

## DIRECT COMMUNICATION

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### Summary

In direct communication we watch out for unintentional messages contained in voice, gesture and facial messages. We all speak and write as the members of a certain society. We have been socialised in the world view, the habitus, the norms of this specific society. These conditions, furthermore are not static, but change in our life time and in history. The invention of writing made it possible to communicate with others who were located far from the sender, and even to communicate (if unintentionally) with people who were not even born yet. In a time, when those who could read and write were nearly all employed in the chancelleries of temples and kings, the use of writing for communication over distances was mostly restricted for official business. Letters are often invaluable autobiographic documents and they allow us a rare glimpse into the life of ordinary people, their convictions and beliefs. Letters among scholars were still the main medium of communication in the seventeenth and eighteenth century. As with letter writing, it was the state, the army and then big business which first made use of the new inventions of telegraphy and telephony. Private letters are often very intimate documents, allowing the writer to say things which he would not say even in a face to

face communication. We do not only communicate in words. Clothing and interior decorations of our dwellings attempt to communicate something about what we like to present to the outside world as our identity. Music, like visual communication, is not in the strict sense a language. Yet it is also not simply a natural form of communication.

## **1. Communication in Face to Face Situations**

Strangely enough many people pay and come to hear writers read their texts, which they already own and have read. What does the personal presence of the writer add to the text, especially as many writers are not very good interpreters of their own texts? Maybe it is the person and the voice, which one feels behind the typeface of the printed book, which creates the desire to meet this interesting person in a face to face situation. Gestures, timbre, inflection of the voice, the melody of sentences, all that seems to add something important to the flow of words on the printed page.

Aristotle already draws stereotypical images of personality traits as they reveal themselves in the presence of a person: “The movements of the high minded are slow, his voice deep, his language solemn. Because he who does not care for many things deeply, is not in a hurry, and he who does not consider anything important, will not raise his voice.” Even if one disagrees with this simplified view of how the personality of a person is reflected in voice and gesture, one still believes that the presence of the speaker adds important elements to the message.

The difficulty of communicating without visual or aural contact is clearly indicated by the use of so-called emoticons in the Internet, where short signals like :- ) stand for the invisible facial clues which tell us, whether a sentence is said with a smiling, sad or a stern face, whether it is meant seriously or ironically. But even more than such intentional signals of meaning we watch out for unintentional messages contained in voice, gesture and facial messages. The ability to jump from one topic to another in a conversation, and to indicate modes of feeling and intention by facial and body expressions makes such direct communication much less formal and more enjoyable than any form of indirect communication.

## **2. Body Language and Ritual Communication**

“How much don’t we do with our hands? We request, promise, call, grant leave, threaten, ask, implore, deny, refuse, question, admire, count, confess, repent, fear, are ashamed, doubt, teach, order, stimulate, encourage, swear, testify, accuse, condemn, start to speak, curse, despise, defy, are angry, flatter, praise, bless, humiliate, sneer, reconcile, recommend, promote, receive, delight, lament, sadden, despair, astonish, call, and are silent. We change and multiply the movements of them as much as the movements of our tongue. With our head we call and send away. With our head we confess, deny, contradict, welcome, honour, admire, despise, demand, refuse, delight, grieve, caress, scold, defy, admonish, threaten, reassure, question. How much do we do with our eye brows? With our shoulders? All our movements talk, and they talk a language which can be understood without being taught, a really common language.” In his enthusiasm for the language of the body as the common language of humanity Montaigne does overlook that even body language is not natural, and that the meaning

of body movements and their combinations are quite different in many cultures, even if some basic elements seem to be similar all over the world.

Yet it is undoubtedly so, and the introduction of television has made us more aware of this, that the body communicates much more than we think, and that we derive important clues about the meaning, the mood and the honesty of the speaker from often minute signs of the body language. (see *Media*)

### **3. Social Constraints**

We all speak and write as the members of a certain society. We have been socialised in the world view, the habitus, the norms of this specific society. We take part in the discourses which are available in this society, be they religious, judicial or political. We can make use of a certain available inventory of words, phrases, processes, motives, patterns etc. Our ability to articulate are dependent of socially available, institutionalised conditions of speaking and writing. Our communications are received by others within that community in terms of their concept of identity, world view, habitus and norms. They take up such socially present themes, question them, change them, disappoint the expectation of our audience or meet them. These conditions, furthermore are not static, but change in our life time and in history. These social structures are the context of all our communications, and we become intensely aware of them, if we are attempting to communicate in an environment which does not share our prejudices and norms. Dictionaries of dialects, sociolects, subject terminologies, and historical forms of the language make it equally clear, that languages are socio-historical entities which are subject to constant change.

In many language groups these norms are explicitly coded in dictionaries and lexicons, which attempt to conserve the linguistic and literary traditions of a language community. They very often serve the reinforcement of a national and cultural identity. The rules contained in such dictionaries do not merely serve academic purposes. Speakers of a language use them as normative guidelines as to what is “correct” speech, and what is unacceptable. Dictionaries also implicitly mirror the world view of a linguistic community. This is also true for multilingual dictionaries, where the differences soon become apparent to any user who attempts to translate his own language literally into another language. The translator becomes intensely aware that not only do the sounds for certain words differ from language to language, but that the signifieds for apparently translatable words are circumscribed in a different way in the two languages. One of the greatest difficulties of machine translation from one language into another is the difference in scope and connotation of words which according to the dictionary are the equivalent of a word in the other language. Because of this translations are always less than perfect.

