

Original Contributions - Originalbeiträge

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Reconstructed multisensoriality. Reading *The Catcher in the Rye*

1. Introduction

In natural face-to-face interactions, verbal communication always occurs in association with some expressions of nonverbal behavior: facial expressions, eye behavior, body movements and postures, spatial behavior, automatic physiological and physio-chemical reactions, and vocal behavior. The multimodal aspects of communication play a crucial role in conveying meaning and achieving the desired effects. These aspects have multiple communicative functions that vary depending on the speaker's intentions, the relationship between the speaker and the listener, the nature of the message, and the context in which it is delivered.

When nonverbal behavior is verbalized and reconstructed in a written literary text, it becomes functional to the textual and narrative process because it serves as a signifier for the reader. A fictional character is never a unique, fixed, and unchanging character. Actually, there are two characters—one created by the author and the other recreated by the reader. Both the author and the reader engage creatively, conditioned by their own experience (personal conditioning) and environment (cultural conditioning). The creative poetics of the author tend to equip the fictional character with nonverbal attitudes that make it human, since “words are not words except when they are said by someone to someone” (Ortega y Gasset, 1957, p. 130).¹ The receptive reworking of the reader consists of decoding, amplifying, and implicitly evoking (Poyatos, 1983, pp. 289–293).

In our paper, we will refer to Salinger's novel *The Catcher in the Rye* (1958) to analyze the literary valence of representing the characters' multisensory communication, focusing on the core relationship between the explicit and the

¹ “Las palabras no son palabras, sino cuando son dichas por alguien a alguien”. And the scholar points out as follows: “...la realidad “palabra es inseparable de quien la dice, de a quién va dicha y la situación en que esto acontece... En esta situación son los seres humanos que hablan, con la precisa inflexión de voz con que pronuncian, con la cara que ponen mientras lo hacen, con los gestos concomitantes, liberados o retenidos, quienes propiamente dicen. Las llamadas palabras son sólo un componente de ese complejo de realidad” (Ortega y Gasset, 1957: 130) [the reality “word” is inseparable from the person who says it, to whom it is said and the situation in which it occurs.... In this situation, it is the human beings who speak, with the precise inflection of voice with which they pronounce, with the face they make as they do so, with concomitant gestures, free or restrained, who actually speak. The so-called words are only one component of this complex of reality].

implicit (evoked or to be inferred) parts in reconstructing the psychological depth of a literary character.

The paper is structured as follows. In Section 2, we will outline the notion of nonverbal communication and its features in narrative literary texts, and in Section 3, we will consider the main characteristics of nonverbal reproduction in Salinger's novel. In Section 4, explicit descriptions of nonverbal behavior will be examined. Sections 5 and 6 will address cases in which the multisensorial nature of the nonverbal is left to the autonomous reconstruction of the reader. In Section 7, we will focus on those descriptions or references to nonverbal signals that serve to reveal to the reader Holden's reconstruction of the world, and Section 8 concludes the paper.

2. Nonverbal communication and its features in narrative literary texts

According to a famous study by Mehrabian (1972), the total impact of a message breaks down as follows: 7% verbal, 38% vocal, and 55% body language. The percentage of nonverbal components reported by Birdsell (1970) is even higher (67%). From this perspective, it would be primarily the nonverbal components of communication that provide the first key to interpretation.

Conversely, other scholars claim that the nonverbal component of communication would not substantially affect the meaning but would only contribute to coloring it emotionally (for example Rimé (1984)). In this regard, the data resulting from empirical research on verbal–nonverbal perception analyzed by Rimé and Schiaratura (1991) demonstrate that nonverbal aspects are peripheral to speech in the decoding activity of the listener (cf. their “figure–ground model”) and that they can have detrimental effects on listeners' appreciation of the verbal material; on the other hand, “the global expressive style correlated with the display of a high rate of gesture” can help the speaker “to be positively perceived and appreciated for interpersonal qualities” (Rimé & Schiaratura, 1991, p. 276).

