

## **Non-Verbal Communication in Models of Communicative Competence and L2 Teachers' Rating**

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**ABSTRACT:** Non-verbal communication (NVC) plays a major role in various aspects of human life (Andersen, 2004; Cameron, 2001; Johnstone, 2008). Children learning their first language come to realize non-verbal communication as their socialization process takes place (Fletcher & German, 1990; Ingram, 1996; Owens, 2001). However, most EFL learners may have little exposure to these non-verbal aspects of communication (Jungheim, 2001). This study attempts to make language teachers aware of this often neglected aspect of communicative competence by investigating how NVC has been conceptualized in existing models of communicative competence (e.g., Bachman, 1990; Bachman & Palmer, 1996; Canale, 1983; Canale & Swain, 1980) using a three dimensional framework proposed by the researchers. This paper also attempts to identify the effect of construct-irrelevant NVC features on teachers' assessment of language learners' speaking ability. The results indicate that some construct-irrelevant nonverbal features do in fact affect teachers' ratings and these effects are surfaced differently depending on the gender of the raters.

**Keywords:** nonverbal communication (NVC), communicative competence, L2 teachers, rating of speaking proficiency

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Although NVC has received some attention in neurolinguistic programming, where the focus of attention is boosting confidence and developing social skills (Richards & Rodgers, 2001), it has not yet received the attention it deserves in language teaching (McCafferty & Stam, 2008). This comes despite the fact that major differences in cultural use and interpretation of nonverbal features can make NVC as one of the most difficult areas of language for second/foreign language learners (Stam, 2006; Yoshioka & Kellerman, 2006).

It should be noted that only few instances of communication rely exclusively on speech (Cameron, 2001; Ekman & Freisen, 1969, cited in Rosa, 2004); therefore, non-verbal communication should be mastered if

successful communication is to be maintained in a second language (Gullberg, 2006; Neu, 1990). Considering these points, it seems reasonable that language educators should raise learners' awareness of non-verbal communication to improve their use of natural language, increase their confidence, and finally help avoid intercultural misunderstandings.

This paper is concerned with non-verbal communication; therefore, in the first part NVC and its components will be discussed, and then its rationale and related research will be presented. The authors will then look at how NVC features have been incorporated into different models of communicative competence, and they will finally look into the aspects of NVC that language teachers pay attention to when assessing L2 speaking ability.

## **Background**

When we engage in face-to-face interactions, we intentionally or unintentionally send and receive messages that are not encoded in the words or sentences we use. The fact that NVC is woven inextricably into our daily interactions is confirmed by Abercrombie (1968, cited in Lörcher, 2002) who believes that "we speak with our vocal organs, but we converse with our entire bodies. Conversation consists of much more than a simple interchange of spoken words." (p. 55). This process of communicating through sending and receiving wordless messages is known as nonverbal communication (Andersen, 2007; Kendon, 2004; Pike, 1967). It can be expressed through body language, or even through clothing and hairstyle. Speech may contain nonverbal elements that are known as paralanguage: voice quality, emotion and speaking style; or prosodic features, such as rhythm, intonation and stress. Likewise, written texts may also include nonverbal elements that surface in the handwriting, layout or the use of images (Cameron, 2001).

NVC is of interest to a number of fields, including anthropology, communication, psychology, sociology, and child development (McCafferty & Stam, 2008). It is a system consisting of a range of features that are often used alongside the verbal features. This system is meant to aid expression of emotions and interpersonal attitudes; it is also meant to accompany speech in managing the cues of interaction between speakers and listeners (Argyle, 1988). The combination of these features is often a choice made subconsciously by speakers within a language group. On the whole, NVC is a multifaceted phenomenon and researchers have to come to a consensus about its components and the appropriate framework for the classification of these components. This complexity is partly due to the difficulty of defining the concept of nonverbal communication. As Scherer (1979, cited in Lörcher, 2002) argues the term *nonverbal* can be used to refer to both visible phenomena, i.e., gestures and facial expressions, and

the audible phenomena, such as tone, pitch and accent. Literature review reveals the following seven entries as the main components of nonverbal communication (Burgoon, Buller, & Woodall, 1994; Hickson, 1985):

