

NONVERBAL COMMUNICATION AND CUES IN ARMENIAN-AMERICAN LITERARY DISCOURSE

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Presentation Outline

- **Introduction to the research and why it matters**
- **Literature Review**
- **Research Questions and Methodology**
- **Research Findings and Analysis**
- **Limitations and Avenues for Future Research**
- **Works Cited**

Armenian-American Literature

Literature is universal means of communication

Armenian-American literature encompasses multiple identities as Diaspora Literature

The authors' personal and cultural experiences find their way into their literary works

Post-genocide pain and trauma as prevailing themes of Armenian-American literary discourse

Communication and Nonverbal Communication

Understanding communication is essential to successful management of interactions

Body and facial expressions have massive role in transferring information, feelings and attitudes

Nonverbal communication has significant role in understanding ethnic identity

Nonverbal cues incorporated in literary texts are seemingly minor yet vital features

Literature Review

- Avakian A. (1977). *The Armenians in America*. Minneapolis: Learner Publications Company.
- Bedrosian M. (1991). *The Magical Pine Ring: Culture and the Imagination in Armenian-American Literature*. Detroit: Wayne State University Press.
- Ekman P. (1978). *Facial Expression*. In A. W. Siegman & Feldstein (eds.), *Nonverbal Behavior and Communication*. Hillsdale, NJ, Erlbaum.
- Hall, J. A., & Knapp, M. L. (2013). *Nonverbal Communication*. Berlin: De Gruyter Mouton.
- Kherdian, D. (2008) *Forgotten Bread: First-Generation Armenian American Writers*. Berkeley, CA: Heyday Books.
- Mekhitarian K. 1956. *A Quarter Century of Armenian Literature Abroad*.
- Morris D. (1977). *Manwatching: A Field Guide to Human Behavior*. New York, Harry N. Adams.

Research Questions and Methodology

- Literature as an essential form of communication has components of nonverbal communication: as in real one-on-one communication, in literature as well nonverbal cues can serve as a source of more honest and strong messages
- Nonverbal cues strengthen the messages, add up to the plot, and have a significant role in transmitting characters' emotional experiences

The research

- highlights the essence of nonverbal communication in fully decoding messages
- explores what sense nonverbal cues give to the reader in addition to the literary techniques used by the author

One fiction piece and a memoir were chosen for the analysis:

- Balakian, P. (1997). *Black Dog of Fate*. Basic Books.
- Aharonian, M. (2001). *Three Apples Fell from Heaven*. New York: Riverhead books.

Choice:

- the most critically respected writers in Armenian-American literary discourse
- the chosen samples have not been widely analyzed especially from communication theory aspects
- the main analysis method was close reading of the texts

Research Findings and Analysis

The Armenian Diaspora: Cultural Identity and Armenian-American Literature

- Armenian-American or Diaspora literature brings unique storylines into literature where feelings of exile, loss, diffusion, pain and alienation are registered. Armenian writers express their feelings of integration to a “new culture” in their works. Their constant self-awareness affected their literary writings and contributed to the development of holocaust literature (Bedrosian, 1991).
- Armenian literature developed through books and the press. The image of Armenians in America is blurry. This is because of the blurred and confused identity issues that people in the Diaspora were facing. Armenians have achieved considerable recognition for accomplishments in various fields. Immigrant literature brought unique themes connected with homeland and collective and individual identity to world literature (Oshagan, 1981).
- Literature produced in Diaspora as a rule utilizes eyewitnesses or archival documents as the dominant source material of their stories (Mekhitarain, 1956).
- The catastrophe of life and death following the Armenian Genocide outlines the Armenian American identity. Shared trauma assures some kind of unity in the community and stops the loss of cultural identity (Abrahamian, 2006).
- “Once diasporas are established, they become intimately shaped by the host country’s dominant ideology, political system, socio-economic structure, cultural traditions and domestic foreign policies” (Aghanian, 2007).

