Representing others:
The role of non-verbal language.
With special reference to Italian speakers of English

M. Grazia Busà

mariagrazia.busa@unipd.it

Abstract. When people from different cultures and using different languages meet, misunderstandings and stereotypes may be generated by the speakers' use of non-verbal language that is unknown to the interlocutors. This paper (1) reviews literature on intercultural and interlinguistic differences in non-verbal language; (2) discusses the case of Italian speakers of English examining the differences in some relevant non-verbal features in the two languages; and (3) speculates how these features may form the basis for construction and spread of the representation of the Italians through the media.

1. Introduction

When we speak we communicate not only through our words. Our voice and body gestures also convey meanings and contribute to listeners' forming impressions and opinions about us. Our intonation, pitch, volume, tones, gaze, smile, hand and body movements etc., what is commonly called non-verbal language, contribute meanings in communication and affect the way in which messages are interpreted by our listeners. In fact, in communication non-verbal messages tend to prevail on verbal messages. This is because, like all animals, we respond to the signals that surround us and reach our senses of vision, hearing, smell, taste and touch. We often forget that because a long tradition of instruction focusing on the word, written or spoken, has taught us to pay attention to the verbal aspects of communication, disregarding the non-verbal aspects.

But not all non-verbal signals carry the same meanings in all cultures. Facial expressions are mostly similar in most cultures as many of them, like smile and cry, are have a biological basis (Ekman, Friesen 1972; 1987).

However, many non-verbal signals are culture-specific, and are learned as part of an individual's socio-cultural and linguistic development in a community. It is only by getting acquainted with that community that the culture-specific non-verbal language can become known and understood (Feldman, Rimé 1991; Gudykunst, Mody 2001; Harper, Wiens, Matarazzo 1978; Kendon 1981).

It has been shown that L2 speakers 'transfer' non-verbal behavior from their L1 into the L2 and, when they speak in the L2, they tend to use the communication strategies that are common to their own cultures (Collier 1995). This may give rise to misinterpretations, create annoyance, and provide grounds for cultural stereotypes or social exclusion, especially if it is associated with speakers' language that is characterized by unexpected (i.e., non-native like) grammatical structures, lexicon or pronunciation –as is likely to be the case with non-native speakers that are not proficient with the target language (Busà, Rognoni 2012; Nicoladis 2007). These differences in verbal and non-verbal behavior are easily picked up by the media and perpetuated through its lens to the masses.

This paper aims to show that when speakers do not share the same language or culture, the use of a non-verbal language that is culturally and 'linguistically' different from that of the interlocutors may contribute to the creation of a representation of the non-native speakers as 'others', as well as provide the 'seeds' for generalizations and stereotypes. This is done first by reviewing literature on intercultural and interlinguistic differences in non-verbal language and then by discussing how some non-verbal features associated with the Italian language (and speakers) are portrayed and spread widely through the media.

2. Linguistic and cultural differences in pitch and gestures

There is growing awareness of the role of non-verbal language in human communication. Non-verbal signals precede verbal language and often substitute for it. From birth, individuals rely on non-verbal signals to express themselves and to understand other people's messages. Mehrabian and Wiener (1967) and Mehrabian and Ferris (1967) found that, in the communication of affect, words contribute only 7% of the total meaning exchanged, while aspects of the speaker's voice (speech rhythm, volume, tone, etc.) contribute 38% of the

meaning, and facial expressions 55%. This finding was formalized by Mehrabian (1977) in the equation known as the 7-38-55 rule.

There is also recognition that communication is *multimodal*, that is, it takes place at multiple levels and through the integration of different semiotic resources, which all contribute to the transmission and interpretation of meaning (Baldry, Thibault 2006; Bateman 2008; O'Halloran 2011; Ventola, Charles, Kaltenbacher 2004).

Non-verbal signals that have a biological basis tend to be given the same interpretation cross-culturally. For example, smiling is generally interpreted as a sign of approval, pleasure and satisfaction. A sudden loud scream generally indicates fear, while a high-pitch, piercing shriek is used to express fear but also surprise and sometimes joy. Other signals are culturally-based, and need to be learned. For example, cultures differ in what is deemed 'appropriate' behavior, for example as it relates to the food to eat (or not to eat), the clothes to wear and the things to do in social circumstances such weddings, funerals, etc. (Pappas 2011).