1. *Kinesics* focuses on the body movements, facial expressions, and gestures. Kinesic behaviors include mutual gaze, smile, facial warmth, childlike behaviors, direct body orientation and the like. Kinesics conveys specific meanings that may be culture bound. Kinesics movements face the risk of being misinterpreted in communications that take place in intercultural situations.
2. *Proxemics (proximity)* refers to how two or more people who engage in face to face conversation use and interpret the physical space between them. This space varies across cultures and depends largely on the sex, status, and social role of the speakers.
3. *Haptics* is related to touching and the feeling that results from it. Touch can manifest in different forms that would include handshakes, pats, and kisses. The message that is communicated through touch is highly dependent upon the context of the situation, the relationship between communicators, and the manner of the touch.
4. *Eye contact or eye gaze (Oculusics)* refers to the role played by eyes in communication. Eyes can show interest, attention, and involvement. Eye is one of the most important nonverbal channels for communication and connecting with other people and is prone to cross cultural variation. In some cultures, looking people in the eye is assumed to indicate honesty and straightforwardness; in others, however, it is seen as a sign of challenge and rudeness.
5. *Chronemics* refers to the way we perceive, structure, and react to time. There are different perceptions about time usage and its value, and cultures differ in their usage of time. For example, in European and American societies, when men are interacting with women, they generally control the time; they talk more and dominate the conversation, they also tend to interrupt their female interlocutors.
6. *Paralanguage (sometimes called vocalics)* concerns various acoustic properties of speech such as tone, pitch, and accent. The main source of information lies in the manner of expression, so, for example, when we say "hello," the verbal aspect is the actual word "hello." The vocal aspect, or paralinguistic element, is the sound of

the word when it is uttered which includes the inflection of the voice, the pitch, loudness, pace, stress, and the like.

7. *Posture* refers to the body orientation, arm position, and body openness of interlocutors that can indicate their degree of attention or involvement, their status, and their intimacy.

There are also other kinds of NVC such as *sound symbols* (grunting, mmm, er, ah, uh-huh, and mumbling), *silence* (pause, wait, secrecy), *adornment* (clothing, jewellery, hairstyle), *olfactics* (smell) and *locomotion* (walking, running, staggering, limping). In conclusion, the researchers use Givens' (2000) remarks to spell out the fact that the effectiveness of communication is a function of attending to both verbal and non-verbal aspects of the message:

When we speak (or listen), our attention is focused on words rather than body language. But our judgment includes both. An audience is simultaneously processing both verbal and nonverbal cues. Body movements are not usually positive or negative in and of themselves; rather, the situation and the message will determine the appraisal. (Givens, 2000, p. 4)

### ***NVC and Second Language Acquisition***

Verbal and nonverbal behaviors can be considered as indispensable components of human communication, and, as a result, they become inseparable from the teaching of foreign languages because a proper understanding of nonverbal communication can improve the effectiveness of communication (Bachman, 1990; Kendon, 2004; Pike, 1967). Despite this fundamental role that NVC plays in communication, second language teachers often neglect the teaching of non-verbal communication (Jungheim, 2001; Soudek & Soudek, 1985), and this, in turn, can result in learners' failure in grasping the true nature of communication in the target language (Cameron, 2001). This failure is due to the fact that nonverbal behavior reveals basic cultural traits by which people are able to gather clues about the underlying attitudes and values of the members of the target community. It can be concluded that the study of NVC is part of the study of a bigger paradigm known as cross-cultural communication (Gudykunst, 2003; Wiseman, 2003).

