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## **THE INFLUENCE OF GENDER ON COMMUNICATION**

### **WPŁYW PŁCI NA KOMUNIKACJĘ**

#### **Abstract**

Today sex is no longer considered only as a biological feature. Being a woman or a man does not just mean having particular anatomy. Femininity and masculinity in the modern discourse are more general concepts, considered biological, social and cultural sex. When it comes to communication, Nęcki [1996] states that among the types of conversation we distinguish the verbal and nonverbal communication. Verbal (linguistic) communication is the process of exchanging information between people through the system of audio or graphic signs called language. R. Jacobson [1960] singled out several elements of linguistic communication, characteristic for all speech acts: sender - context - contact - the message. Oral communication is the most common way of transmission of meaning between people. Nonverbal communication is mainly our language: of the body, time, space and appearance. The essential elements

#### **Abstrakt**

Obecnie płeć nie jest już uważana jedynie za cechę biologiczną. Bycie kobietą lub mężczyzną nie oznacza tylko posiadania określonej anatomii. Kobiecość i męskość we współczesnym dyskursie są szerszą koncepcją, uważaną za biologiczną, społeczną i kulturową płeć. Jeśli chodzi o komunikację, Nęcki [1996] stwierdza, że wśród typów konwersacji rozróżniamy komunikację werbalną i niewerbalną. Komunikacja słowna (językowa) to proces wymiany informacji między ludźmi poprzez system znaków dźwiękowych lub graficznych, zwany językiem. R. Jacobson [1960] wyróżnił kilka elementów komunikacji językowej, charakterystycznych dla wszystkich aktów mowy: nadawca - kontekst - kontakt - przesłanie. Komunikacja ustna jest najczęstszym środkiem przekazywania znaczenia między ludźmi. Komunikacja niewerbalna to głównie nasz język: ciała, czasu, przestrzeni i wyglądu. Podstawowe elementy komunikacji niewerbalnej to:

of nonverbal communication include gestures, facial expressions, posture, touch, communication distance zone, smell, eye contact, and even appearance. Nonverbal communication is a mirror image of our attitude, lived emotional states and material status.

The present study aims at examining the influence of gender on verbal and nonverbal communication as well as the existing relationship between them.

### **Key words**

Communication, gender, verbal, nonverbal.

gesty, mimika, postawa, dotyk, strefa dystansu komunikacyjnego, zapach, kontakt wzrokowy, a nawet wygląd. Komunikacja niewerbalna jest lustrzanym odbiciem naszej postawy, przeżywanych stanów emocjonalnych i statusu materialnego.

Niniejsze badanie ma na celu zbadanie wpływu płci na komunikację werbalną i niewerbalną, a także na istniejący związek między nimi.

### **Słowa kluczowe**

komunikacja, płeć, werbalna, niewerbalna.

## **1. About communication**

During the evolution and the requirements of group life, humans created the ability to communicate. Initially, this capability was used mainly by cooperation in gaining food, caring for children, and defiance against predators. With time it developed, creating a system of information exchange, establishing a hierarchy as well as creating and maintaining relationships. Today, communication is the main element of social life, which is a means of satisfying needs, self-expression and building relationships. Each individual daily interacts with many people from the surrounding, starting with the most common family relations, ending with passers-by in the street. Components of communication are not only words and gestures made towards a particular person, but also an item of clothing or way of moving. The latter is a message of financial wealth, preferences, membership of a social group, self-confidence or mood.

Although communication serves people at almost every moment, there are often disruptions in its progress, which often causes conflicts. It is due to both the individual differences related to temperament, experience and education, as well as a lack of self-awareness and the ability to determine their desires and feelings. Also, the cause of misunderstandings is socio-cultural differences and situational factors in changing the perception of a given situation.

In many studies, the importance of communication in the course of assessing the quality of the relationship is emphasized. It is also an essential tool of support; it maintains the well-being and can protect against unpleasant emotional states, also from depression. In the following sections, I familiarize you with the subject of communication.

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## 2. What is communication?