Research Findings and Analysis

Parenthood and Armenian Genocide

- Many parents who survive wars are found to be emotionally inaccessible to their children's sensitive needs, probably because of the link between problems of nurturance and their incapability to grieve their death. Anxious with the issue of life and death, parents often suffer from emotional state of self-hatred and insignificance. Studies have observed at communication styles within families of survivors (Bar-on & Chaitin, 2001).
- Two main patterns were identified in the behavior of survivor-parents. Some survivor-parents either extremely exposed their children to their horror stories, or otherwise, were silent about their emotions and experiences, through "guilt-inducing, non-verbal and indirect styles of communication with their children" (Bar-on & Chaitin, 2001).
- It is not a coincidence that many American-Armenian writers write their literature based on their survivor-parents' personal memories or based on diaries or documents of their acquaintances. Growing up in Diaspora Armenian Americans are constantly exposed to the problem of Armenian Genocide.

Research Findings and Analysis

Themes of Pain of Loss, Exile, Alienation Represented through Literary Devices and Nonverbal Cues in Armenian-American Literature

Writing was a key tool for the victims to record crime and preserve the history. Writing of such autobiographies and memoirs particularly developed in the 1920s – 1930s (Cheterian, 2015)

Few quotes that showcase the essence of nonverbals (from *Three Apples Fell from Heaven* by Micheline Aharonian Marcom):

- “She walks in the direction of the well now...She does not look to it or breathe more quickly into the late morning air which is no longer still but bustling...She speaks underneath her breath, pushes the words to the packed and uneven stones in front of her booted feet. She stares at the ground and at the tips of her shoes as they leave no dusty impressions. She whispers...”
- “Anaguil enters the kitchen quietly and remembers that today they will go to the hamam.”
- “Anaguil looks and thinks, she bites at the hard edges of her finger.”
- “For Anaguil it is impossible to notice how her shoulders stiffen and her arms lock during the hours they spend there”
- “Anaguil nods her head.”
- “Hagob gazes at his feet as he walks and stumbles when the man to his left or right jerks him.”

As Paul Ekman discusses in his book *Facial Expressions* (1978), people often give the appearance of having no feelings to hide their true feelings. Ekman categorized these kind of nonverbal cues as *neutralization*. Aharonian incorporated silence and “quietness” in the text as form to express *neutralization*. As Morris discusses in *Field Guide to Human Behavior* (1977) “manwatching” has great importance in decoded body messages which tend to give out truthful information about people’s intentions. In the text Aharonian used gazing and staring for enriching character’s feelings.

Research Findings and Analysis

Themes of Pain of Loss, Exile, Alienation Represented through Literary Devices and Nonverbal Cues in Armenian-American Literature

Few quotes that showcase the essence of nonverbals (from *Black Dog of Fate* by Peter Balakian):

- “My grandmother walks ahead of my aunt...she is dressed navy or beige...My aunts are dressed in white or pale-blue linen suits. Silk blouses, silk scarves. They wear gold earrings, pearls.”
- “Every day our extended family would sit around dining room...and my grandmother quietly watching.” “My grandmother’s big brown eyes keep watching me intently.”
- “My grandmother nodded at me as if to confirm my comprehension then there was silence.”
- “My grandmother looked around the kitchen and then looked me square in the eyes, as if she was about to attack a melon with her hands to see if it was ripe.”
- “On these walks my grandmother liked silence, but when she talked, she talked about stock markets or Yankees.”

Morris in *Manwatching* (2012) discusses dressing and colors as part of nonverbal communications. In *Black Dog of Fate* very often the reader gets description of dressing and colors which correspond to the character’s feelings and state. Ares in *World without Words* (2012) discusses the importance of ability to watch and correctly define the nonverbal messages. These descriptions give out and stress the emotional experience that characters are going through. Silence is the most used nonverbal cue both in *Black Dog of Fate* and *Three Apples Fell from Heaven*.

Limitations and Avenues for Future

- Readers pay close attention to the descriptive writing styles or literary devices used by the authors. However, they do not usually consider nonverbal cues as part of literary techniques. However, in case of thorough analysis one can identify the importance of those cues in every context.
- Further, research can focus on poetry collections, in order to identify whether nonverbal cues are as significantly used in poetry as they are used in stories and novels.

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Thank You!