respondent gave an example of a classroom situation. She mentioned that if one is a new teacher at a school, in order to establish credibility among the students, the teacher should strive to appear comfortable and at ease in the role. She said that the teacher should remove all teacher or student barriers because students accept teachers as their instructors based on the sincerity and their clothing. A smile is, however, worth much more than what the teacher might pay for the clothes. The respondent indicated that students form some lasting impressions of their teachers during the first few moments of their contact. Gamble and Gamble (1999:148) mention that "unquestionably what you wear causes people to relate to you in particular way". An example given by a respondent was the lack of morals associated with the kinds of clothes worn by the youth of today. She mentioned that attending different forms of social gatherings calls for wearing different forms of clothing. She also stressed that initially when

attending funerals every woman had to put on a blanket as a sign of respect. This has changed with time and even though there are set rules in some areas about the acceptable forms of clothing for attending funerals, some people still find these conditions unacceptable. An example on this matter was provided by a member of *diphiri* literally meaning wolves. These are the men who go out to dig the grave for the deceased, and because they usually do it at night and wolves are nocturnal animals, they are called *diphiri*. *Diphiri* also take care of the smooth running of the burial proceedings in the graveyard, including not allowing those who are not properly dressed for the occasion to enter the graveyard. This man said that they normally encounter problems with the youth and people from urban areas because the youth normally tell them that they have the right to dress as they please and the people from the urban areas, especially the women, would come dressed in trousers without covering their hair. That is why disagreements on the matter of clothing start and sometimes lead to soured relationships among the *diphiri* and other members of the society.

Some kind of clothing indicates the modesty of the wearer. Most African women who wear long loose-fitting outfits and cover their heads are proclaimed respectable. On the other hand, a woman who wears tight fitting and body-revealing clothing may be perceived as flirtatious. What constitutes modesty and appeal varies radically across cultures. Within different contexts in the same culture, and over time, fashions come and go.

#### 4.2.2 **Body decorations**

There are various ways of decorating the body in Northern Sotho culture, but there are set rules to be followed when doing so. Frost *et. al.* (1993:74) mention that there are instances in which people break the decoration taboos of their societies. They mention that although both men and women in Western culture wear earrings, there are certain restrictions to certain ages and occupations. Even with

those groups, some kinds of earrings such as the dangling ones are simply not acceptable to be worn by men.

In Northern Sotho culture, earrings were initially only meant for women and girls. Boys and men were not allowed to wear earrings. Currently, however, boys and men wear earrings which is an indication that traditional gender restrictions on the use of artifacts are being violated. Another trend was for men to keep their hair very short or clean-shaven. This seemed natural but it is gradually becoming something of an aberration. Today young men wear their hair short, long or even in braids.

Responding to the question of body decoration and the use of artifacts, an elderly respondent said that in the olden days they had traditional ways of decorating themselves. She said that their preferred type of hairstyle then was *tlopo*. Mönnig (1972:128) defines *tlopo* as a hairstyle whereby “the hair is formed into a flat bun on top of the head, with the sides shorn off”. These shorn off sides would then be decorated with a dot of *letsoku* (a mixture of red ochre and fat) on each side. This type of hairstyle was worn by marriageable and married women alike. Those who preferred longer hair had *leetse* referring to the hairstyle where the hair is left to grow, is separated into long strings and smeared with *letsoku*.

Another method of body decoration for women was *tshumu*. This is almost the same as tattooing. The respondent stated said that they used a needle to prick themselves from the forehead downward in a straight line down to the nose. They then applied *mošidi* or soot to give the line a permanent black colour. The respondents also mentioned that there were body decoration must haves for every woman. These were called *maseka le dipheta*. *Maseka* are bangles worn by women on hands and around their wrists and legs, and *dipheta* are beads that are usually worn by both men and women when attending social functions such as welcoming the *dialoga* or initiates. The respondent mentioned that there were

what they called *maseka a dithuthu* and *maseka a matanyetša*. She mentioned that *matanyetša* were ordinary but colourful and were normally worn immediately after the last leseka. They were used for decorative purposes. Men usually used goatskins to decorate themselves. They put on various kinds of animal skins, especially when attending social functions. They also carried *lerumo le kotse*, which are a spear and shield respectively.

