The role of the nonverbal communication in interpersonal relations

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Abstract

Communication is an art we have to master especially in those professions that involve interpersonal relations, emotionally, diplomatically and historically charged. In the present paper we challenge a topic sometimes underestimated: the signals and messages we transmit by nonverbal communication in interpersonal relations. Nonverbal communication is inevitable, as it refers to the transmitting of information and to the influencing of behaviours and reactions of humans. Artefacts, i.e. clothing, jewellery, sartorial accessories transmit information regarding gender, age, economical, social and professional status. What we wish to draw the attention on is a case study belonging to the diplomatic stage, respectively a career diplomat’s way of interpersonally communicating through sartorial accessories worn during a series of high-ranking meetings.

Keywords: Communication, interpersonal relations, nonverbal communication, artefacts

Introduction

Our mere presence or absence during a certain moment says much about us. The way in which we appear or dress gives away information we would prefer others not to notice about us. On the contrary, we can also pay attention to the way we look, hoping that the others will understand the message we want to send. Therefore, communication is an art we should master, especially in the professions that involve interpersonal relations, which are emotionally, diplomatically and historically charged. In this paper, we intend to broach an aspect we sometimes underrate: the signals and messages we transmit by nonverbal communication in interpersonal relations.

Nonverbal communication is inevitable. Some researchers (R. Birdwhistel, 1977, *apud* Chelcea S., Ivan L., Chelcea A., 2005) ascribe to this type of communication, by voice and body, a major contribution – 65 per cent, in comparison to the transmission of information by words – 35 per cent. Others (such as A. Miller *apud* Chelcea S., Ivan L., Chelcea A., 2005) claim that in interpersonal relations, information is transmitted in proportion of 82 per cent by body and voice, and only 18 per cent by verbal language. G. Johns states about nonverbal communication that the messages transmitted in this way “can be extremely powerful, as they show how things really are, while words serve as a smoke curtain” (Johns G., 1998:335). The interest in the study of nonverbal communication is of relatively recent date, mentioned for the first time by J. Ruesch and W. Kees in 1956, and concerns the transmitting of information and the influencing of the behaviours of human subjects. The structure of nonverbal communication is given by a series of codes and signs which, once combined, transmit all the information from the source to the receiver, by different communication channels. Scientific literature gathers numerous classifications regarding nonverbal communication. Most of the classifications rejoin around several analyzers involved in the transmitting of information, such as the visual analyzer, the olfactory one, the kinesthetic one, etc. It is certain the fact that inside interpersonal relations the inexistence of nonverbal communication is impossible. This way of expression is part of
the human communication and its analysis must make allowance for a set of factors such as: motivation, socio-cultural context, historical context, etc.

A classification model is given by R.P. Harrison, who structures nonverbal communication into four categories: a) performance codes associated to body movements, facial expressions, glance, touch and vocal activity; b) spatial-temporal codes referring to messages given by the combined use of space and time; c) artefact codes used in messages received from objects; d) mediating codes referring to the special effects given by the interposition between transmitter and receiver (apud Chelcea, Ivan, Chelcea, 2005:35). Artefacts, i.e. clothing, jewellery, sartorial accessories, transmit information by nonverbal communication. About the person wearing them, they send messages regarding gender, age, economical, social and professional status, etc.

What we wish to draw the attention on is a case study coming belonging to the diplomatic stage, respectively a career diplomat’s way of interpersonally communicating through sartorial accessories worn during a series of high-ranking meetings. Our brief research on certain brooches worn and collected by M. Albright gives a certain image to the diplomat, different from what the press released on several occasions. One fact is for sure, the one that the 200 pieces of jewellery tell much of the personality and emotions of the ex lady of the American diplomacy and the manner in which she interpreted the etiquette. Albright, politician and diplomat, has always struggled for protecting the human rights and is known for her direct involvement in important humanitarian activities developed worldwide. In other words, the manner of tackling the accessories will be a pure analytical one, as we are interested in approaching the image in terms of significance and of sending messages, and not in terms of emotions or aesthetics. A sign is the materiality we perceive by one or more of our senses. It can be seen, heard, touched or even tasted. Still, a sign replaces something for someone, according to a certain relation or under a certain title. The perceived face of the signifier, “the object or the reviewer” and the convention that confirms the relation based on “interpretation or signification” (the signified). The triangle presented above represents the dynamics of each sign whose signification depends on the context of its apparition and of its receiver’s expectations.