Communication is a system of signs [Tokarz, 2006], including both the words and gestures, facial expressions, tone of voice, as well as road signs, clothing and housing design method (e.g. a severe or full of souvenirs). According to Necki [1996] communication involves the exchange of verbal and non-verbal messages, which are symbols of actual objects. It aims to achieve a higher level of cooperation and obtain benefits for both sides. Conversation between two or more people is intended to the interests of all sides, by the principle of cooperation.

In his theory of communication Watzlawick [1967] emphasizes the circulations of causal relationships. Each of the units participating in the communication process is the participant, has an impact and is affected by the other. It is impossible to separate the sender and the recipient, as the course of the interaction is due to the interactions. The behaviour of a partner of conversation stimulates the behaviour of another and vice versa. Therefore nonexistence of communication is impossible: any behaviour or lack of it is information affecting the course of the contact. If a woman asks her husband a question, "What would you want to do today", she stimulates him to respond. At the same time, a way of asking the question may result from the earlier experience of the difficulties of finding general plans. A man may then feel the unwillingness to take discussion and answer "nothing", which brings anger of his wife and convinces her that husband has no interest. This type of interaction may deepen the conflict and prevent making a decision. What is essential here is the interdependence of the partners' responses, interaction through verbal and non-verbal cues. The course of communication can be represented schematically. The sender has a particular intention, which may be thought, intention, or emotion, which he decides to refer to the receiver of a message – followed by the encoding process, which is concluding thoughts in words, gestures, behaviour, drawing, dress, or another form. The communication channel can be air, computer network, telephone, book or TV. Various channels allow unilateral or bilateral communication, taking place in real time or not. The next step is to receive the information by the receiver and decode the message. The recipient gives meaning to the information received in the process of interpretation, which initiates a reaction to the message. It should be noted that in the case of direct contact, communication takes place simultaneously on many levels. Verbal communication and nonverbal communication are distinguished. The first term refers to the transfer of the word, and the second to signals and symbols, such as gestures, facial expressions, body movements, behaviour, tone of voice and eye contact. It is also vital that the message sender is at the same time the receiver. For example, if the husband expresses his opinion on the journalistic program at the same time he is watching the face of his wife and her behaviour. In the communication model, there are several areas where interference in the course of communication may occur.

A) Because the transfer of information is done through symbols, the problem of the sender is to deal appropriately with their intentions. The result of the encoding process depends on the skills, linguistic wealth, the ambiguity of used signals, also from the social and cultural transfer, patterns of family life, previous experience of the sender or his attitudes.

B) The communication channel can also be a source of interference, such as noise, an excessive amount of stimuli in the environment, lack of eye contact, speech disorder, poor quality of telephone transfer and others.

C) The recipient receives the information through sensory organs, and then begins the process of decoding. Understanding of verbal messages is possible if the receiver uses the same language as the sender. It is essential, however, that due to different life experiences to signals the meanings given can be inconsistent with the intent of the sender, which also may be a source of confusion.

D) The last stage is the process of interpretation of information, which depends on the current situation, the mood and the behaviour, attitudes, cultural patterns and other characteristics of the individual.

Nęcki [1996] suggests the use of general rules that reduce the risk of disruption of communication which are described above:

Rule of comprehensibility and grammatical correctness refers to the clarity and uniqueness of expression, its grammatical correctness and style, use the language of known recipient, a bright start and finish and avoiding excessive content.

Rule of consistency refers to both continuity in conversation, avoiding sudden changes in the topic of conversation, and the consistency of the verbal and non-verbal transfer.

Rule of the economy is associated with avoidance of repetition, words which adding nothing to the content of expression and long breaks.

Rule of expressiveness means expressing themselves in a manner consistent with their emotional state, disclosing their opinions and avoiding too harsh terms.

Theory of attribution explains the issues related to the transmission of meaning, evaluating partner behaviour as positive or negative. In contrast to real communication, during which the intention of the sender is read correctly, and intentional communication, in which the sender's intention has not been read, in the attribution communication receiver gives intention to the statement that no one gave to it [Rostowska 2008]. In general, the causes of behaviour can be described as internal or external, intentional (disposable) or situational and permanent, general or specific. There is a relationship between the quality of marriage and the tendency to confer meanings of partner behaviour. In happy couples, the causes of positively assessed behaviour of a spouse would rather be seen as internal, intentional, fixed and general. Such behaviours are also longer remembered, with more details and are considered to be more positive. Negatively evaluated behaviour in happy couples are assigned to external, situational and specific causes. They are both less stored and treated as unimportant.