Frost, *et al.* (1993:75) mentions other forms of body decorations such as scarification, body mutilation, and tattooing. People have always had the desire to improve on nature. According to one respondent, the Northern Sotho people believed that massaging and moulding their children's body parts such as the head, ears and the nose would make them good-looking. This was performed on babies before their bones hardened. Frost *et al.* (1993:75) furthermore state that the scarification method was usually used to communicate among other things, the tribe status, sense of style, and even religion of that person. This is further supported by Mbiti (1975:22) when he mentions that among the Nigerians, one of the African tribes, this was done as a way of communicating and strengthening the religious ideas among these people. These marks were made on the face or on other parts of the body such as the back and the chest.

Another example of the use of artifacts for body decoration given by a respondent was that, people who wore glasses were assumed to be intelligent. The perception about these people was that they probably suffered from eyestrain, which might be a result of too much reading.

Body piercing is another form of body decoration today. This involves piercing a part of the body and subsequently inserting and keeping a foreign object in the opening until the wound heals. This can be done on the ears, nose, lips, and even the belly button. A wedding band or ring is another form of body decoration that is used as a token of marriage. This band is worn on the fourth finger on the left

hand. This European custom has been adopted almost worldwide. Without saying anything, anyone is able to recognize that a person is married only by seeing the wedding band.

### 4.3 CHRONEMICS

Gamble and Gamble (1999:159) define chronemics as “the study of how we use and interpret time to communicate”. The manner in which a person uses or abuse time tells much about that person. Barker and Gaut (1996:95) mention that “time is a valued commodity, time is money” - we are paid for the time we spend at work”. This is further supported by statements such as “time wasted is never regained” and “we have run out of time”. Time is a powerful communication channel in face-to-face interaction. This is supported by Mortensen (1972:308) who mentions that “time’s strip of film runs forward never backward, even when resurrected from the past”. Perceptions of time provide important nonverbal cues, and these cues vary from culture to culture. When two people from opposite cultures set up an appointment, various time problems may arise. This is because of their cultural orientation towards time. Gamble and gamble (1999:161) give an example of the following two proverbs on the use of time: “He who hesitates is lost” (North American) and “Think three times before you act” (Chinese). When people from these two conflicting cultures set up an appointment problems are easily to occur.

According to Mbiti (1989:17), “when Africans reckon time, it is for a concrete and specific purpose, in connection with events but not just for the sake of mathematics”. The late Prime Minister of the former Lebowa, Dr. C.N. Phatudi once said: “*Lebowa ga re je nako, re ja bogobe le nama*”, (literally meaning, in Lebowa we do not eat time but we eat porridge and meat, that is in Lebowa adhering to time is the order of the day). This is an indication that time has always been a priority to Africans. This is the case with the Northern Sotho speaking people. In this society, there are traditional phenomenal calendars.

With the use of the phenomenal calendars, the events that constitute time are reckoned or considered in their relation to one another and as they take place. The rising sun is an event recognized by the whole community. It is of less importance whether the sun rises at 6 am or 7 am, as long as it rises. An example is that, when people agree to meet and make sacrifices or *go phasa* they do that before the sun has risen.

In traditional life, the day is reckoned according to its significant events. A respondent who was a shepherd, gave an example of an ordinary day for him. He said that many people know that when the cattle go out to the grazing fields, it is an indication that it is around 8 am for some people. This is further supported by Mbiti (1989:17) when he mentions that “in rural areas, cattle are at the heart of the people. The day is reckoned in reference to events pertaining to cattle.” According to the shepherd, approximately

- 6am is milking time;
- 8 am is time for the herdsman to take the cattle out to the grazing fields;
- 12 noon is time for the cattle to rest;
- 2 pm is time to take the cattle to drink water;
- 3 pm is time for the cattle to leave the drinking place and start grazing again;
- 5 pm is time when the cattle return home, together with the herdsman;
- 6 pm is milking time again before the cattle go to sleep;

In contrast to this traditional day, a respondent who was a teacher, gave a completely different view on the modern use of time. He said that approximately

- 6 am is the time when children prepare themselves to go to school and teachers prepare to go to work;



- 8 am is the time when every child is expected to be in class and the school day starts;
- 10 am is time for a short break;
- 12 noon is time for a lunch break;
- 2:30 pm is knock-off time.

