

An Analysis of Non-verbal Performance in Theatre

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Abstract

Theatre, commonly seen as an audiovisual art, has performance at its core. Performance is mainly narrative through language, movement, dance, music, art and other forms to create an artistic image for the stage, which contains verbal and non-verbal elements. Non-verbal elements have crucial implications for theatre practice and theoretical perception. The present research investigates non-verbal performance in theatre based on semiotics and non-verbal communication theory. The study found that non-verbal performance includes (not limited to) posture, movement, gestures, props, and costumes. To make a more comprehensive analysis of non-verbal performance in theatre, a mixed research method combining textual analysis and questionnaire survey to collect data was employed, comprehensively investigate non-verbal performance in theatre, and comprehensively discuss the definition, classification and characteristics of key elements of non-verbal performance in drama based on the research design of analytical study, and reveals how non-verbal performances are expressed in theatre. Then, it provides ideas for the theatre creation and education.

Keywords: non-verbal performance; theatre; nonverbal communication; semiotic.

Theatre, as a physical work, is a vocal and gestural display directed at the audience, usually performed in a specific location with unique decorations (Biet et al., 2019, p.1). It is an audiovisual art centred on performance, that often uses language as the main form of expression, accompanied by movement, dance, music and art, which can be used to tell a story and express ideology and emotions. Theatre performance is understood to include verbal means, as well as all non-verbal means used to establish or facilitate dramatic expression and the accompanying production of meaning (Liapis et al., 2013, p.1). These non-verbal means include not only limited to movement, costume, make-up, and props. Theatre performances use the

medium of the body to respond to dialogue, music, and even internal emotional responses through non-verbal elements.

What is non-verbal performance? How aware are theatre audiences and creators of non-verbal performances? This study aims to discuss these questions. Regarding non-verbal performance, researchers and practitioners in the field of theatre have not given a clear definition of it. However, previous studies have affirmed the necessity and value of the presence of non-verbal means in theatre. This study attempts to comprehensively explore the definition, classification and characteristics of non-verbal performances based on semiotics and non-verbal communication theory by analysing Aristotle's

(1954) reference to “opsis (ὄψις)” in Part VI of Poetics and Kowzan’s (1968) reference to sign systems of theatre. In addition, the study will incorporate a questionnaire survey to analyse the level of awareness of non-verbal performances among audiences, practitioners and students of theatre, thus validating the analysis in the previous part. It is important to note that the current research is a new direction in the field of non-verbal performance and aims to provide ideas about non-verbal performance in theatre creation and teaching.

1.1 Background

Western theatre is often considered to have originated in Ancient Greece, with Aristotle’s Poetics considered to be the first theoretical work on theatre. However, Germany is considered to be the first country to develop the study of the discipline of theatre as we think of it today (Fischer-Lichte, 2014, p. 12). Theatre studies in this period were mainly textual studies. It was not until the beginning of the twentieth century that theatre studies began to develop as an independent discipline, and theatre studies underwent decades of development from the beginning of textual and historical studies to the rise of studies on performance in the 1980s (Balme, 2008, p. 11-12). Generally referred to as performance analysis, performance studies nowadays tend to focus on analyses of live performances, including theatre production, theatre interpretation, etc.

Production analyses and interpretation analyses of performances usually focus on sets, costumes, performance spaces, characterisation (voice, speech, movement, acting), etc. Most of these research objects have symbolic characteristics. Symbols are perceptions that carry meaning; meaning is the potential for one symbol to be interpreted by another symbol (Zhao, 2016). In a semiotic perspective, a performance is considered to be a coherent assemblage of theatre signs, i.e., a text consisting of signs such as the space of the scene, the physical appearance of the actors, gestures, movements, speech, voice, music, etc. (Fischer-

Lichte, 2008). Therefore, it is feasible to use semiotics for theatre studies and performance analysis.

