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FLARR Pages #35: Let Your Fingers Do the Talking

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FLARR PAGES # 35

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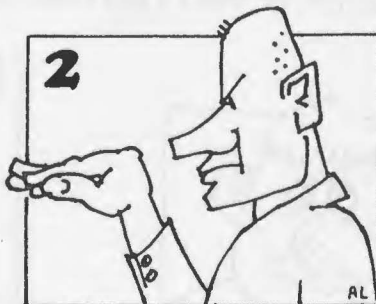
File under:

- Gestures for French speakers
- Non verbal communication
- Humor in the classroom

"Let Your Fingers Do the Talking"
Text and Illustrations by André Lebugle
University of North Dakota

There are gestures and facial expressions that replace words and are immediately understood by natives of each country. The same signs may exist in another culture and have different meanings. Although these cultural traits are very simple, they must be performed very accurately; otherwise they are as meaningless as a mispronounced word.

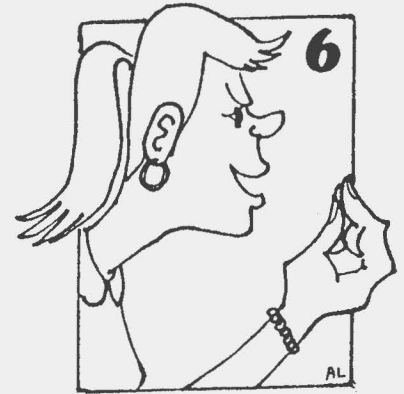
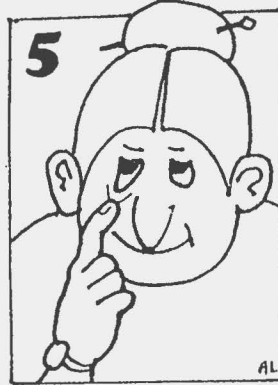
Here are a few gestures that are very common in France. I have included them in tests like any other cultural item.



Picture 1: Touch your temple with your index finger and rotate your hand twice. This means "crazy." Not to be done to someone bigger than you.

Picture 2: Raise your hand as high as your mouth and form a beak with your fingers, palm facing down. Slightly open and close your hand quickly two or three times to tell someone to shut up. Do not try it in faculty meetings unless you have tenure.

Picture 3: Hold your arm shoulder high, close to your chest without touching it. Make a fist, palm down. Move your forearm horizontally in a rapid motion as if you were shining shoes. It means "hurry!" Try it on your slower students. Results not guaranteed.



Picture 4: When something is boring, rub your cheek a couple of times with the back of your fingers pointing down. This means “boring” and replaces colloquial words like “*barbant*” and “*rasant*” that allude to shaving. You won’t know how boring shaving is until you’ve tried it.

Picture 5: Pull your lower eyelid with your index finger to express that you do not buy what someone is saying. You may say, “*Mon œil*” (My eye) at the same time. Useful during speeches by politicians.

Picture 6: Hold your hand shoulder high, palm up, with the tips of your fingers touching. Very slightly separate your fingers a few times to indicate that someone is scared. Practice on your poodle: he won’t get offended.



Picture 7: Next time your neighbor comes home drunk out of his shorts, let your household know without words: place your fist on your nose and rotate it twice. This comes from the expression “*avoir le nez tordu*” (to have a twisted nose), which means “to be drunk.” Do not do it on Friday nights; your arm will get tired.

Picture 8: Hold one hand, palm up, waist high. With your other hand pretend to pull something thin out of the first palm. Do it twice. This illustrates the expression “*avoir un poil dans la main*” (to have a hair in the hand), which means “to be lazy.” If someone is lazier than lazy, you may say, “*Il/elle a une queue de vache dans la main.*” (He/she has a cow’s tail in his/her hand.) Now, examine your hand:

not a trace of hair. Congratulations! You are a hard worker.

Your students will enjoy the above gestures. Some may even say, "Why learn how to speak and write French if we can communicate without words?" I know you will easily convince them that there is more to the French language than what fingers can express. However, remind them that, like words, gestures need to be chosen carefully.