A holistic approach, which considers communication as a whole, interprets the relationship between the verbal and nonverbal components in terms of multimodality (see, for instance, Poggi & Magno Caldognetto, 1997; Magno Caldognetto *et al.*, 2004; Poggi, 2007; Bonacchi & Karpinski, 2014).² Bonacchi

² In particular, after identifying the modalities through which communication takes place (verbal, prosodic, gestural, and bodily), Poggi and Magno Caldognetto developed a model, called “score”, which takes into account all the signals produced in different modalities and allows them to be transcribed simultaneously. As they explain, “si parte da una metafora musicale: il corpo è un'orchestra, e il ricercatore può ricostruire la ‘partitura’ seguita dai vari strumenti nel produrre questo concerto comunicativo” [we start from a musical metaphor: the body is an orchestra, and the researcher can reconstruct the ‘score’ followed by the various instruments in producing this communicative concert] (Poggi & Magno Caldognetto, 1997, p. 162).

and Karpinski point out that modality does not mean exclusively “sign orders” but much more “communicative resources”:

In investigations into *nonverbal communication* the term “multimodality” emerged at the beginning of 1990 to designate the whole set of communicative modalities which cannot be reduced to verbal behavior, but interplay with it in the rising of meaning. The term “multimodality” designates a new, global way of considering human communicative resources as a whole, in which verbal language, gestures, facial expressions, voice, and movements are regarded as mutually interdependent. Modality does not mean exclusively “sign orders” but much more “communicative resources”. (Bonacchi & Karpinski, 2014, p. 2)

Notwithstanding differing points of view, all these positions agree on a dichotomous distinction between what is verbal and what is nonverbal in communication.

There are various definitions of nonverbal communication. According to Fernando Poyatos’ interdisciplinary approach, a broad definition of communication includes not only human signs but also artifactual and environmental signs. These “sensible sign systems contained in a culture” (Poyatos, 1983, p. XVI) encompass the acoustic, visual, olfactory, and tactile spheres. However, when referring to dialogues in literary texts, this interpretation of “communication” as “information exchange” may be too broad.

Narrow definitions of nonverbal communication generally include only body signs such as mimicry, kinesics and proxemics, glances and eye contact, involuntary reactions, and touching behavior. These signs are considered “‘meaningful’ in both natural and fictional communication” (Korte, 1997, pp. 3–4). However, such definitions do not account for all the other components inherent to nonverbal behavior and communication.

As far as the literary field is concerned, reproducing the complexity of communicative multimodality requires a certain accuracy (the nonverbal in literary texts is the result of an intersemiotic translation):

Written words are not just printed symbols on a piece of paper [...] They are, in first place, mentally (if not *sotto voce*) uttered by the reader, who must ascribe to them a series of linguistic, paralinguistic and kinesic elements—besides all the described, represented, evoked or between-lines situations which transcend the page and constitute an important part of the story. (Poyatos, 1983, p. 179)

A rather comprehensive perspective of analysis applied to the novel is Poyatos’ so-called “Basic Triple Structure,” namely language–paralanguage–kinesics (1983, 1992a *et alibi*).

Paralanguage consists primarily of vocal behavioremes: segmental or suprasegmental effects (non-distinctive voice qualities or modifiers), vocalizations, manners of speech, and silences with which one “affects” the synergistic–simultaneous or alternating–verbal message and/or kinesics behavior, rhythm, tempo, pauses, hesitations, any manner indicating the speaker’s emotion, both explicitly and implicitly, by referring to the speaker’s attitude or behavior towards the listener (cf. Poyatos, 1997; Poyatos, 2002a, vols. I, II; on this point, see also Abercrombie, 1972; Burger, 1976; Nord, 1997; Albano Leoni, 2002).

The kinesics components include, in summary, conscious and unconscious gestures, facial expressions, eye movements, manners, body movements and postures, of visual, visual–audible, tactile, and kinesthetic perception, which, whether isolated or in combination with words and/or vocal co-verbal behavioremes, possess intended or unintended communicative value (cf. Poyatos, 2002a, II, p. 187; Poyatos, 2002b, p. 101; Korte, 1997).