Both voice and body language can be considered aspects of a speakers' non-verbal language. For voice, it is possible that the phonological system of the speakers' native language may lead speakers to give certain interpretations to non-native patterns. For example, Mennen (2007; et al. 2008, 2012) found that Southern Standard British English speakers have higher and more varied pitch range (i.e., variations in the fundamental frequency of the voice) than Northern Standard German speakers. The authors suggest that the difference in pitch range might explain why Germans may sound "bored" or "unfriendly" to British listeners (Gibbon 1998), and conversely British voices (especially female) may sound "over-excited" (Eckert, Laver 2011) or even "aggressive" (Gibbon 1998) to German listeners. Language-specific socio-cultural factors also may influence the interpretation of non-native speakers' patterns. For example, van Bezooijen (1995) found that differences in the evaluation of high vs. low pitch by Dutch and Japanese listeners correlate with differences in the use of pitch by the two cultures.

Some studies suggest that L2 speech is characterized by a narrower pitch range than L1 speech (Aoyama, Guion 2007; Hincks 2004, 2005; Graham 2013; Mennen *et al*. 2008, 2012; Pickering 2004; Traunmüller, Eriksson 1995).

Ullakonoja (2007, 2010) found some evidence that Finns speaking Russian as a second language use a narrower pitch range and a less variable pitch than Russian L1 speakers, though they show more Russian-like patterns in advanced stages of language learning. Busà and Urbani (2011) also found that Italian speakers of English have a narrower pitch range and less pitch variation than native English speakers. A possible explanation is that L2 speakers rely more on segmental as opposed to prosodic information to get their meanings across–which could be due to L2 speakers' lacking the amount of extra-linguistic knowledge that native speakers rely on for communicating (Jenkins 2002). In any case, limited pitch variation may be associated with lack of speaker's liveliness (Aoyama, Guion 2007; Graham 2013; Johns-Lewis 1986; Ladd 1996) and thus affect the image the L2 speaker projects of him/herself.

Finally, different languages and cultures may differ in what voice characteristics they associate with charismatic voices. For example, Italians seem to associate Calm-Benevolent charisma to speakers who make short pauses and have a normal or high pitch, while French attribute Calm-Benevolent charisma to speakers who make long pauses with normal or low pitch (D'Errico, Signorello, Demolin, Poggi 2013).

Differences in non-verbal language across cultures may be as conspicuous as differences in language. A case in point is the dynamics of eye contact. In most western cultures eye contact is considered a sign of participation and interest, and thus it is maintained during a conversation. The inability or unwillingness to maintain eye contact during a conversation is often interpreted as a sign of untrustworthiness. On the other hand, in many Asian and African cultures, avoiding eye contact is a sign of reverence for the other person. So, looking at an elder or authority figure in the eyes during a conversation is considered disrespectful (Akechi, Senju, Uibo, Kikuchi, Hasegawa, Hietanen 2013; Uono, Hietanen 2015).

For body language, as for pitch, cross-linguistic and cross-cultural differences may give way to different interpretations of non-native speakers' body language. In many cases, the improper use of body language may make a situation awkward or be a source of tension. The case of eye gaze was mentioned above. Another example regards proximity, that is, the distance interlocutors feel appropriate between themselves and the people with whom

they are speaking. In some countries, for example the United States, the concept of personal space is an important aspect of daily life and in spoken interactions people try to respect the space of others. Standing very close when speaking with someone is considered rude and an invasion of personal space, and creates an uncomfortable feeling for many Americans. On the other hand, standing very close to someone when speaking is acceptable when what is being said is private or secretive. In other countries, such as Asia and the Middle East, personal space is not so important, and people think nothing of their proximity to each other, and tend to sit or stand closer to one another while talking (Hall 1966; Sommer 1969).

Languages and cultures also differ in the frequency of production of gestures. A distinction has been made between high-frequency and low-frequency languages, depending on the frequency with which gestures tend to co-occur with speech. For example, Italian has been defined as a high-frequency gesture language (Barzini 1964; Kendon 1992; Pika, Nicoladis, Marentette 2006), while English is a low-frequency gesture language (Graham, Argyle 1975). When speakers of high-frequency gesture languages come in contact with speakers of low-frequency gesture languages, the former's use of frequent, broad, full arm, animated gestures during speech may be considered distracting, and cause annoyance to the latter; on the other hand, the little gesturing of low-frequency gesture speakers may put off interlocutors that are used to much gesturing in conversations (Axtell 1991; Efron 1972; Ekman, Friesen 1969; Graham, Argyle 1975; Okada, Brosnahan 1990). In either case, speakers' use of gestures will affect the image the speaker is projecting of him/herself.