NVC has also been investigated by the researchers who desire to discern the process of second language acquisition. For instance, Stam (2006) argues that we can get a clearer and more complete picture of the learners' progress in learning another language by looking not only at their speech but also at their gestures. Gullberg (2006) also suggests that the analysis of second language learners' use of NVC in interaction can offer valuable

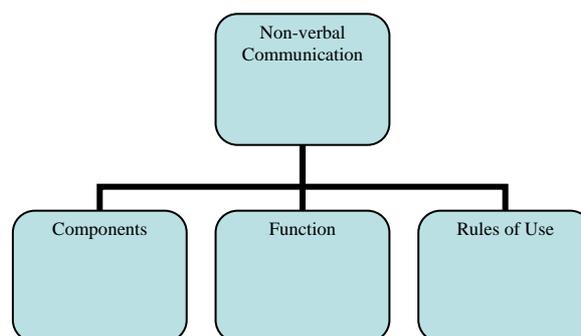
insights into the processes of language acquisition. Stam (2006) and Yoshioka and Kellerman (2006) found that the speakers of verb-framed languages, like Japanese and Spanish, as well as those of satellite-framed languages, like Chinese and English, inappropriately transfer their L1 gestures of motion verbs to their L2 signing.

The importance of nonverbal communication has also been attested by some language teachers (Smith, 1979). Ehrman and Dornyei (1998) and Sime, (2006), for instance, have identified three functions of non-verbal communication. The first of these functions is *cognitive*. Given its cross-cultural and cross-linguistic variation, non-verbal communication can be treated as part of what learners can acquire in a target language (Gullberg, 2006; Pennycook, 1985; Neu, 1990). Rosa (2004) reminds classroom teachers of the second function of NVC, namely as *emotional function*. For effective teaching to take place, Rosa believes, teachers need to pay attention to how they combine verbal elements to convey particular meaning to children, especially to older children because they tend to focus more on adults' nonverbal behavior in their attempt to understand what is expected of them. She recommends proactive use of eye contact with individual students. Non-verbal communication tools, like tone of voice, body posture, facial expression, and gesture can help a teacher to establish a presence in the classroom and therefore motivate students to engage actively in class activities (Sime, 2006). These tools also help boost the students' learning capacity and their ability to recall information (Allen, 2000; Lazaraton, 2004). The third function of NVC in the classroom is *organizational function*. Rosa (2004) backs the use of gestures for classroom management and endorses the use of paralanguage (voice tone, pitch, volume, tempo, intensity and silent pauses) in establishing and sustaining learners' attention.

### ***NVC and Models of Language Proficiency***

Now that the importance of nonverbal communication has been established, we will look at how it has been conceptualized by different models of language ability. The concept of *language ability*, commonly known as *communicative competence* in research circles, has been considered as one of the most influential theoretical developments in language education. The instigation of the concept of communicative competence has helped redefine the objectives of L2 instruction and target language proficiency (Lee, 2006). Different models of language knowledge and language use (*communicative competence*) have been proposed, and we should expect more models to emerge as researchers try to open the *Pandora's Box* (McNamara, 1996). Three of such models (Bachman, 1990; Canale, 1983; Canale & Swain, 1980) will be examined using a three dimensional

framework that opts for the components, functions, and the rules of using non-verbal communication (see Figure 1).



**Figure 1. Three dimensions of NVC**

### ***Canale and Swain's (1980) Model of Communicative Competence***

Earlier models of language ability were either linguistic (Oller, cited in Farhady, 2005) or psycholinguistic (Carroll, 1961; cited in Farhady, 2005). Such models focused exclusively on the linguistic components (knowledge of lexical items and rules of morphology, syntax, sentence grammar, semantics, and phonology) of language skills or mental processes needed to realize these skills. These models had a fairly narrow vision of linguistic ability and were concerned with verbal aspects of language (not going beyond the context of sentence) thus ignoring the nonverbal aspects altogether (Bachman, 1990).