In novels, the perception of sensible nonverbal signs and their written reproduction can be a) transcribed through punctuation marks (exclamation marks, dots, dashes), italics, block letters, or b) described by linguistic signs (i.e., lexicalized or paraphrased)³, or c) evoked and left to personal interpretation (by both the character and the reader). It is important not to forget that, as Burke (1976, p. 5) points out, “in being a link between us and nonverbal, words are by the same token a screen separating us from the nonverbal”. For example, an obvious limitation of verbal language in reproducing the nonverbal is inherent in its linearity: nonverbal behavior has its own temporal dimension (synchronicity *vs.* asynchronicity) that the printed narrative text can only imperfectly render.⁴

³ Examples of lexicalization include single words, like *smile* or *nod*, or polylexical idioms like *shrug one’s shoulders*. Some lexicalized expressions relate to a precise image; others can be used for a wide range of nonverbal behavior and allow the reader to imagine various kinds of body language (cf. Korte, 1997, p. 94). Paraphrasing nonverbal language can be accomplished in the following ways: a) by describing the behavior and explaining its meaning (signifier and signified), which is the emblematic case of explicitness; b) by describing the behavior without explaining the meaning (signifier but not signified); c) by explaining the meaning without describing the behavior (signified but not signifier); this includes also references to nonverbal behavior that is implied through its function or effects; d) by providing a verbal expression always concurrent with the nonverbal one but not referred to all (cf. Poyatos, 1983).

⁴ When discussing the reconstruction of implicit meaning, it can be argued that the reader is engaged in a similar process to that of intersemiotic translation, such as the translation of written text into the interpretation of cinema actors or directors. The reconstruction of a scene in its three-dimensional form, independent of its communicative intent, varies among interpreters: an actor’s interpretation represents only one possible realization of the same content. The individual reader’s freedom to reconstruct meaning, influenced by their personal sensitivity and experience, may be irrevocably shaped by the film adaptation of a novel. Perhaps it is to preserve the reader’s autonomy that Salinger consistently rejected, even in the face of significant financial gain, all proposals to adapt his novel into a film, including those from Billy Wilder, Steven Spielberg, Jack Nicholson, and Tobey Maguire. For an overview of other fields of study concerned with the intersemiotic significance of nonverbal behavior beyond narrative literature, such as theater, cinema, and poetry, see Poyatos (1997). It is clearly a too broad field to be adequately addressed in this paper. We thank an anonymous referee for inviting us to consider this aspect.

3. Nonverbal reproduction and multisensoriality within *The Catcher in the Rye's* dialogues

We consider descriptions of nonverbal behavior explicit when the author directly refers to a nonverbal signal, whether paralinguistic or kinesic. Conversely, we consider descriptions implicit when the reader is led to reconstruct the multisensory nature of nonverbal language based on the description of the communicative effects it has produced, even in the absence of detailed information from the author about nonverbal signs.

The descriptive details reported by the narrator Holden (*The Catcher in the Rye* is a first-person novel) and useful for representing the characters are much more frequent than those reported here, as we have taken into account only the dialogic parts.

In our analysis of the dialogues, we identified 204 instances of nonverbal communication between characters. Of these, 169 were classified as explicit and 35 as implicit. Of the explicit descriptions we identified, 60 were strictly paralinguistic and 95 were kinesics: mimicry, gestures, and proxemics. In some cases, nonverbal language is not fully described, but the text refers to universal facial expressions or codified gestures, so we included these instances in our count of explicit references. We also counted separately 14 mentions of communicative silence.

We identified a significantly lower number of implicit descriptions of nonverbal communication, totaling 35 occurrences. Of these, only four can be attributable to the paralinguistic dimension and nine to the kinesic dimension. The remaining 22 occurrences fall more often into a grey area where the reader must reconstruct the scene's multisensory nature, as it is not possible to categorize them as either paralinguistic or kinesic. The abundance of descriptive details provided by the narrator Holden, instrumental in portraying the novel's characters, far exceeds the limited number of extracts we present here.