The use of semiotics in theatre research has opened up new possibilities for research in this field. At the heart of semiotic analysis is the exploration of the hidden meanings behind symbols. In the study of theatre and performance, semiotics explores the conditions under which all theatrical symbols are produced and the meanings that are conceivable and possible. Kowzan proposed a sign system for theatre based on semiotics, including auditive signs and visual signs. Both visual and auditory symbols contain non-verbal elements that are the focus of this study. This study will analyse non-verbal symbols in theatre based on non-verbal communication theory, theatre semiotics, and a questionnaire survey.

1.2 Problem statement

Theatre, as a performing art, usually refers to a real or imaginary story presented to the audience by actors playing the roles of characters in a script, under their physical movement and speech. The acting skills of actors are the core of theatre art (Grotowski, 1968, p. 15). Normally an actor’s performing training includes voice, speech, movement, and acting, but an interpretation of the word spectacle reveals that performance should encompass all the visible parts of the theatre, i.e., the visual elements, including but not limited to costumes, make-up, and props (Οικονόμου, 2013). Therefore, the performance should contain all the verbal and non-verbal elements mentioned above, i.e. verbal and non-verbal performances.

From the perspective of existing research, performance research has not carried out a comprehensive analysis and exposition of non-verbal performance and has not formed a complete system of non-verbal performance. However, non-verbal performance plays a significant role in theatre, which can enrich the image of the character and enhance the level of the dramatic text. Existing research has mostly focused on analysing a single non-verbal

element, especially from the technical and training level, such as body training, movement and so on. There are not many studies analysing and discussing non-verbal performance in theatre, mainly starting from the actor's physical expression, and lacking in-depth research on the basic theories of non-verbal performance, especially from the point of spectacle. This study will use semiotics and non-verbal communication theory to conduct an in-depth discussion of non-verbal performance, construct a research framework for non-verbal performance, and provide guidance for actors to conduct non-verbal performance training, thus it has certain research value.

1.3 Objectives

This study aims to examine the non-verbal performance elements present in theatre performances. The specific objectives of the study include: (1) to identify the types of non-verbal performances in theatre performance, (2) to classify the different types of non-verbal performances, (3) to analyse the value of the presence of non-verbal performances in theatre, (4) to explore the level of awareness of non-verbal performances among audiences and theatre creators, and (5) to inspire theatre educators to broaden their thinking about performance education and to provide a theoretical foundation for dramatic characterisation.

Literature Review

2.1 From theatre to performance

Theatre studies consists of many different fields of study (including historical, aesthetic, theoretical, social, and cultural) and scholarly perspectives that encompass a variety of methodologies and approaches. Theatre studies have gone through three stages of development, and the object of research has shifted from text and history-based to performance studies. The shift in the centre of research does not mean that the research in the previous research areas stops; they have always accompanied the development

of theatre research. From the perspective of historical research, Brockett (1968) outlined the development of theatre around the world from the origins of primitive dance rituals to the twentieth century. In the past few decades, similar studies have been conducted by Wickham (1992), Brown (1995), Zarrilli et al. (2009), etc. There are also studies dealing with the problem of the composition of theatre, Southern (1961) discusses the essence of theatre and its composition and gives an essentialist definition. Styan (1960) elaborates on the elements of theatre through a large number of theatre productions.

The study of theatre performance can be divided into theoretical and analytical; historical and biographical; and cross-cultural. Williams (1968) briefly describes the development of analytical approaches to theatre and argues for a general view of the relationship between dramatic text and performance. Passow and Strauss (1981) investigate the current state of analysis and research in theatre performance. In addition, the relationship between materials and symbols in theatre performance is explored and an analytical approach to materials and symbols is proposed. Fischer-Lichte (2014) introduces the central concepts of theatre and performance studies, identifies areas, theories and methods of theatre and performance studies, explores the interrelationships between theatre and the other arts, and performance aesthetics. Gingrich-Philbrook and Simmons (2023) examine the ways of performance, the culture of performance, and the performer in relation to the artist's work, demonstrating a variety of approaches to conducting performance studies.

