

# The Art of “Silence” in Interpersonal Communication

Qiqi Zhu

Master of applied linguistics, University of New South Wales, Sydney, Australia

Email: z\_921127@163.com

**How to cite this paper:** Zhu, Q. Q. (2025). The Art of “Silence” in Interpersonal Communication. *Open Journal of Modern Linguistics*, 15, 69-77.  
<https://doi.org/10.4236/ojml.2025.151005>

**Received:** September 18, 2024

**Accepted:** February 7, 2025

**Published:** February 10, 2025

Copyright © 2025 by author(s) and Scientific Research Publishing Inc. This work is licensed under the Creative Commons Attribution International License (CC BY 4.0).

<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>



Open Access

---

## Abstract

This article focuses on non-verbal expression in interpersonal communication, observes their manners, gestures, expressions and other non-verbal symbols and explores the art of “silence” in interpersonal communication. We find: 1) “Silent” art expression; 2) The function of “silence” art; 3) The difference of “silence” art; 4) The beauty of “silence” art; Due to social, cultural, customs, personal characteristics and other reasons, the non-verbal ways of communication objects are diverse, and the information conveyed by these non-verbal ways is also rich and colorful. According to the needs of communication, the non-verbal language can be adjusted, and we can judge the information transmitted by the communicative object according to the analysis of its non-verbal language, and take effective countermeasures, so as to achieve the expected communication effect.

## Keywords

Silence Art, Interpersonal Communication, Non-Verbal Signs

---

## 1. Introduction

Silence plays a crucial role in non-verbal expression in interpersonal communication, often intertwined with verbal communication. Rich and diverse information is conveyed through non-verbal cues, such as sign language, body language, facial expression, outfit communication gestures, etc. During actual interactions, people have noticed that their manners, gestures, expressions and other non-verbal symbols will have an important impact on interpersonal communication, and more and more attention is paid to the role of non-verbal symbols in interpersonal communication. Nonetheless, people pay more attention to non-verbal signs in sign language, body language, appearance and clothing language. They also call it body language, posture language or body language. Silence has distinct cultural,

regional, ethnic and gender characteristics. In different backgrounds, the expression of silence often contains different connotations and meanings, and these differences affect people's attitudes and application of silence. The expression of silence mainly relies on changes in body movements such as posture, gestures, expressions, and eyes to convey information or express meaning. Researcher shows that in interpersonal communication, 7% can be expressed with the help of words, 38% with the help of oral speech, and 55% with the help of body language (Sagar & Jowett, 2012). So, in interpersonal communication, the most important thing in communication is hearing what isn't said, we can properly use the beauty of silence to make verbal communication more powerful. Can receive the "silent better than sound" artistic effect (Kim & Park, 2020).

## **2. "Silent" Art Expression**

### **2.1. The Dress Expression in "Silence" Art**

Clothing plays an important role as a cultural carrier and external refraction. Therefore, the non-verbal communication function of clothing plays a key role in the development of the long era. When clothing rises to the level of literary significance, it not only reflects the social status of the characters in the works, but also reflects the shaping of the characters' images, the expression of emotions, and the choice of values. Especially in the perspective of modern society, it reflects a person's cultural accomplishment and aesthetic style. Clothing, therefore, is a powerful form of non-verbal communication often used to form fixed opinions about others. The beauty of clothing, not gorgeous, mainly lies in neatness, coordination, and moderation. Should be consistent with their own age, gender, occupational characteristics and seasons, but also be clean, generous, and harmonious (De Wachter, 2017).

### **2.2. The Facial Expression in "Silence" Art**

Facial expression mainly refers to the information expressed by various forms of facial muscles, eyebrows, lips and so on. Facial expressions have a remarkable ability to express language. Because "the spiritual beauty of a person is determined by the inner quality of a person, and is expressed through facial expressions and other forms," according to expert research, the human face can make hundreds of thousands of different expressions. Sympathy and concern, disgust and contempt, trust and respect, forgiveness and understanding, acceptance and rejection, anger and disgust, relief and joy are all difficult to conceal in facial language. Therefore, psychological experts have conducted research on human emotions, which can be roughly divided into five types: 1) Surprise, a person often shows emotions when facing unexpected things. 2) Fear, the emotion that people show in the face of something they are afraid of. 3) Disgust, a person's emotion for something he hates or dislikes. 4) Happiness is the emotion that people show when they are particularly happy and excited. 5) Sadness, the emotion shown by people when they appear depressed (Prajwal, 2020). This shows that people's emotions such as

joy, anger, sadness, and happiness can be conveyed through their faces. A beautiful facial expression always gives people a beautiful memory (Zhang, 2023).