It is evident that even if people such as the shepherd do not carry a watch with them at all times, they know what should happen and when it should happen. This is also the case with the everyday activities familiar in different communities. A respondent gave an example of *Labone* (Thursday) as *letšatši la bomma la merapelo*. *Labone* is normally a day for women in different churches to gather and hold their service. Similar to this is the use of *LaMorena* for Sunday. *Lamorena* literally means that the day is specially meant for the Lord. People know that on this day they have to attend church services and thereafter rest as this day is not meant for the hard work that people do during the week. The respondent went further to mention that in an event of death in the community, it is quite normal to see young girls and women at around 4pm on *Labohlano* or Friday before the funeral wearing *dikhiba* or aprons heading for the deceased home. This is a customary action in an attempt to go and help with the food preparation of food for the following day. These women also prepare food for the *diphiri* who will during the course of that night (*Labohlano*) go out to dig the grave for the deceased.

Every month is also characterized by its own particular events. In traditional Northern Sotho culture the lunar rather than the numerical month is recognized. When a woman is pregnant the elders normally know when the baby is due by following the lunar months. An elderly respondent mentioned that even after the child is born, when the first quarter of the moon appears the child is taken outside and they whisper to him or her that “*mogwerago šole*”, literally meaning there is your friend.

The year is also composed of events, but on a wider scale than those which compose either the day or the month. In agricultural communities, seasonal activities compose an agricultural year. An elderly respondent who is still actively taking part in the agricultural activities said that they usually have their agricultural lands prepared for ploughing immediately after *go buna* (harvesting). This is called *go paraka*. They usually put in fertilizers such as *mmutedi* (cattle manure) or *molora* (ash) and then plough their lands without putting in any seeds because this allows the land to be fertilized before the next season begins, as this lets the land keep water for a longer period. She gave another example of the Easter holidays when they go out to clean the graves of their deceased family members. This is only done during the Easter holidays. However, one respondent from Ga-Mmaboi stated that in their area they do not clean the graveyards. She reported that they did it once back in the 1960s and they experienced floods that year. The *kgoši* summoned them to the royal kraal and told them that *badimo* (the ancestors) were furious with them for taking off what covered them. This is a clear indication of the different uses of time within the same culture.

No man can live outside time, and the economic and social life of people is deeply bound to their concept of time. Mortensen (1972: 307) mentions that the conflict over matters of punctuality reflects an underlying difference in the time perspectives of different cultures. Misunderstandings, miscalculations and disagreements involving time create communication and relationship problems.

In Northern Sotho culture, it is acceptable for the subordinates to wait for their superiors and not the opposite. It was mentioned on *Tabakgolo*, a talk show on Thobela FM, in October 2005 that time is important and that people, especially the government officials, do not respect it. One respondent on the show mentioned that it is already perceived as a norm for officials to be late at gatherings, consciously or unconsciously carrying out the *9 ya Mosotho ke 10* statement, literally meaning an African man's 9h00 is 10h00. He further stated that even when they arrive they never bother to apologize to the masses. Mbiti (1989:19)

mentions that “another common cry is, Oh Africans are always late!” which is usually termed *nako ya Mosotho* or African time and that “it is easy to jump to such judgments based on ignorance of what time means to African people”.

Another important factor in the use of time in communication, according to Gamble and Gamble (1999:160), is “the allocation of certain activities to appropriate times”. It may not be acceptable to call a colleague at 3am and ask about work related issues, unless there is a reason for it. The same applies to the Northern Sotho people where it is not acceptable for one to go out and ask for salt after sunset. This is considered as a taboo. Another example from a respondent who is a teacher was that students are expected to complete their studies at high schools, colleges and universities within a specific period. Punctuality is, therefore, a crucial factor in the communication situation. He also mentioned that students in a classroom situation are used to a period running for a certain period of time. The students tend to become restless if their expectations are not respected. He also stated that it is always not a good idea to introduce something new towards the end of a period. At this point, the chances are that the pupil’s attention span is exhausted

#### 4.4 CONCLUSION

It is sometimes easy for the words to say one thing while bodily conveying completely different messages. It is always important to be aware of the dominance of nonverbal messages in a communication situation. If there is a double bind, the nonverbal messages are most likely to be taken as the truth. This chapter has treated several forms of traditional Northern Sotho clothing and artifacts together with Western ones. The aspect of time has also been addressed as it is used by the traditional Northern Sotho people who do not usually rely on numerical calendars.

