

Understanding Nonverbal Communication Among TNI (Indonesian National Army) Members in Everyday Life

Amaliah Ramdani, Syarifuddin Dollah*, & Geminastiti Sakkir

Universitas Negeri Makassar, Makassar, Indonesia

Abstract

This research focuses on how nonverbal communication is important in the military, particularly among members of the TNI in their neighbourhoods. The researcher used interviews to collect data using open-ended questions. The researcher identified that saluting is more than just a greeting; it shows respect for superiors and tradition, which promotes a disciplined and united military community. The research underlined the adaptation of nonverbal communication, especially hand signals, in operational settings for efficient and silent exchange of information. In summary, nonverbal cues, such as saluting, play a huge role in keeping the military community disciplined and united for successful operations.

Keywords: Communication, Cross Culture, Interaction, Nonverbal.

1. Introduction

Language is the most important component of life. We use language to interact with others, convey our thoughts and feelings, understand abstract and complex ideas, fulfil our needs and goals, establish norms, and preserve our culture. Language is a basic type of communication that is verbal in nature, and physically intrinsic. Language is often described by behaviourists as a taught behaviour involving stimulus and response. They often define language as verbal behaviour, which includes spoken words as well as gestures and body language.

Language can be used in a variety of ways to maintain communication with others in a given society. This is in line with Sirbu (2015) who says that language is essentially a means of communication among members of society. Language is most often used to exchange concepts through their bodies, as the creation of meaning is closely linked to the body. Based on this phenomenon, language allows individuals to give expressions about feelings, ideas, and concerns through the body, and this is called nonverbal communication.

It is important to note that nonverbal communication varies from one person to another with each person often exhibiting a different style. In addition, different cultures may emphasize different aspects of nonverbal communication, with some cultures placing more importance on certain aspects, such as facial expressions or body language, than others.

In a certain group, there are codes of communication that are commonly practiced between members of that group. As I see in the neighbourhood where TNI members live, there is some nonverbal communication that they do when meeting with fellow members. This makes me interested in knowing more about the meaning of nonverbal communication used by TNI members in their neighbourhood.

Based on my interest in the communication styles that I usually see in the neighbourhood where TNI members live, the research question that I formulated was "What are the types of nonverbal communication commonly practiced by fellow TNI members in their neighbourhood in daily life?". The objective of this research was not only to explore the nonverbal communication commonly practiced by fellow TNI members in their neighbourhood in daily life but also to know the implied meaning of it.

* Corresponding author.

E-mail address: syarifuddindollah@unm.ac.id

2. Literature Review

2.1. Defining Nonverbal Communication

Many researchers have formulated the definition of nonverbal communication. Chaudry & Arif (2012) defined "nonverbal communication as the unspoken communication that takes place in every face-to-face encounter with another human being". This exchange of information reveals to us the genuine feelings they have towards us and how effective our statements are. In line with that, Adler & Rodman (2006) proposed nonverbal communication as: "spoken and non-spoken messages expressed by means other than language". This definition not only applies to sign language and written words, but also includes messages conveyed by vocal means that do not involve sighs, laughter, and other utterances.

Furthermore, Negi (2009) made assumption that when people speak, they often do not stop with simply expressing themselves. They also communicate by using their hands (gestures), heads, eyes (eye contact), lips (smiles), posture, and symbols, which are always used in conjunction with spoken language, whether intentional or not. Nonverbal communication refers to the effects of these non-linguistic cues during discussions (NVC).

As non-verbal communication has been widely studied, Pandzic (2007) stated that non-verbal communication refers to all aspects of message exchange without the use of words. In addition to manual sign language and speech, non-verbal communication also includes all expressive signs, signals, and gestures (audio, visual, etc.). There are several uses for nonverbal communication. Nonverbal communication has the ability to organize meetings, contradict or complement verbal signals, emphasize or repeat verbal messages, and substitute for them- especially when verbal messages are obscured by background noise or other distractions.

Nonverbal communication is the production and perception of any type of signal, excluding speech, that is made in order to convey information to another person (Akre, 2023). This highlights the concept of nonverbal communication, which emphasizes that nonverbal communication involves the production and understanding of various signals that convey information. These signals, which can include gestures, facial expressions and other forms of expression, are meant to convey messages without the use of spoken or written words. In essence, this underscores the richness and diversity of ways people convey information beyond verbal language.

From these definitions, it can be concluded that nonverbal communication is the process of sending and receiving messages verbally by considering paralanguage and nonverbal cues, eye contact, touch, distance, and others.

