

# A Qualitative Study on Teacher's Nonverbal Communication and Iranian EFL Learners' Perception of Language Learning<sup>1</sup>

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## Abstract

One of the significant aspects of the communication is its nonverbal aspect. In this study there was an attempt to explore this aspect of language teaching qualitatively from the learners' point of view through observation and interview in Iranian context. It was revealed that four main categories of nonverbal communication(NVC) including: hand gesture, eye-contact, facial expression and tone of voice are used from the most frequently used to the least used respectively. Moreover, it was found that a teacher's use of nonverbal communication can help learners to get more benefit from the learning context. Also, the findings indicate how utilizing NVC may contribute to different aspects (vocabulary, grammar, and pronunciation) of language learning. According to the students' comments, six main themes as different roles of the teacher were found including: Teacher as a composer, Teacher as a constructor, Teach-

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er as a mirror, Teacher as a conductor, Teacher as a mentor, and Teacher as a vocalist.

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## 1. Introduction

Nonverbal communication forms an important part of everyday speech and therefore may occupy a more central place in second / foreign language teaching than it does now (Andersen, 2004). NVC can be helpful in assisting L2 language learners in both the production and reception skills. The current study is a look at the NVC from a pedagogical perspective and in an EFL context, i.e., in Iran.

Language is an exclusive tool of communication for human; nevertheless, most of our messages have a root in a communication system called body language or, to say in another word, nonverbal communication which is beyond the language system. The nonverbal aspects of communication play an extremely important role in human social interaction (Andersen, 2004).

The majority of communication is conveyed through nonverbal behaviors. It has been claimed that 65% of meaning is conveyed through nonverbal communication (Birdwhistell, 1970). Lakin (2006) believes that people are not aware of what their nonverbal behaviors convey and communicate or the extent to which their feelings, thoughts and behaviors will be influenced by the nonverbal communication of others. Saitz (1966) has a more strict view and believes that "we all use gesture quite unconsciously" (p.37). For an investigator such as Mc Neill (1992), gesture and language are one system. He also adds that nonverbal and verbal aspects of communication are two simultaneous views of the same process. He states "gestures are an integral part of language as much as are words, phrases, and sentences – gesture and language are one system" (p.2). This phenomenon happens in the classroom context all the time, and communicators (the teacher and students) use the power of gestures and other nonverbal behaviors consciously and unconsciously.

Some researchers such as Kellogg and Lawson (1993) mention an estimate of more than 82% for the communication techniques employed by teachers in the classroom are nonverbal, while other researchers such as Neulip (2003) have estimated that up to 90% of all communication happens via nonverbal communication (both cited in Kruger, 2009).

Ritts and Stein (2001) believe that "it is not what you say in the classroom that is important, but it's how you say it that can make the difference to students" (p.3). They observe nonverbal messages as an essential element of communication in the teaching process. Young and Shaw (1999 cited in Zhang

2006) have emphasized the role of nonverbal behavior in effective teaching in the classroom and have recognized it as another teaching strategy besides suitable learning atmosphere, student motivation, organization of the course and etc.

NVC may lead to more efficient interaction in the classroom thus creating a more conducive context to learning. Neill (1991) also claims that teachers' nonverbal ability helps them to enhance the monitoring of students' understanding by controlling classroom interaction and discipline.

When teachers are aware of nonverbal communication, they are better receivers of students' messages and they can send positive signals to strengthen students' learning and elude negative signals that hinder students' learning (Miller, 2005 cited in Koshland-Crane, 2008). He adds that a teacher who is aware of nonverbal cues such as nodding heads, smiles and frowns, becomes skilled at receiving students' messages. As teachers teach and work with students in the class, their use of body movements enhances effective delivery of the lesson.

Mehrabian (1981) reports, based on his research, that " teachers who habitually gesture get better emotional and academic results with their students"(p.103). Teachers' use of affirmative and positive gestures help students to gain self-esteem and increase cooperation and learning between individuals.

Soudek and Soudek (1985) discussed the indispensable role of nonverbal communication channels in the human communication system and as an essential component in the expertising the intricacies of a second language and culture. Hague (2000) supports this idea by stating that language teachers' nonverbal accommodation is their attempt to make language much more understandable to students. He considers teacher talk and teacher gestures as twin strategies.

Moskowitz (1976) asserts that outstanding teachers and instructors exhibit more nonverbal behaviors than ordinary teachers do. Wylie (1985) highlighted the interrelationship between the verbal and the nonverbal elements in learning to interact and communicate in a foreign language. He added that we communicate with all of the means in our property, so we should train not only our speech organs but also our whole body for communication in a foreign language.

Saitz (1966) claims that use of NVC and dramatization inject enthusiasm and interest into the learning of the linguistic patterns of the target language. Thus, the use of gestures not only provide the students with valuable information by itself but also it functions as a stimulus which the language teacher can take advantage of.

People vary in their abilities to transmit nonverbal messages to others accurately and appropriately, read and realize others' nonverbal communications and control and monitor their nonverbal outputs (Riggio, 2006). He also be-

believes that nonverbal skills can be learned and improved. According to this claim, we can assume that teachers as human beings differ in their nonverbal behaviors' abilities and can try to improve this aspect of their communication in order to teach more effectively.

Gullberg (1998) investigated the use of gestural and oral communication strategies by FL speakers of English and Swedish. Also, foreign language learners appeared to favor a combination of the two types of strategies - oral and gestural - more than L1 speakers did. Her empirical study revealed that L2 learners used more gestures in L2 than in L1, and the gestures were mostly complimentary to speech rather than substitutive.

Barnett (1983) reported that "teacher's nonverbal signals increased student talk and practice in the target language, drew students' attention to the teaching point, eliminated the need for excessive verbal explanation and directed student participation" (p.174). In other words, NVC may lead to more efficient interaction in the classroom thus creating a context more conducive to learning .