It was not until late 1970s and early 1980s that a more comprehensive model was proposed by Canale and Swain (1980), and this model was later adapted by Canale (1983). The 1980 model comprised minimally of *grammatical competence*, *sociolinguistic competence*, and *communication strategies* (strategic competence). Canale and Swain's model does not seem to have assigned a specific place for the components of the NVC; nonetheless, the model is explicit about the compensatory function of nonverbal communication strategies. As part of strategic competence, nonverbal communication strategies can be called into action "to compensate for breakdowns in communication due to performance variables or insufficient competence" (p. 30). An example of this non-verbal communication is the use of role-playing strategies for the communication of difficult concepts. Canale and Swain have also included sociolinguistic element as an important component of communicative competence into their model, and it seems that this component governs the realization of other competences to ensure social acceptability. However,

the authors argue that there is not a strong theoretical or empirical incentive for supporting this view. So it can only be inferred that sociolinguistic rules govern NVC and ensure its contextual suitability.

In 1983, Canale began to modify the earlier model and introduced a model that tried to account for both psychological and contextual factors. He defines communicative competence as “the underlying systems of knowledge and skill required for communication” (Canale, 1983, p. 5). What is intriguing about this framework of communicative competence is that the mechanisms that are employed to tap into language knowledge are assumed to be part of one’s competence. The communicative competence is, then, distinguished from what Canale calls “actual communication,” which is defined as “the realization of such knowledge and skill under limiting psychological and environmental conditions such as memory and perceptual constraints, fatigue, nervousness, distractions, and interfering background noises” (p. 5). The components of Canale’s model, except for the grammatical competence, have witnessed drastic changes when compared with Canale and Swain's (1980) model. Sociolinguistic competence, for instance, helps form two separate components of sociolinguistic and discourse competence. Sociolinguistic competence refers to the socio-cultural rules of appropriate use of L2; that is, how utterances are produced and understood in different sociolinguistic contexts. Canale (1983) has also tried to specify the components of NVC by the introduction of the concept of *proxemics*, she further relates the appropriateness of non-verbal behavior and proxemics to socio-cultural rules that govern in a speech community. Discourse competence was defined as rules concerning cohesion and coherence of various kinds of discourse in L2 (e.g., use of appropriate pronouns, synonyms, conjunctions, substitution, repetition, marking of congruity and continuity, topic-comment sequence, etc.). Canale also extends the use and the function of non-verbal communication strategies in that the author considers them not only as compensatory strategies that are called upon when grammatical and sociolinguistic L2 competence fail to function, but also as elements that boost the effectiveness of communication (e.g., slow speech for rhetorical effect).

### ***Bachman's Communicative Language Ability***

A decade after the introduction of Canale and Swain’s (1980) seminal model of communicative competence, a more comprehensive, stratified model was proposed by Bachman (1990), who stressed the importance of describing “the processes by which [the] various components interact with each other and with the context in which language use occurs” (p. 81). Bachman (1990) suggests using the term *communicative language ability*, CLA in short, claiming that this term combines in itself the aspects of both

language proficiency and communicative competence. He developed three central components for CLA that are essential for defining one's competence in communicative language use; these components include language competence, strategic competence, and psycho-physiological mechanisms. The first component was termed as language competence, and it contained organizational and pragmatic competence. The organizational competence was further divided into grammatical competence and textual competence. Bachman's grammatical competence is consonant with Canale and Swain's (1980) grammatical competence in that it comprises abilities to control the formal structure of language. The second type, i.e., textual competence, pertains to the knowledge of conventions for cohesion and coherence and rhetorical organization. It also includes conventions for language use in conversations, involving starting, maintaining, and closing conversations. Bachman's (1990) textual competence is thus believed to contain Canale and Swain's (1980) discourse competence, as well as the strategic competence.