### 2.3. The Head Movement Expression in “Silence” Art

We know, in China, that the ancients often shook their heads when reading, and even led the whole body to shake. It expresses a rhythm, because the poetry with a strong sense of rhythm itself. In the process of reading, a part of the body can be accompanied by the similar rhythm, it is a very beautiful enjoyment, you can not only taste the internal beauty of the work, but also experience the external beauty of form. This information expressed through the postural changes of the whole head is actually a kind of “head movement language”. Head movements, like facial expressions, can send non-verbal messages and play a role in communication. First of all, we should pay attention to the hair style, hair style is the key factor that constitutes the harmonious unity of the head, solemn and generous. In this way, the movement of the head can be natural and harmonious perfect performance. The most common are nodding and shaking their heads. Nodding generally indicates agreement, affirmation, determination and other information; Shaking the head generally indicates opposition, disapproval, dissatisfaction and other information. When using head action language in interpersonal communication, the movement should not be too much, and the amplitude should not be too large. If the head action can be coordinated with the content of the speech, it can not only attract the attention of others, but also give people a harmonious aesthetic feeling (Yang & Yang, 2018).

### 2.4. The Gestures Expression in “Silence” Art

The hand, known as the “second face”, is rich in expression and can be said to be the most powerful non-verbal signal. In modern language communication, gesture is indispensable, it can not only express some information independently, but also complement and strengthen other non-verbal and oral language. “Good gesture can make the language expression vivid, clear and emphasized.” And the appropriate gesture can not only enhance the expression effect, but also give people with beautiful visual effects, such as affective gesture, indicative gesture, pictographic gesture, symbolic gesture, etc. have a strong performance function. Of course, the use of gestures in interpersonal communication should be as simple, natural and appropriate as possible, and it should be appropriate and vivid. Beautiful gestures should be based on the specific communication situation, and carefully choose the way of expression (Liu, 2000).

### 2.5. The Posture Expression in “Silence” Art

Body language, that is, body language, also known as body language, posture language or body language, is a form of non-verbal communication, which is the expression and action used in the transmission of communicative information. It involves the dynamic change and performance of all parts of the human body,

such as expression, movement, posture and body space distance. Body language, as opposed to sound language, is a language without sound. It can be used as a non-verbal symbol to convey information, exchange ideas or feelings, and assist or replace language expression. Body posture can reflect a person's ideological quality, cultural accomplishment and emotional state. In interpersonal communication, standing, sitting, walking and other postures can show a full state of mind and give people a sense of demeanor and beauty. In interpersonal communication, we often behave appropriately, solemn and unrestrained, not humble, generous, lively and dignified body, whether it is a dynamic posture or a static posture, we should make our body language form naturally stretching, harmonious and lively, and only in this way can we achieve the ideal communication effect (Barmaki, 2014).

### **2.6. The Distance Expression in "Silence" Art**

In interpersonal communication, there are certain requirements for the space distance between two people. When people are in face-to-face communication, because of the different relationship between the other party, the communicative distance also varies. In the United States, they roughly divide distance into four types, including intimate distance, private distance, social distance and public distance. When couples get along, they can use the intimate distance, which is generally 4 to 5 centimeters. The private distance generally used for communication between relatives and friends is generally 45 cm to 80 centimeters. Social distance is generally between 1 and 2 meters, while public distance is further in distance. In people's communication, the two sides of the communication will keep the physical distance between them due to cultural differences. In communication, the contact distance between bodies will also be affected by different cultural backgrounds, but under the same social and cultural background, the physical contact between people will also be different. Many young people like to hug in the process of communication, indicating that the relationship between people is close. But adults don't hug each other like young people do. With the different events and environment, the differences in the process of interpersonal communication will also be different, which requires us to clarify the communicative distance in non-verbal culture in the process of cross-cultural communication, and we should not ignore the communicative distance because the relationship is too close. In addition, we also need to observe and study the communicative distance of other countries to ensure that we maintain a correct Angle in the process of non-verbal communication, so that we and the other party can avoid embarrassing situations in the process of communication (Minskoff, 1980).