Another research conducted by Taleghani- Nikazm (2008) emphasizes the important role of L2 teachers' gestures in order to compensate for difficulties with the verbal message and that it seems "to modify and make teacher's verbal input more comprehensible to L2 learners" (p.237). Taleghani- Nikzam's investigation of video-taped L2 teacher verbal and nonverbal behavior in elementary and intermediate levels suggested that L2 teachers frequently perform specific gestures during meaning-focused and form-focused practices which may make input more comprehensible for the L2 learners. This research had been conducted in four foreign language classrooms of an American university. Two of the classes were Persian language classes for foreign language learners whose native language was English and two other ones were German courses for native speakers of English.

In another study Koshland-Crane (2008) investigated the role of nonverbal behavior in teaching foreign language from a more qualitative perspective. She believed that "nonverbal communication behaviors play a substantial role in the interaction between teachers and students" (p.116). This study investigated the effect of training in nonverbal communication behaviors on participants' self-assessment of this quality. As the procedure, first of all, the instructors trained participants on nonverbal communication behaviors for about six hours during the semester. The participants were administered pre and post-tests of the nonverbal communication behaviors. After training, the participants were provided by a qualitative survey which consisted of five open-ended questions pertaining to the training. They were asked to respond to the questions in the written form and then participate in discussion-groups. The results from the survey indicated that the participants' knowledge of nonverbal communication behaviors increased and most of them believed that the training enhanced their understanding of nonverbal communication behaviors.

Despite different research conducted in this field, no qualitative analysis of teacher's NVC from teacher's and students' point of view has been conducted in Iran. Moreover, the most and the least attended NVC from the Iranian points of view have not been explored so far. In fact, in different countries and cultures the kind of gestures used and amount of attention allocated to each of them are different and culture specific. Due to the importance of the NVC and culture specificity, the present study was conducted to answer the following questions:

1. How do Iranian EFL learners perceive teachers' NVCs in the process of language learning?
2. What are the gestures used and what is their hierarchy?

## 2. Method

### 2.1. Participants

The participants included a teacher and the learners of this teacher. For this study, a teacher with the following characteristic was selected. She was teaching English in a Language Institute in Tehran and was a young lady with about five years of teaching experience. The very first reason to choose this specific teacher was her reputation as a lively and energetic teacher amongst her colleagues and students. During talks with the students and instructors in this institute, it was clarified that she is very popular amongst the students and even teachers in the institute. Her popularity referred to her special way of teaching to learners. In talks with her the researchers were also convinced that she was a respectable teacher who had dedicated her educational life to teaching and encouraging learners to learn better. Before the first observation session, her students were talked to in order to ensure that she was an appropriate candidate for the research.

The second group of the participants included the learners of this teacher. They were twenty Iranian intermediate female EFL learners who studied English in one of the Language Institutes in Tehran. All the participants were young female learners of English. Several studies on adult EFL learners suggest that women are more accurate nonverbal senders and receivers than men in certain situations (Buck, 1975; Noller, 1986; Rosenthal & Depaulo, 1979 cited in Devito, 2002), hence female participants were selected.

According to the friendly talks during the breaks, the participants were found to be motivated learners who wanted to learn as efficient as possible. The researchers talked to them before observation and found out that they were open to learning and experiencing new ways of education. These participants were intermediate learners according to the institute criteria which was passing the previous courses, i.e., elementary and pre-intermediate courses of the institute which were based on books compiled by the institute's teachers. The students studied *The ILI intermediate English Series*, a series of books devised by the institute, and story books such as *Little Women*, as criteria for old students and placement test and interview for the new ones.

## 2.2. Setting

This institute was selected because of its quality of teaching. The institute was located in the center of Tehran. In fact, the participants admitted that their learning quality had been improved as they started studying there. Most of them had the experience of studying in other institutes but they admitted that this one had been much better because of the lively and friendly atmosphere of that place. They believed that the building, the materials, the people, the personnel, the equipment and the facilities in the institute had made it a pleasant place for learning. This institute was chosen amongst many others in Tehran for the mentioned reasons and the cooperation of the personnel.

## 2.3. Instrumentation

The instruments include:

(1) Classroom Observation: In this phase of the study which lasted a full semester of six months I, as one of the researchers, participated in the class as an observer in order to record all the teacher's and students' verbal and nonverbal interactions carefully for later analysis. As the classroom events were recorded, I took notes of the important points related to the teacher's way of teaching, specifically her use of the nonverbal communication in her teaching process and even the students' reactions. The observation was conducted very carefully because every aspect of the teacher's teaching, specifically the nonverbal aspect of it, had to be considered in later analyses. Even the smallest movement of the teacher's hand, her tiniest eye contact, or even small changes in tone of her voice could be of significance in the process of the research.

(2) Video recording of the class on the teacher's use of the gestures and nonverbal communication: In this step of the research, all the sessions were video recorded which amounted to fifty hours with the focus on teacher and teacher's teaching process.

(3) A Semi-structured interview with the students on the use of nonverbal communication and gestures in the class: The interview was held at the end of the semester. The interview was started by asking some basic questions (e.g. Have you ever paid any attention to your teacher's nonverbal communication in the classroom? What is your interpretation of your teacher's gestures and NVC in the process of the teaching?) and it continued based on the learners' responses. According to Gillham (2005), this kind of interview which is called semi-structured interview is the most important way of conducting a research interview for its flexibility and the quality of the obtained data. In this sort of interview all the participants are asked the same questions. A friendly atmosphere was provided to make the interviewees relaxed and motivated to talk.

(4) A semi-structured interview with the teacher about the use of

nonverbal communication and gestures in the class: After interviewing the students, the teacher was shown the extracts of the recorded sessions, i.e., simulated recall, and asked to explain her use of NVC in those selected parts.

## 2.4. Procedure

The procedure consisted of: 1) observation and note-taking, 2) video-recording, 3) interview with the learners and 4) interview with the teacher to ensure triangulation of the data. The present study was conducted through a six-month observation and an interview with the participants which lasted for fourteen weeks. For the study, the focus was on an EFL class of ninety minutes which was video-taped in its entirety for about one semester. It was an intensive course and the semester lasted about six months. Two sessions of ninety minutes were held each week. Then based on the teacher's amount of NVC in each session, at least six sessions with approximately the most use of NVC were selected from among the sessions during the whole semester. From each of these six sessions about six extracts of five minutes including the most use of NVC were selected. Then the selected parts were shown to the learners and were interviewed about their perceptions and interpretations of the teacher's gestures and NVCs. The interviews were conducted individually to make them feel relaxed and concentrated on their responses. The purpose was to know how the students analyzed their teachers' NVC and how it led to their learning process.