Finally, languages and cultures may also differ in the types of gestures produced or in the meanings assigned to the gestures. The existence of culture-specific differences in gestures is well documented. A major difference concerns the use of *emblems*, that is, the gestures that have a direct verbal referent and can substitute for the words or expressions that they represent (Kendon 2004; Poggi, Magno Caldognetto 1997; Ting-Toomey 1999). Emblems are culture- and language-specific, and so need to be learned; they are unlikely to be understood or interpreted correctly by people that are not familiar with them. Examples of emblems are signs used to greet, hitchhike, say 'yes' or 'no'. In different cultures, variations of the same gestures may be used with different meanings.

For example, the gesture used in America to signal 'All-OK' is an obscene gesture having sexual implications in Russia, Brazil and Turkey; it means 'worthless' in Tunisia, France and Belgium, and 'money' in Japan (Matsumoto 2006; Pease, Pease 2004). The 'thumbs up' gesture has a positive meaning in most western world, it means 'man' in Japan, and is an obscene gesture or an insult in some Middle Eastern countries. The 'V' sign may be used to mean different things in different parts of the English-speaking world, depending on how it is realized. In the UK and in the countries of the Commonwealth, the 'V' sign produced with the palm facing inward is an obscene gesture, but when it is produced with the palm facing outward it means 'two' or 'peace'. In the US, the gesture is generally made with the palm facing outward, and it means 'two', 'peace' or 'victory' (Pease, Pease 2004). There are cross-cultural variations also in the use and meanings of the head shaking and nodding. In many cultures a headshake is used to indicate denial or disagreement, but in some Southern European countries, like Bulgaria and parts of Albania, it is used to say 'yes'. Nodding is used in many cultures as a sign of agreement, but in countries like Greece, Iran, Lebanon, Syria, Palestine, Turkey, Macedonia, Bulgaria, Albania and Sicily a single nod of the head up (not down) indicates a 'no' (wikipedia sub voce).

Other types of gestures that may differ cross-culturally are the so-called *illustrators* or *iconic* gestures, that is, gestures that complement or illustrate spoken words. Cognitively, illustrators have a 'pictorial' function, that is, they illustrate what the speaker is saying. They tend to be subconscious, and are less arbitrary and occur more regularly than emblems. Examples of illustrators are: two hands that are held apart to indicate size; one hand that is raised to indicate height. The cross-cultural differences in the use of illustrators may regard both frequency and extension of gestures. In general, Southern Europeans (e.g., Italians, Spaniards, Greeks), Arabs (e.g., Egyptians and Saudis), and Latin Americans (e.g., Chileans and Venezuelans) use illustrators more than Northern Europeans (e.g., Belgians, Scandinavians) and many Asians. Northern Americans can be placed in an intermediate position between Southern and Northern Europeans. In addition, Asians' and Northern Europeans' gestures are more restrained and 'quiet', while Southern Europeans' and Northern Americans' gestures are more animated. In some Asian cultures, the extensive

use of illustrators is considered distracting, rude and undisciplined. In Latin cultures, the absence of illustrators may indicate lack of interest (Morrison, Conaway, Borden, 1994).

3. The representation of the Italians in the US media

The media play a fundamental role in educating and informing about facts, peoples and societies, but they also play an equally relevant role in the development and spreading of stereotypes, by creating characters that have no shades of gray. In the case of cultures that are non-mainstream, this creation takes place through the embodiment of condensed and exaggerated versions of many features shared by many people in any given culture.

In the United States, Italians are the objects of frequent representations by the media. In fact, Italian stereotypes are some of the most prevalent stereotypes in the media, and, apparently, the frequency with which Italian stereotypes are used in the media is increasing (DiMino 2013). While in the past the main portrayal of the Italian in the media was connected to the idea of the *Mafia* (i.e., Italian = Mafioso), today the reality shows have expanded this stereotypical idea of the Italian to include the image of the *bimbo*, the buffoon or the mobster, or of some person that is very childish in the way they act (DiMino 2013). In fact, it is lamented that while with other ethnicities the negative stereotypes are shown together with the positive stereotypes, for Italians only the negative side is shown (DiMino 2013). Stereotypes providing a diminishing representation of Italians are found in commercials (e.g., *Uncle Ben*'s pasta bowls, Budweiser, International Dairy Food) (Sorrentino 2009); in TV series (e.g., *The Sopranos*, to *Jersey Shore*), as well as appear in episodes of series or in isolated shows. For example, in one episode of the cartoon series *Family Guy*, Peter Griffin, the main character, is portrayed as entering a local Italian grocery, and so trying to speak Italian. Figure 1 shows an image from the clip. The dialogue of the two characters is reported below.