According to Mbiti, as cited by Masolo (1994:108), an analysis of the concept of time for Africans is simply a combination of those events that have occurred, those that are taking place at the moment and those that are yet to occur. All these measures of time suggest that the universe will never come to a halt, whatever the circumstances may be.

## CHAPTER 5

### 5. CONCLUSION

The main objective of this chapter is to give summary, recommendations and the findings of this research paper.

In the first chapter, the researcher has tried to explain the various forms of nonverbal communication as they are used in Northern Sotho as opposed to Western culture. It also concentrated on the aim, the significance, the problem statement and the methods of study that were used in this paper. Various scholars have contributed towards the use of nonverbal communication and their works have been utilized in the study. Among these scholars are Kembo-Sure, Gamble and Gamble, McKenna, and Cleary. **Chapter One** has shown how various problems may arise as a result of the misconceptions, misunderstandings, and ambiguity of these nonverbal cues.

**Chapter Two** explored the use of proxemics and haptics in Northern Sotho. This chapter expresses how the use of nonverbal communication can elicit positive and negative reactions from the receivers of the messages and how culture plays a critical role in the use of nonverbal communication. This has been done by showing how:

- Status plays a crucial role in the use of space;
- Space influences on what people talk about;
- Touch is determined by status ; and
- Touch can function importantly in sexual communication.

**Chapter Three** has dealt with the importance of facial expressions and eye contact in Northern Sotho, and how social issues play a role in the use of

nonverbal communication. The chapter has shown how the traditional Northern Sotho people used eye contact and facial expressions to show respect. They knew who to look in the eyes and when and how to manage their eye contact. A number of the functions of eyes have been given, such as:

- Eyes regulate interactions;
- Eyes allow people to express intimacy;
- Eyes provide information; and
- Eyes can be used for goal facilitation.

In **Chapter Four** the use of time and personal appearance as a way of expressing oneself has been dealt with. Various forms of traditional clothing for the Northern Sotho speaking people have been mentioned and how they decorated their bodies before the Europeans came with their make up. Among the various kinds of dressing codes are:

- *Legabe* (apron made of beads worn by uninitiated girls)
- *Mose* (a triangular skin apron worn by girls)
- *Metšeka* (colourful cloths women wear on the upper and lower bodies)
- *Setsiba* 9a drawer made of supple animal skin

The different artifacts used then were among others the following:

- *Tlopo* (a traditional hairstyle whereby the hair is formed into a flat bun on top of the head, with the sides shorn off)
- *Tshumu* (a line on the forehead made by using a needle and then given a permanent black colour by applying soot to it)
- *Maseka* (bangles)

From the research, it has been deduced that nonverbal communication is as important as verbal communication in the Northern Sotho culture. The other cultures are taking over the African cultural ways of doing things. Respect, discipline, and good morals that the Northern Sotho elders instilled in their children may soon disappear if nothing is done about the way in which things are done today. The researcher has made the following findings:

- Nonverbal communication is culture bound, since its usage differs across cultures;
- Nonverbal communication can be used differently within the same cultural group;
- Clothes do not necessarily make a man in Northern Sotho culture;
- Being on time for appointments is not as important in Northern Sotho as in the Western cultures;
- It is dangerous to judge a person by merely looking at his or her personal appearance.

It has been discovered that not enough work has been done on nonverbal communication in Northern Sotho. There are some areas such as the use of silence to communicate; paralanguage, as well as locomotion and pacing that still require intensive research. As an attempt to preserve their cultural norms and do away with the moral degeneration the Northern Sotho people are faced with, the researcher makes the following recommendations:

- The advancement of the study of human communication in all its forms, apart from language.
- It is of great importance for other researchers to consider the concept of nonverbal communication in Northern Sotho and other African languages.
- That children be taught of their cultural norms and behaviours from an early age.

- Africans have a difficult task at hand, namely, to learn to respect time irrespective of one's social or political status.



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