One video extract of at least five minutes from each of the six sessions which lasted for about thirty minutes was prepared. The guiding principles in the selection were that each extract was to offer a coherent and comprehensible stimulus, without creating any confusions and including the maximum use of NVC. The amount of NVC used was the basis for selection of the video extracts.

It was explained that they could watch video-records as many times as they liked and it could be stopped at any point to let them take note or have time for more concentration. The goal of the study and the way to conduct it was described for them. It was declared that the aim was to know about their interests, abilities and tendencies in taking benefit of teacher's NVC in language learning. The extracts were shown to the participants individually and were asked to comment on the teacher's body actions that were important for them. It took about thirty minutes to show the recorded extracts to the participants and between thirty to thirty-five minutes for talking with the participants. Hence, each interview lasted about one hour. They focused on what the teacher did as much as what she said. Their comments were recorded with a short description of the teacher's gestures. They were asked to tell whatever they thought about their teacher's nonverbal communication and not to be worried about their probable inability in using words and grammar in order to express their thoughts or their feelings. As some of the participants did not talk as much as it was expected, asking more questions related to the nonverbal

communication and the learning process was used as the motivating factor. The process of interview took about fourteen weeks time.

The recorded interviews were listened several times and transcribed accurately. The interview transcripts were used as a basis for developing data-driven codes. Each transcript was first divided into units of analysis to include the instance of NVC identified by the learner and the comment made in relation to that specific instance. The learners' comments were grouped into 'categories' that were labeled to reflect learners' perceived functions of the instances of NVC identified (Sime, 2008).

The analysis involved a process of constantly testing and refining descriptive codes to take account of all data. Included in the analysis were the participants' comments on all aspects of the teacher's NVC, even if they were not directly linked to a specified gesture or action.

In the next phase of the procedure, the teacher was interviewed about different aspects of her nonverbal behavior. The teacher watched the recorded tape and explained her intention in using those gestures and nonverbal behaviors in the process of her teaching.

### 3. Results

The participants referred to the teacher's use of different NVC for different functions. In general six general themes emerged by the use of our main categories, i.e., facial expression, hand and head gestures, eye-contact and tone of voice. The emerged themes indicated the way students looked at their teacher's use of nonverbal communication in the teaching. The following graph can indicate this procedure in brief.

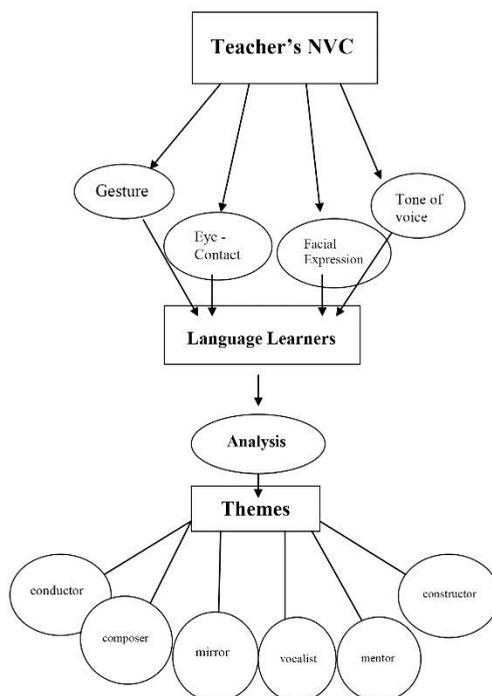
Most of the times, in the emerged themes more than one of the four main categories were used.

#### 3.1. Teacher as a composer: Giving life to the language of words

A teacher, like a composer, can put the elements of sentences together in a way to make the meaning as clearly and memorably as possible. Various facial expressions of the teacher can act as notes in music. Each note has different sounds the same as each facial expression conveys different meanings in dialogues.

Facial expression as one of the aspects of NVC can be used in explaining the meaning of words or giving life to the language of words. There are cases that facial expressions help to understand and learn words and concepts. The teacher's various facial expressions in different situations made the flow of the class as natural as possible. When the teacher used NVC to show the conditions of the characters in a dialogue, it became more natural and acceptable for the stu-

dents. For example, as the observation showed, the teacher demonstrated a serious facial expression to show a command: *my mother said to me: don't make a mess*. The use of facial expression for teaching dialogues is confirmed by the students, too.



**Figure 1.**  
How language learners perceive teacher's NVC

*Behnaz: I think facial expression can be helpful in the class specifically in teaching dialogues. Use of facial expression makes our statements more influential. This aspect of NVC convinces the students on how to deal with the presented contents.*

The video recording of the class (week one) indicated the teacher's opinion vividly. In this video recording, the teacher wanted to teach a dialogue which was about a dispute between an employee and his boss; she tried to show the reproachful look of the boss in her facial expression and on the other hand the sense of regret in the face of employee as she spoke instead of them. In another example, when she wanted to explain words such as *sad, happy, shocked, surprised, sick, worried, bored, tired* and words like these, she usually, used her facial expression to show them nonverbally.

The interviews with the students and observing their behaviors and reactions towards the teacher, as she tried to show the meaning of words, indicated

that they were aware of her facial expression beside her verbal communication in teaching and explaining the vocabularies.

Another aspect of NVC which contributed the teacher to deliver the language of words to the learners was hand gestures and head movements. Her hand gestures in explaining the meaning of words made the class atmosphere exciting for the students. In the interview sessions with students, there were many cases that learners mentioned the brilliant role of hand gestures in the process of learning vocabulary. Almost all of them mentioned this role of hand gesture as the first and most important one. There are many examples provided by students as well as class observations in this area. For instance, the teacher (week twenty-one) raised her hand above her eyes to show the meaning of a phrase → *to shade his eye from the sun*.