Figure 1. A still image from the clip: *Family Guy – speaking Italian*.
Retrieved from https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VIW6ZSFIjaM

Dialogue from the clip

Peter: Oh, you know? I've always wanted to comin' here and now that I've got a mustache the time feels right.

Brian: Wow, all the stuff looks pretty good. Can we get some salami and...

Peter: Brian, Brian, let me handle this... Ah, scuzie...babadabupi?

Grocer: Che cosa?!

Brian: Peter? What are you doin'?!

Peter: Speaking Italian! Babadabupi? Bibdebubdebabdebubabde!

Brian: Peter, You can't speak italian just because you have a mustache!

Peter: Bubedebapa! Bupapipipupapa, pupapipi pupa papa.

Grocer: Tu sei un pazzo! Va via da qui!

Peter: Papipi papi!

Grocer: Sono stanco di te. Ti do un pugno nella testa! Ti uccido con questa carne!

The clip collects a few traits that are typically associated with the Italian stereotype: the mustache, the salami, the gestures the two characters make when they are speaking, their loud voice, their intonation and their tendency to pronounce words having a CVCV structure (where CV stands for consonant-vowel) or, in other words, to add an epenthetic vowel (a schwa) at the end of the

words ending with a consonant.

A second example comes from the comedy sketch TV series *Mad TV*. In this episode, the Italian is portrayed like a cartoonish character: he has big hair, wears an open shirt to show his long gold chain; he is loud, gesticulates excessively and ridiculously, behaves ridiculously.

Figure 2. A still image from the clip: *Mad TV - Italian stereotype*.
Retrieved from https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WgTUF_7vRMI

In these two examples, it is clear that differences in both Italians' voice and speech characteristics, as well as their use of gestures are picked up by American speakers and form the basis for the creation of stereotypes. While the loud voice seems to be associated with being rude or unrefined, features of the speakers' accented speech as well as speakers' gestures make the characters ridiculous and thus buffoonish.

4. Italians' use of non-verbal language: the seeds for a stereotypical representation?

What are the characteristics of the Italian voice, speech and gestures that make Italians the object of such extensive stereotyping? Addressing this question would require a thorough investigation of many social, cultural and historical factors and is beyond the scope of the present paper.

However, this paper presents some generalizations on the characteristics of Italians' non-verbal language, which may contribute to the identification of certain traits as typically Italian and thus form the basis for some stereotypes.

The following generalizations are based on the preliminary analysis of a corpus of videos of Italian learners of English studying at the University of Padova. The collection of the videos started in 2009 and is ongoing. The purpose of the collection and analysis of the videos is the study of non-verbal elements in the speech of Italian learners of English, as compared to those of native Italian and native English speakers. Though the social, cultural and historical context in which the videos were recorded is very different from the one that presumably gives rise to the kind of stereotypes observed above, some preliminary observations are in order.

4.1 Italian's vowel pronunciation, intonation and pitch characteristics in English

A feature that is imitated in the portrayal of the Italian accent in English is the lack of differentiation of English vowels, leading to the incorrect pronunciation of many English words, and particularly those that are in opposition in English (e.g., sheep – ship, beg – bag, etc.). This feature is also found in the speech of other European language speakers, especially those of romance languages, such as French, Spanish, Portuguese, and thus cannot be considered a unique feature of the English produced by Italians. However, the production of English vowels by Italians largely correlates with Italian speakers' perceived degree of accent in English (Busà 1995; Flege *et al*. 1999; Flege *et al*. 2003; MacKay *et al*. 2001; Piske *et al*. 2002), and is therefore not surprising that this feature carries a stigma in the representation of the Italians abroad.

Italian speakers' difficulties in producing English vowels stem from differences existing between the Italian and English phonological systems, both at the segmental and suprasegmental levels. At the segmental level, English has 11-13 vowels in its inventory, depending on the variety of English under consideration, while Italian has only seven vowels. The fewer vowels in the Italian system condition the Italian speakers' production and perception of English vowels, and lead to frequent hypo-differentiations of vowel contrasts. In addition, in English vowels may span from full to reduced, in both quality and

duration, and even disappear, depending on a combination of factors relating to syllable structure, rhythm, stress; in Italian, vowel quality tends to remain quite stable, regardless of the degree of stress on the vowel or any other phonological condition of the utterance. Thus, while English phonological rules operating at the level of suprasegmentals trigger vowel reduction processes and create distinctions between vowels in 'strong' and 'weak' syllables, in Italian, these rules do not operate and syllables tend to have the same 'weight', and vowels are always fully pronounced.

