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MIMICS AS AN ELEMENT OF INTERPERSONAL
COMMUNICATION

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"Of all parts of the body, the face is most considered and regarded, as is natural from its being the chief seat of expression and the source of the voice."

Charles Darwin (1988: 351)

The basic tool of human communication is the language. Knowledge of its system makes it possible to generate verbal utterances. In direct, natural communication between people, these utterances are usually accompanied by non-verbal means of communication. They include i.a. human kinetic behaviours, performed with the help of hands, face, head, torso and legs.

Scientific deliberations concerning kinetic behaviours of members of various language-culture-territorial communities were undertaken for the first time in the United States. The first to engage in these deliberations already in the first decades of the 20th century were linguists of anthropological interests and anthropologists fascinated with the human communication. In the 50s there was developed kinesics — a separate branch of science examining human body movements performed in the course of communication.¹

Irrespective of the development of research in the United States, human kinetic behaviours, both communicative and non-communicative, were also of interest to European scientists.² Considerable achievements were made in

¹The basics were developed by R. L. Birdwhistell (1952; 1960; 1966; 1970).

²These were for example: A Switzer, Ch.Bally (1966: 110-116), a Frenchman P. Guiraud (1974: 60-62, 102-106), an Italian U. Eco (1972: 334-371). An immense and original contribution into the work of human kinetic behaviour analysis was made in particular by an Austrian I. Eibl-Eibesfeld (1987: 25-37, 67-76, 155-181, 196-224).

this field by British science.³

In the Soviet Union, the research from the scope of kinetics was commenced in the 60s of the 20th century. Some Soviet scientists included this research in the field of the interest of paralinguistics (Kolšanskij 1974). Movements of the body participating in human communication above all absorb linguists (e.g. Nikolaeva, Uspenskij 1996; Filippov 1975). Some works were written on this topic in connection with the research of informal speech (e.g. Kapanadze, Krasilnikowa 1973). Kinesics is also of interest to psycholinguists (Gorelov 1980; Kuliš 1982) and scientists inclined towards etnolinguistics (e.g. Smirnova 1997). Soviet scientists saw also the need of including the research of human body movement in the process of foreign language teaching (Nikolaeva 1969; Vereščagin, Kostamarov 1976). Also specialists engaged in *savoir vivre* (Formanovskaja 1982; Stupin, Ignat'ev 1982) and semioticians (Stepanov 1971; Ivanov 1976) contributed towards the analysis of kinetic behaviours.

In Poland the period of greater interest in kinetic means participating in human communication falls in the 70s and 80s of the 20th century. This topic was above all taken up by linguists (Cienkowski 1963; Pisarek 1985), in particular those who were directed by their curiosity towards sociolinguistics, functional stylistics or both of these disciplines (Janasowa, Nowakowska-Kempna 1979; Krawczyk 1983; Wilkoń 1982). The problem of cooperation of verbal utterances with kinetic behaviours occupies also the researchers of customs and social behaviours (e.g. Rojek 1984). Human body movements participating in human communication also draw the attention of specialists from the field of foreign language teaching (Machowska 1977; Korosadowicz 1989; Jarzabek 1989).

The above list of disciplines which covers with its scope the research of human kinetic behaviours indicate that this research is of multilayer character. Yet there is not much of it, when compared with the entirety of the research of the language. That the research in this area is unappreciated may be evidenced by the fact that so far there has not been developed (although some attempts have been made) a form of notation of moves participating in human communication, a notation based on the language signs. This might result from the fact that in common perception human body movements constitute an additional, yet not an indispensable and therefore not worthy of attention, element of human communication. What is interesting, though,

³In commencement of its works in this respect a considerable role was played by an anthropologist, sociologist and ethnographer B. Malinowski, who created the so-called theory of situational context. The essence of Malinowski's situational context was presented in a thorough manner by J. Szymura (1985: 177-205).

this feeling is shared by some linguists. In their opinion the issue of kinetic behaviours supporting human communication is something so obvious and known to such an extent, that it should not constitute an object of scientific research.