Attribution process is reversed in unhappy marriages, which is associated with as-signing external, unintentional and specific causes of behaviours assessed as positive, and internal, permanent and general causes of behaviour assessed as unfavourable. So as can be seen the process of attribution can be used in increasing the satisfaction from the relationship in the case of happy marriages and escalation of conflicts and dissatisfaction in unhappy marriages.

### 3. Types of communication

According to Nęcki [1996] among the types of conversation we distinguish verbal and nonverbal communication. In general, communication triggers impulses to get you thinking, analyzing, creating a synthesis, as well as to act. It forms the very foundation of the functioning of the world. Communication uses for its objectives all available means, from the most traditional to the latest achievements of science and technology. It is a kind of bridge between people, their history and time. Communication does not only exist in the real world but also appears in spirituality, among plants and animals. In the following paragraphs, I will refer to verbal and then nonverbal communication.

Verbal (linguistic) communication is the process of exchanging information between people through the system of audio or graphic signs, called language. R. Jakobson [1960] singled out several elements of linguistic communication, characteristic for all speech acts: sender – context – contact – the message. Oral communication is the most common means of transmission of meaning between people. The popular forms of oral communication encompass speech, personal or group interview, an informal network of gossip and rumours. The significant advantages of this type of communication are quick and easy in obtaining the feedback. The disadvantage of this form is susceptibility to distortion, which increases with a more significant number of people who are involved in the transfer. That is directly linked with differences in the interpretation of the message. Thus, if the messages are transmitted orally along the lines of command in the organization, there is a significant risk of distorting the message. Input message often differs from output message.

Nonverbal communication is mainly the language: of the body, time, space and appearance. Many professionals and experts who were researching the information we provided, consider that the nonverbal communication and body language, accounting for more than 50% message that is passed in the interaction to the person we are talking to. The essential elements of nonverbal communication include gestures, facial expressions, posture, touch, communication distance zone, smell, eye contact, and even appearance. Nonverbal communication is a mirror image of our attitude, lived emotional states and material status. It can refer to one or all of these elements but does not necessarily reflect the fact, that is presented by its means. Nonverbal

communication, which is what we present on our own in a given situation, can vary depending on the location and the time in which someone can take an objective or subjective conclusions relating to us.

### 3.1. Verbal communication

According to *Słownik encyklopedyczny informacji, języków i systemów informacyjno-wyszukiwawczych* [2002] verbal communication is a transmission of information by using the natural language, that is speech as a means of communication. This is the primary way of verbal connection between people. In a residual form, verbal communication also occurs in animals, e.g. chimpanzees which have developed in some cases, the ability to use a metaphor. For oral transmission can take place, there must be a person: speaker and listener. They use the code (language), which must be known to both sides. According to Nęcki [1996], verbal communication is the transmission of information by using words.

Verbal communication is communication based on the word. It boils down to the fact that we use the words for passing messages. When we are talking with another person – we use words. Reading the book – we perceive messages from the author given to us by words. Writing a letter or essay, we pass messages using words.

### 3.2. Nonverbal communication

Nęcki [1996] defined nonverbal communication as a complex of nonvocal messages transmitted and received by people at all nonverbal channels simultaneously. They inform us about primary emotional states, intentions, expectations from the caller, social status, origin, education, self-esteem, qualities of temperament. These messages are transmitted and received mostly on an unconscious level, but can also be transmitted and received consciously (as most of the gestures – emblems or many facial expressions). Nonverbal communication can play an equally important (or even more) role as verbal communication. When we say that we have a “hunch” or “vague feeling” that someone lied, it means that body language does not go hand in hand with the words. There are at least two sources of nonverbal communication diversity: cultural norms and individual human experience. In general, women are better senders and recipients of nonverbal communication than men. Therefore they are judged as more internally consistent, direct and expressive in communicating. When we compared the accuracy of interpretation of nonverbal behaviour of foreign women and men, women showed a significant advantage especially when reading the negative messages from men.