*Sharzad: We sometimes forget a word or a vocabulary; teacher's hand movement helps us to remember the meaning of that word.*

*Mojgan: When we memorize words we may forget it after a while but if we learn it by our visual memory, it may never be forgotten. For this reason, we learn the words that teacher explains by her hand movement better and we remember them for a longer time.*

As the observer I saw, for instance, the teacher brought her two fingers near each other to emphasize the exact meaning of the word *exactly*. The teacher in her interview said that not all but most of the NVC used in her teaching process had been consciously used. She added that even in our everyday communications, some parts of our interactions with others are unintentionally nonverbal and other parts are consciously used. She mentioned that the feedback she received from the students encouraged her to be stable in her use of NVC.

*Eye contact* was used and mentioned as another instrument and its role in vocabulary learning was observed more in teaching words which conveyed emotions and feelings such as: *happy, sad, and angry* than other words.

*Bitia: In addition to gestures, teacher's eye-contact contributes to better learning of words. For instance, when teacher was teaching the word terrifying, her eyes were wide-open and this was very helpful.*

Fatemeh insisted on the use of tone of voice in learning and commented:

*Fatemeh: Teacher's tone of voice could convey the meaning of the word such as surprised.*

### **3.2. Teacher as a constructor: Giving life to the language of structure**

Constructors are those who can construct a variety of things by placing them in some way or another. The constructors can make a construction admirable by putting things properly or make it something deformed by placing them im-

properly. The same may happen in grammar. If structure elements are arranged properly, they will make sense to the learners.

The theme of “teacher as constructor” emerged as the teacher attempted to put different parts of the grammatical points together by means of her nonverbals to give liveliness to them. For instance, as the teacher wanted to teach different parts of speech she showed her hand and named each of her fingers as a definite part of a sentence; then she asked the students to replace each of these parts whenever she commanded. This method of teaching grammar reminded the students of the correct structure of sentences at that time and perhaps forever.

Some students such as Shahrzad supported the role of hand gestures in teaching grammar:

*Shahrzad: There was a lesson about comparative adjectives for which she gave an example for more or less and she explained these words by her hands.*

*Tahereh: As teacher talked about comparative adjectives, she used her hands. When two things were equal, she used her hands like this (Tahereh keeps her hands next to the each other at the same distance) and for comparative adjectives she used her hands like this (she keeps one of her hands lower than the other one).*

The observation (week four) supports Tahereh’s statements. As the teacher taught comparative adjectives such as *taller (than)*, *shorter (than)* or other examples, her hand gestures aided her to show the concept in shapes. Another example was related to teaching a grammatical point (i.e., *another* and *the other*) in which the teacher’s hand gestures functioned as a medium of teaching. One good example of using hand gesture was observed in week thirteen when the teacher taught possessive pronouns such as *mine*, *yours*, etc.

Some students observed eye-contact as a tool to understand things that may not be comprehensible for them if uttered only verbally. Mozghan referred to eye-contact as the most important element of NVC. She believed that when the teacher looked at her, she could learn the grammar better. Ava agreed with Mozghan that eye-contact made them learn better.

*Ava: When teacher looks in my eyes and teaches, I get the lesson better but if I don’t see her NVC, I don’t get interested in the lesson*

Of course these statements can be classified under the theme of “teacher as mentor” which contributes to emotional aspect of NVC, too.

Another category of NVC which can be studied under this theme is tone of voice which was less observed in this area. Also, the learners mentioned briefly this aspect of NVC in teaching structures. Mozghan was one of those rare students who mentioned tone of voice as an element used by her teacher.

*Mozghan: I have realized the use of tone of voice in teaching comparatives. For example, our teacher said more louder than other words in the sentence and this made me get the sense of the word more.*

### 3.3. Teacher as a mirror: Reflecting learners' actions

Mirror does not say anything in words to anybody but at the same time it has lots of things to mention indirectly. Mirror does not say about our positive or negative points directly but at the same time it informs us about our good deeds and those that should be corrected or improved. Teachers using their facial expressions can be like a mirror.

Ghazal commented that teacher's facial expressions let her know that she had been good or not in class. She stated that:

*Ghazal: My teacher's facial expression is like a mirror whose reflection makes me aware of my deeds in the class. Her admiring or criticizing facial expression indicates her feelings about me and this frames my attitude towards the class.*

Ghazal's comment shows the importance of facial expression as a feedback for students. Facial expression can function as an indirect medium to reinforce her good points and to eliminate the improper ones. Facial expression is like a scale for students like her who search in their teacher's face for a reaction to assess themselves. It means that they take advantage of the teacher's facial expression to find out about their functions in the classroom. Even the teacher's small smile or a weak frown may influence students' tendencies towards the teacher and the class. The effect of the teacher's facial expression on these kind of students, depends on the sensitivity of them. It was inferred from her comments that she saw the reflection of her performance in the teacher's face. To her, the teacher's face, which functioned as a mirror, reflected her deeds in the class and whenever a problem was reflected in *the mirror*, she attempted to improve and correct it.

Roghayeh stated that teacher's facial expressions were very important especially as she answered a question; her teacher's facial expressions indicated that she was right or wrong. Later, Yasaman's comment showed her common point of view with Roghayeh. Yasaman was a seventeen-year old student who needed English for her future education abroad. She observed English not only as a need but also as a must for her life. In interview with her I considered that how attentive she was towards her addressee's facial expressions (field notes of week ten).

*Yasaman: Fortunately or unfortunately I am so dependent on my addressee's facial expressions. Their positive reactions make me more motivated to talk and their negative or neutral ones make me despondent and silent.*

Neda's opinion showed that she could be classified in the same group with her friends.

*Neda: As I answer a question right and my teacher shows it by her eyes and eyebrow movement, I continue to speak. Also, teacher's head movement shows me that I am wrong and I correct myself.*

She mentioned that she took advantage of facial expression to correct her errors. Also, she referred to the teacher's head movement in making her aware of her errors. She said that as she made a mistake, the teacher's shaking head let her know about her error. In one of the classsessions once the students answered the question incorrectly together, the teacher showed her face in a surprised way to make them correct themselves. As students faced this reaction, they understood their errors and modified it (class observation of week seven-teen).