Therefore, by reading some of her pins, the ones we consider to be the most significant of all, we shall add to the images: the jewelleries’ characteristics, the context in which they were worn, the association Madeleine Albright did between the accessory and the event, as well as explanations regarding the sent message. Regardless the context, whether it is the academic or the political one, Madeleine Albright respects the imposed etiquette norms, by using not only her own knowledge, but also the “dowry” received from her father, the famous diplomat and professor, Josef Körbel. Practically, she respects “the multitude of ceremonial types and practices that are respected during official festivities in diplomatic relations”, but she does not hesitate in the process of subtly manipulating the interlocutor (Coteanu, Seche, and Seche, 1975:755). The etiquette has been, for a long time, a domination instrument, and its specific methods have been created in favor of the strongly hierarchical systems. Another fact is that the authority, whichever it may be, uses, in practice, an external apparatus, meant to impress the imagination (Dussault, 1996:19-21) and M. Albright permanently speculates and identifies heterogeneous ways of “gaining” the other, by inductive reasoning or philosophical conceptions.

As if to demonstrate that choice making does not necessarily involve a certain model, Albright illustrates, in a seemingly original manner, the connection between amusement, the way of transmitting a message, and the mood. We call it “seemingly original”, because the present manner of using the decorative style, illustrated by nature-inspired motifs, is characterized only by a certain manner of seeing and associating things. «M. Albright stated several times that she started associating the brooches with the purpose of the event she was attending in 1994. She was, at that time, the USA ambassador at the UN and, in the context of the Gulf War, was called by the Iraqi press “an unparalleled serpent”. “I didn’t consider the gesture a big deal”, she writes in her recently published book, “Read my pins”, adding: “I doubted that the Iraqis even made the connection... As the television cameras zoomed in on the brooch, I smiled and said that it was just my way of sending a message. I thought, well, this is fun. So then I went out and I bought a bunch of costume jewellery to signal what my mood of the day was.”» (“Lamb, Christina, “M. Albright reveals brooch diplomacy pinned down adversaries,” The Sunday Times. Web. 4 Oct. 2009). M. Albright, the diplomat, is part of the ones who have intentionally used signs and symbols, unconventional ways of transmitting subtle messages. From this point on, her options receive different dimensions, regarding the conceptual and semantic meanings. Were we to be interested in the analysis of the “sign”, we should watch the materialization of a representation or of a convention of “something” by suggestive or graphical methods. But what Albright does is attribute each individual or grouped accessory new meaning, precise expressiveness, filled
with intellectual significance, in order to show “the mood” related to a diplomatic event that is to take place according to the already known coordinates, specific for the level it belongs to. Yet, it is this discrimination itself that contains the diplomat’s call for “allegory, especially the call for a conception that explains the symbolic expression that it circumscribes, or the call for a meant reformulation of an already known thing” (Jung, 1994, vol.1:196). Still, the manner of using the imagination, as well as the further capitalizing of its actions stresses, once again, the diplomat’s adaptability.

Were we to take into consideration only the diplomat’s choice in attaching the brooches, we could state that the place is not randomly picked. By analyzing the multitude of images that show Madeleine Albright while exercising her diplomatic and political functions, we can observe that she prefers pinning the brooches on the left side of her bust. Moreover, as the level of the event is higher, the accessory is applied higher, even on the seaming on the shoulder. Therefore, according to Chevalier and Gheerbrant (2009), we find out that:

- **Brooches**, seen as jewellery, “represent the unknown wealth of the unconsciousness, from the perspective of the Jungian soul. Jewellery tend to cross from the secret awareness plan to the plan of primordial energy, as they are energy and light” (Chevalier and Gheerbrant, 2009: 147);

- The **positioning on the shoulder** or as close as possible to the clavicle: “the shoulder represents the force, the power to achieve. ... the power to do, to action, to operate” (Chevalier and Gheerbrant, 2009: 975);

