

# THE MAIN FUNCTIONS OF PARALINGUISTICS IN COMMUNICATION

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## Abstract

This article examines the main functions of paralinguistics in the process of human communication. Special attention is paid to the role of intonation, voice timbre, facial expressions, gestures, pauses, and other nonverbal components of speech in communication. The influence of paralinguistic means on the transmission of emotional state, speaker intentions, and the effectiveness of interpersonal interaction is analyzed. The relationship between paralinguistics and psycholinguistics, sociolinguistics, and communicative linguistics is also considered. It is concluded that paralinguistic means are an integral part of speech communication and significantly affect the understanding of information.

**Keywords:** Paralinguistics, communication, nonverbal communication, intonation, facial expressions, gestures, psycholinguistics, speech behavior.

## Introduction

Modern linguistics pays great attention not only to the language system itself, but also to the means that accompany human speech in the process of communication. In real communication, people perceive not only words, but also the way they are pronounced. Intonation, voice volume, pauses, facial expressions, gestures, speech tempo, and emotional coloring of an utterance have a significant influence on understanding the meaning of a message. The study of such phenomena is the subject of paralinguistics.

Paralinguistics is a branch of linguistics that studies the set of nonverbal means accompanying oral speech and participating in the transmission of information. The term “paralinguistics” comes from the Greek word *para* meaning “beside” and the Latin *lingua* meaning “language.” This means that paralinguistic means exist alongside language and complement it. The relevance of studying paralinguistics is due to the fact that communication effectiveness plays a crucial



role in modern society. People interact with one another daily in professional, educational, social, and personal spheres. At the same time, successful communication depends not only on the correct choice of words, but also on the ability to use nonverbal means.

The study of paralinguistics within psycholinguistics is especially important because a person's emotional state is directly reflected in their voice, intonation, and behavior. Quite often, the speaker's true attitude is determined precisely through nonverbal components of speech.

The purpose of this article is to examine the main functions of paralinguistics in communication and determine its role in the communication process.

### **The Concept and Essence of Paralinguistics**

Paralinguistics studies those elements of communication that accompany speech utterances but do not directly belong to the vocabulary or grammar of a language.

Paralinguistic means include:

Intonation

voice timbre

speech tempo

pauses

stress

facial expressions

gestures

body posture

eye contact

emotional coloring of speech

These means help clarify the meaning of an utterance and convey the speaker's emotions and attitude toward the interlocutor or the discussed topic. For example, the same phrase can be perceived differently depending on intonation. The phrase "How wonderful" may express sincere joy, surprise, or even sarcasm. Without intonation, it would be difficult for the listener to interpret the meaning correctly. Paralinguistic means perform an important communicative function. They help make speech more expressive, emotional, and understandable. In addition, nonverbal elements can strengthen or, on the contrary, weaken the impact of words. Researchers note that in live communication a significant part of information is transmitted precisely through nonverbal means. People often trust

the intonation and facial expressions of the speaker more than the words themselves. Paralinguistics is closely connected with other sciences:

psycholinguistics

sociolinguistics

psychology

cultural studies

communication theory

In different cultures, paralinguistic means may have different meanings. For example, gestures acceptable in one country may be considered inappropriate in another. This demonstrates the close relationship between paralinguistics and national as well as cultural characteristics.

## **Main Functions of Paralinguistics in Communication**

### **Emotional-Expressive Function**

One of the main functions of paralinguistics is the transmission of the speaker's emotions and feelings. A person may express joy, fear, anger, surprise, irritation, or sympathy through intonation, voice timbre, and facial expressions. The emotional coloring of speech plays a major role in interpersonal communication. Even a neutral sentence can acquire different emotional meanings due to intonation. Raising one's voice may indicate irritation or excitement, while a calm and quiet tone may reflect confidence or trust.

Facial expressions also help the interlocutor recognize a person's emotional state. A smile expresses friendliness, furrowed brows indicate dissatisfaction, and widened eyes may signal surprise. Thanks to the emotional-expressive function, communication becomes more lively and natural.

### **Communicative Function**

Paralinguistic means help organize the communication process and regulate interaction between interlocutors. For example, pauses divide semantic parts of an utterance and give another person an opportunity to join the conversation. Intonation helps determine whether a sentence is a question, a statement, or a command. Without proper intonation, oral speech would be less understandable. In addition, gestures and eye contact help maintain interaction between participants in communication. A nod may signify agreement or understanding, while eye contact demonstrates attention to the interlocutor. The communicative



function is especially important in public speaking, teaching, and business communication.

### **Meaning-Enhancing Function**

Nonverbal means can strengthen the meaning of words and make statements more persuasive. For example, a person may accompany speech with active gestures or changes in speech tempo. During speeches, orators often use intonational emphasis to highlight key ideas. This helps listeners better perceive information. Sometimes paralinguistic means may even contradict words. For instance, a person may say that everything is fine, but a trembling voice and sad facial expression may indicate the opposite. Thus, paralinguistics helps better understand the speaker's true intentions.

### **Contact-Regulating Function**

In the communication process, paralinguistic means help establish and maintain contact between people. A smile, friendly tone, and open posture contribute to creating a positive atmosphere. On the contrary, a harsh tone, lack of eye contact, or aggressive gestures may cause tension and conflict. The contact-regulating function is especially important in educational and professional spheres, where successful interaction directly affects performance results.

### **Social Function**

Paralinguistic features of speech often reflect a person's social status, age, profession, and cultural background. For example, formal communication is usually characterized by restrained intonation and minimal gestures, whereas informal conversation allows more emotional speech. Moreover, representatives of different cultures may use gestures, interpersonal distance, and intonation differently. This makes paralinguistics an important tool of intercultural communication. In modern society, the importance of paralinguistics is constantly increasing. People actively interact not only in real life but also through digital technologies such as video communication, online conferences, and social networks. During online communication, paralinguistic means remain important. Intonation, facial expressions, and gestures continue to influence information perception. The role of paralinguistics is especially noticeable in the professional sphere. Successful teachers, journalists, politicians, and public speakers

effectively use voice, pauses, and facial expressions to influence audiences. Psychologists note that people often form their first impression of an interlocutor based on nonverbal behavior. Confident intonation and open posture inspire greater trust. In foreign language teaching, much attention is also paid to intonation and pronunciation. Without proper intonation, speech may sound unnatural and cause difficulties in understanding. In addition, paralinguistics plays an important role in psycholinguistics. The study of nonverbal reactions helps researchers examine emotional states, speech perception, and psychological aspects of communication. Thus, paralinguistics is an important part of human communication. Nonverbal means help convey emotions, regulate interaction between interlocutors, strengthen the meaning of utterances, and maintain social contact. Intonation, gestures, facial expressions, pauses, and voice timbre significantly influence information perception and understanding of the speaker's true intentions. Without paralinguistic means, speech would be less expressive and emotional. Modern research confirms the close connection between paralinguistics, psycholinguistics, sociolinguistics, and communication theory. This makes the field relevant and promising for further study. Under conditions of developing digital communication, the importance of paralinguistics continues to grow, since effective communication is impossible without taking nonverbal components of speech into account.

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