### **3. The Function of "Silence" Art**

Some researchers have studied silence from the perspective of conversation, and put forward the quantity principle of conversation, that is, "the amount of information provided during conversation should be appropriate, neither too much

nor too little, and the amount of speech should be suitable for different environments.” When studying the role of silence in conversation, Harvey Sachs and others summarized three styles of silence: pause, gap and lapse. They are phenomena that must be present when speaking, and speech without pause is incomprehensible. Silence is not an interval, but a bridge that unites voices. More importantly, silence can also convey information, especially when people are limited by the expression of words, and non-verbal signs such as expressions, body movements and contact used in silence can fill the temporary meaning gap. Moreover, silence itself can express both positive and negative emotions (Ambady, 2002).

Silence has a unique function in interpersonal communication. It is not only a supplement to oral communication, but also can promote people’s communication in all aspects of social life, including politics, economy, entertainment, etc. especially in People’s Daily communication plays an important role. It is mainly manifested in: 1) Complementary role: non-verbal signs are also known as “paralanguage”, which means that non-verbal behaviors can support, but cannot replace, verbal information. However, non-verbal behaviors complement the communication and communication of people using verbal information. For example, a manager tells an employee that he is satisfied with the employee’s work; If the manager speaks while tapping the employee on the shoulder, the message takes on extra meaning and the employee will be more encouraged or inspired. 2) Substitution: Silent information is limited by the functions of time, space, depth and some special environments in its transmission. Therefore, non-verbal symbols are needed to replace them in order to complete information transmission and mutual communication. 3) Auxiliary role: Especially in the process of interpersonal communication needs to convey emotions, non-verbal communication is often more vivid than simple language. For example, people use movement and voice to emphasize meaning in daily speech, and use eyes to assist language to convey emotions. 4) Repetition: the use of non-verbal communication symbols to repeat the meaning expressed by the words or to deepen the impression of the role; 5) Contradiction: they can contradict a message the individual is trying to convey. 6) Accenting: they may accent or underline a verbal message. Pounding the table, for example, can underline a message. 7) Negation effect: Sometimes nonverbal symbols can negate the meaning of information conveyed by linguistic symbols. A fake smiling face often negates happy and joyful words, and a painful expression can be “read” as a state of schadenfreude. When they conflict, people tend to believe in information carried by nonverbal symbols rather than linguistic symbols. 8) Regulating effect: This refers to the use of nonverbal symbols to coordinate and regulate the state of verbal communication between people, such as placing a finger close to the lips, meaning “stop talking” or “speak softly”; Aim your ears at the speaker’s mouth, meaning “louder” or “I’m listening carefully”. In addition, some researchers also listed five functions of nonverbal symbols from the perspective of cross-cultural communication, including “initial impression, relevant information, emotional factors, self-expression, and control over others”. For example, when

people use their own words to communicate, they are accompanied by corresponding expressions and other non-verbal symbols. Non-verbal symbols can often be used to express certain repetitive meanings. For example, people wave repeatedly when they say goodbye to friends and relatives, and slap repeatedly on the table when they are angry. By repeating a verbal message in a non-verbal way, the receiver has a greater chance of understanding that message. Such as tiredness, anger, fear, embarrassment, *et al.* (Griffith, 2003).