Bachman's (1990) pragmatic competence mainly focuses on the relationship between what one says in his or her communicative acts and what functions he or she intends to perform through his or her utterances. This concerns the illocutionary force of an utterance, or "the knowledge of pragmatic conventions for performing acceptable language functions" (p. 90), which he embodies as illocutionary competence under the pragmatic competence. Illocutionary competence enables a speaker to use his or her language to serve a variety of functions; it also helps a hearer in interpreting the illocutionary force of an utterance. One needs, however, more than illocutionary competence to successfully execute a certain communicative function; the speakers and/or hearers must have a criterion for appropriateness, and this criterion should be based on the language use context in which communicative exchange actually takes place. This ability is accounted for by the sociolinguistic competence which forms the other component of Bachman's pragmatic competence. To be more precise, Bachman talks of a number of abilities that pertain to sociolinguistic competence: ability to be sensitive to regional and social language varieties; ability to be sensitive to differences in register; and ability to produce and interpret utterances based on naturalness of language use. In his framework, sociolinguistic competence and illocutionary competence are put together to form a speaker's pragmatic competence, which, in turn, composes, along with grammatical competence, the speaker's language competence.

While Canale and Swain (1980) restrict strategic competence to a set of "compensatory" strategies, Bachman (1990) broadens the scope and envisages a much broader perspective for strategic competence. Bachman provides a broader theoretical model of strategic competence by dissecting

it into three components. He believes that the strategic competence is a mental capacity for implementing the competences of language competence in contextualized communicative language use. According to Bachman, the strategic competence provides the means for relating language competences to features of context in which language use takes place (sociocultural knowledge, real world knowledge) and thus ensures the interaction among the competences.

Looking at this model from the perspective of our three dimensional framework, it can be argued that the model is not overly different from Canale's (1983) model. The feature that distinguishes Bachman's (1990) model from other models is its in-depth analysis of the components of each competence. Bachman mentions paralinguistic features and places them within the grammatical competence which are governed by sociolinguistic competence and illocutionary competence for contextual and functional appropriateness, with strategic competence providing the link between these competences.

### ***NVC and L2 Teachers' Rating***

The reliability and validity of language tests depend on our ability to distinguish the effects (on the test scores) of the ability we want to measure from the effects of other factors (Bachman, 1990; Brown, 1996). This, of course, requires a clear definition of the abilities we are interested in (Bachman, 1990), so that the variance in test scores would result from factors that are directly related to test takers' ability. According to Gullberg (2006), Neu (1990) and Pennycook, (1985), NVC should be considered as part of the communicative ability and consequently should be included in our language teaching and testing activities. This can only happen when we have specified what aspects of NVC are *construct relevant* and what aspects are not. Construct relevant NVC features, such as the appropriate space between interlocutors, relate mainly to the behavioral characteristics of learners during verbal interaction. *Construct irrelevant* NVC features, such as physical characteristics or the environmental conditions of the interview session, may send (nonverbal) messages which may cause inconsistencies in the scoring of subjective tests such as interviews (Bachman, 1990).

## **Methodology**

### ***Participants***

Forty-four EFL teachers participated in this study. The teachers had at least four years of experience in teaching English as a second language and had conducted interviews on a regular basis. Twenty-two of the participating

teachers were male, and the other twenty-two were female and their age ranged from 22 to 40.

### ***Materials***

The researchers aimed at examining the extent to which L2 teachers included construct relevant nonverbal features in their rating of language learners' speaking ability; they also tried to identify the extent to which this rating was affected by construct irrelevant nonverbal features. To this end, the researchers developed a questionnaire and distributed it among the participating language teachers. The questionnaire consisted of 19 nonverbal features which were divided into three categories based on three themes: physical characteristics of interviewees, learners' behavior, and the characteristics of interview room. These features were further divided into two groups of construct relevant and construct irrelevant nonverbal features (see Appendix). The first category (*physical characteristics of learners*) contained construct irrelevant nonverbal features of: (a) gender, (b) odors, (c) clothing (style), and (d) physique. The second category (*behaviors of learners during interaction*) included the following construct relevant nonverbal features: (a) facial expressions, (b) eye contact, (c) space between interlocutors, (d) gesture, (e) posture or body language, (f) voice quality, as well as (g) chromomics. The third category also contained the following construct irrelevant features: (a) temperature, (b) noise, (c) lightning conditions, (d) interior decoration, and (h) music.

