

THIRD EDITION

Language

INTRODUCTORY
READINGS

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1/A Structure for the Analysis of Nonverbal Communication

MARK L. KNAPP

Most of the popular books and articles about nonverbal communication (which they usually refer to as "body language") have drastically oversimplified the subject, suggesting that one can easily learn to "read" the nonverbal signals unconsciously "sent" by other people. In fact, however, the study of nonverbal communication is complex and subtle, far more than a kind of game which anyone can play. In the following selection, excerpted from the opening chapter of Nonverbal Communication in Human Interaction, Professor Mark L. Knapp presents some basic concepts concerning nonverbal communication and a classification system which, in effect, is a definition of this aspect of human communication.

Body motion, or kinesic behavior, typically includes gestures, movements of the body, limbs, hands, head, feet and legs, facial expressions (smiles), eye behavior (blinking, direction and length of gaze, and pupil dilation) and posture. The furrow of the brow, the slump of a shoulder and the tilt of a head—all are within the purview of kinesics. Obviously, there are different types of nonverbal behavior just as there are different types of verbal behavior. Some nonverbal cues are very specific, some more general; some intended to communicate, some expressive only; some provide information about emotions, others carry information about personality traits or attitudes. In an effort to sort through the relatively unknown world of nonverbal behavior, Ekman and Friesen¹ developed a system for classifying nonverbal behavioral acts. These categories include:

¹P. Ekman and W. V. Friesen, "The Repertoire of Nonverbal Behavior: Categories, Origins, Usage, and Coding," *Semiotica* 1 (1969):49-98.