<i>The Catcher in the Rye</i>			
Nonverbal occurrences within dialogues			
	EXPLICIT		IMPLICIT
PARALINGUISTICS	60		4
KINESICS	95	Facial mimicry 23	9
		Gestures/proxemics 72	
SILENCE	14		
UNDETERMINED	9		22

4. Explicit descriptions of nonverbal behavior

Just over half of the total nonverbal occurrences (56%) concern kinesics. Within these occurrences, nonverbal body signals account for about 75% of the total, while the rest specifically concern facial mimicry. Among the first group, head movements are recurrent, nodding or negating:

(1) He started going into this nodding routine. You never saw anybody nod as much in your life as old Spencer did. You never knew if he was nodding a lot because he was thinking and all, or just because he was a nice old guy that didn't know his ass from his elbow. (CR, 2)

In Chapter 2, Mr. Spencer's habit of nodding (his "nodding routine") during his conversation with Holden is mentioned several times. The narrator sarcastically focuses on Mr. Spencer's body language rather than listening to the content of his words. Drawing attention to nonverbal communication while disregarding the utterances' meanings is a recurring theme in Holden's approach to communication throughout the novel. This is a defining characteristic of his cognitive processing. Mr. Spencer's nonverbal language serves as a symbol of the overall ineffectiveness of his teaching methods and educational practice.

Interestingly, Holden often finds himself making gestures that are the opposite of those made by Mr. Spencer, as if in a symbolic comparison:

(2) "And how do you think they'll take the news?" "Well . . . they'll be pretty irritated about it," I said. "They really will. This is about the fourth school I've gone to." I shook my head. I shake my head quite a lot. (CR, 2)

While Mr. Spencer nods, Holden, on the other end of the communication channel, shakes his head. This contrast in nonverbal communication could be seen as a sort of game, as Mr. Spencer notes a few lines later: "Life *is* a game, boy. Life is a game that one plays according to the rules." (CR, 2)

In 23 occurrences, the nonverbal is an explicit notation of facial signals, as in the following example:

(3a) "What the hell's the matter with you?" he kept saying, and his stupid face kept getting redder and redder. (CR, 6)

Stradlater's blushing indicates anger, as can be seen by examining a larger portion of the passage:

(3b) I tried to sock him (...) Anyway, the next thing I knew, I was on the goddam floor and he was sitting on my chest, with his face all red (...) "What the hell's the matter with you?" he kept saying, and his stupid face kept getting redder and redder. (CR, 6)

In examples (3a) and (3b), however, the color of Stradlater's face alone is not enough to reconstruct his feeling of anger and his facial expressions. Readers must rely on their own personal experience to reconstruct the scene in their own minds. This physical description of the color of Stradlater's face is a sort of *unicum* in the novel; Salinger typically prefers to provide information on facial expressions, focusing especially on the eyes.⁵

In fact, the description of the gaze within a dialogue occurs 16 times in the novel and represents the majority (70%) of explicit notations on mimicry. Almost always (14 occurrences out of 16), the gaze precedes the verbal expression:

(4) I gave him this very cold stare, like he'd insulted the hell out of me, and asked him, "Do I look like I'm under twenty-one?" (CR, 9)

In example (4), Holden wants to convince the waiter that he is old enough to order alcohol. As can be seen, Salinger prefers to describe the communicative intention and interpretation of the nonverbal (Holden's cold and resentful gaze) rather than its physical description. In most cases, the interlocutor's gaze somehow anticipates a reproach or disapproval before it is verbally expressed:

(5) He put my goddam paper down then and looked at me like he'd just beaten hell out of me in ping-pong or something. (...) "Do you blame me for flunking you, boy?" he said. (CR, 2)

Professor Spencer scolds Holden for being expelled from the Institute. The old teacher's gazes, mimicry ("He started getting serious as hell"), and gestures convey his intention to make the boy reflect on his own condition. Professor Spencer's body language reveals his sincere concern for Holden's future. However, Holden, caught up in his own sarcasm, fails to fully appreciate the old teacher's intentions. Holden's sarcasm, as mentioned above, is focused on the nonverbal signals that the old professor sends, undermining his authority, even in the eyes of the reader:

(6) Then all of a sudden old Spencer looked like he had something very good, something sharp as a tack, to say to me. He sat up more in his chair and sort of moved around. It was a false alarm, though. (CR, 2)

5. Implicit nonverbal behavior and the caption of the nonverbal

In some cases (35), the multisensory nature of the nonverbal is left to the autonomous reconstruction of the reader:

(7) "You're sweet," she said. But you could tell she wanted me to change the damn subject. (CR, 17)

⁵ "Eye gestures", cf. Poyatos (2017: 362ff.).