### **4. Distant Communication: Letters**

The invention of writing made it possible to communicate with others who were located far from the sender, and even to communicate (if unintentionally) with people who were not even born yet. The writing of letters as a means of communication was initiated thus soon after the invention of writing as a means of accounting for the income of temples

and palaces in Sumer. But as soon as writing became a more generally distributed art, letters became a means of communication which was open to more people, and even those who could not read or write used public scribes to compose and read their messages. Letters were, especially in the Renaissance and far into the eighteenth century an important means of communication among philosophers, researchers and scientists, and were the precursors of academic journals. And finally the letter entered the realm of literature with the novel in letters in the eighteenth century, which documented the intimacy of letter writing.

#### **4.1 Letters in the service of administration**

In a time, when those who could read and write were nearly all employed in the chancelleries of temples and kings, the use of writing for communication over distances was mostly restricted for official business. Without it the administration of large empires or even large temple properties would have been nearly impossible. Although private matters thus rarely form the content of letters of the early empires of East or West, they are nevertheless still important testimonies for the reconstruction of the history of these empires. We know that Asia Minor was probably one of the first large scale producers of iron because a letter of the king of the Hittites, Hattusilis III to the Egyptian pharaoh Ramses II reports that Hattusilis at present has no iron objects at hand, but will send some as soon as they are available. This letter of the 13th century B.C. is the oldest document in which iron is mentioned.

With the expansion of the Egyptian empire more and more scribes were needed and schools for scribes were instituted. In order to learn how to write the children had to copy the texts of the classics. Most of the time, however, they learned the more practical tools of the future scribe in a chancellery, of paymasters, treasurers and public scribes. They were given sample letters to copy, and in order to motivate them to learn the difficult Egyptian script they were told about the laborious life of peasants and artisans in contrast with the wonderful life of a government servant. Even eternal life was reserved for the learned.

Letters were also a common vehicle for admonishments to errant princes, as they could be read even after the death of the letter writer and thus constantly reinforce his good advice. The letters of king Shamshiadad of Assur are documents of such an educational use of the medium of letter writing. While they are not systematic they attempt to teach by examples of everyday occurrences in the kingdom.

One of the great letter writers of antiquity was Caesar. He was constantly accompanied by his political bureau and wrote letter after letter, even at night, when he sat in his camp, sometimes more than one at the same time. His letters show him as a great stylist and often of great kindness. In a way he is the precursor of the modern business man with his laptop at air terminals, checking and answering his e-mail.

Even the dead can write letters. In 756 Petrus wrote a letter from Rome to king Pippin of the Franconian empire, which begins with the sentence: "I, Peter, the Apostle", and in which the apostle promises the Franconians the empire of God and eternal life, if they

subject themselves to the pope. It says much for the naive belief of Pippin that he believed this and was prepared to assist the pope against his enemy Aistulf.

One of the most brilliant political letter writers of the Renaissance was the chancellor Coluccio Salutati of Florence, who was fighting for the independence of his city against the powerful city of Milan. The Visconti of Milan considered his letters as more dangerous than a whole regiment of cavalry. Written in sonorous Latin they excited curiosity and admiration at the great courts of Europe. Using the rediscovered language of antiquity they nevertheless spoke a new language.

## 4.2 Letters as an expression of convictions and belief

Letters are often invaluable autobiographic documents and they allow us a rare glimpse into the life of ordinary people, their convictions and beliefs. Such is for example the correspondence of prince Kurbsky with the Russian Tsar Ivan between 1564 and 1579, in which both delineate their political views. Kurbsky had fled from the Russian army to Lithuania in 1564 and attempted to justify this step in a letter to the Tsar. In it he pilloried the Tsar's regime as inhuman, senseless and inefficient. The Tsar answered in a long letter in which he tried to refute Kurbsky's attacks against his court and the Boyars with countless quotes from the Bible but also with rude curses and unrestrained anger.

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### **Biographical Sketch**

**Peter Horn** studied German and English at the University of the Witwatersrand. In 1971 he graduated Ph.D. from the University of the Witwatersrand with a thesis on "Rhythm and structure in the poetry of Paul Celan", and was offered the chair of German at the University of Cape Town in 1974. From 1987 to 1990 he was Dean of the Faculty of Arts, and from 1993-1994 Acting Deputy Vice-Chancellor of the University. He was president South African Association of German Studies (1989-1997), president of the Institute for Research into Austrian and International Literary Processes (Vienna) (2001-), on the executive committee of the Elias-Canetti-Gesellschaft, the National Executive of the Congress of South African Writers (COSAW) (1991 - 1992), the National Executive of the South African Writers' Association. Besides he was Honorary Vice President of the National Union of South African Students (1977-1981), Trustee of the South African Prisoners' Educational Trust Fund (1980-1985), and a member of the Interim Committee of the Unemployed Workers' Movement (1984/5). In 1974 he received the Pringle Prize of the South African English Academy for an essay to the concrete poetry, in 1992 he received the Noma Award for Publishing in Africa (Honourable Mention for *Poems 1964-1989*), and in 1993 the Alex La Guma/Bessie Head Award and in 2000 the Herman Charles Bosman Prize for the short story collection *My Voice is under Control now*. In 1994 the University of Cape Town granted him a Honorary Fellowship for life. Two of his volumes of poetry and numerous other publications by him were banned for possession during the Apartheid regime. His poems are anthologised in most major anthologies of South African poetry, and more than 100 have been published in journals. He has published numerous contributions to academic books, learned journals, and reviews and review articles.