- The **positioning on the right/left side**: “Reasoning about a text from the Song of Songs – “His left hand should be under my head, and his right hand should embrace me” - Guillaume de Saint-Thierry states that. The right arm represents the sharpness of the cleverness and makes use of effort. The left arm, fond of rest, suggests the contemplative lifestyle and the wisdom; it is fulfilled in peace and tranquillity. ... Politically speaking, the right will symbolize order, stability, authority, hierarchy, tradition and a certain self-contentment; as for the left – dissatisfaction, demand, movement, search of a greater justice and of progress, liberation, innovation, risk. In fact, these simplifying schemes are very intermingling in real politics and do correspond, in the voters’ minds, only to some sort of stimulating fantasies, to some myths. » (Chevalier and Gheerbrant, 2009: 355 - 357) (see picture n.1).

Brooches state several messages we hardly could have perceived without the help of a well documented symbol dictionary, formulating pertinent theories. To take an example, we shall consider the most famous or favorite pins of the collector M. Albright, who was declaring at the opening of her exhibition: "I clearly have always liked jewelry, but it had not occurred to me that they could, in fact, become part of diplomacy. It all began with Saddam Hussein". When asked about her mood, she would turn G.W. Bush’s trick “read my lips”, into “read my pins”. If we were going to do happy things or something pleasant, I’d wear flowers and butterflies and balloons," she says. "On bad days I wore various bugs and weapons. It obviously became a signaling process.”(Strickland C., 2009). “The rolled serpent” (Albright 2009:14), the display of this pin took place in 1994, while Madeleine Albright was the US ambassador at the UN and was urging Hussein to allow the ammo inspections. The Iraqi press called her “unmatched serpent”, while Saddam Hussein, using the same term, referred to her as “unparalleled serpent”. According to J. Chevalier and A. Gheerbrant, 2009:891-903, „The man and the snake are opposed to one and each other, complementary, rivals. In the same note, the man has something "snakely" inside, in that certain place which reason controls the least. (...) in Arab, the same word is used to name “life” and “snake”: el-hayyah ("snake") and “el-hayyat” ("life"). The Great Unseen Snake is above the vital principle and above the forces of nature. It is an old primordial god who can be found at the basis of any Cosmo genesis and that is to be dethroned by the religions of the sprit. (...) The fundamental archetype, linked to the springs of life and of imagination, the snake has kept, therefore, in many places of the world, its symbolic features – apparently irreconcilable, while the most positive of these, although previously stigmatized by our history, start appearing again, in order to give the man harmony and liberty. Poetry, arts, medicine have contributed, as they all keep the snake as their emblem. Fundamental science also helped, by its most revolutionary discoveries: we believe this could be a conclusion for Einstein’s famous formula on the sameness between matter and energy”.

In this context, it is hard to believe that the graduate of an art masters, or a professor specialized in subjects that focus mainly on diplomacy, politics, strategy, as Dr. Albright is, would not have the knowledge regarding this manner of seeing "the snake as symbol and image”. Was the press expecting a vexed attitude shown by the ambassador, or did it mean, by the transmitted message, to confirm the diplomat’s power? In any case, Saddam Hussein, as a state leader, certainly had counselors that could have advised him regarding the labelling of Albright. Intentionally or not, the press stressed the American diplomatist’s power, and Saddam Hussein confirmed it.
Madeleine Albright admits being amused at the moment, yet this attitude relied on knowledge, on the solid education that allowed her to transform a tensioned situation into a favorable context.

