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## VERBAL AND NON-VERBAL COMMUNICATION IN SPORT ENVIRONMENT

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### Abstract

*Any change of information between individuals is called communication, whether intentional or not, conscious or not, whether transmitted through words, gestures, body-language or facial expressions. Being an incredibly complex process, communication is also very difficult to define in such a way as to cover all the aspects which it entails. This essay aims to tackle the important aspects related to the communication phenomena and its' implication for sport teams. Training and especially competitions require efficient communication between teammates and between coach and team. Communication skills become a necessity for tactical interactions and for success in sport competitions.*

**Keywords:** *education; sport; coaches; athletes; competition.*

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### 1. Introduction

Communication represents a large field of interest for researchers of different areas. The problem with the phenomenon of communication in the sports environment is stretched out over a vast research area, following large interest areas such as the capacity to communicate as an individual aptitude, the individual aspects of the socio-cultural environment in which communication is performed as well as the institutional environment in which it is performed (school, sports club, etc.).

The education that we have received, the way in which we have been raised, the society, culture and experiences we have had, as well as other factors influence people making all of us unique individuals. Knowing this, it becomes easier to understand that the differences between individuals are very real and that we have different ways of seeing a situation, feeling it and interpreting the world around us. This essay aims to tackle the important aspects related to the communication phenomena and its' implication for sport teams.

The process of communication is the foundation of society. The forming of any group of people (at least two individual) implies an interaction without which it could not be possible. What else is an interaction between people if not communication? Any change of information between individuals is called communication, whether intentional or not, conscious or not, whether transmitted

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through words, gestures, body-language or facial expressions. Being an incredibly complex process, communication is also very difficult to define in such a way as to cover all the aspects which it entails. Although it exists since the beginning of man, the perception of it as an element fundamental to human existence dates to antiquity, the multitude of areas in which it is manifested and the complexity of the forms in which it is found make the process of communication to be, to this day, researched and analyzed on a continuous basis. It is a dynamic process that finds itself in a continuous transformation.

Each of us develops our preferences in relation to the way in which we gather information from our surrounding environment. It could be done through our senses: vision (seeing and thinking in images), through audition (using sounds and voices), in a kinesthetic way (through which we feel our environment), through stimuli (which are physical sensations; such as taste and olfaction). Some of us are mostly visual; others perceive best the sounds or can learn especially by doing. Knowing these individual preferences helps us to know how to adapt our language and speak to another “in their own terms”.

## 2. Verbal Communication

The communication of thoughts, feelings and desires is done mostly through language, this being the most specific and used method of inter-human communication. Language is a complex system of interpersonal exchange composed of articulate sounds which represent more than a simple method of transmitting information and data. It's “a different/unique type of individual conduit, namely verbal conduit, which implies diverse activities (speaking, listening, idea exchange, retention of audio code and the reproduction and translation of it)” (Zlate, M., 2000).

One of the first researchers in the area of linguistics which established a scheme of verbal communication was Roman Jakobson. In his point of view, the following constituent elements apply to any act of oral communication: broadcaster (the speaker) –he who conveys the message, the receiver (intended listener or recipient), the context –general area which determines the initiation of the communication, the message – which, in its own right, requires a code – a set of rules that are communal between the broadcaster and the receiver in order to code and decode the message and ultimately the channel – the physical space and psychological connection between the broadcaster and the receiver, all of which allow for communication to be maintained.

Pânișoară, I. O. (2008) states that “thought and language are developed together; such as each individual's thought structure is unique, so is their method of speech. This individuality of language can be embedded into verbal style. The chosen communication style will determine how pleasant will the work climate will be. An open, relaxed working environment expresses trust, encouragement for students and increases the pleasure of exercising. A rigid behavior that is always



based on authority or a suspicious and criticizing attitude will more likely bring a grey environment and a defensive posture from the students (Jinga, Pop, 2008).