Not only did the teacher use facial expression as a device for teaching something more effectively but she used it for making the students do self-correction.

*Teacher: Sometimes I use my facial expression to let them know that their answer is not correct and they should correct it.*

The class observation (week three) confirms the teacher's claim. When she taught a part related to the conditional clauses and when one of the students answered incorrectly to her question, the teacher showed a surprised facial expression to make her correct her response. In this example, the teacher's art of acting made the student aware of her error and led her to self-correction. This kind of behavior prevents error from fossilization and at the same time does not hurt the learner's self-confidence.

Mahshid was a seventeen year-old student referred to the role of teacher's hand movement in self-correction.

*Mahshid: When a student answers a question incorrectly, teacher doesn't tell her directly that her answer has been wrong but she mentions it by her hand movement and shaking her head.*

Mahshid's comment can be related to the video recording (week nine) which showed the teacher's simultaneous use of hand gestures and head movement to inform the learners of their errors. In one of the cases, the teacher repeated a student's correct part of the sentence and then stopped at the problematic part and by pointing to her, invited her to continue the sentence in a correct form (class observation of week two).

Sanaz is another student who mentioned the role of hand gestures in self-correction. Her example is amongst other instances which support the role of hand gestures in encouraging the learners for self-correction.

*Sanaz: When my teacher asked me a question and I answered incorrectly, she made me correct myself with moving her hand from side to side to alarm me of my mistake.*

For Shahrzad eye contact was meaningful in making her decide to self-correct.

*Shahrzad: Teacher's eye contact helps us to self-correct. Her eye contact makes me know that I'm good or not, especially in reading and dialogue.*

Then it can be inferred that students are cautious about the teacher's gestures towards their performance in the class. Here eye-contact acted as a mirror for students to know about their problems in the class. Tahereh named eye-contact as another important aspect of NVC which reflected their actions in the class and added that without it, she would be lost.

*Tahereh: If teacher doesn't have eye-contact, I can't understand that my answer is right or wrong.*

For some others, tone of voice was the signal of continuing or stopping. Reihaneh emphasized it in self-correction.

*Reihaneh: Teacher's change in tone of voice helps me to know that I'm wrong and I should correct myself.*

An example from the class observation can make Reihaneh's idea more tangible. It was observed (class observation, week eleven) that as one of the students said: "they are the same country". The teacher pointed to the student and repeated her answer in a questionable tone of voice in order to make the student aware of her error and made her correct herself. As a result, the student said: "they are from the same country". At the first sight, this way of using tone of voice may not seem noticeable and important in error correction but this way of showing problematic parts contributes to both educational and emotional aspect of class.

### **3.4. Teacher as a conductor: Orchestrating the flow of the class**

A conductor in an orchestra tries to coordinate each member of an orchestra with the rest in order to maintain the harmony of the music. If each of those musicians plays regardless of others, the result will be something harsh and discordant. The teacher as a conductor can maintain the harmony in the activities of the class and control the students' behaviors.

Sometimes the teacher used facial expression to control the students and maintain the class discipline. It was based on what the students said, the observation, and all the teacher's statements.

*Mino: Sometimes we, students, forget that we are in the class and make a noise and in this condition teacher frowns to warn us of her superiority in the class and it makes us obey her and respect the class.*

Mino's expression can be well-observed in video recording (week twenty) when the teacher frowned at one of the students who distracted her classmate from listening to the lesson.

*Elnaz: Teacher's facial expression shows us who should answer the question, read the text or come to the board. Sometimes her facial expression shows that we should participate more in the class.*

Elnaz's statement reminds me of one of the moments that the teacher was talking about the *journey* which was the topic of discussion. Whenever she felt the students were distracted from the discussion, she used her facial expression in a way to motivate them to participate more actively in the class discussion. For example, when Nastaran was indifferent to the other students' comments and discussions, the teacher looked at her enthusiastically and asked with a smile to let the class know about her idea. This solution from the teacher made Nastaran's eyes glitter and she started talking because she felt that she and her opinion was important for the class.

By means of facial expression, the teacher reminds the students of their misbehavior in the classroom. For example, as the class became noisy, the teacher showed her dissatisfaction with her annoyed facial expression to make the students aware of their indiscipline.

*Teacher: There are moments in the class that I should remind students that they are in the class and they should obey its rules.*

Teacher's comment put forth the idea that a class is like a small community and students as members of this small society should respect its rules in order to prevent chaos. Somewhere else, in her interview the teacher expressed that she utilized her facial expression to encourage the students to be as active as possible in the class. The class observation (week twenty-two) indicated her attempt to share the right of speaking and participating in the classroom amongst the students. Her facial expression showed the learners who had to take turn to speak or answer the question. The teacher also used her hand gestures in the class management.

*Teacher: I utilize my hand gesture to coordinate the class and the students. Such as an orchestra conductor who applies his hands to conduct the performers, a teacher applies his/her hands to conduct the students appropriately. I prefer to manage my class indirectly so it makes the class disciplined and at the same time fresh and active.*

The teacher used her hand gestures to invite the students to talk or stop talking to their classmates (class observation of week twenty-one). Hand gestures also functioned as a way to conduct students' turn-taking in the class and to make them participate in the class equally (video-recording of week seven). For example, the teacher pointed to Mina to ask her to answer the listening comprehension questions.

Kiara confirmed the use of hands in grabbing the attention of students.

*Kiara: We know by experience that we should attend to all of our teacher's gestures because sometimes her gesture rather than talk asks us to do or not to do things.*

Kiara's expression can be observed in class observation (week eleven) in which the teacher pointed to the students and then turned her hands circularly to show the students they had to change their roles in dialogue.

It was inferred from the teacher's interview that if teachers remind students to be quiet verbally all the time, the learners will get used to it and it works no more but when they ask the learners nonverbally, they would not feel insulted and at the same time would be warned of the teachers' dissatisfaction with their behavior in the class. In the video recordings (week three and eleven), the teacher put her finger on her lips and said shhhh to invite the students to be silent in the class. By means of this action, she maintained her authority in the class without making too much tension in the classroom.