This article is aimed at provision of data undermining the legitimacy of such feelings and opinions expressed. Due to the small size hereof, we will limit the field of observation to mimics. i.e. moves made by eyes (eyeballs, eyelids), eyebrows, forehead, cheeks and tongue. It has been attempted to prove herein that human body movements, even so minor as facial movements, are important in the process of human communication; therefore they cannot be unappreciated or even omitted in the research of full communication: both verbal and non-verbal. Despite the adoption, consciously and purposefully by the way, of a popular form of communication, the observations contained in this article are based on:

- live observation of communicational and non-communicational mimic behaviours of Poles,
- analysis of mimics recorded on photographs,
- steered conversation on provision of certain information, expression of opinions and emotions in a mimic form,
- analysis of mimic behaviours of literary characters,
- analysis of certain dictionary entries from selected dictionaries in the context of the use of mimics.

This text contains:

- views of certain researchers on inborn and conventionalised human mimic behaviours,
- discussion of mimics performed in an unconscious manner,
- analysis of conscious mimics,
- summary.

INBORN AND CONVENTIONALISED HUMAN MIMIC BEHAVIOURS

Charles Darwin already in the 19th century ascertained as a result of the research carried out that the principle mimic moves made by a human being are either inborn or inherited, i.e. are not learned by an individual (Darwin 1988: 25-37, 155-180). Suffering and sadness are expressed by a slant position of eyebrows, lowering of the corners of the mouth, crying. Reflection connected with effort or noticing something difficult or unpleasant causes frowning. Wellbeing, happiness or joy are expressed by a smile or laughter. Anger, outrage or rage are expressed by showing teeth and frowning. In Darwin's opinion, the fact that most of mimic movements are inherited is confirmed by the fact that the same movements to express psychological conditions are used by children as well as adults; by mentally retarded and mentally ill persons as well as healthy individuals, by persons who are blind or mute from birth as well as by persons who can see and hear. These movements are common for all human races and the representatives of all continents, living in various cultural conditions. In Darwin's opinion some mimic behaviours (e.g. laughter) were shared by our ancestors, even before they deserved to be called humans. For this reason, the mimic movements are in the repertoire of not only the human species but also of animals.

Inborn or inherited movements do not usually depend on the individual's will. Despite this fact many shades of facial expressions are recognized instantly, without the process of conscious analysis. No-one, as Darwin claims, can clearly describe the expression of sulkiness or cunningness, and yet such facial expression can be recognized in various human races. Everyone on first sight is able to recognize sadness or happiness.

Apart from inborn movements there are, in Darwin's opinion, also mimic movements which are not common in various human races. These are learned, conventional movements. An individual acquires them in the juvenile period by imitating other members of a given community. With time, these movements become habitual, but are performed purposefully and consciously. They are different in different races and representatives of various regions of the world, similarly as their languages differ from one another.⁴

A similar, and with respect to certain issues, an even more elaborate argumentation concerning the inborn character of certain human mimic

⁴Ch. Darwin based his assertion on questionnaire research conducted among the inhabitants of various regions of the worlds, analysis of photographs and drawings prepared by informants and on his own direct observations.

behaviours, was provided by Irenäus Eibl-Eibesfeld, an Austrian etiologist working in Germany (Eibl-Eibesfeldt 1987). There are no doubts, he writes, that a baby can smile without being taught to do it. Deaf-and-numb persons grow in constant darkness and silence, do not see the smile of their mother and do not hear the sound of human voice. Despite this these persons smile and laugh (make correct sounds) when they are happy, they cry when they suffer and frown when they are angry. To the argument that these children learned how to smile when they were rewarded with friendly treatment the first time they demonstrated a behaviour resembling smile, this scientist replies that even children with severe brain damage, who were unable to learn how to put a spoon into their mouth, smile, laugh and cry. It is impossible to imagine that these children could be able to learn such complex movement patterns, when they were unable to master much simpler activities. Eibl-Eibesfeld further indicated that much more characteristics than one usually thinks are inborn, which he learned on the example of a ten-year-old blind, yet well-hearing girl. When she played for him something on the piano he praised her and she blushed, then quickly turned her head towards him and then lowered her eyes, exactly in the same way embarrassed seeing girls do (Eibl-Eibesfeldt 1987: 31).