Sally, Holden's friend, shows discomfort during their conversation. Despite this, she responds to him in a courteous manner. Holden picks up on Sally's impatience and notes that, in antithesis (*but*) to her polite verbal responses, she would have preferred to change the subject. Holden's deduction is necessarily derived from reading the nonverbal (facial expression? tone? posture?), but Salinger does not provide any indication in this regard. The reconstruction of the three-dimensionality of communication—without the nonverbal, Holden's *a parte* would not make sense—is entrusted to the personal sensitivity of the reader. The same can be said of the following case:

(8) "You could tell he was trying to concentrate and all." (CR, 24)

Holden reads from implicit nonverbal signals that Mr. Antolini (another teacher) is trying to concentrate on a very serious conversation. Even in this case, the nature of these signals is not given, and Holden addresses the readers with a sort of *a parte* (*you could tell*), thereby forcing them to imagine a multisensory situation, although without providing explicit indicators. The dialogue with Mr. Antolini is in some way analogous to the dialogue with Mr. Spencer—both Holden's interlocutors are teachers, both are engaged in giving him advice, and both are objects of his sarcasm, thus derailing their communicative intentions. Finally, even in the dialogue with Spencer, Holden addresses the reader in the same terms and with the same function:

(9) "I'd like to put some sense in that head of yours, boy. I'm trying to help you. I'm trying to help you, if I can." He really was, too. You could see that. (CR, 2)

Holden states that Spencer is visibly (*you could see that*) trying to help Holden. This note prompts the reader to reconstruct the complexity of old Spencer's nonverbal language, a zealous teacher sincerely concerned for the boy. The locution "you could..." appears frequently throughout the novel, almost a fixed formula that introduces the interpretation of implicit nonverbal language:

(10) "Eddie Birdsell? From Princeton?" I said. You could tell she was running the name over in her mind and all. (CR, 9)

In example (10), the dialogue is on the phone: probably a pause in the conversation, together with the tone of voice (but neither of these two notes is described), makes Holden (and consequently the reader) think that Miss Faith Cavendish is wracking her brain to associate a face with the name Eddie Birdsell. At this moment, readers autonomously reconstruct in their own minds the image of a girl concentrating on trying to remember—the same mental operation that the character Holden is performing. This is a curious case of nonverbal meta-description: The reader reconstructs the physical image that the same character

tries to reconstruct through the paralinguistic signals received from the other end of the phone. We will revisit the topic of imagining nonverbal language later.

Implicit nonverbal signals need, from a narrative point of view, an interpretation by the narrator, as in examples (7), (8), (9), and (10). However, this interpretation also appears, in some cases, even in the presence of an explicit nonverbal signal (italics in the original):

(11) Holden: “How’ve you been, Mrs. Spencer?”

(...) Mrs. Spencer: “How have *you* been?”

The way she asked me, I knew right away old Spencer’d told her I’d been kicked out.

The author’s italics on “*you*” is a metaphonological reference to the intonation of the elderly lady, from whose response Holden infers that she is aware of his expulsion from school. *The way she asked me* not only refers to the metaphonological aspect, but, naturally, by calling into play the multidimensionality of communication, it induces in the reader a further interpretation, this time free, of the facial mimicry of Holden’s interlocutor. In this case, the nonverbal caption is useful for Salinger to convey to the reader the complexity of the inferences, as the meaning of Mrs. Spencer’s seemingly innocent question, “How have *you* been?” differs from its literal interpretation. It is important to note that what matters is not whether the lady knows that Holden has been expelled but rather that the boy realizes at that moment that she is aware of it. This awareness heightens Holden’s discomfort and at the same time prepares the reader to intuit and empathize with his state of mind.

In conversations with his little sister Phoebe, nonverbal communication usually elicits significant emotional reactions in Holden. These reactions demonstrate the unique bond between the two siblings, characterized by an almost role-reversal dynamic in which it is the younger sister who is concerned for her older brother:

(12) Then all of a sudden, she said, “Oh, why did you *do* it?” She meant why did I get the ax again. It made me sort of sad, the way she said it.
(CR, 22)

In example (12), the nonverbal signals are indefinite, although *the way she said it* clearly refers to the nonverbal. For Holden, the disappointment on his sister’s face and in her voice is the harshest reproach, much more effective than the words of the adults who interact with him.