Remembering... Herb Boswau (Spring, 2005)

Jerry Bakken, Colleague to Herb, University of North Dakota:

FLARR and FLAND lost a good friend in late December. Herb's interest in both organizations was immense. Different people will remember different things about Herb, when they think of him. When I do, I'll remember his celebrations of German-American Day on October 6th every year, with an official proclamation from the mayor (who was often present) as well as a proclamation from the Governor and occasionally even from the President (they were never present). I'll remember the long and pleasant talks as we drove to or returned from FLAND conferences in Bismarck or Minot. I'll remember his many acts of kindness to me, my family and colleagues. But most of all, I'll remember his strong interest in German and in teaching. At the next FLARR and FLAND meetings, his absence will be noted, and regretted.

Ted Schaum, Prof. Emeritus, Minnesota State University Moorhead, Past President of FLARR:

Herb was one of the most conscientious colleagues I've known in my entire teaching career -- and a friend beyond comparison. When we founded FLARR in 1970 to facilitate professional communications up and down the Red River, Herb became a loyal supporter and frequent presenter to our semi-annual gatherings in the spirit of caring and sharing within our academic discipline and for the benefit of our students.

His sister, Ava G. Guerrero, wrote to me in her letter of Jan.16, 2005: *"In going through my brother Herb's things I found a very nice Christmas letter from you, which I am sure he had read, and also we listened to your New Year's greeting [on] his answering machine -- which he unfortunately didn't hear -- and realize that you were a good friend of his."* She concludes, *"It was gratifying to learn that Herb had so many friends who loved and respected him, especially since -- as many said -- he was such a private person, and didn't talk much about himself and wanted to know more about you"* . . . thereby aptly summing up her brother's unique personality, the memory of which will remain in our minds for as long as we follow in his footsteps and uphold his exemplary standard(s) at future professional meetings, be it at FLAND, FLARR, ACTFL, at Central States Conferences or MLA.

I feel privileged to have had the opportunity of getting a few glimpses into this extraordinary, "private person" when together we traveled to and attended language and literature conferences or -- as in November 1991 -- we shared CSC convention hotel accommodations in Washington, D.C.

And I fully concur with Linda Gresham's characterization of Herb that he maintained a rare and felicitous balance between a subjective seriousness and an objective sense of humor.

As we celebrate the 35th anniversary of FLARR, we also celebrate the life and legacy of our friend and colleague Herbert Hans Boswau.

Georgine Lutz, retired, from second home in Mazatlán, Past President of FLARR

The North Dakota Foreign Language Association and the Foreign Language Association of the Red River lost a respected and valued personage with the death of Herbert Boswau on December 27, 2004. Herb was instrumental in the creation, development, and ongoing support of these organizations.

The Germans from Russia organization has also lost an important and active member, and certainly he will be missed as the historian of the Foreign Language Association of North Dakota.

I had known Herb for about 20 years. I first met him when I attended a Foreign Language Workshop at the University of North Dakota, conducted by Herb, and Graciela Wilborn.

I became better acquainted with him as, over the years, we both attended meetings of the Foreign Language Association of the Red River, and the MN Association of Teachers of Cultures and Languages.

Herb Boswau was a warm and friendly being, ready at any time to sit and visit, and especially to enjoy a lively conversation over a good meal. He had a hearty laugh, and a strong handshake.

He will be sorely missed by many, and impossible to replace.

Thomas C. Turner, University of Minnesota, Morris, Past President of FLARR:

Like Georgine Lutz, I had also known Herb Boswau for at least 20 years. Herb was always fully engaged in the teaching process, which he accomplished with considerable gusto and great enjoyment. I am reminded of two of his many presentations at FLARR: "Foreign Language Standing Up," in which he had us all conversing in situations where we would naturally be on foot, and "Weights and Measures," in which, accompanied by all kinds of tapes and bottles, Herb enlightened us all about metrical Europe and how much of "theirs" could or could not fit (or be poured) into "ours." He also came back from retirement to present a wider review of the past 30 years in foreign languages and a view of what was to come in the future, at FLARR's 30th anniversary celebration at MSU.

Herb's contributions to FLARR as well as to FLAND were substantial and consistent. He enjoyed especially seeing that teaching and service be somehow rewarded and he had a good memory for those who had contributed to our organizations and to foreign language in general. Herb maintained a positive attitude throughout many years, years which were not always kind to foreign languages and especially to German.

I remember the friendly rapport that Herb developed with many of us and the respect that he held for us. Herb told me once that he sorely missed the energetic clackety-clack of Graciela Wilborn's heels in the corridors of the University. We will miss Herb's wonderful energy as well, and his witty insight, his humor... the sparkle in his eyes and his love for life.