Sometimes the teacher utilized her hand gestures to handle the students' participation in the classroom. She tried to command using her hands to make them less imperious. For example, the teacher pointed to two of the students and invited them to work in pairs and to do an exercise.

*Teacher: I try to use my hand gesture to ask the students to answer a question, do an exercise or participate in the discussion. I think students are so intelligent and can guess your wants even from your hand gestures or your head movements.*

The teacher's sayings show that she used her hand gestures to control the class. Most of the time the teacher utilized her hands, head and even fingers to guide the students in their activities. For example, when the teacher looked at Zohreh and nodded her head, Zohreh understood that she should read the text or answer a question (class observation of week fifteen). As another example, when the teacher showed her palm to the students they realized that they should not answer and should wait for their classmate to answer the question (class observation and video recording of week seven).

Some of the students mentioned the role of eye-contact in the management of the class besides gestures.

*Zohreh: Sometimes our teacher uses her eye-contact to make students quiet.*

There were moments in the class when the teacher took advantage of her eye-contact to conduct the class properly. As the students started talking to each other and did not listen to the class, the teacher looked at them in a way that showed her dissatisfaction with them (field notes of week five). In another case, the teacher by looking at one of the students invited her to read the next exercise (class observation of week three).

Ava referred to the role of tone of voice in management of the class. She said that once her friend and she were talking in the classroom and they did not pay attention to the class. As a sudden, the teacher changed and in fact raised her tone of voice and made them stop talking.

*Teacher: Sometimes I as a teacher need to use my tone of voice as a tool to control the classroom. I don't like to interrupt my classroom with direct and verbal hint to the students unless in rare cases in which verbal hint is unavoidable or simultaneous use of nonverbal and verbal one can be more effective.*

As the students talked to each other in the class and did not pay attention to the teacher, she raised her tone of voice in the process of her teaching to make

them aware of the situation (class observation of week twelve). Here, her tone of voice asked them to respect the class and their classmates and listen to the teacher. As observed, this strategy was very efficacious in the management of the class. Teacher's use of this strategy was familiar for them and was a sign that announced: "the class is too noisy! Please, be quiet!"

### **3.5. Teacher as a mentor: Bridging towards the learners' emotions**

A close relationship between teacher and learners may help to both of them for better teaching on the side of teacher and better learning on the side of learners. I mean some sort of relationship like mentors and their disciples. If learners believe in their teachers, they follow their direction more willingly. The relation between a mentor and disciples are more of a parent and children rather than a master and subordinates.

In the interview with the students, some believed that facial expression of the teacher could stimulate their feelings or give hints about their functions in the classroom. One of those participants who evaluated facial expression was Ava.

*Ava: I prefer my teacher to look at me and smile as she teaches because this promotes my self-confidence*

As it was stated by Ava, teacher's happy face can increase students' self-confidence and enthusiasm and in contrast, her frowning face may discourage them from learning. The teacher put forth a topic and asked the students to comment on it. The teacher smiled in order to make the students talk about the topic (class observation of week eighteen).

Mina warned teachers of the double role of facial expression in teaching. Mina worked as a chemist in a laboratory. She believes that if a teacher does not provide his/her students with an assuring feedback on their performances in the classroom, they will become disappointed and stop to do their best in the class. On the other hand, even a trivial reaction in the teacher's face can pave the way for students to attempt more than before. As observed in this classroom, as students talked about their experiences related to a definite topic which was the subject of the lesson, the teacher smiled to encourage them to continue (class observation of week four and filed notes of week five). Students, who faced with this reaction from the teacher, became encouraged and brave to take a part in the discussion. Then in this case the teacher's facial expression reinforced their attitudes to participate more and more in the class.

*Teacher: My experience has proved me that students can be so flexible in the emotional aspect of teaching. They can be motivated to show themselves as a talent with an ensuring expression in the teacher's face or they may become discouraged to answer a simple question with a disappointing look from the teacher. I try to manage my facial expression to make students to move in their proper routes.*

The teacher said that she was well-informed of her facial expression in the classroom and tried to manage this aspect of her communication to help the students in their education. She added that she was aware of the positive or negative effect of her facial expression on students' production of knowledge, and level of learning. The teacher admitted that she knew that her facial expression could act as a facilitative or debilitating factor which influenced students' output. The existence of disinterest in her facial expression could suppress their creativities in expressing themselves. Even in cases that she did not agree with their comments, she attempted not to interrupt them by means of her annoying facial expression. She tried to listen to them carefully and then she explained her opinion about their sayings. She stated that students should learn to have courage to express themselves in the class.

It was assumed from the teacher's use of eye-contact in the class that teachers can talk a lot with their eyes than their mouths and words. Neda approved the very ideas by stating how the eye-contact controls her actions.

*Neda: When I answer a question correctly and teacher shows it by eye and eyebrow movement, I continue speaking*

There were some students for whom eye-contact was not enjoyable. Bita was one of those students who criticized eye-contact in her own way. She said that she did not like too much eye-contact because she became anxious and she could not answer the questions. However, when the teacher looked at her with smiles, it gave her self-confidence.

Mona was an Electronic student at Azad University. She was twenty-two years old and related her disagreement with eye-contact to the lack of concentration.

*Mona: When teacher looks at me and focuses on me, I lose my concentration, the only thing that I need at that time.*

In comparison to Bita and Mona, Mahya's disagreement was at a lower level. As she commented that short eye-contact was good but long ones made her anxious.

In the observations it was clear that the teacher tried to share her eye-contacts and looks with all of the students. Of course, later she said that she tried to share her look and eye-contact with all of the students in the same way but she thought that it would not be unfair to look at under-active students more than the over-active ones.