In instances of insincere or hypocritical communication, nonverbal cues naturally prevail. Even in these cases, Salinger provides a caption, as in the following (13), which contains a description of Holden’s interpretation of the other’s communicative intentions:

(13) "I was just leaving," I told her. "I have to meet somebody." You could tell she was just trying to get in good with me. So that I'd tell old D.B. about it. (CR, 12)

The manner in which "old" Lillian, a friend of Holden's older brother, converses seems contrived. Her true intention is to make a good impression on Holden so that he will relay this to his brother. Holden's deduction alludes to the implicit presence of nonverbal cues and represents his interpretation of them. At the same time, it conveys his criticism of his interlocutor. We could therefore say that the choice to make the caption of the nonverbal explicit, which is not inherently linked to the presence of explicit or implicit nonverbal communication but rather to narrative choices, serves to underscore the true intent of communication when it cannot be directly inferred or is even contradictory to verbal communication.

6. Communicative silences

In the 14 occurrences of communicative silences in the dialogues of *The Catcher in the Rye*, two types are described. The first is illustrated by significant speakers' pauses that divide one speech into two parts, and in the second, silence is used as a substitute for a verbal response. In the latter case, silence can mean indifference or anger, or it can be used to create expectation, as in the following example in which Holden explicitly states his intention:

(14) "I didn't answer him right away. Suspense is good for some bastards like Stradlater." (CR, 4)

Pauses in the conversation, on the other hand, take on great narrative intensity in the speeches that adults make to Holden. In Chapter 24, Mr. Antolini is engaged in an important motivational speech in an attempt to capture the protagonist's attention. However, his speech is continuously interrupted by numerous silent pauses accompanied by other nonverbal signals related to proxemics.

It is late at night, and Holden is too tired to hold a conversation, but Mr. Antolini does not realize it, enflamed ("Boy, he was really hot") by the educational mission he feels invested in. With his usual sarcasm, Holden, who is not in the mood to endure a sermon, interprets Mr. Antolini's silences as clumsy and ineffective attempt to concentrate:

(15) Mr. Antolini didn't say anything for a while (...) You could tell he was thinking (...)
He started concentrating again (...)

He didn't say anything again for quite a while. I don't know if you've ever done it, but it's sort of of hard to sit around waiting for somebody to say something when they're thinking and all. It really is. I kept trying not to yawn. (...) (CR, 24)

Holden's notation reveals his criticism of Mr. Antolini's majestic sermon, whose very intent is belittled. Overcome by boredom and fatigue, Holden fails to suppress a yawn at the least (or most) opportune moment—during the climactic conclusion of Mr. Antolini's speech:

(16) "You'll begin to know your true measurements and dress your mind accordingly."
Then, all of a sudden, I yawned. (*CR*, 24)

7. The character Holden and his interpretation of the nonverbal

The many descriptions or references to nonverbal signals serve to clarify Holden's worldview. Through his personal interpretation of nonverbal language, Holden reconstructs the thoughts, intentions, and intellectual abilities of those around him. His hypersensitivity to nonverbal cues, while indicative of a sharp mind, is out of control, a sort of weapon that Holden points toward himself, subjecting every social relationship—except his relationship with Phoebe—to criticism and mistrust.

Holden's lack of self-esteem folds into a cynical and demeaning view of the world around him, in which he clings to certain points of reference to anchor himself—the idealization of Allie, his dead brother; the memory of his friend Jane Gallagher, whom he is in love with; his little sister Phoebe, who convinces him not to run away from home; and the looming figure of his older brother, D.B., who appears at the beginning and the end of the novel, enclosing it like a frame. The great absentees are his parents, whom Holden declares from the outset that he will not talk about.⁶

Holden's basic insecurity and tendency to justify himself identify the character, who gradually leads the reader through a complex game of analysis of what is not explicitly said by his interlocutors. If the novel's incipit is an open parody of Dickens' *David Copperfield*,⁷ Holden also shares similarities with the character Zeno Cosini (cf. Svevo, *La coscienza di Zeno*), who is likewise engaged in a therapeutic autobiography ordered by a psychoanalyst—and it is evident that Svevo himself retraces, for differentiation, the model of Dickens' *ab ovo* autobiography.⁸

⁶ "My parents would have about two hemorrhages apiece if I told anything pretty personal about them. They're quite touchy about anything like that, especially my father" (*CR*, 1).