Similarly as Darwin, Eibl-Eibesfeld claims that many from amongst the inborn human moves belong to the archaic phylogenetic heritage. This results from the fact that they are shared with the anthropoidal monkeys with the closest relation to the humans. Eibl-Eibesfeld included into the inborn moves connected e.g. with a threat, which we share with the monkeys, showing teeth in the expression of rage.

Baboons, which are armed in extremely long fangs, when threatening, pull the corners of the lower lip far down, so that these teeth are revealed in all their length. The same is done by humans, despite the fact that they do not have such big fangs. The movement pattern has therefore survived the reduction of the previously presented teeth.

Similarly to Darwin, Eibl-Eibesfeld admits that apart from inborn mimic gestures, people perform also conventional movements. He elaborates this idea, demonstrating a large range of kinetic forms of greeting and leave-taking of people stemming from various cultural areas, civilisations and races, from distant regions of the globe.⁵

⁵When collecting documentary material in support of his theses, I. Eibl-Eibesfeld worked with a film camera, with the use whereof he filmed people (without them knowing about it) in various parts of the world. To each filmed document he prepared a protocol with data what a given person was doing before being filmed and thereafter,

From the cited opinions of both of these researchers it follows that certain mimic moves are common for all inhabitants of the Earth. There are however not that many of them, since every language-territorial-cultural community creates above all its own, conventional movement sets, which are used by its participants purposefully in the course of communication. These are the most important in the course of communication between representatives of alien communities.

UNCONCIOUS MIMICS

The face is this part of the human body, which participates in articulation of sounds, voice emission and consumption of food. Apart from the basic function of the face, thanks to the contraction of its muscles, it is possible to "read" various information: a part thereof is communicated in an unconscious, non-purposeful and automatic manner, yet a part is of conscious, purposeful and conventional character. On a human face unconscious mimics is intertwined with consciously generated nuances, and intended facial expressions, i.e. purposeful facial expressions are intertwined with those which are automatic. Therefore, sometimes it is difficult to clearly distinguish between spontaneous mimics and conscious mimics.

Human eyes are subject to the least control. For this reason they most easily give away the emotional state. There is a reason, why we say that the eyes do not lie. From the observations of psychologists (Borzyszkowska-Sękowska 1984a; 1984b; 1984c; 1984d), psychiatrists (Kępiński 1997), as well as from observations made by people every day, it follows that shining eyes usually express joyfulness and matt eyes express sadness. Wide pupils of the eyes may indicate fear, fixing the eyes on one point demonstrates focusing of attention. "Restless" eyes signify distraction, absent-mindedness and anxiety. Distrustful persons cast stealth, fast and often sideways looks. This is also a quite common syndrome for people troubled by guilty conscience, who fear being judged by the society. Fatigue makes the look heavy. Shy eyes are characterised by bashful "lowering of eyes," which gives away anxiety. "Unconscious" eyes signify considerable weariness, sleepiness, high emotional elevation, fury, anger and paralysing fear. Persons of fiery, burning, sparkling as well as wild eyes are under the influence of strong emotions. Thanks to hardly describable movements of the eyeballs and eyelids, the eyes may be: cunning, curious, mischievous, ice-cold, mild, persistent, reluctant, indifferent, gloomy, crafty, yearning, provocative, cold, evil, fearful, timid. In

and in what social situation a given mode of behaviour took place.

accordance with the opinions of the writers quoted in dictionaries a look may be: scrutinizing, tender, pleading, inquisitive, critical, open, scornful, sharp, piercing, ice-cold, absent, distracted. With no other part of the face can a human being express with such fullness and power his internal conditions. For this reason eyes sometime say more about us than we might expect or more than we would like them to.