#### 4. The Difference of “Silence” Art

With the development of society, countries have close contacts, and cross-regional and cross-cultural exchanges have become increasingly close. Regional culture is a culture with a unique style within a certain region. It is a cultural tradition with distinctive characteristics and a long history that has been passed down to the present day, which is jointly shaped by various factors such as regional geographical characteristics and natural conditions. It is the overall embodiment of regional geographical features, natural ecology, folk customs, and political economy. It is also the sum of the material wealth and spiritual wealth of a region, the synthesis of natural environment and historical humanity. Regional cultural symbols are the representation of a regional cultural style, and also the external sign of regional culture formed by the gathering of various regional symbolic information. It can be said that it is a deep-rooted brand and symbol of a regional collective identity (Makoul, 2001). The material forms of regional cultural symbols are language symbols, as well as non-language symbols such as sound, graphics and objects. No matter what kind of symbol, it is generated through the cognition of the regional cultural reality phenomenon and cultural characteristics and the interaction of cultural psychology, natural environment and social culture and other factors. It expresses a meaning or will, and is recognized or accepted by the group, and has the socially agreed meaning attribute and the media function of transmitting meaning. Cross-regional and cross-cultural communication is no longer strange to people. Different non-verbal behaviors have different meanings in different cultural backgrounds, and the conflict of non-verbal communication in cross-cultural communication has become increasingly apparent. Communication distance under different cultural backgrounds refers to the distance between the parties in communication, including human distance, social distance and public distance. Different nations have different ideas about communication distance. Different cultural backgrounds also have different regulations on the object, scope, form and occasion of physical contact. Therefore, in cross-cultural communication, we should pay attention to the proper handling of subtle areas, otherwise it is easy to cause embarrassment and misunderstanding. Although some actions are the same in different cultures, they have different meanings. For example, patting someone on the head in English means comfort, encouragement, affection; In Chinese, this kind of behavior shows the love of adults for children, but it is relatively rare, and usually such behavior among peers is interpreted as insulting

action, which will cause the other party to dislike. Another example, stamping the foot in the English meaning of impatience, but its Chinese meaning is remorse, anger, frustration and so on. The content of English films is vivid and the scene is intuitive, which truly reflects the social situation, life situation, culture and education of English-speaking countries. It can be a good way to gradually get familiar with and adapt to these differences, and improve cross-cultural interpersonal skills (Duggan, 2001).

## 5. The Beauty of “Silence” Art

### 5.1. Mind Tranquility Beauty

Silence is a wonderful form of communication. People can sit side by side, communicate without words, enjoy the peace of human interaction, listening to the stream and wind, bathing in the sun, observing the people and children playing around. It's a moment of peace and contentment. This harmonious relationship in silence does not require a deliberate pursuit of the number of words, but establishes a tacit understanding and understanding deep in the heart. This state of human connection can make people feel the beauty of endless peace of mind (Mercer, 2002).

### 5.2. Body Relaxation Beauty

There is an ineffable comfort in relationships that transcends verbal communication and makes even silence seem just right. This relationship does not need to be deliberately maintained, nor does it need to constantly search for topics to fill in the blank, it exists naturally, allowing people to find a unique peace and relaxation in it. Imagine the scene in the interpersonal relationship, your friend leisurely drinking coffee, sipping wine, enjoying the soft music, while you quietly staring out the window of the sky, enjoying the breeze on your face, feeling your own relaxation and peace. In such a time, there is no dialogue, no communication, but the tacit understanding and peace between you are so deep, as if all words have become redundant. This silence is not embarrassment or indifference, but a deep trust and understanding, and a real relaxation from the mind to the body (Skye, 2014).

### 5.3. Emotion Transmission Beauty

A true relationship doesn't need words. When we establish true rapport in interpersonal communication, we will find that people are able to convey emotion through their eyes, smiles, touch and other ways. These non-verbal forms of communication often express our true feelings better than words. Because they touch our souls directly, they make us feel an indescribable warmth and closeness. Therefore, we should cherish this silent tacit understanding and understanding in interpersonal communication. Don't rely too much on words to express your feelings, but feel the other person's feelings and thoughts with your heart. Only in this way can we truly connect with each other and enjoy that kind of wordless warmth

and closeness. Perhaps this is the beauty of the true art of silence in interpersonal communication (Jefferson, 2013).

## 6. Conclusion

In short, Due to social, cultural, customs, personal characteristics and other reasons, the non-verbal ways of communication objects are diverse, and the information conveyed by these non-verbal ways is also rich and colorful. The same non-verbal language can transmit different information in different situations, and the same information can also be transmitted by different non-verbal forms in different environments. Non-verbal language can not only be used alone, but also in combination, and can also be used with language to enhance the effect of communication. According to the needs of communication, the non-verbal language can be adjusted, and we can judge the information transmitted by the communicative object according to the analysis of its non-verbal language, and take effective countermeasures, so as to achieve the expected communication effect.