- Nonverbal communication is the “body language”. Significant are factors such as:
- social space (distance) – according to theorists, there are four types of distance (intimate, personal, social and public) – is an expression of affection or authority, although it varies depending on the cultural patterns
  - symbols – also emphasize the distance, power, position
  - facial expression
  - eye contact

#### 4. Research questions and methods

The primary purpose of my research was to investigate the role of gender in verbal and nonverbal communication among graduate students. Referring to the existing studies on gender, the research aims at answering the following questions:

1. Whether students communicate with each other verbally or nonverbally?
2. Whether verbal gestures affect interpersonal communication or not?
3. Which elements while speaking the women and men pay more attention to?
4. Which characteristic features of way of speaking belong to women, and which to men?
5. Which given target group most frequently uses verbal and nonverbal signals?

In order to study the relationship between gender and verbal and nonverbal communication, a questionnaire was applied. This is one of the typical research instruments used to collect data on a specific area of the topic. The questionnaire is organized in the form of closed or open-ended questions, or a written statement with which we agree or not. The questionnaire is anonymous and consists of 15 questions. Among the questions, only two questions concerning nationality and age are open questions, and the other questions are closed. In most of the questions, it is possible to have more than one answer which gives greater freedom to answer for surveyed people. The first part of the questionnaire includes questions on necessary information about the respondent. The second part of the questionnaire deals with general information about the respondent’s communication with other people. The last section contains questions relating to more detailed information on the verbal and nonverbal communication and gender differences affecting communication.

Seventy students of Polish participated in the research. There were students of MA studies at the University of Silesia and the University of Rzeszów. Questionnaire respondents were aged between 22 to 25. The research involved both women and men.

The research was conducted via the Internet as well as a paper form of survey. Through Internet page [www.interankiety.pl](http://www.interankiety.pl) for people conducting a survey, I created an electronic version of the questionnaire survey in a website form. I posted an internet link on the forums bringing together different groups of MA Polish students from Rzeszów and Katowice with a request to complete a survey. Link to the created survey

was sent by e-mail to 25 friends who study in Rzeszów. While the paper version of the survey I handed out at the Faculty of Languages at the University of Silesia. Each of the respondents filled the questionnaire alone, without question from the interviewer. Via the Internet, 110 people filled out the questionnaire and the other 30 I got in the paper version.

## 5. Results

According to the subject of the thesis, the research involved students of MA studies at the University of Silesia and the University of Rzeszów. The selection of students was random and the language of the questionnaire was Polish in order to facilitate the understanding of questions. Research embraced women and men. The group was created according to the intentional selection. The group embraced in a total of 70 people and was diversified in terms of the sex and the age. In the group of examined people following tables depict the disintegration of individual variables.

Thirty-seven women and thirty-three men were examined in terms of sex. Women constitute 53% of examined people, and men 47%. Respondents were at the age of 22–25. Most of them were people at the age of 24, both among men and women. The smallest number of examined people among women was at the age of 22, but among men at the age of 25.

The next stage of the research was to analyze the general information about the respondent's communication with other people. The first aspect in this part was a question: which situations in your opinion make it difficult to communicate with other people? Out of 8 options to choose from respondents have most often chosen the lack of common interests, the external noise as well as the disinterest from the second person. Nonetheless, situations which disturb respondents at the lower level during a conversation are situations when the second person gesticulates and is looking straight into our eyes.

Tab. 1. Kind of situations which make communication difficult.

Kind of situations which make communication difficult	Percentage
The external noise	21,76%
The lack of common interests	22,35%
The person you are talking to is not interested in what you say	21,76%
The other person is talking indistinctly	14,12%
The other person is gesticulating	5,29%
The other person is looking sideways	11,188%
The other person during a conversation is looking into your eyes	2,35%
None of the above	1,18%



When it comes to the question which of the elements during a direct conversation they draw the greatest attention to replies were quite diversified, but the content of statement achieved the largest majority 43%, then facial expression and posture had 24%. The external appearance achieved hardly 5%, and 4% of respondents acknowledged that none of options was focusing their attention.

Tab. 2. Types of elements which draw people attention

Types of elements which draw people attention	Percentage
The content of the speech	42,73%
Facial expressions, posture	24,55%
External appearance	4,55%
Form of expression: the tone and the strength of the voice	24,55%
None of the above	3,64%

Regarding the question: with whom it is easier for you to communicate with, respondents mostly stated that it was no significant difference for them whether it is a woman or man. 12 people out of 70 answered that they more easily communicate with a man, and 13 out of 70 that communication with a woman is easier for them.