A lot may be "read" from the movement of mere eyelids. Thanks to them people are able to eye somebody up and down, to make big or sweet eyes,⁶ to shoot with the eyes. They also avoid somebody's stare or exchange the looks with somebody.

A meaningful element for many experienced feelings are the eyelids together with eyebrows. Strong tension is accompanied by narrowing of the space between the eyelids and frowning. These movements are also indicative of hostile or aggressive attitude. Eyes wide open characterise persons who are hungry for adventures, new stimuli coming from the environment. The more we are surprised or startled the wider the eyes are open and the higher the eyebrows are raised.

The whole range of feelings may be expressed with the mouth open in various ways: surprise, being scared, suffering, astonishment. Tightly pressed lips signify pride, secretiveness, stubbornness, cruelty, obstinacy. The expression of the lips informs of self-assurance, resignation, weak will. And how many shades of smile are there? Dictionary authors list the following kinds of smiles: mild, sweet, playful, evil, ironic, sneering, insolent, bitter, vicious, helpless, sad, challenging, embarrassed. If we say that the smiles flourishes, plays in the corners of the mouth, then in each of these descriptions there is a different smile. In sad moments the corners of the mouth drop, in happy moments they are lifted. Also the forehead says a lot about the human feelings. It sometimes is cloudless, cheerful or overcast. There is also an expression *clear forehead*. When a person concentrates heavily, exercises his attention, his eyes fix on one point, the eyebrows are pulled together, and there appears a horizontal fold on the forehead. A surprised person rises his eyebrows, which causes vertical folds to appear on the forehead.

As a result of the muscle movements the human face may be ice-cold, appalling, scared, evil, open, unfriendly, full of cruelty, good-hearted, nice and proud. The face — the proverbial mirror of the soul — is sometimes wry with fear, beaming with happiness or full of misery, over-brimming

⁶Some of the movements mentioned in the article are reflected in the phraseological resources of the Polish language. This topic was presented by A. Krawczyk (1983: 137-144).

with joy, full of hidden worries and extinguished hopes. It is changed by wrinkles — signs of worries, hardships and struggles. It is a reflection of human life, i.e. suffering, happiness and strives. It may for example be huffy, arrogant, daring, apathetic, stupid, embarrassed, sullen, firm, indifferent, official, solemn, formal, apologetic, mysterious, sour.

Mimics performed without the use of human will, i.e. unknowingly, unconsciously, is not aimed, obviously, at specific purposes or immediate communicating something or with somebody. It is of the character of signs for those perceiving it. These are more like signs or syndromes. Proper interpretation of facial muscles movements is facilitated by the fact that human emotional reaction usually precedes the reactions directed by his will. Therefore, sometimes, before a person chooses a desired facial expression other people will be able to read his true colours. In each interaction of two human beings one may perceive the moment of "filling in of the frames" of a given situation. Then the partners to the contact see each other the way they really are. Therefore, irrespective of the fact whether at a given point mimics is performed intentionally or unknowingly, it says as much to the eyes, as the words say to the ears. Thus, it plays an important role in human communication.

Mimics is a set of movements appearing in space and evolving through time. There are however certain mimic behaviours which are not subject to temporal changes; these are permanent behaviours constituting a certain mask.⁷ This mask appears with age, and therefore the faces of young people are less expressive than the faces of old people. At that time the face reveals, independently of human will, their personality, psychological silhouette, it reflects the features of the disposition, expresses their character. Facial expression manifests the sphere of a person's emotional life. Depending on the fact what a given person experienced the most, the face reveals anxiety or happiness, love or hate, satisfaction, bitterness, disgust, stubbornness, self-assurance, resignation, inertia, loneliness, sadness. It also records surprise, as it does sardonic laughter.

