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Using Body Language to create Believable Characters

By Lisa Hood

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Have you ever had a "Gut" feeling about someone? You meet someone and a little voice says: "I like him" or "I don't trust her". Have you ever wondered why you formed that immediate opinion?

Body language plays a big role in intuition as it gives us messages about the other person that we can interpret at an intuitive level. We are always communicating verbally and nonverbally.

To make a good impression, it is important to understand that you are always communicating through body language, whether it is intentional or not. Studies done in the field indicate that:

- 55% of the communication consists of body language,
- 38% is expressed through tone of voice (paralanguage) and only
- 7% is communicated through words. (1)

As a writer, you can use the body language of your character to convey a great deal of information.

There are four types of body language to be aware of: facial expression, including eye contact, gestures, posture and space relationship.

1. Facial Expressions including eye contact – "Darwin believed that facial expressions of emotion are similar among humans, regardless of culture." However, researchers now believe "our non verbal language is partly instinctive, partly taught and partly imitative." (1) There are some universal facial expressions; a smile, a frown, a scowl, however, there are many more nonverbal messages that are learned and may be unique to specific cultures.

Eye contact is direct and powerful. The eyes are always talking. A poet and writer of 19th-century France wrote, 'Eyes are so transparent, that through them, one sees the soul.' Nothing builds trust and rapport as effectively as eye contact. (2) The use of eye contact varies significantly from culture to culture. In some regions, direct eye contact may be

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considered insulting or challenging. In the United States, direct eye contact is often considered a sign of trustworthiness. So, if your character is American, regular, attentive eye contact would convey honesty, straight forwardness and/or approachability. However, a hard, unblinking stare will send a much different message.

2. Gestures – can be used purposefully to emphasis meaning. Fidgeting shows boredom and restlessness. Pressing fingers together to form a steeple shows interests, assertiveness and determination. Touching the nose or rubbing eyes indicates discomfort, or it may even be a signal that your character is not being completely honest. A hand to the back of the neck may indicate withdrawal from a conversation.

3. Posture – The way people hold themselves gives important information. Body posture can be closed

or open. Interested people always pay attention and lean forward. Leaning backwards demonstrates aloofness or rejection. A firm handshake will give the impression of assertiveness or honesty, too firm can seem arrogant or challenging. Folding arms across your chest or body is protective and will give the impression of a character who's closed, guarded and defensive. People with arms folded, legs crossed and bodies turned away are signaling that they are rejecting messages. People showing open hands, both feet planted on the ground are accepting. A head held straight up signals a neutral attitude. A head tilted to the side indicates interest. A head down is negative and judgmental.

4. Space – Dr. Edward T Hall, a professor of anthropology at Northwestern University, coined the phrase "Proxemics" to describe his theories about zones and territory and how we use them. There are four distinct zones in which most people operate, including: intimate distance, personal distance, social distance and public distance. The cultural influence on spatial relationships is significant. "How we guard our zones and how we aggress to other zones is an integral part of how we relate to other people." (1)

"The orientation of speakers and listeners: face-to-face, side to side, or back-to-back, can send powerful non-verbal messages. In a group situation, when the leader faces the group and turns toward the one who is speaking, this conveys strong attention. When two people are communicating, competitors are more likely to sit facing each other while collaborators are more likely to sit side-by-side. If one stands while the other is sitting, the standing person may be sending dominance signals, which can stifle free exchange of ideas." (2)

You now understand different types of body language and you may be able to incorporate body language into your writing to make your characters come alive on the page.

Resources

(1) Dick Mooney, Often, actions really do speak louder than words. Knoxville, TN: ACA Communicator, 2002

(2) Debbie O'Halloran, How to use Body Language in an Interview. The Irish Jobs Column, 2002

Lisa Hood is the author of "Shades of Betrayal" and "Shades of Revenge". She has been writing for over 10 years and is presently working on her third suspense novel, "Shades of Jealousy." She is also the Talent Liaison @ BOOKJOBBER.com. Other articles by Lisa Hood can be downloaded from <http://www.bookjobber.com/articles.asp> or mailto:lisa_j@bookjobber.com

biz-domains with special characters

By Hans Peter Oswald

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Biz-domains with special characters will come soon. ICANN-Registrar Secura is announcing, that the company is accepting free pre-registration of biz-domains with German special characters(<https://www.domainregistry.de/biz.html>)

On October 12, 2004 the registry of biz-domains will introduce IDN.BIZ-domains, or domain names featuring foreign language characters. The German language will be the first non-english language to be introduced at biz-domains.

With the introduction of German script IDN names, ICANN and NEULEVEL accredited Registrar Secura will be able to offer customers the ability to register biz-domains containing the IDN characters.

Hans-Peter Oswald
<https://www.domainregistry.de/biz-domain.html>

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