

Paralinguism in the Theatres and the International Theatre Festivals

with the special review on the Macedonian theatre paralinguism

Sasho Ognenovski

Bitola, R. Macedonia

Abstract

The paralingual structure of the theatrical concepts, particularly those of the postmodernist trends, successfully break the linguistic barriers in the communication of the theatrical play - spectator - recipient in the art of theatre. I would say that the international theatre festivals who are treated as such in their programs, in their own way, manage to maintain complete communication between the artistic forms on several culture structures taking into account that paralinguistic which is particularly present in this form of performances is in close relation to the roots of the national identity of a nation. Transfused into artistic work through the international festivals this form of artistic performance opens a complex stream of communications which imply to dialogue whose finite consequence is the similarity in the manner of thinking and living of different civilizations, and of course, the polemical parts which are not excluded.

Keywords: paralingual communication, linguistic barriers, international theatre festivals, theatrical paralinguistics, national identity.

Meandering from one theorist to another and from one scientist to another while analyzing the theory of paralinguistics defined by Georg L. Trager as: "all voice cues that do not have real language structure", I have come to the conclusion that theatrical paralinguistics, unlike other forms of life we encounter, have diametrically opposing poetics, especially the ones referring to the postmodern trends of theatrical art.

But, let us start from the beginning.

I Paralinguistics

The condensation of the study and research of this distinct way of communication of the world renowned scientists is that paralinguistics is the study of the smallest fragments of speech (voice tones) and the facultative variants which support linguistic communication and appear as conventional elements which can be systematized (or in some manner can be ranked as "natural" or "motivated").

Trager divides paralinguistics into:

- a. Types of voices that reveal the gender, age, emotional state, and body positioning in space. In one word it reveals the internal and external state. Ostwald goes even further researching medical semiotics and analyzing voice modalities depending on a variety of biological factors under given conditions and specific course of action.
- b. Paralanguage which contains:
 1. Vocal features: pitch, control of mouth and vocal cords motion, heavy or easy inhaling and exhaling, articulation control, tempo and etc;
 2. Vocalizations which can be divided into:
 - vocal characterize for e.g. laughter (silent or reserved) crying, whining, weeping, whisper, scream, silent cry, mumbling, mourning, groaning, howling, belching, yawning, and so on).

- vocal qualifiers (intensity and altitude of voice);

- Vocal word - a complexity of sounds and phonetic emissions which follow. They are: sighs in the form of coughs, "hmm" as a commentary or cry and so on

Nonverbal communication or "body language" known as kinesics in paralinguistics is also covered here. It is the study of deciphering gestures, decoding their physical makeup and hidden meanings by which the person speaking gives to their message emotional color in addition to the code that has to be conveyed to the recipient. Research in this field of paralinguistics at first considered that "the language of gestures was a predecessor of articulated language". Berdwhistle managed to negate this hypothesis claiming that the system of body movement notation is at large precise and independent. Namely, this means that even though our grandfathers had to wave with their hands and legs to understand each other before articulating what they would have written down, that this doesn't mean that when they took a pen in their hands they stopped moving (and all this to mean more than a word). Mr Lee Barr agrees with me on this. His profound kinetic research resulted in a long list of systematized gestures:

- the mute language of gestures in the monasteries,
- ceremonial hand movement of Hindu and Buddhist priests,
- styled gestures in the art of painting,
- old civilizations till the present day,
- as well as the theatrical gesticulation where, unfortunately, attention was given only to the eastern civilizations.

The transcription of the gesture structure as a method of communication in all forms of art is given in theories of Brem and Metz whose research scope is from ethnosemiology to pathological paralingual forms.

II Theatrical paralinguistics

Peter Brown, one of the greatest theorists and researchers of theatre, in his masterpiece *The Empty Space* states that "The words in the play are the final product that starts as an impulse. This process happens in the playwright and is repeated in the actor" (*The Empty Space*, pg. 12). Elia Kazan, another great name in the art of theatre – defines his studies of the theatre in one sentence written over the whole wall in *Astor Studio* where the greatest stars of film and theatre obtained their education. That sentence is *No acting, please*. That means that the theatre took the paralingual form of man, transcended it in a character of a play and passed it back to the ordinary man giving him the role of an observer.

Constantine Stanislavski Sergeevich, the peer of theatre theorists of the 20th century divides the actor's play into 3 components:

- a. exterior action
- b. nuncupative action
- c. interior action

Their limited structure codifies a character of a play that penetrates into the observer's mind as presented by the producer. The observer then adorns that structure and creates his own semantic projection, which in most cases is known as an impression.

Of course, I would not oppose to any linguistic and paralinguistic structures of an actor's play from this classification, but would make a more essential systematization that opens several questions such as:

- a. Paralinguistics that follow the lingual code and supports it;
- b. Paralinguistics that oppose the lingual code.

Unfortunately, the first way of thinking includes a large part of theatre art. I would call it passive paralinguistics to which I'd add inanimate kinesics. For many years, with some exemptions, the actors acted out what was written. What does this mean?

