

# Child Gesture as a Form of Non-Verbal Communication

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**Abstract**—Child gestures are non-verbal messages that use the body parts such as eyes, mouth, hands that communicate various meanings. Non-verbal communication becomes an integral part of children's language skills. This paper aims to describe various forms of gesture in early childhood as a form of non-verbal communication and the meaning behind gestures that appear as a form of expression which speaks their language. It is expected to bring up a new understanding of meaning in non-verbal communication in the form of child gestures as an important expression to appreciate children.

**Keywords:** *gesture, early childhood, communication*

## I. INTRODUCTION

Motion in children through facial movements or different body movements such as gestures of hands, eyes, and other body parts is nonverbal communication <sup>1</sup>. Movement in children produces an understanding as to the initial development of verbal language <sup>2</sup>. Children's gesture will produce various forms of non-verbal messages as a way for children to communicate various meanings. The average child at an early age, especially 10 months, cannot produce words that can be understood but communicate through movement. Bates, (1976; Bates, Benigni, Bretheton, Camaioni & Volterra, (1979) <sup>2</sup>. The ability of children to move from an early age is a learning process so that the more children make move, the more vocabulary they speak in the future in its development. (Acredolo & Goodwyn, 1988; Rowe, Ozcaliskan & Goldin Meadow, 2006) <sup>2</sup>.

In the family system, parents are a reflection that can be seen and imitated. Therefore, parents must be able to be an example in the childcare process which becomes a series of obligations that must be implemented. If childcare cannot be fulfilled properly, it will often create problems and conflicts, both within the child itself and between the child and his parents, including the environment. For example, various difficulties parents have in directing their children is clear proof that parents should be able to pay more attention to children seriously <sup>3</sup>.

Otherwise, if we as parents can respond to children in a more relaxed and full of trust, children will have a great opportunity to believe in themselves, their parents, and the future <sup>4</sup>. Therefore, the acquisition of values that shape the child depends on how the utterances, words, gestures, and sentences that are commonly heard, seen and felt by the child become an inherent pattern, forming the values that underlie a child's behavior. It takes various forms of knowledge to

understand gestures in children from an early age, especially on how they express their opinion through movement so that parents can respond to their children's attitude well.

## II. GESTURE DEFINITION

Cartmil, Beilock & Gordin Meadow, 2012; Lyn, Greenfield, Savage-Rumbaugh, Gillespie-Lynch & Hopkins, 2011; Pika, 2008; Tomasselo, 2007 <sup>5</sup> provides an explanation that gesture is a primitive form of language expression which is a body movement to express a concept, belief, and feeling. It can easily be conveyed that gesture is a body language that arises spontaneously as a primitive instinctual form of the language of human expression. Becvar, Hollan, & Hutschin, (2008) <sup>6</sup> also mentioned that gestures can be defined as a whole body movements, especially the arms and hands, whether or not it is integrated with an utterance to communicate something.

Other research explains that gesture is also an expression language that arises when spoken language is unable to bring up the meaning to be conveyed, this is explained by Goldin-Meadow, 2003; Goldin-Meadow, Alibali & Church, 1993 <sup>7</sup>. The research explains that by using gestures, children are able to find answers or have a process of thinking about the various possible answers to the problem at hand. In this case, the researcher wants to convey that gesture encourages cognitive processes to solve problems. Dermina & Thea also expressed their view that gesture is a form of communication using simultaneous limbs with speech as a form of comprehensive cognitive processes in the visual, motor and spatial aspects of experience <sup>8</sup>. This agrees with Mc Neill (2006) who argues that gesture is an integral process in spoken language. Gesture plays as a companion or even a driver of the verbal speech.

These views lead to the conclusion that gesture is a form of communication expressed through body language that can strengthen verbal expression and language or which becomes a substitute for spoken language to communicate an opinion that is not conveyed orally. The last opinion links with cognitive processes that occur in individuals but have not been able to convey simultaneously with spoken language.