CONSCIOUS MIMICS

The mimic behaviours discussed so far are not subject to human will or control. They have the character of signs for the person perceiving and interpreting them, yet they are emitted unknowingly. Therefore, they are not aimed at communicating something to somebody. Apart from the behaviours

⁷This was noted i.a. by T. Kowzan (1976: 309).

of this type, a human being shapes his meaning also in a conscious and purposeful manner, in accordance with their will. A material difference between unconscious and conscious mimics is therefore reflected on the level of emission and not perception; the difference is made by the will of sending information or lack of such will. Sometimes it is difficult, as already noted, to differentiate spontaneous mimics from conscious mimics. And so for example, the set of eyebrows and eyelids may depend on human's will. A person may freely decide to look focused (by opening the eyes wider and rising the eyebrows), contemptuous (by looking down and at the same time squinting the eyes and lowering the corners of the mouth). Not only the look of eyelids, eyebrows and forehead is subject to our volitional control. A human being has control also over the look of the mouth, and therefore we are able to smile, even if we do not have any greater reasons for it. Therefore conscious steering of the mimics in interpersonal communication makes it possible to express feelings which are not always consistent with the actual condition.

Irrespective of the fixed, but unconscious mimics, which is "painted" on the human face by life itself, a person most often consciously assumes a certain mask, adjusted to the role played in the society, be it the professional, social or family role. Moreover, the mask is adjusted to the environment, the circumstances and the situation. It may for example be a mask of: a teacher, a pupil, a priest, a judge, a doctor, a nurse, a father, a well-wishing person, a self-assured person, an embarrassed person or an unhappy person. A different mask is put on when we congratulate someone, and a different one is put on when we are giving our condolences. Putting the mask on is a necessity or a lie. The used thereof is required by the rules adopted in a given society, and therefore, a person who does not care about it is often considered to be unfit for the society, helpless and not knowing the rules applicable therein. What a man wears on the face is recognized thanks to the knowledge of the convention known to the viewers and actors of the everyday life theatre. Thanks to this convention a man may pretend to be someone else than he really is, to present values, which he in fact does not have. He may also hide those values, which he wishes to hide and emphasize other — such that he considers important.

The basic group of conscious and purposeful communication mimic behaviours are the mimic signs supporting the verbal communication. These signs, together with the communication they are connected with, are a creation of a specific community having a separate language, they function in a specific geographic area, which is inhabited by this community (therefore limited territorially) and they are marked by civilisation, culture and history

of this community and are a component of the knowledge which is obligatory for this community. The basic function of these signs is communication. Irrespective of that they may express the emotional attitude of the sender of the communication to the contents expressed or may cause certain reactions of the recipient. Thanks to the fact that they are a part of the common consciousness, the communicational sense intended by the sender is identical with the sender which will be ascribed thereto by the recipient. These signs are acquired. Representatives of a given society need to learn them in order to correctly use them in the process of communication. Most of the signs discussed appear in the conditions of oral, direct, spontaneous and unconstrained conversation, conducted in the most typical situations of human life (in such case they are in the most active and the closed connection to the conversation).

Below I present examples of mimic signs used in the communication of Poles:

BLINKING OF AN EYE — is to draw the recipient's attention, warning him of something or alluding to something.

EYES WIDE OPEN — express surprise.

BLINKING THE EYELIDS — means confirmation of something or consent to something.

RISING EYEBROWS — reflects the condition which the sender experienced as a result of seeing or hearing something weird, extraordinary, not understandable, or something that surprised him.

PULLING THE EYEBROWS TOGETHER — expresses dissatisfaction, unpleasant surprise, anger.

LOWERING OF THE CORNERS OF CLOSED MOUTH — expresses lack of knowledge.

LOWERING OF THE CORNERS OF THE MOUTH AND BLOWING THEM — means contempt or negative attitude towards someone or something.

A SNEER WITH SIMULTANEOUS SQUIRTING OF THE EYES — has ironic and mocking undertone and is a prove of ridiculing someone.

STICKING ONE'S TONGUE AT SOMEONE — is aimed at teasing someone or showing a kind of revenge.