The most stereotypical imitation of the Italian accent in English is one where vowels are added after words ending in consonants, especially after the stop consonants (i.e., 'p, t, k, b, d, g). The addition of word-ending epenthetic vowels seems to be unique to the Italian speakers of English and is regularly picked upon and stigmatized by non-Italian listeners.

The production of an epenthetic vowel at the end of a word ending in a stop consonant in English stems from differences in the syllabic structure and rhythmic tendencies in Italian and English. English allows complex consonant clusters both in syllable initial and final position, and English words have a CVC-type syllable structure; Italian, on the other hand, does not allow complex consonant groups in syllable-initial or final position, and allows only a limited set of consonants in word-final position; Italian words tend to have a CV-type syllable structure, with a distribution of long vowels in open syllables and short vowels in closed syllables (Busà 1995). The differences in the syllabic structures and the type and numbers of consonants allowed in syllable- and word-final position in Italian and English are the source of the Italian pronunciation in English and its stereotypical imitation.

English and Italian also differ markedly in the intonation patterns used linguistically as well as the way in which intonation is used to signal discourse information structure and focus. One of the differences concerns the relation between word order and intonation. Word order and intonation are the two most commonly used focus marking devices, and languages differ in the preference for one over the other, and in the ways in which they realize focus by means of intonation (Chen *et al.* 2007). English has few inflections and a relatively fixed word order, and it relies heavily on intonation to convey grammatical information or focus elements in the sentence. English also uses intonational

accent (or extra stress) to mark grammatically salient elements (for example new or emphatic information) as prominent, while given or old information is de-accented; typically, focus accent in English is found on the last major word of the sentence, but can come earlier to emphasize one of the earlier words or to contrast it with something else. Italian, on the other hand, has more inflections and a more flexible word order than English, and so provides its speakers with the option of giving prominence to some information by rearranging words in the sentence. In addition, in Italian prosody is not used to distinguish between new and given (i.e., known) information. In other words, giveness (or known information) is not marked prosodically by deaccenting elements carrying given information or by using a particular type of pitch accent; rather, prominence is given to elements that are in focus (Avesani, Vayra 2005; Bocci, Avesani 2008). Finally, while in English stress is associated with variations in pitch, in Italian it is associated with variations in vowel duration (Voghera 1992).

Preliminary comparisons of English intonation patterns produced by native and non-native (i.e., Italian) speakers show that Italian speakers' of English cannot distinguish different grammatical functions through their intonation patterns in the L2 (Busà, Stella 2014). This is unlike English native speakers' intonation, which uses different intonation contours for different sentence types. In addition, as a result of the application of their native language strategies for marking focus in an utterance, Italian speakers of English seem to be unable to mark salient discourse information through intonation, and show instead a tendency to either move syntactic elements around in the sentence, or use other linguistic devices (for example lexical items) to mark discourse focus. This explains why, compared to native English intonation, Italian intonation in English appears to have a rather 'flat' contour, i.e., has no clear pitch peaks in the sentence, or, when present, they are markedly less prominent than in English (Busà 2010). In other words, Italian speakers of English, unlike the native speakers, do not seem to be able to distinguish between strong and weak elements in the sentence through vowel reduction and pitch excursions.

It is certain that native speakers of English pick up on some of the features of the Italian intonation in English which strike listeners are very non-native, to form the basis for the creation of the stereotypical Italian intonation. However, it is not clear which features might trigger this type of reaction. Possibly, the

English speakers perceive the differences in vowel duration that the Italians use to mark prominence and they caricature the Italian accent based on them. Interestingly, Italians do not seem to recognize themselves in their portrayed intonations (anecdotal observation).

Finally, Italian and English speakers differ in their use of pitch range (see section 1). Studies by Urbani (2013) and Busà and Urbani (2011) show that Italians have an overall higher pitch level than the American speakers, the latter show a wider pitch span (i.e., they have a wider excursion between high and low pitch values). As with intonation, native English speakers are likely to perceive the Italian-produced patterns as non-native, and create stereotypical Italian accents based on the perceived differences, though it is not clear how.