- “Hear no evil, speak no evil, see no evil” (Albright, 2009:109) is an Iradj Moini creation (USA, 1999), worn for the first time in Moscow at the meeting with Vladimir Putin, the Russian president at the time. The message was related to Chechnya, as the diplomat considered that the Russians were neglecting the events taking place there and the violation of the human rights. The ensemble of brooches is formed of three monkeys that cover, one at a time, their ears, their mouth, their eyes (see picture n.2). “The monkey is well known for its agility, the capacity of imitating, and its tricks. There is, in the monkey’s way of being, a side that upsets, that of the “spread consciousness” (Schuon). (...) Still, its agility is immediately applied in the Tibetan Wheel of Existence, where the monkey symbolizes the consciousness but also the pejorative meaning of the term: for the consciousness of the sensitive world skips from one object to another, as the monkey skips from branch to branch” (Chevalier and Gheerbrant 2009:552). Being a diplomat implies, among others, preparing the meetings beforehand. This ensemble of the three brooches was created in 1999 and worn in 2000. In our opinion, these pins state not only the superficial message, “hear no evil, speak no evil, see no evil”, but also imply some connection to the situation in Chechnya. Although the discussions with Vladimir Putin were not made public entirely, Albright might have brought Tibet into discussion, if not directly, at least by a discreet hint, knowing the Russian President’s high influence in the area.

After all, both in Chechnya and Tibet, there was the problem of conflict and of neglecting the human rights.

- “Bee” (unknown designer, USA, est. 1980), Albright would often wear it, anytime she wanted to “transmit a little sting or a harsh message.” Worn at a meeting with Yasser Arafat, its message was “the sting. «Each time she found herself in front of tensioned negotiations, the former State Secretary chose to wear a bee pin. “It is a subtle way to let your interlocutor know: Listen to me carefully, because I decide where this discussion is heading”, states Albright in her book.” (Cosmin, D.F., 2010). „Impossible to count, organized, hard working, disciplined, restless, the bee would only be another ant if it would not have wings, a chant of its own – the buzz – and if it would not transpose the sweet scent of the flowers into the immortal honey. (...) As it is the embodiment of the soul and of the word – in Hebrew, the term for bee, Dbure, comes from the root Ddr, which also means word; it is, therefore, natural, for the bee also to fulfil an initiating and liturgical role. In Eleusis and in Ephesus, the priestesses are called bees. Virgil praised their virtues” (Chevalier and Gheerbrant 2009: 60-61). Madeleine Albright states that during her meeting with Yasser Arafat she wore “a wasp turned upside down”, but the images contradict her. Certainly, Prof. Madeleine Albright knew its symbolism, hypothesis confirmed by the photo which shows “The bee” upwards, which transmitted the good part of the things and, still, Yasser Arafat received politely the American diplomat, despite the fact that she associated her image to such important oriental cultural values. He gave Albright a worked in filigree butterfly, adding that this symbol would suit her better.” (see picture n.3).

«Her favorite pin is emotionally charged – an uneven ceramic heart received on a Valentine’s Day from one of her daughters, Katy, when she was only 5.» Strickland C., „As a diplomatist, Albright charged her jewellery with messages – some more than others”, The Christian Science Monitor, New York, October, 9, 2009.

In the volume entitled “Read my pins”, the acknowledges chapter is completed by the photo of a group of colorful ant pins (Albright, 2009:176). By consulting Jung’s “Memories, Dreams, Reflections” (Jung, 1994, vol.IV:66), we find out that “the instinct of the leaves-cutting ant takes shape in the image of the ant, of the tree, of cutting, of transportation and of the mushrooms”. The deciphering of the symbol of the ant, overlapped onto the finale of the book suggests, one more time, as if needed, Prof. Albright’s permanent preoccupation regarding signs, signals and codes communication.

Madeleine Albright never abandoned her “beloved” career. In fact, by her attitude, the Professor always “incited” the audience to knowledge, in an unconventional manner.

Picture n.1: “Together with Nelson Mandela, after he was awarded the Nobel Prize for Peace (1993)” (Albright, 2009:103). Photo: Reuters
Photo: John Bigelow Taylor (Albright, 2009:102)

**Picture nr.2:** At the White House, Albright together with President Bill Clinton, Defense Secretary William Cohen and National Security Counselor Sandy Berger – the first three mimic “hear no evil, speak no evil, see no evil”

Photo: Diana Walker/Time (Albright, 2009:108)

Photo: John Bigelow Taylor (Albright, 2009:109)

**Picture n.3:** “Madeleine Albright and Yasser Arafat”; Photo: John Bigelow Taylor (Albright, 2009:95)

Photo: Reuters/CORBIS (Albright, 2009:94)

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