⁷ "I was born at Blunderstone, in Suffolk, or 'there by', as they say in Scotland. I was a posthumous child. My father's eyes had closed upon the light of this world six months, when mine opened on it..." (C. Dickens, *David Copperfield*, Ch. 1) is openly Salinger's model: "If you really want to hear about it, the first thing you'll probably want to know is where I was born, and what my lousy childhood was like, and how my parents were occupied and all before they had me, and all that David Copperfield kind of crap" (*CR*, 1).

⁸ "Povero bambino! Altro che ricordare la mia infanzia!" (Svevo, 2021, Ch. 2).

While it is true that the reader learns to know Holden through his way of interpreting the world, it is equally true that the reader simultaneously finds himself having to judge Holden's reliability. What is the truth about Holden's reconstructions? What happened at Mr. Antolini's house, the teacher who had just performed such a generous monologue?

In Chapter 24, Holden, who was sleeping at his teacher's house, wakes up with a start in the middle of the night: Professor Antolini has placed a hand on his head and is caressing him. Holden is deeply embarrassed and uncomfortable. He unequivocally regards Mr. Antolini's behavior as entirely inappropriate. Despite the teacher's apparent nonchalance, Holden, the sole witness to the event, believes that Mr. Antolini's body language reveals his true intentions:

(17) "You have to go *where*?" Mr. Antolini said. He was trying to act very goddam casual and cool and all, but he wasn't any too goddam cool. Take my word. (CR, 24)

The nonverbal signals are obscured to the reader and entrusted to Holden's interpretation (*take my word*), according to which Antolini's nonchalance is a pose. Should we trust Holden's interpretation? Salinger, in the same scene, makes explicit the nonverbal signals concerning Holden:

(18) Was I nervous! I started putting on my damn pants in the dark. I could hardly get them on I was so damn nervous (...)
I was shaking like a madman. I was sweating, too. (CR, 24)

Through Holden's agitated movements, trembling and sweating, the reader can deduce that his state of agitation is indeed real. Regardless of Mr. Antolini's intentions, which remain unknown, the effects of his actions lead us to conclude that his gesture was, at the very least, inappropriate.

Because readers can clearly read Holden's nonverbal cues, they are inclined to believe the narrator's account. On the other hand, Mr. Antolini's apparent calm appears disingenuous—he sits in an armchair, holding a glass, and intently watches Holden through the darkness. Mr. Antolini's body language takes on a sinister meaning, both for what is visible and for what Holden does not see but can imagine as a consequence of what he sees. In fact, Holden sees the teacher's hand holding the glass in the darkness but cannot clearly distinguish his face, yet he senses his gaze, or rather, feels his gaze in the dark:

(19) It was dark and all, and I couldn't see him so hot, but I knew he was watching me, all right. (CR, 24)

Salinger, through the narrator Holden, often requires his readers to use their imagination to interpret nonverbal cues that are not directly visible but can be perceived. By the end of the novel, experienced readers can reconstruct, through

Holden's imagination, what even the character cannot or does not see but intuitively senses.

The entire situation with Mr. Antolini, completely unexpected, is a scene that relies heavily on the mutual reading of body language by the two characters, a reading that greatly reduces the role of verbal communication in the process of constructing meaning.

Holden effectively utters non-contextual sentences ("I am gonna start reading some good books. I really am") to break the embarrassing silence, and then says to himself: "I mean, you had to say something. It was very embarrassing" (CR, 24). Mr. Antolini, for his part, pretends not to understand Holden's reaction, and his sentences serve to disqualify his behavior without actually arguing anything: "Don't be ridiculous, Holden" (CR, 24), and "You're a very, very strange boy" (CR, 24), a phrase that Antolini repeats several times. Being *ridiculous* and *strange* represents a criticism exercised by Mr. Antolini to distance himself from the interpretation that Holden has assigned to his gestures. However, Holden's comment for the benefit of the reader, "Strange, my ass" (CR, 24), in turn, denies Mr. Antolini's sincerity.

Complicating the reader's task of decoding the character Holden and understanding when there is or is not credibility, however, is the end of the novel, which resumes the initial frame and from which it emerges, this time more clearly, that Holden is, while writing, a patient in a mental health institution.