### 3. Non-verbal communication

Nonverbal communication is a message expressed differently than through words, and these messages are 4.5 times more rapidly decoded than words. Nonverbal messages can confirm, support, contradict, complete or replace messages transmitted through words. They constitute of body-visual signals which offer information through the collocutor and information about their participation method to the process of communication. These signals could be (Cristea, D., 2000):

- **Static** (natural, developed, superimposed) with express reference to physical appearance (physiognomy, morphologic type, wrinkles, clothes, makeup, etc.)
- **Kinetic** (general body-language, gestures, mimic, position of gaze)
- **Sensitive** (olfactory signals, thermic signals, tactile signals)

Mehrabian, A. and Weiner, M. were the first to study non-verbal messages and they underlined the complexity of the process of communication through the prism of the multitude of information which are transmitted through the attitude of those involved. A study from the 1970's, conducted by Dr. A. Mehrabian, still valid to this day, after a prolonged and thorough studies, shows that in our communication process with those around us, the proportion in which we use verbal language and non-verbal language is in oral communication as follows (Mehrabian, A. 1968): 7% words, 30% paralanguage (mostly intonation and inflections of the voice), 55% other elements of non-verbal language (generally the expression of the face, the gestures, or the posture of the body).

Each time we communicate we exteriorize signs and signals, conscious or not, intentional or not, through way of methods such as:

- Facial expression – shock, amazement, smile, frowning, blushing, etc.;
- Gesticulatory – movement of the body or the hands, gestures that usually accompany verbal messages to accentuate their content;
- Orientation between the interlocutor and the position of the body during the process of communication;
- Proximity – the distance between interlocutors;
- Visual contact – whether it occurs, how it occurs and how long it lasts;
- Touches – a gentle pat on the back, the grabbing of shoulders, etc.;
- Movements of the body – which suggest approval or disapproval, encouragement or discouragement, the interlocutor to continue;
- Exterior aspect – their physical appearance, clothes, makeup;



- Intonation, rhythm and the topic of speech – these are considered elements of paralanguage;
- Nonverbal aspects of writing – the general visual aspect, organisation, positioning of text orientation, inclination, etc.;

These *signs* and *signals*, to some authors, meaning the same thing, are terms that imply certain meaning differences in the opinion of others. Chelcea, S. (2005) considered that the two terms be used interchangeably, although it is recommended to use the term of *signal* when referring to non-verbal behavior and the term of *sign* when referring to somatotypes, artifacts or odors emanating from the body.

The assembly of the elements of non-verbal communication is named, by some authors, meta-communication (meta, Gr.- beyond, extra). Meta-communication means everything that is more than communication, even silence as a form of communication, which makes us often, to consider that “silence is an answer”. Other authors speak of the language of silence, the language of space, and the language of the body over time refining more disciplines of non-verbal communication, all including, as well as the diversity of communication channels, the multitude of factors that can positively or negatively influence the authenticity of the communication (Pop, Zamfir, 2015). It is a proven fact that only 50% of the verbal message is perceived from first hearing.

**The position of the body is betrayed by verbal language. 6 positions of the body that “speak”:**

In the opinion of the psychologist Tănăsescu A. (2017) people have the tendency to focus on words, on articulate information that they want to transmit. They are so focuses on this that they don’t take into consideration that some parts of their body contradict them. *“This major discrepancy between what the mouth says and what the body transmits has become more acute in the era of Facebook because people lost face-to-face communication abilities. People have forgotten how to transmit real emotions. They have forgotten the entire process of communication; our body confirms or denies those transmitted. What is worrying is the fact that people have forgotten even the importance of para-verbal communication. Many cannot succeed in adapting the tone of their voice to the social context; they speak either too slow or, in opposition, much too fast, too loud or too quiet. Because of these inadvertences, people no longer understand each other face to face and this can lead to loss of temper from both sides or even confrontation”*, such is the affirmation of Andra Tănăsescu.



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## Arms and legs “speak” more than we do

There are at least 6 positions of the body to pay attention to when speaking to a person. If we were more attentive to the posture that we adopt when we hold a conversation with another person we immediately observe that the other person becomes more receptive, interested and open in this communication with us.

**3.1 Arms crossed at the chest.** When a person with which you are speaking crosses their arms at their chest means most times that the person is looking at an unconscious level towards self-protection and they are using their arms as a shield. *“The method in which they cross their arms as well as the moment in the conversation at which they do it can determine the cause for which the other person adopts this posture. The most commonly encountered motives for doing this are: uncertainty or distrust in themselves, reticence or holding back in the expression of their emotions, invasion of their personal space and the need to protect themselves against boredom or hostility (in the situation where the dominant arm is the right arm)”*, explains Andra Tănăsescu.

