

# Modern day paralanguage

[Sociology](#), [Communication](#)



Communication is much more than just speech and writing. Most of us are unaware that we are communicating in many different ways even when we are not speaking. The same goes for other social animal species. We are rarely taught about this mostly non-verbal form of human communication in school even though it is very important for effective interaction with others. Growing up in a society, we informally learn how to use gestures, glances, slight changes in tone of voice, and other auxiliary communication devices to alter or emphasize what we say and do. We learn these highly culture bound techniques over years largely by observing others and imitating them. Linguists refer to all of these auxiliary communication methods as paralanguage. Paralanguage is part of the redundancy in communication that helps prevent ineffective communication. It can prevent the wrong message from inadvertently being passed on, as often is the case in a telephone call and even more so in a letter. The paralanguage messages that can be observed through face to face contact also makes it more difficult to lie or to hide emotions. Paralanguage is often more important in communication than what is actually being said orally. It has been suggested that as much as 70% of what we communicate when talking directly with others is through paralanguage. The most obvious form of paralanguage is body language or kinesics. This is the language of gestures, expressions, and postures. In North America, for instance, we commonly use our arms and hands to say good-bye, point, count, express excitement, beckon, warn away, threaten, insult etc. In fact, we learn many subtle variations of each of these gestures and use them situationally. We use our head to say yes or no, to smile, frown, and wink acknowledgement or

flirtation. Our head and shoulder in combination may shrug to indicate that we do not know something. While the meaning of some gestures, such as a smile, may be the same throughout the world, the meaning of others may be completely different. Another form of paralanguage that emerged in today's society is with the use of emoticons, and emoji's in text messages.

Emoticons and emoji's are small pictures that arouse emotion in a text message. Text messages are sent everyday rapidly between friends, family and coworkers. However, reading a text message with the intended tone, or attitude is sometimes difficult to do. Using emoticons or emoji's help the text sender a better understanding of the emotion felt with the words. Several examples include a variety of smiley faces, sad faces, angry faces, crying faces, laughing faces; the list goes on and on! These faces show different emotions that can be clearly seen by the person receiving the text. For example when a daughter receives a text message from a parent with an angry emoticon or emoji and the text, " Come home now", the daughter clearly has an idea that her parents are not happy with her. This text however, could be reversed with the same words and a different emoticon. With a smiley face and the text " Come home now" the daughter can safely assume her parents are not angry. Because our society is using these so often, text messages are becoming a part of paralanguage. With the use of one single emoticon or emoji the emotion and feelings of the writer is better displayed and understood. These little faces show emotion that would regularly be used in face-to-face communication or even verbal communication. Text messages are generally read in the receivers voice and therefore tone is hard to display. With improved technology, paralanguage

can be understood even through text messages. In conclusion, it is clear to see that the unspoken communication is extremely important in understanding and interpreting language. Paralanguage is the gateway to understanding emotion, feeling and gives the ability to connect with the speaker. Words are just words until paralanguage gives them meaning. In this paper it is clear to see that paralanguage is seen through the gestures of body language and tone of voice, but paralanguage has even expanded into the non-spoken, written form of communication. Emoticons and emoji's is just the beginning of today's form of paralanguage, an incredible tool created to better enhance communication to fit the times of society. Without paralanguage, there would be no order or structure in communication, but with it communication is effective and alive.