### ***Procedure***

The questionnaire was handed out to 44 EFL teachers in 8 English language centers in two different provinces across the country (i.e., Tehran & Mazandaran). The introduction section of the questionnaire stipulated that the teachers rank each feature in each category from the most important (4) to the least important (1). This made the interpretation of the questionnaire easier as the most important feature received the highest score and the least important ones received the lowest score. The researchers also took the following underlying assumptions for granted: 1) the teachers did not know the interviewees; 2) features would influence the teachers' rating positively when they were to their liking, and negatively when they were not so; and 3) the teachers' name would remain confidential.

### **Data Analysis**

#### ***Analysis of Ratings of NVC Features for all Teachers***

The obtained data from the teachers were analyzed using the SPSS software. The mean of each nonverbal feature was calculated and compared

with that of the other features. The analysis revealed that most of the features of the second category (*behaviors of learners during interaction*) had a strong effect on the teachers' rating of the students' speaking ability. The analysis also indicated that most of the nonverbal features of the first category (*physical characteristics of learners*) had little impact on the teachers' rating.

Among the features of the second category, the most significant feature was chronemics with the mean of 3.11. This finding indicates that language teachers (interviewers) expect the interviewees to wait for their turn in a conversational exchange. This may also relate to the fact that time can also be used as an indicator of status. Feeling that they are in charge and have a superior role in an interview, interviewers might probably assume that they should set the tempo of their interview. The second most important feature of this category turned out to be the learners' eye contact (mean= 2.91), followed closely by learners' voice quality (mean= 2.86). Eye contact and voice quality are important signs of confidence, and in conversational exchanges people consciously or unconsciously probe each other's eyes and voice for positive or negative signs. Teachers often use eye contact to gauge their students' level of interest, and they also use it to find out where the students' attention lies. Nonverbal speech sounds such as tone, pitch, volume, inflection, rhythm, and rate are important communication elements, and they can show students' interest and self-confidence. The least important feature of this category seems to be the proxemics (mean= 2.18). This might relate to the physical structure of the interview room in that the seating is normally pre-arranged and the distance between the interviewer and interviewee cannot be manipulated.

**Table 1.** Mean of nonverbal features for behavior of learners during interaction (for all teachers)

Features		Proxemics	Gesture	Eye contact	Posture	Facial expression	Voice quality	Chronemics
N	Valid	44	44	44	44	44	44	44
	Mean	2.18	2.61	2.91	2.77	2.84	2.86	3.11

Turning to the features of the first category (*physical characteristics of learners*), one realizes that clothing (style) of the interviewees has the strongest effect on the teachers' rating of their language ability (mean = 2.39). This feature is followed by odors (mean = 2.32). Surely, the formal

structure of an interview session entails proper dressing style and odor. (see Table 2)

**Table 2.** Mean of nonverbal features for physical characteristics of learners (for all teachers)

Features		Gender	Odors	Clothing (style)	Physique
N	Valid	44	44	44	44
	Mean	1.86	2.32	2.39	1.84

As for the features of the third category (*environmental conditions where the communication takes place*), noise enjoyed the highest mean (mean=3.27), followed closely by temperature (mean= 3.20). The lowest mean in this category belongs to the interior design (mean = 1.80).

**Table 3.** Mean of nonverbal features for environmental conditions where the communication takes place (for all teachers)

Features		Temperature	Noise	Lighting Conditions	Interior design	Music
N	Valid	44	44	44	44	44
	Mean	3.20	3.27	2.61	1.80	1.82

### ***Analysis of Female Teachers' Ratings***

Female raters, in line with other raters, considered the features of the second category as the most effective. This also holds true for the features of the first category, which female raters considered as the least important. Among the features of the second category, the most important feature, for female raters, turned out to be chronimics (mean=2.95), followed by facial expression (mean= 2.86) and eye contact (mean=2.82). This order neatly matches the above mentioned ranking. This consistency reveals that the behavior of the learners during an interview can have a marked effect on the interviewers' rating (see Table 4).