**3.2 Hands in their pockets.** The specialist believes that, “when the person with who you are communicating puts their hands in their pockets can be a sign of uncertainty or a sign of shame. Depending on the context and the way in which this gesture manifests itself it can be viewed as a gesture of sexual availability, the hands acting as indicators to the sexual organs”.

**3.3 Open and relaxed arms.** “When we observe a person with relaxed arms falling to the sides of their body, this is a sign that the person is relaxed and comfortable, in the majority of cases is an indicator of a calm and open person. This combined with a straight posture (straight back, forwarded chest and raised eyes). This can indicate the fact that the person is sure of themselves and confident” declare the psychologist.

**3.4 Closed legs – crossed or in contact.** “Such as the case with crossed arms, in the case of crossed and connected legs, the person feels the need to protect themselves. Such protection can be an indicator of uncertainty, lack of self-trust or the sensation of loss of control and fear” says Andra Tănăsescu.

**3.5 Stretched legs –crossed or straight.** “When we observe a person sitting down with their legs stretched and crossed it can mean that this person feels unsure and is trying to mask this by adopting a position that they perceive as relaxed. If the person holds their legs stretched out without crossing them they are looking to expand the space that they occupy, thus dominate through position and a relaxed attitude. Depending on the context and situation, such position can be a genuine



desire to relax after a long day, the person in question looking to relax through a comfortable and leisurely position”, explains the specialist.

**3.6 Relaxed legs; feet steadied on the ground.** “In a majority of cases this type of position is adopted by confident, optimistic and open people. Also, a person which sits in this way know what they need to do, how to do it and is conscious of their own abilities and capacities. Such person knows the way in which to act always manages to find a solution towards competing tasks”, concludes the psychologist and trainer, Andra Tănăsescu.

#### **4. Particularities of communication in the sports environment.**

Whether we refer to verbal or non-verbal communication, communication between athlete and coach or the communication between athletes, even the interaction between athletes and spectator’s (which also represents an actor in the process of communication) we consider that in sports this is always a very important component in the process of optimization of performance. “Communication through body-language exists from the beginning of time but its scientific analysis began only in the past twenty years. It has become popular in the 1970s. By the end of the XX century it was discovered throughout the entire world and we have motive to believe that its impact on the meaning of human communication will become constitutive elements of official training” (Stănea, R. 2012).

Dragnea, A. (2006) speaks about the importance *sociometric representations* and their role in communication, noting that these are strongly influenced by prejudice, stereotypes or routines. Superstitions and prejudice dominate emotional and motivational life without having any real basis. Controlling athletes, their routines and stereotypes, determines sociometric representations which favour the athletic activity and are controlled by the athletes. As a language, sport, is understandable to all, regardless of race, age and occupation. As an educative impact, well used, sport can be a positive educative mean for everybody.

#### **The importance and advantages of sports communication**

- Sport remains the best way to manifest, demonstrate and inform a man.
- Through sport the necessity to demonstrate our power and will to fight is satisfied.
- Through sport one can reach the knowledge of performance, to always be above the competition.
- Through sports the limits of human performance capacities are expanded.
- Though sport culture and tradition are developed.



- Sport information amplifies the phenomenon thus transforming it into an athletic spectacle.
- Sport has become a way of technological, artistic and aesthetic capitalization.
- Sport can trigger emotional states such as love, hate, respect and fear.
- Sport can trigger group bonding and socializing between different groups.
- The athletic performance is of interest for a diversity of areas of research.

All those who benefit from this system of communication through sport are: athletes, coaches, referees, specialists, officials, journalists, spectators and readers.

## 5. Conclusions

Dominance over the process of communication through knowledge, understanding the phenomenon of verbal and non-verbal communication in the conduct of basketball as a sport is an essential element in leading a team in training and competitions.

Communication in basketball is very complex due to factors which intervene in form of messages through verbal language, motor language and body-language. Knowledge of non-verbal communication types and the level on which this manifests leads to an efficient cooperation during team plays.

Knowledge and mastery of the process of communications during practice is an essential element in leading the athletes as well as pre-existing inter-relationships among the groups of athletes. Communication skills become a necessity for tactical interactions and for success in sport competitions.

The *coach-athlete* relation of communication, in the process of training and competition, compared to the realities that the professor can identify in his day-to-day supervision and work lead to major dysfunctional between the motor potential and the athletes' capacity to express themselves. The use of a complex range of communication ways (verbal, non-verbal and gesture) brings an appeal bonus to the trainings, maintaining players' interest.

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