*Teacher: Working with different sorts of students for years, has taught me how my eye-contact can affect my students' behaviors in the class. I have realized that my eye-contact can have different effects on my students and they react variously in response. Students' eyes are means for communication. As I look at their eyes, I read their minds. Eye contact is a very important element not only in teaching but also in every day communication*

*Reihaneh: When teacher looks at my eyes, I understand better and pay more attention to the lesson especially the grammar points. I feel I have to learn because she looks at me and she expects me to answer. My teacher's kind look makes me brave to talk. Teacher's eye-contact gives me self-confidence to talk and participate in the class. I think teacher's eye-contact act as feedback. As teacher looks at us very carefully, she can translate our minds.*

Some of the students such as Reihaneh referred to the emotional aspect of eye-contact.

*Reihaneh: Teacher's eye-contact is very important as she looks at me; I feel I'm in the class and I'm important for her".*

In observation (week three) when a student answered a question correctly, teacher kept her index finger towards her and said: *exactly*. Or somewhere else as all the students provided the teacher with a good response, she clapped them as a feedback and this clap made some quiet ones participate more in the classroom (video recording of week ten). Here, teacher's hand gesture acted as a tool to convey her positive energy to the students.

*Teacher: I have learned that I can reinforce students' good functions in the class by means of working on their emotions. One way to develop this aspect of their learning is use of hand or head gestures to encourage them to be as active as possible.*

The above statement makes clear the teacher's attitude towards the learners' performances and emotions in the process of learning. She obviously searched for the situations to encourage the students for more participation in the class and her hand gestures functioned as a tool for her (field notes of week seven). There were moments in the class (class observation of week nineteen) when the teacher was excited with students' responses; she nodded her head enthusiastically to confirm their responses. This reaction from the teacher motivated them to participate more confidently in the class activities.

Tone of voice is as a tool to convey feeling to the interlocutor. This aspect of NVC makes the audience aware of the nature of an utterance as a question or statement. As an example, Marjan looked at tone of voice as a tool to make variety in the class.

*Mojgan: I think that dull or flat tone of voice makes the class boring and exhausted. A student who seats in the class for about ninety minutes or more needs to variety which can be made by means of teacher's change in tone of voice.*

The teacher did not change her tone of voice only for making the teaching point more understandable, but also for changing the class mood. She wanted to make the class atmosphere as pleasant as possible for the students. She thought that this made the students more receptive for learning new materials.

*Teacher: There are moments that I feel a need to motivate students to participate more and more in the class; then I change my tone of voice to a fresher one to make them joyful. I believe that the energy in my voice can be delivered to the*

*students then it's better to be a positive one. If my voice is tired and bored, it will be transferred to my students and will influence their learning's attitudes.*

### **3.6. Teacher as vocalist: Producing the language of rhythm**

One of the characteristics of voice is its quality as a natural song. This quality can be utilized in classroom, too. As it was observed in the class and the interviews demonstrated, the happy and energetic tone of voice of the teacher made the class environment lively and friendly. Teacher as a vocalist can save the class atmosphere from boredom. The monotonic atmosphere of the class may discourage learners from complete attention to teacher and learning material.

The teacher's comment below shows that she used her tone of voice for a more effective teaching. It is inferred from her opinion that she believed in using tone of voice to make conversations in the class natural and native or near native like.

*Teacher: In teaching dialogues, I try to match my voice to the characters of the dialogue to convey the natural sense of it to the students as much as possible. Tone of voice gives rhythm to the flow of the class. Tone of voice can inject liveliness to the class to make it a live place for the students to enjoy it. I believe that if teachers speak beautifully and with a mild and pleasant tone in the class, their words would be more influential on the students and they enjoy listening to them and the opposite is true, too.*

The teacher believes that most students do not learn how to read or perform a dialogue. They read or retell dialogues the same as reading an article from a newspaper. They lose the sense and naturalness of the conversation because they have not learned that language and speaking a language need to be accompanied by all its characteristics. She insisted that language learners should learn that saying a negative statement in a neutral tone cannot convey the negative sense of it to the audience.

Roghayeh claimed that the tone of voice makes learning enjoyable.

*Roghayeh: Use of tone of voice makes teaching more enjoyable especially in teaching reading and dialogues.*

The class observation (week fourteen) indicated that whenever the class was getting exhausting for the students, the teacher used a strategy to make them free from tediousness. In one of these cases when she was teaching a reading text about a mystery, she read the text in a mysterious tone of voice to make it interesting for the students.

The collected data indicated that most of the participants in this study (about %70) evaluated hand gestures as the most useful NVC which contributed to their understanding and learning. The learners highlighted the role of hand gestures in explaining the vocabularies which led to fast learning and easy remembering of words. Most of the examples uttered by the learners indicated

their positive looks towards hand gestures in teaching vocabularies and grammar points. The cases related to the use of hand gestures mentioned by the students included:

- ❖ Teaching grammar: as teacher teaches comparative adjectives, she uses her hands in order to compare two things or materials. This kind of teaching conveys the meaning in a clearer mode.
- ❖ Showing the meaning of words and phrases: *fasten the seat belt, pay, getting the money, exchanging the money, roll up the car window, to take money from the bank (withdraw), to borrow money from the bank, put money in the bank (deposit)*
- ❖ Make the students self-correct: as students answer a question incorrectly, teacher applies her hand gestures to make them aware of their errors and consequently self-correction.

The second NVC element which received more attention by the learners was eye-contact. The learners accounted eye-contact as a medium to develop their interaction with the teacher. This group of learners who comprised 40% of the participants supported their attitudes towards eye-contact and that appropriate eye-contact can provide sense of trust and friendship between two sides of interaction in the class. Learners in this group stated that the first step to gain trust is through eye-contact. In their point of view, eyes were a double tool to help them make a two-way relationship with teacher and students e.g. to show their problem in understanding some parts or receive feedback from teacher on their performance.

Facial expression was perceived as the third favorite category. For them, facial expressions revealed the sense of the words and dialogues. These students who cared for their teacher's facial expression and included 35% of the participants stated that teacher's changes in her facial expression indicated the mood of characters in the dialogue more vividly. Also, facial expression was used as a reaction to the students' performances in the class. The learners took advantage of teacher's facial expression to realize her satisfaction or dissatisfaction with their performance in the classroom.