Apart from these considerations, what emerges from Salinger's novel is that the analysis of Holden's reading and interpretation of nonverbal communication, which continuously impacts the boy's thoughts and actions, is an indispensable path to reconstructing the psychological depth of the character.

8. Conclusion

In this paper, after a short introduction to the notion of nonverbal communication and its features in narrative fiction texts, we considered the main characteristics of nonverbal reproduction and its functions in Salinger's novel *The Catcher in the Rye*. The few examples adduced should be sufficient to validate how multimodal/multisensorial communication is multifarious and multifaceted and how its recurrence in literary narrative texts is functional to the narrative process.

The favorite playground for nonverbal language is definitely in natural face-to-face conversation, or in any case, in situations that favor an interaction *in praesentia*. However, even in written text, nonverbal communication requires an interaction between author and reader, this time *in absentia*. Indeed, the creative poetics of the author equip the fictional characters with nonverbal attitudes, and this is based on their physical and/or intellectual multisensory perception and

their capacity for decoding and translating such experiences. At the other end, the receptive work for its readers consists of decoding, amplifying, and implicitly evoking based on their personal and cultural conditionings and mood (Poyatos, 1983, pp. 289–293).

The Catcher in the Rye is a first-person novel; therefore, it provides an excellent example of what we have called descriptions of multimodal/multisensory communication. The interpretation of all the nonverbal signals (used here as an “umbrella term”) that Holden carries out continuously, even involving the reader’s judgment, and the core relationship between the explicit and the evoked or to be inferred parts have turned out to be an indispensable means to reconstruct the psychological depth of the character in the novel.

Summary

In natural face-to-face interactions, verbal communication always occurs in association with expressions of nonverbal behavior. The functional contribution of these multimodal aspects to the meaning of the message and to its effects fulfils multiple communicative functions that differ according primarily to the speaker’s intentions, to the interpersonal relations between the speaker and the addressee, to the nature of the message, and to the context.

When nonverbal behavior is reproduced in a written literary text, it becomes functional to the textual and narrative process as it serves as a signifier for the reader. A fictional character is never fixed and unchanging. Through writing, each author encourages the explicit or implicit evocation of a multisensory world, which readers decode and reconstruct, inevitably conditioned by their cognitive and cultural environment.

In this paper, we refer to Salinger’s famous novel *The Catcher in the Rye* to analyze the literary valence of representing the characters’ multisensory communication, focusing on the core relationship between the explicit and the implicit parts in reconstructing the psychological depth of a literary character.

Keywords: multimodal communication, multisensoriality, nonverbal behavior in literature (novels), character psychology.

Zusammenfassung

In natürlichen Interaktionen von Angesicht zu Angesicht findet die verbale Kommunikation immer in Verbindung mit einigen nonverbalen Verhaltensweisen statt. Der funktionale Beitrag dieser multimodalen Aspekte zur Bedeutung der Mitteilung und zu ihren Wirkungen erfüllt vielfältige kommunikative Funktionen, die in erster Linie von den Absichten des Sprechers, den zwischenmenschlichen Beziehungen zwischen Sprecher und Adressat, der Art der Mitteilung und dem Kontext abhängen.

Wenn das nonverbale Verhalten in einem geschriebenen literarischen Text wiedergegeben wird, erweist es sich als funktional für den Text- und Erzählprozess, da es als Signifikant für den Leser dient. Eine literarische Figur ist niemals ein fester und unveränderlicher Charakter. Durch das Schreiben fördert jeder Autor die explizite oder implizite Evokation einer multisensorischen Welt, die der Leser entschlüsselt und rekonstruiert, was zwangsläufig durch sein kognitives und kulturelles Umfeld bedingt ist.

In diesem Beitrag beziehen wir uns auf Salingers berühmten Roman *Der Fänger im Roggen*, um die literarische Wertigkeit der Darstellung der multisensorischen Kommunikation der Figuren zu analysieren, wobei wir uns auf die Kernbeziehung zwischen den expliziten und den evozierten oder hergeleiteten Teilen bei der Rekonstruktion der psychologischen Tiefe einer literarischen Figur konzentrieren.

Schlüsselwörter: Multimodale Kommunikation, Multisensorik, nonverbales Verhalten in der Literatur, Charakterpsychologie.

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