The next aspect of the general information about the respondent's communication is the question: with people from which age group communication is the most effective for you? Respondents answered in a diversified way. Out of four possible responses, 63% of people answered that the age was not making any difference for them. 18% of respondents answered that it was easier for them to communicate with people of their age. However, 12% chose the reply: with older than me and 7%: with younger than me. Information presented above shows that people do not usually have problems with communication with people from different age groups. Irrespective of whether it is the communication with younger or older people, for the majority of respondents it does not have importance.

Tab. 3. The age of people

The age of people	Percentage
With older than me	12%
With younger than me	7%
At my age	63%
It does not matter to me	18%

The next part of my questionnaire relates to more detailed information about verbal and nonverbal communication and also gender differences which affects these two types of the process of exchanging information. The first two questions contain different statements concerning in what way women and men are talking to others and if respondents agree with this statements or not.

Tab. 4. Opinions about women ways of speaking

In your opinion women talk:	I agree	I do not agree
Longer sentences than men	70%	30%
More directly than men	10%	90%
In a more chaotic way	78%	22%
More quietly	22%	78%
Kindlier than men	40%	60%
In a more emotional way	88%	12%

The table demonstrates that respondents diversely answered to the question of whether they agree or not with statements concerning a manner of speaking of women. Statements include longer sentences than men, more directly than men, in a more chaotic way, more quietly, in a kindlier way and in a more emotional way than men. The most significant difference between I agree, and I disagree appeared at the statement that women are talking more directly than men. Only 10% stated that they agree with it and 90% that they do not agree. On the other hand, the smallest difference occurred in the statement that women are talking kindlier than men. 40% of respondents agree with this sentence, and 60% of them disagree with it. We can notice that this vast difference between the percentage of agreeing and disagreeing people results from the fact that women are perceived as a more emotional and chaotic person than men.

The next table presents statements referring to men and their manner of speaking.

Tab. 5. Opinions about men ways of speaking

In your opinion men talk:	I agree	I do not agree
In a more objective way	77%	23%
More generally than women	77%	23%
In a more structured way	70%	30%
Louder than women	55%	45%
Less politely	33%	67%
In shorter sentences	72%	28%

These statements include: in a more objective way, more generally than women, in a more structured way, louder, less politely and in shorter sentences than women. With the first and second sentence, 77% agree, but 23% disagree. The next sentence has a significant majority of respondents agreeing with it than disagreeing. With the statement that men are talking louder than women agreed 55% of respondents, the rest stated that this sentence was not right. The respondents disagree with the opinion that men are talking less politely than women; 67% of people answered this way. With the last statement, that men are using shorter sentences than women agreed 72% of the respondents. It proves the fact that men prefer to communicate in a more specific and balanced way than women.

The next stage of the questionnaire contains questions concerning verbal and nonverbal signals which we are using during the conversation with other people.

The table illustrates answers to a question of what verbal signals we are using in the conversation with the woman. We most often use logical arguments; 64% of respondents chose this option out of 5 possible. On the second place, there is a change of intonation of the voice, 48% of people ticked this statement. Very rarely in the conversation with the other person people use simple words, loud and clear speaking as well as repetitions. The majority of respondents think that it is better to use in the conversation with the woman logical arguments which can convince her than still repeat one thing which does not have any sense and does not improve our conversation.

Tab. 6. Which verbal signals do you use in a conversation with a woman?

Which verbal signals do you use in a conversation with a woman?	Percentage
Repetition	21%
Using logical arguments	64%
Changing intonation	48%
Using simple words	38%
Speaking loud and clear	33%

The next table describes nonverbal signals such as gestures, eye movement of the caller, clothing, smell, correction of the glasses or rubbing a nose and imaging the topic of conversation by using hands, which are facilitating the communication with a woman. The most significant percentage of respondents is using the gestures (68%) and imaging the topic by using hands (58%). Then, 39% of people are facilitating the conversation with the woman through the movement of eyes. Probably in this way they are trying to send vital for them aspects of conversation, emphasizing them. Seven people out of 70 stated that they do not use any of the above nonverbal signals. However, eight people declared that they are facilitating the conversation with a woman by rubbing the nose or correcting glasses.