**Table 4** Mean of nonverbal features for behaviors of learners during interaction (for female raters)

Features	Proximics	Gesture	Eye contact	Posture	Facial expression	Voice quality	Chronimics
N Valid	22	22	22	22	22	22	22
Mean	2.09	2.50	2.82	2.73	2.86	2.59	2.95

As for the features of the first category, female raters found the nonverbal features of clothing (style) (mean= 2.27), odors (mean= 2.23) and gender (mean= 1.82) as the most important. This order is in keeping with the order obtained from other teachers (see Table 5).

**Table 5** Mean of nonverbal features for physical characteristics of learners (for female raters)

Features	Gender	Odors	Clothing	Physique
N Valid	22	22	22	22
Mean	1.82	2.23	2.27	1.55

Among the features of the third category, female raters identified noise (mean= 3.27), temperature (mean=3.05) and lighting conditions of the rooms (mean= 2.32) as the most important and the interior design (mean= 1.77) as the least important features (see Table 6).

**Table 6** Mean of nonverbal features for environmental conditions where the communication takes place (for female raters)

Features	Temperature	Noise	Lighting Conditions	Interior decorating	Music
N Valid	22	22	22	22	22
Mean	3.05	3.27	2.32	1.77	1.95

**Analysis of Male Teachers' Ratings**

Male raters, like their female counterparts, found the features of the second category of nonverbal features as the most important. This reinforces the earlier findings (for all teachers and female teachers) that the behavior of learners during an interview can have a marked impact on the rating of the learners' speaking proficiency. Male teachers' ranking of these features mirrors those obtained from all teachers but differs from the order obtained from female teachers in that male raters considered voice quality (mean=3.14) as the second most important feature, while female raters regarded facial expressions as the second most important feature. This might stem from the fact that women are better "face readers" and can perceive facial emotions more acutely than men. Another difference between male and female raters in terms of their rating of the features of the second category is that male raters gave higher importance to almost all of the features of this category except for the facial expressions (mean=2.82) (see Table 7).

**Table 7** Mean of nonverbal features for behaviors of learners during interaction (for male raters)

Features	Proximics	Gesture	Eye contact	Posture	Facial expression	Voice quality	Chronimics
N Valid	22	22	22	22	22	22	22
Mean	2.27	2.73	3.00	2.82	2.82	3.14	3.27

As for the features of the first category, male raters identified the nonverbal features of physique (mean= 2.50), clothing (style) (mean= 2.18), and odors (mean= 2.14) as the most important and gender (mean= 1.64) as the least important feature (see Table 8). This order differs slightly from the order obtained from all teachers and female raters. The reason may lie in the fact that male raters put physique first and, therefore, attach a particular importance to this nonverbal feature.

**Table 8** Mean of nonverbal features for physical characteristics of learners (for male raters)

Features	Gender	Odors	Clothing	Physique
N Valid	22	22	22	22
Mean	1.64	2.14	2.18	2.50

Among the features of the third category, male raters identified noise and temperature (mean= 3.27) and lighting conditions of the rooms (mean= 2.91) as the most important factors; they also selected the interior design (mean= 1.82) as the least important. This order also replicates the order obtained from other groups.

**Table 9** Mean of nonverbal features for environmental conditions where the communication takes place (for male raters)

Features		Temperature	Noise	Lighting Conditions	Interior decorating	Music
N	Valid	22	22	22	22	22
	Mean	3.27	3.27	2.91	1.82	1.68

## Conclusions

The review of the most influential models of language ability (Bachman, 1990; Bachman & Palmer, 1996; Canale, 1983; Canale & Swain, 1980) reveals the prevailing trend for including context and context sensitive features into the components of communicative competence. However, this improvement in conceptualizing language ability fails to account for the role that NVC plays in actual communication and most prominent models of communicative competence have nothing to say about the components and functions of NVCs, except that it can help solve communication problems or enhance the effectiveness of interaction. The integration of NVCs in present model of language ability in terms of components, functions, and rules of use was therefore a bid for addressing this theoretical set back. This new perspective not only can facilitate the teaching of these crucial aspects of language, but also provides positive washback effect on L2 teaching activities.