### A. *Gesture as a Non-Verbal Communication.*

Non-verbal communication is communication that uses cues instead of words as expressed <sup>9</sup>. Examples of non-verbal communication are using gestures, body language, facial expressions, and eye contact, the use of objects such as

clothing, haircuts, etc., symbols, and ways of speaking includes intonation, emphasis, sound quality, and emotional style. Samovar and Porter's speech style argues that non-verbal communication includes all stimuli (except verbal stimuli) in communication settings, generated by individuals and users of the environment, which have potential message value for the sender or receiver<sup>10</sup>. Cartmill, Beilock, & Goldin-Meadow, 2012; Lyn, Greenfield, Savage-Rumbaugh, Gillespie-Lynch, & Hopkins, 2011; Pika, 2008; Tomasello, 2007 (Cartmill, Beilock, & Goldin-Meadow, 2012; Lyn, Greenfield, Savage-Rumbaugh, Gillespie-Lynch, & Hopkins, 2011; Pika, 2008; Tomasello, 2007<sup>5</sup> expressed that gesture is a primitive form of language in the form of body movements to convey views, beliefs or feelings. It can be concluded that non-verbal communication is communication that comes out from someone when there's a stimulation while communicating even without speaking (verbal communication) which has its own meaning. Usually, non-verbal communication is followed by verbal communication (communication using words) to provide support or reinforcement when communicating.

According to Effendy<sup>11</sup>, communication is done with the aim of changing attitudes (attitude change), changing opinions (opinion change), changing behavior (behavior change), and social change (social change). While the purpose of communication according to Cangara (2002: 22) are in order what is conveyed can be understood, to understand people, to propose ideas and it can be accepted by others and influence others to do something. To influence people in a way that encourage them to do that we wanted.

### B. Forms of Nonverbal Communication

Sekarjati<sup>12</sup> found types of non-verbal messages that are divided into several types, namely:

- Kinetic Messages, is a messages that use meaningful body movements. Kinesik messages are the clearest form of nonverbal communication.
- Facial Message, this message uses a face to convey a certain message. Various studies have shown that faces can convey at least ten groups of meanings namely; happiness, surprise, fear, anger, sadness, disgust, criticism, interest, wonder and determination.
- Gestural Message, which is a message that shows the movements of some limbs such as eyes and hands to communicate various meanings.
- Postural Messages, are gestures when communicating. The open posture that requires a large space can indicate comfort and dominance, on the contrary, certain bodily postures make a person look small and indicate inferiority. When communicating, several messages done by walking, talking, standing, and sitting. Standing tall but not rigid and a little leaning forward means that the speaker can be approached, they are accepting and friendly. Furthermore, interpersonal closeness is created when the speaker and the interlocutor face each other. Postural messages usually involves all body parts.
- The Artifactual Message, is expressed through clothing, cosmetics, and others. Generally,
- Clothing is used to convey an identity that means showing others how we are and how to treat us.

### C. Gesture in Early Childhood

In general, the form of gesture according to McNeill<sup>13</sup>, there are four forms of gesture such as:

- Iconic gesture are movements that imaginatively represent object attributes, actions, and spatial relationships. This gesture is a form of a movement that describes the image of the object that being addressed or discussed.
- Pointing / deictic gesture the index of this movement is linking some aspects of speech to several other ideas, objects, locations or actions. It's a form of gesture that pointing something that is intended.
- Metaphoric gesture to convey abstract ideas in concrete form.
- Beat gesture are hand movements that maintain the rhythm of speech, these movements are not considered to carry any semantics.

The Mc Neill (1992) and Goldin-Meadow (2003) study explains that early childhood routinely uses gestures when talking<sup>14</sup>. This situation is due to early childhood's capacity that can not explore the ability to speak. As stated above, that gesture can be a companion, reinforcement or a way for children to convey the thought process that occurs but has not been able to express in the form of verbal sentences. Butcher & Goldin-Meadow, 2000; Mayberry & Nicoladis, (2000)<sup>14</sup> explained that after 2 years old, children build integrated speech-motion systems as they acquire their language skills. It shows that the gesture system and language system develop simultaneously since the initial language learning period, this is explained by Volterra, Caselli, Capirci, & Pizzuto, (2005)<sup>14</sup>. The process of gestational development (gesture) is described as an integral part of children's language development and the use of gesture reflects a more advanced thought process. This understanding shows that gesture and language are closely related to cognitive processes that occur. It was explained by Gordon, Chernyak and Cordes<sup>5</sup> that the use of gestures can reflect cognitive sophistication rather than merely physical abilities. It was further revealed that the use of gestures was carried out by children when the child had arrived at conceptual understanding. It was concluded that cognitive progress supports the development of body movements which has meaning to convey intentions, to accompany an explanation or to explain a message that cannot be understood verbally but it can be understood in the conceptual realm.

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