2. 2. Kinds of Nonverbal Communication

As we know, nonverbal communication is the transfer of information through various gestures and behaviours, rather than using words. Nonverbal communication plays an important role in conveying emotions, feelings, and intentions. Walker (2023) mentions six types of nonverbal communication, such as:

- 1) Kinesics. It is the study of hand, arm, body and facial movements (Walker, 2023), and its name comes from the root word kinesis, which means "movement". Ry (2023) mentioned that kinesics is the study of how we use body movements and facial expressions in conveying messages. These gestures are essential for conveying a wide range of emotions and intentions, and often provide more information than words alone. Gestures, head movements and posture, eye-contact, and facial expressions are included as kinesics.
- 2) Vocalic / paralinguistics. Vocalics is the study of paralanguage, which involves the vocal qualities that come with a verbal message, such as pitch, volume, speed, vocal quality, and vocal filler (Andersen, 1999). The vocal signals of paralanguage include accent, pitch, volume, speech rate, modulation, and fluency. Those can be signed as the way someone delivers their speech related to the voice they produce.
- 3) Haptics. Haptics is the study of communication by touch. Ry (2023) mentioned that touch is the first type of nonverbal communication we experience as humans and is critical to our development and health. Furthermore, Walker (2023) said that a lack of competence in touch-related nonverbal communication can have negative interpersonal consequences. For example, if we do not follow the advice we have been given about the importance of a firm handshake, someone might make a negative judgment about our confidence or credibility.
- 4) Proxemics. Proxemics refers to the study of how space and distance affect communication (Walker, 2023). The distance can differ based on the cultural norms and the type of relationship that exists between the two parties (Ry, 2023), and it can affect the way people communicate and behave in society. Hall (1966) in Ry (2023) identified four zones of distance commonly observed by North Americans.

- a. Intimate distance - (0 to 1.5 feet). Usually meant for people who are in an intimate relationship. At this distance, the physical presence of the other person is highly felt.
 - b. Personal distance (1.5 to 4 feet). This is the interactional distance of good friends or other close acquaintances.
 - c. Social distance (6 to 12 feet). This is the proper distance for friends and casual acquaintances to communicate.
 - d. Public distance (12 feet or more). This is the distance for most speeches in public. At this distance, the speaker becomes formal.
- 5) Chronemics. Chronemics is the study of how people use time. Sandhu (2021) said that anthropologists who are focused on chronemics are looking at time-related cultural norms and how cultures vary and converge around them.
- 6) Nonverbal Congruence. Walker (2023) referring nonverbal congruence as the consistency among different nonverbal expressions within a cluster. Consistent nonverbal communication is more trustworthy and impactful than unclear or conflicting nonverbal signals. Despite the intention for nonverbal messages to be consistent, they can be interpreted differently, mainly due to variations in the conscious encoding of nonverbal expressions.

2. 3. *Previous Studies about Nonverbal Communication*

Research on nonverbal communication has been conducted by many researchers in various fields. Research from Ramadhan et.al (2023) on human interactions in specific contexts, such as in business, education, or interpersonal relationships. The researchers found that nonverbal communication can influence the way we communicate with others, and can even help strengthen or weaken the message conveyed. By understanding and mastering nonverbal communication, we can improve our communication skills in various situations. This research provides a broader understanding of the importance of nonverbal communication in everyday life. Furthermore, research from Putra & Purba (2020) examined the functions and forms of nonverbal communication in the Nusantride biker forum. The researcher used a descriptive qualitative method. It was found that several movements were made using hand and foot signals starting from the group leader who then passed on to the other members who were behind him in order to know every condition of the road or route to be travelled and to know if there was an emergency condition while they were all riding in the group.

Odeh et.al (2020) examined the nonverbal communication used by parents to their children in front of visitors at Ovoko. The study found several body languages cues that parents use to communicate with their children. The study also showed that each expression people use has a meaning linked to it. Therefore, in order to determine whether the appropriate perlocutionary reactions to the cues are always obtained, this study shows that investigating children's interpretations and opinions about their parents' body expressions is an academic effort worth making.

Korochentseva & Terekhin (2021) studied teachers' ideas about the appearance and features of their nonverbal communication with students during distance learning. The majority of teachers, according to the study, were satisfied with their performance. The study then highlights the importance of nonverbal communication in the pedagogical process and the challenges that modern teachers present to teachers trying to communicate with students remotely. The study also points out the need for extra attention to be paid to the issue of nonverbal communication between teachers and students in the contemporary information space.

Based on some previous research related to nonverbal communication, it can be concluded that indeed nonverbal communication is important to know. Because it appears in various fields of life, nonverbal communication also provides benefits for its users in communication.

3. **Methodology**

This research applied descriptive-qualitative research to find out and analyze nonverbal communication used by TNI members in their neighborhoods. The selection of research subjects used a purposive sampling technique. The subject of this research is one TNI member who has served and lived in a dormitory/battalion neighbourhood for approximately 14 years until now. Data collection used interviews with open-ended questions. A phone recorder was used to record the interview. The results of the interview were transcribed and then analyzed to answer the research questions.