Tab. 7. Which nonverbal signals do you use in a conversation with a woman?

Which nonverbal signals do you use in conversation with a woman?	Percentage
Gestures	67%
Eye movement of the speaker	38%
Clothing of the speaker	17%
Smell	17%
Correction of the glasses or rubbing the nose	12%
Imaging the topic of conversation by using hands	56%
None of the above	10%

The table below illustrates the verbal signals which we are using in the conversation with a man. Out of five possible options, respondents mostly chose using logical arguments (65%). Then 53% of people answered that they use simple words when they want to talk to a man. Very rarely in the conversation with the other person people use, changing intonation, loud and clear speaking as well as repetitions.

Tab. 8. Which verbal signals do you use in a conversation with a man?

Which verbal signals do you use in a conversation with a man?	Percentage
Repetition	15%
Using logical arguments	65%
Changing intonation	42%
Using simple words	53%
Speaking loud and clear	38%

The last question in the questionnaire was: which nonverbal signals you use in a conversation with a man? The results indicate that 59% of respondents chose gestures like the most helpful signal in communication. Then 46% replied that imaging the topic by using hands is very important for them when they are talking with a man. However, eye movement of the caller and smell were chosen by the smaller number of people. The smallest support among respondents, only 11%, obtained the reply: clothing of the speaker.

Tab. 9. Which nonverbal signals do you use in a conversation with a man?

Which nonverbal signals do you use in conversation with a man?	Percentage
Gestures	59%
Eye movement of the speaker	38%
Clothing of the speaker	11%
Smell	21%
Correction of the glasses or rubbing the nose	16%
Imaging the topic of conversation by using hands	46%
None of the above	15%

## 6. Conclusions

The primary purpose of this paper was to investigate the role of gender in verbal and nonverbal communication among graduate students. It resulted from my research in the determined way that sex plays a significant role in interpersonal communication.

The first conclusion which comes to my mind during the research is the fact that students are using not only verbal but also nonverbal signals during their communication. They usually do not have any idea that the simplest things such as external noise, gestures or looking straight into somebody's eyes are also affecting their communication with others. The research outcome provides information that nonverbal gestures

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have an impact on interpersonal communication. Respondents generally answered that the lack of common interests, the external noise and indistinct speaking mostly make communication with other people difficult. These aspects have a terrible influence on oral transmission of information and make it stymied.

Another observed thing is the fact that men and women pay attention to different aspect during a conversation. Women mostly focus on the content of the speech and the form of expression- the tone and the strength of the voice. While men pay more attention to facial expressions and external appearance, this means that men are visualizers in contrast with women which are more focused on contents of the conversation than on marginal things. I also observed that for people generally, it is not significant whether they talk to a woman or a man. Further analysis revealed that for respondents more often eye contact, the position of the body or intonation of the voice are subsidiary means of expression which increase readability in direct communication. It means that by them we can ease our transmission of information between us and others and also we can reduce appearing different types of oblique statements during a conversation.

To question: which characteristic features of way of speaking belong to women and which to men, respondents answered differentially. It is shown that women talk in a more emotional, chaotic way and in longer sentences than men. We can notice that women are perceived as more emotional and chaotic, but also as a person who cannot be more quiet and kindlier than men. When it comes to men, it is presented that they are more objective, talk more generally and in a more structured way than women. It proves the fact that men prefer to communicate in a more specific and balanced way than women. Another thing observed in this part of the questionnaire was the fact that different verbal and nonverbal signals are used during a conversation with a different target group. Respondents answered that during a conversation with a woman they usually use logical arguments and changing intonation as verbal signals to make the conversation more straightforward, but also gestures and eye movement of the caller as nonverbal signals. When it comes to conversation with man respondents also chose using logical arguments but in the second place was using simple words. From the nonverbal signals, respondents selected imaging the topic of conversation by using hands and clothing of the caller. Very rarely people used repetitions in a conversation with a man, which proves the fact that, if we want the man to understand us we should use logical arguments instead of repetitions which do not help us in any way.

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