The analysis of the corpus has not yet tackled what may cause the stereotype of the Italians being 'loud'. Loudness is a subjective measure, a psychological correlate of the *amplitude* and *intensity* (or the power) of a sound. For linguistic purposes, loudness adds emphasis to an utterance or expresses speaker's emotions (Cruttenden 1997). However, average loudness of speech varies not only between individual speakers, but also between accent-communities, and perceived degrees of loudness might be language-specific (Abercrombie 1967: 95), so it is possible that Italians are perceived as relatively louder than American English speakers.

4.2 Italian's use of gestures in English

Italian has been defined as a high frequency gesture language (Pika, Nicoladis, Marentette 2006), which means that gestures play a crucial role in conveying meaning and pragmatic force. Italians' speech is not only characterized by the frequent use of co-speech gestures, which are often extensively large and full-armed, but also by the use of a wide repertoire of emblems (see section 2) that may be incomprehensible to non-Italian speakers or people that are not familiar with the Italian culture (Kendon 2004; Poggi, Magno Caldognetto 1997). The richness of the Italian emblems repertoire is evidenced by the wide variety of "Italian gesture dictionaries" (available both online and on paper) aimed at helping the traveler to Italy to understand the spoken language.

Studies have shown that, when speaking a second language, speakers transfer L1 gestures, just as they transfer linguistic features (Brown, Gullberg

2008; Busà, Rognoni 2012; Cavicchio, Kita 2013; Gullberg 2006; Nikoladis 2007; Ortega 2009; Pika et al. 2006). This is particularly clear in the case of emblems, that is, the language-specific gestures that substitute for words or expressions (Kendon 2004; Poggi, Magno Caldognetto 1997). It is less clear whether language-specific gesture rates are also transferred (Nicoladis 2007). Also, it is still uncertain whether there is a relationship between bilinguals/L2 speakers' proficiency level and gesture use, with speakers with lower levels of competence using more gestures than more advanced speakers. According to Nicoladis (2007), if one assumes, with Meisel (1983), that transfer serves learners who have not yet acquired well-formed structures in the L2 to communicate more effectively, then it is possible that learners might use more L1 gestures at earlier stages than at later stages of acquisition.

In a study aimed at investigating the perception of Italian gestures by non-native Italian speakers, Busà and Rognoni (2012) designed a test to verify whether: (1) Italians transfer Italian emblems in their English speech; (2) Italians' overall gesturing is identified as 'foreign' by non-native Italian speakers; and (3) Italian emblems are in fact not understood correctly by non-native Italian speakers. The results of the experiment provided evidence that Italians do transfer their native-language emblems into English; the experiment also showed that speakers distinguish correctly between their own native language and other languages based solely on their use of gestures, i.e., when no speech is present. Also, English speakers do not understand the Italian gestures that are transferred in the L2, while Italians, as expected, do. For example, the meaning of the gesture of tossing something behind ones' back, which in Italian is used to mean 'once upon a time' or ' a long time ago', was recognized by the Italians, but interpreted as meaning 'I'm hot' by the English speakers.

Italians' use of gesture is obviously very noticeable and it is not surprising that it may catch the attention of any listener or interlocutor with an Italian speaker. This explains why gestures may be associated with Italian speech and be caricatured in the stereotypes of Italians.

5. Conclusions

This paper aimed to draw attention to L2 speakers' transfer of non-verbal features from L1 to L2, and show how L2 speakers' use of non-native non-

verbal language may affect their representation of self, and contribute to their characterization as 'others'.

This paper has reviewed some basic facts about speaking a foreign language that are often not emphasized enough in second-language teaching and learning. In intercultural and interlinguistic communication, speakers' non-verbal language is as important, or may be even more important, than verbal language. Drawing on examples from Italians and Italian-spoken English, this paper has shown that, just like verbal language, non-verbal language is transferred from L1 into L2. Speakers tend to be unaware of their use of non-verbal language and of the functions it serves in their native language. Especially, speakers may be unaware of the differences in meanings that non-verbal language may have in intercultural and interlinguistic contexts. In fact, however, transferred non-verbal features may not be well understood by target language speakers, and may give rise to misinterpretations and miscommunication, and ultimately be the source of stereotypes.

Raising the awareness of the differences in non-verbal language interculturally and interlinguistically should be pursued as part of L2 instruction, to meet the needs of today's communication in a global context and avoid stereotypes based on linguistic and cultural habits.

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