## Conflicts of Interest

The author declares no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

## References

- Ambady, N., LaPlante, D., Nguyen, T., Rosenthal, R., Chaumeton, N., & Levinson, W. (2002). Surgeons' Tone of Voice: A Clue to Malpractice History. *Surgery, 132*, 5-9. <https://doi.org/10.1067/msy.2002.124733>
- Barmaki, R. (2014). Nonverbal Communication and Teaching Performance. *Proceedings of the 7th International Conference on Educational Data Mining* (pp. 441-443).
- De Wachter, E. M. (2017). *Co-Art: Artists on Creative Collaboration*. Phaidon Press.
- Duggan, P., & Parrott, L. (2001). Physicians' Nonverbal Rapport Building and Patients' Talk about the Subjective Component of Illness. *Human Communication Research, 27*, 299-311. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1468-2958.2001.tb00783.x>
- Griffith, C. H., Wilson, J. F., Langer, S., & Haist, S. A. (2003). House Staff Nonverbal Communication Skills and Standardized Patient Satisfaction. *Journal of General Internal Medicine, 18*, 170-174. <https://doi.org/10.1046/j.1525-1497.2003.10506.x>
- Jefferson, L., Bloor, K., Birks, Y., Hewitt, C., & Bland, M. (2013). Effect of Physicians' Gender on Communication and Consultation Length: A Systematic Review and Meta-Analysis. *Journal of Health Services Research & Policy, 18*, 242-248. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1355819613486465>
- Kim, Y., & Park, I. (2020). "Coach Really Knew What I Needed and Understood Me Well as a Person": Effective Communication Acts in Coach-athlete Interactions among Korean Olympic Archers. *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health, 17*, Article 3101. <https://doi.org/10.3390/ijerph17093101>
- Liu, X. (2000). *Introduction to the Pedagogy of Chinese as a Foreign Language*. Beijing Language and Culture University Press.
- Makoul, G., Curry, R. H., & Tang, P. C. (2001). The Use of Electronic Medical Records: Communication Patterns in Outpatient Encounters. *Journal of the American Medical Informatics Association, 8*, 610-615. <https://doi.org/10.1136/jamia.2001.0080610>

- Mercer, S. (2002). Empathy and Quality of Care. *British Journal of General Practice*, 52, S9-S12.
- Minskoff, E. H. (1980). Teaching Approach for Developing Nonverbal Communication Skills in Students with Social Perception Deficits: Part I. The Basic Approach and Body Language Clues. *Journal of Learning Disabilities*, 13, 118-124.  
<https://doi.org/10.1177/002221948001300302>
- Prajwal, K. R., Mukhopadhyay, R., Namboodiri, V. P., & Jawahar, C. V. (2020). A Lip Sync Expert Is All You Need for Speech to Lip Generation in the Wild. In *Proceedings of the 28th ACM International Conference on Multimedia* (pp. 484-492). ACM.  
<https://doi.org/10.1145/3394171.3413532>
- Sagar, S. S., & Jowett, S. (2012). Communicative Acts in Coach-Athlete Interactions: When Losing Competitions and When Making Mistakes in Training. *Western Journal of Communication*, 76, 148-174. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10570314.2011.651256>
- Skye, E. P., Wagenschutz, H., Steiger, J. A., & Kumagai, A. K. (2014). Use of Interactive Theater and Role Play to Develop Medical Students' Skills in Breaking Bad News. *Journal of Cancer Education*, 29, 704-708. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s13187-014-0641-y>
- Yang, S., & Yang, Y. (2018). *Slapping the Table in Amazement: A Ming Dynasty Story Collection*. University of Washington Press.
- Zhang, W., Cun, X., Wang, X., Zhang, Y., Shen, X., Guo, Y. et al. (2023). SadTalker: Learning Realistic 3D Motion Coefficients for Stylized Audio-Driven Single Image Talking Face Animation. In *2023 IEEE/CVF Conference on Computer Vision and Pattern Recognition (CVPR)* (pp. 8652-8661). IEEE.  
<https://doi.org/10.1109/cvpr52729.2023.00836>