Tone of voice received the least attention from the Iranian learners of this study and only 20% of them mentioned the role of tone of voice amongst the other nonverbal moods. Most students observed it as a medium to change the atmosphere of the class and save it from being boring. Also, they regarded tone of voice as a device to make learners aware of their errors, to make them quiet and make them take turns in the class activities.

#### 4. Discussion

The research commenced considering the statement that "the language teacher's role stands out prominently in the nonverbal situations" (Soudek & Soudek, 1985, p.112). The results of the present study indicated how teacher's art of

acting and demonstration along with the verbal input can help learners in their learning and dealing with the materials and information taught by the teacher.

This study showed how teacher's use of different four categories of NVC provided Iranian language learners with self-correction. The learners mentioned some examples of NVC which they took advantage of to become aware of their errors and try for self-correction. Also there were cases when teacher mentioned language learners' errors and invited the learners to self-correct by means of her NVC. These results are in line with Muramoto's (1999 cited in Taleghani- Nikzam, 2008) study which showed how teacher's use of specific gestures provided the students with an opportunity for self-correction. Or Heslin and Patterson (1982) reported that the most significant function of NVC is its partial communication and indirect mentioning of the matters that might be offensive if verbalized. The findings of this study support this view, too.

Allen (1999) suggests that nonverbal elements contribute to comprehension by producing more contextual information. The findings of the present study support Allen's view in the sense that teacher's nonverbal cues provided the learners with as much information as she could in order to help their understanding.

Barnett's (1983) study indicated that teacher's nonverbals motivated students to talk and practice more in the target language and removed the necessity for excessive verbal explanations. The results of the present study support Barnett's claim by the evidences inferred from the observed classroom. The teacher's use of positive facial expression or eye-contact encouraged learners to participate more in the class activities and specifically class discussions. And also, her use of hand gestures and facial expressions helped learners to comprehend the meaning of those words which could be conveyed using NVC rather than using first language equivalences.

The findings of the present study indicated that teacher's eye-contact and smiling face contributed to an increase in their self-confidence to participate and learn more effectively. This view is in line with the results in the study conducted by McCroskey, Fayer, Richmond, Sallinen, and Barraclough (1996) that eye-contact, vocal variety and smiling were the nonverbal behaviors which were highly related to the effective learning. Also, Mehrabian (1981) asserted that those teachers who use affirmative NVC help students to gain self-esteem for more cooperation in the class.

Wood (2007) believes that as we look at people directly, we encourage them to talk. We rarely use verbal communication to invite people to talk or to be silent in our daily conversations. He also believes that holding eye-contact indicates interest and helps to keep the flow of the conversation. Similarly, the results of the present study reveal that eye-contact between the teacher and the learners gives confidence to the students and motivates them to speak in the class although there were cases amongst the learners who assumed eye-contact as a debilitating element. Therefore, all the findings in nonverbal

communication researches cannot be applied to all the situations and for all the learners.

In general, the learners' comments showed that as long as the teacher had a kind look and made eye-contact with the students patiently, they felt relaxed and were not afraid of their mistakes. Another point worth mentioning is that the younger learners in the current study with the average age of sixteen stated that they observed hand gestures as the most useful aspect of NVC specifically in vocabulary learning while older ones with the average age of twenty-nine mentioned facial expression as the most helpful NVC especially in speaking area.

In the interview with the students it was revealed that each student had her own ideas about the role of NVC. Of course, there were cases that they uttered ideas which were similar about a specific situation e.g. almost all of them observed hand gesture as a good tool for elaborating the meaning of the words. Some of them evaluated eye-contact highly and some others preferred to use hand gestures as a helpful aspect of NVC.

The findings of this research indicated that almost all the Iranian EFL learners pay attention to four main categories of NVC. It was notified that Iranian EFL learners paid the most amount of attention to hand gestures and the least to tone of voice, which indicated their attitudes towards NVC categories in the context of Iran which might differ from other contexts. The implication of these NVCs can be viewed from two perspectives: the cognitive and the affective one. Teachers can use NVC to aid their students cognitively and consider their emotions and feelings as well. In this study the teacher applied NVC and specifically hand gestures as a psychological instrument to control the class and students indirectly and make them understand the content taught in the most appropriate way. She also used facial expression specifically to help shy students to feel relaxed in the class and participate in the activities and express themselves more openly.

It should be mentioned that the present study explored the teacher's non-verbal communication amongst adult intermediate level students all of whom were female. Different results may be revealed if males and learners with different levels of language proficiency are considered.

## 5. Conclusion

The class observations, interviews with the participants and field notes unveiled the learners' perceptions of the teacher's use of NVC in the classroom. Six main themes were derived from all these sources of data collection: *Teacher as composer*, *Teacher as constructor*, *Teacher as conductor*, *Teacher as mentor*, *Teacher as mirror* and *Teacher as vocalist*. These themes emerged as the result of interaction between verbal language and its accompanied NVC. The findings indicated that almost all the learners in the observed class paid attention to the teacher's NVC in the process of language learning but their attitudes towards

one or more specific aspects of NVCs studied in his research varied from one student to another. Perhaps the best description which supports teacher's NVC is the opinion uttered by one of the students who believed that "doing is better than saying" (Zohreh's interview). The learners' comments revealed that the same as they believed the actors should apply all of their capabilities and physical abilities to convey the text of the play or movie, the teachers should resort to their NVC in addition to their knowledge to teach the materials of the course in the best way.

The findings indicated that most of the students of the current study benefited from NVC significantly and the rest of them took advantage of it in some areas and in a smaller scale. According to the gained evidences, the role of NVC cannot be denied in the process of language teaching. The students' interviews showed that the learners preferred their teachers to do much more NVC in their teaching and in the classroom; and that sophisticated technology cannot replace the human side of the teacher. Although new technology can be a valuable source of information for both learners and teachers, the role of teacher as the center of the class cannot be denied. It was inferred that while English was a new language and considered as foreign, the gesture language became a friendly familiar language that even replaced Persian in translation. In other words, learners utilized the nonverbal language to learn English as a new language and most of the time NVC was used to convey meaning of the words rather than the L1 translation.

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