This means that all of the gestures that were systematized perfectly by Lee Bar are transferred on the stage more or less transcribed and only uphold to the lingual code. The same applies to paralanguage. Every cry and whisper, every whimper and mumble emanate out of life and as such are tailored into the concept of a theatre performance. And what happens. This inanimate kinesics with no variants, clutched in the words and works of the eminent authors such as Sofokles, Euripid, Molière, Shakespeare, De Vega and others demonstrate identical repetitions to the audience. They do not contemplate paralinguistics whose employment of these three segments of actor's play reveal other more absorbing verticals in the immortal Lear, Tartuffe, Oedipus, etc.

The other way of thinking uncovers other variants, which I presume several centuries were necessary to pass by.

Somewhere towards the middle of this century the theatre that Brook refers to as "Dead Theatre" begins to live a different life. Namely, the kinesics structures in the producer's concepts simply deny conforming to the textual component. Thus gestures appear that don't correspond to the characters that we were used to watching as they were in the past. That means that Tartuffe possesses a hypocrisy, which is easily recognized but by involving diametrically different paralingual structures the audience manages to decode his internal state of being. This now becomes the character mannerism, which offers opportunity for a more contemporary analysis of that problem. Hamlet as well is not a melancholic character who doesn't know what to do with himself when he finds out about the tragedy plotted by his closest family. If we impregnate an opposite paralingual structure in such a character and replace whispers with cries and indignant receptive gestures with dynamic and raging ones we get a Hamlet who has clearly understood his destiny. Everything that happens subsequent to this is an ingenious plan on his behalf. Lingual structure offers an excellent foundation for this.

Of course, all this opens opportunities for new research with the emergence of the International Theatre Festivals where the paralingual structure of the performances corresponds with the audience that comes from a diversified language domain.

The pinnacle of Peter Brook's research in this field was the performance of The Great Epic of India *The Mahabharata* in which actors from all over the world took part talking in their own languages where the kinesics and paralanguage structures were almost identical. There were many people of different nationalities in the audience at the opening night of the performance *Avignon*. Nevertheless, the performance was faultless due to that successful hybrid of paralanguage and kinesics forms, which on the other hand are culturally similar to each other.

III Macedonian theatre paralinguistics

Macedonian theatre paralinguistics is chiefly an arrangement of paralanguage forms that can be divided into two emotionally colored directions:

- a. Jubilance - where the laughter and the jolly cries of the Macedonian folk dances called *ora* are main indicators. More complex schemas are wedding, baptism, birth, love, sex, and etc even though they were taboos for many years (because of 5 century of Turk slavery, a wide veil of shame is put on the emotional forms of theatre art, which is especially present in play propositions). These structures of the international theatre festivals unveiled a unique mode of thought, a culture that opens a wide field for research.
- b. Grief - where the scream, the crying and the weeping are general indicators for complex schemas which indicate death, funeral, separation and etc.

These two directions are interrelated creating tragic plots similar to the antique ones. We find themes of separation after the first wedding night where the sweet agonies of the sexual act are substituted with the cries of agony in war, themes which Macedonia may be commended about.

International theatre festivals have opened the doors for the less recognized cultures, as is the Macedonian.

The performance *Just Like That Under The Clouds* held at the Cultural Center *Petite Station* of Skopje and structured only of paralingual forms was widely accepted by many international festivals Cividale" (Italy), Bonn (Germany), Orxys (Denmark), Young Open Theatre - Skopje (Macedonia). That performance managed to connect paralinguistics with the entity of the Macedonian nation, its specific culture and literature and with the nation's centuries of struggle for national independence. Paralanguage and kinesics t successfully intertwined managed to form many strange situations and many interesting forms.

The modern Macedonian playwright Goran Stefanovski, in his play *Black Hole* performed by the National Theatre of Bitola, has translated the paralingual parts in paralingual dividends in his play director concept. Thus the crisis of identity of the Macedonian modern society, as the topic of his play, received a universal context with its participation at the Theatre fair in Ljubljana in 1989 and the International Festival *Eurokaz* in Zagreb in 1988.

One of the greatest successes of the Macedonian theatre in this field is the performance *Underground Republic* which was created on paralingual and kinesics concepts only. Through movements, cries, whispers this play presented the diversions of the young Macedonian intellectuals in Thessaloniki. The world mediums called them *The Assassins from Thessaloniki*. Some of the International theatre festivals were this play was shown gave the audience of various cultures the opportunity to learn about the one the most interesting historical events from the beginning of this century. This was confirmed by the theatre critiques in the printed mediums, which succeeded to decode this performance and to break into its semantic structure.

In the end, discussing about theatre paralinguistics, I would like to summarize that the foundation of every theatre performance is its nonverbal part. That means that in the movements, gestures, cries and whispers there are hidden a bundle of concepts and interpretations in the dramatic models proven through centuries and in the new cultural trends, too, which, I suppose, with this form of art will connect cultures which were not aware one of each other.

Sasho Ognenovski
Car Samoil st.,No. 126
97000 Bitola,FYR Macedonia
e-mail:sogne@soros.org.mk
sasoo@freemail.org.mk

Intercultural Communication, ISSN 1404-1634, 1999, August, issue 1.

Editor: Prof. Jens Allwood

URL: <http://www.immi.se/intercultural/>.