There are but a few of these signs in the communication of the Poles. Mimics is usually an ordinary auxiliary means during performance of signs made by other parts of the body. It companies e.g. such kinetic behaviours as beckoning of a finger, showing of the thumb, showing of a fist, patting somebody with the hand on the shoulder, placing a finger on the mouth,

tapping one's forehead with a fist, blowing a kiss, pointing the index finger towards the door, kissing the tips of the fingers, rising a hat, a bow.⁸

Particular kinetic signs, irrespective of the fact, whether mimics pays the main or only auxiliary part therein, are composed of a complex of minor movements, from which each has its own form, size and tempo. These movements need to appear in a relevant moment and in a relevant order. Therefore, they are included in direct relations with other movements.

These signs are closed wholes, which cannot be broken into smaller meaningful parts. They are also not directly dependant from one another, since they do not relate with other signs. It is impossible to construct from these signs, apart from but a few, any superior structures. They constitute a set of signs, with the use whereof one is able to express only those meanings which are connected with a particular sign, and those meanings which are additionally ascribed in the sentence, situational and cultural context.

Only a part of the signs is performed once only; many of them are repeated by the sender several times, and some of them are repeated as long as they are understood. A limited number of signs facilitates official communication, and most frequent movements accompany spontaneous and friendly contacts.

Mimic signs which are used by the sender in the process of communication cooperate closely with the verbal utterance — the recipient must after all receive the information sent as one whole. They may double the words, make them clearer, emphasize them, as well as provide them with a new informational layer. Mimics may multiply or weaken the impact of the words, may modify their meaning or contradict them. Lack of consistency between the uttered text and the accompanying mimics lowers the credibility of such text. Mimics may also add something new, not necessarily connected with the context of the uttered words. Thanks to immense expression capabilities, mimic behaviours sometimes replace, and quite successfully, the words. In such case they are an independent carrier of information. They appear in communication when: they may reach the recipient faster than words, the participants of the communication are separated by a small space, verbal communication is distorted by noise, one of the interlocutors has troubles hearing, it is necessary to keep quiet, the circumstances exclude the possibility to use words, the sender does not want to interrupt someone's verbal utterance, it is required to observe certain discretion or to keep the

⁸A full characteristic of the signs mentioned in this article, including their form, meaning, scope of use and the degree of connection with the verbal expression, is contained in the book by K. Jarzabek (1989).

communication secret, the sender feels strong emotions of negative or (rarely) positive character, and the signs turn out to be more adequate in a given situation than a verbal utterance.

SUMMARY

1. From the oldest of times, in face to face contacts between the humans a considerable role was played by mimics. Irrespective of the fact whether it is of inborn, inherited character and not learned character or whether it is conventional and learned, whether it is performed unconsciously or purposefully, it provides a lot of information to persons who are watching the sender at a given time.
2. The most important role in interpersonal communication is played by the facial movements which are made consciously and purposefully. Information provided in such manner are read thanks to the knowledge of convention, known to the senders and the recipients. Despite this, the signs of this kind are not always true or credible.
3. Mimics performed without the participation of human will is unconscious and is not aimed at direct communication of something to someone, it does however have the character of signs for someone who sees and interprets them. These signs in many cases say a lot to the observers. This pertains in particular to individual features of the author of the kinetic behaviours and his true not pretended feelings towards somebody or someone.
4. Mimics often says more about a person than his words. From the movements of the face — the conscious, and more often the unconscious ones — it is possible to read the feelings, states, conditions, impressions, intentions, will and the attitude towards other people. The face most faithfully reflects the human inside, and therefore it may reveal to the recipient sometimes more, than the sender wants to show or the recipient wants to see.
5. Human mimic behaviours may be replaced by verbal expressions thanks to the knowledge of full-value language, which is independent from other forms of communication systems. It is however not omitted in direct, natural communication by any community. The fact that humans have not learned to record mimics with the use of special signs does not mean that it may be treated as an element of minor importance for social contacts.

6. This article merely signals the problem indicated in the title, presenting it only in the context of the communication of Poles. It would be purposeful and at the same time interesting to examine the differences which decide on the variety of mimic communicational behaviours of the members of various communities.
7. The movements of human body should be included — to a greater extent than so far — into the field of examination of researchers interested in interpersonal communication.

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