4. Findings

Based on the results of interviews conducted by researchers, it was found that the types of nonverbal communication used by TNI members in their neighbourhood are gestures, head movements, and posture, also the tone of voice. This is usually found when they make a salute gesture to a more senior member. As said by the interviewee:

Kalau yang itu sebenarnya biasa disebut penghormatan dan memang sudah jadi jati diri tentara itu. Naik kendaraan pun penghormatannya diatur. Dia tidak mesti mengangkat tangan karena kan dia sedang bawa kendaraan. Jadi misalnya kita naik kendaraan roda dua, tidak perlu kita angkat tangan, cukup teriak saja 'selamat pagi' sambil dada dibusungkan dan kepala ditegakkan, begitu. Nah terkecuali kalau kita bawa kendaraan roda empat, perlakuannya tetap sama, karena kan mereka bisa lepas tangan. Jadi penghormatannya itu tetap penghormatan yang angkat tangan. Dan itu berlaku untuk atasan. Yang harus digaribawahi, atasan itu kan tidak harus komandan. Jadi atasan itu, semua yang senior. (This is usually called respect and has become the soldier's identity. Even if you ride a vehicle, respect is regulated. He didn't have to raise his hand because he was driving a vehicle. So, for example, when we ride a two-wheeled vehicle, we don't need to raise our hands, just shout 'good morning' with our chest out and our head held high, that's how it is. Unless we bring a four-wheeled vehicle, the treatment remains the same, because they can get out of hand. So, respect is still the respect that raises your hand. And that goes for bosses. What must be underlined is that superiors do not have to be commanders. So, the superiors, all the seniors.)

The act of saluting in a military context, as described by the interviewee above can be considered as a form of nonverbal communication. Nonverbal communication here involves conveying messages relying on gestures, posture, head movement and tone of voice. Descriptions of how salutes are performed, postures, and distinctions based on the rank or status of the person being saluted, all contribute to the complex system of nonverbal communication in military culture. So, at its core, saluting in a military environment is a form of nonverbal communication that carries a specific set of meanings and adheres to a well-established code of ethics.

The interviewee then explained further about the use of nonverbal communication in the military. According to the interviewee, this nonverbal communication will be widely used when they are in the field of military operations. As quoted in the interview results below:

Komunikasi nonverbal itu sebenarnya lebih ke yang kalau kita di daerah operasi, kalau kita sudah didalam hutan itu kan, kita lebih sering berkomunikasi menggunakan tanda-tanda isyarat atau tanda visual. Jadi kode-kodenya cuma tangan saja, oh ada musuh didepan sekian orang, oh ada di depan 2 orang sudah dieksekusi, begitu. Jadi tanda-tandanya dari tangan saja. Jadi tidak ada suara, Cuma tanda isyarat saja. (Nonverbal communication is more like when we are in the operational area, when we are in the forest, we often communicate using signs or visual signs. So, the codes are just hands, oh there is an enemy in front of so many people, oh there are 2 people in front of him who have been executed, like that. So, the signs are from the hands only. So, there is no sound, just signs.)

Based on the interviews above, it can be concluded that the use of nonverbal communication in the military is more often used when doing operations in the field and it has a significant role. Visual cues according to the interviewees, which are specifically conveyed through hand signals, are prioritized as a practical and strategic means of communication. The use of these nonverbal cues stems from the need to maintain silence for operational safety. This section demonstrates a structured system of codes and symbols using hands, which allows for the efficient and rapid conveyance of important information.

5. Discussions

Various meanings in the military environment are revealed by interpreting nonverbal communication. As stated by Marković (2027), the term nonverbal communication refers to a type of communication that conveys messages not by words, but by other means. The nonverbal communication expressed by the interviewee has an implied meaning in the military context. Saluting superiors or seniors is a sign of sincere respect for them and emphasizes the military hierarchical system, which means respect for rank. In addition, these nonverbal gestures, which include saluting, have important cultural value and help military forces maintain discipline and togetherness. This is in line with what Jaffe (1988) said about the military custom of saluting, which reflects the military hierarchy and provides a medium for expressing individual attitudes towards the system.

Furthermore, relying on hand signals and visual cues in the field of operation shows dedication to effective communication, which emphasizes the need for quick and silent information sharing for operational safety. This is explained by Aravind et.al (2023) that military hand signals are a visual communication method for field use and are the most common form of communication during operations. It is important for communication in the mission to be clear, distinct, and understandable. Hand Sign Language (SL) has become a standard part of communication in the military, especially when voice communication is not desired or silence must be maintained for security (Aravind et.al, 2023). Besides implying a proper and organized communication system, the use of hand codes and symbols ensures important information is communicated clearly and effectively.

6. Conclusion

Based on the findings of this study, it can be concluded that nonverbal communication in the military emphasizes how important it is to maintain discipline, show respect, and establish clear communication. Saluting someone is more than just a polite greeting; it also shows respect for superiors/seniors and tradition. In general, saluting is one of the many nonverbal cues that help military personnel maintain a strong sense of discipline and unity, both of which are critical to successful operations.

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