The analysis of the importance of the nonverbal features in interview sessions was indicative of the fact that the interviewers pay greater attention to construct relevant features (proximics, gestures, eye contact, posture, facial expression, voice quality, and chronimics) than construct irrelevant features (compare the means of nonverbal features of Table 2 with those of Table 1 and 3). However, the analysis also revealed that the interviewers do not give equal importance to all features. Construct irrelevant features that affected teachers' ratings were *noise* (mean =3.27), *temperature* (mean=3.20), *lighting conditions of the interview rooms*

(mean=2.61), *clothing (style)* (mean=2.39) and *odors* (mean= 2.32). This finding is indicative of the fact that language teachers pay a considerable attention to environmental conditions; therefore, language centers have an ethical responsibility to provide the finest conditions for a fair assessment of learners' speaking ability.

Teachers also considered language learners' clothing (style) and odor as important; this may in fact relate to the nature of interview sessions in that an interview is a formal occasion which requires proper clothing and/or a pleasant smell. As stated above, twelve of the participating teachers were female and twelve were male. A comparison of the obtained ratings by both groups revealed that they held almost similar views on the importance of nonverbal features and considered construct relevant features as more important than construct irrelevant features. What is significant here is not the particular mean obtained for these nonverbal features but the order, and this is the order of importance of these features that raters in this study agreed upon.

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**Appendix:** The questionnaire

Thank you in advance for taking the time to answer the questionnaire. It will take only a few minutes :-). Please email it back to me.

Gender:

Teaching experience (years):

Language teachers can be consciously or unconsciously affected by nonverbal features of language learners when rating their speaking proficiency in an interview. This questionnaire tries to find out which aspect(s) of the nonverbal communication **you, as an interviewer**, think might change your rating of learners' oral proficiency. Please indicate the importance of the following nonverbal features (which have been divided into three categories) for you by numbering them from 4 (most important), 3 (important), 2 (not very important) to 1 (least important). For instance, you might rank *clothing style* as **4**. This means that you think the way an interviewee dresses affects your rating most strongly. In cases where you have no preference for one feature or the other, you can rank them with the same number. Please remember the underlying assumptions of this questionnaire 1) you **do not** know the interviewee, 2) the features influence your rating positively when they are to your liking and negatively when they are not, and 3) your name will not be mentioned under any circumstances.

### **Physical characteristics of the learners**

Rank	Feature
	<b>Gender</b>
	<b>Odors</b>
	<b>Clothing(style)</b>
	<b>Physique</b>

### **Behaviors of learners during interaction**

Rank	Feature
	<b>Proxemics<sup>1</sup></b>
	<b>Gesture</b>
	<b>Eye contact</b>
	<b>Posture<sup>2</sup></b>
	<b>Facial expression</b>
	<b>Voice quality<sup>3</sup></b>
	<b>Chronemics<sup>4</sup></b>

1. **Proxemics:** how close or how far the learner prefers to sit to you
2. **Posture:** direction of lean, body orientation, arm position, and body openness
3. **Voice quality:** volume (loud or low), nasalized, harsh, creaky, and falsetto
4. **Chronemics:** the use of time in communication, i.e., how the speaker perceives time, structures time and reacts to time, how long s/he is willing to listen and the tempo (slow or fast rate of speaking)

### **Environmental conditions where communication takes place**

Rank	Feature
	<b>Temperature</b>
	<b>Noise</b>
	<b>Lighting conditions</b>
	<b><u>Interior decorating</u></b>
	<b>Music</b>

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