In a study that explores what theatre performance and research is, Schechner (2002) and Bial (2004) discuss in detail what performance and performance studies are, as well as ritual, play, performativity, performance processes and global and intercultural performance, providing an all-encompassing overview for understanding and studying performance. Osipovich (2006) analyses the

essence of performance and argues that theatre performance is an activity in which the actor and the audience interact. At the same time, the relationship between theatrical performance and text is discussed. Saltz (2001) also analyses the question of the nature of theatre, in addition to pointing out that it is a misconception that there is a necessary link between dramatic performance and interpretation. Although theatre performance and its processes usually involve interpretation, interpretation does not define the relationship between performance and text, calling for a pluralistic understanding of theatre performance. Hamilton (2001) offers an ontological explanation of theatrical performance, arguing that dramatic performance can be seen as an interpretation and rendition of the script rather than simply a presentation of the script, but that such an interpretation is conditional. Koner (2013) categorised the elements of performance in terms of artistic and technical dimensions. Art is the primary element: emotion, motivation, concentration, dynamics, and movement texture; technology is the secondary element: stage, props, fabrics, costumes, and stage manners. These studies describe the composition of theatre and its elements, but have not analysed and discussed them from verbal and non-verbal perspectives.

2.2 Semiotic approach to the study of theatre

Ferdinand de Saussure and Charles Peirce laid the groundwork for the first step in the theorisation of the principles of modern semiotics by discussing the concept from different perspectives, resulting in two major models of semiotics research: the linguistic model and the logic-rhetorical model. Both Saussure's and Peirce's semiotic studies emphasised the crucial role of the sign as a mediator of meaning (Khafaga, 2022). Many contemporary semiotic studies are based on them, including theatre semiotics.

Elam (1980) outlines the history of the semiotics of theatre and drama, beginning with Prague in the 1930s, and proposes a model of theatrical communication, and an analysis of the

"logic" and discourse of theatre. The Prague school was the first to study theatre from a semiotic point of view, and it was not until the late twentieth century that the study of the semiotics of theatre increased. Kowzan (1968) first introduced the concept of systematisation of dramatic symbols based on the Prague School and developed a model of the theatrical symbol system, which consisted of thirteen dramatic signs. Subsequently, Elam (1980) and Fischer-Lichte (1992) made minor modifications to Kowzan's system of theatre symbols, but they did not change its essence. According to this theatrical sign system, this study combines theatre semiotics and non-verbal communication theory to analyse non-verbal performance.

2.3 Non-verbal communication and non-verbal performance

Darwin (1872) laid the foundation for non-verbal research by observing and comparing human expressions with animal expressions and elaborating on the physical expression of emotions. Malandro et al. (1989) provided a comprehensive overview of the various forms of non-verbal communication, including personal space, eye contact, touch, facial expressions, and so on. Similar studies have been conducted by (Burgoon et al. (2021), Danesi (2022), etc. Fridlund (1995) reveals how expressions have developed over time from the perspective of the evolution of human facial expressions. Hostetter and Alibali (2008) argue that gestures originate from a sense of embodied language and mental imagery, emphasising the importance of non-verbal communication in human interaction.

There are not many studies on non-verbal communication in theatre and comprehensive investigations of non-verbal performance, the main ones relevant to this study are as follows. Finburgh (2000) provides a comprehensive analysis of non-verbal elements such as rhythm, movement, colour and shape in Genet's dramaturgy, but does not discuss non-verbal elements outside of Genet's dramaturgy. Kurosawa and Davidson (2005) investigate non-verbal performances in popular music

performances in terms of performers' non-verbal behaviour, analysing the use and function of gestures, postures and facial expressions in musical performances and the significance of non-verbal behaviour in musical performances. Kirova (2021) explores the role of non-verbal theatre in international theatre festivals, providing festival planners with guidance on non-verbal theatre presentations. However, no specific non-verbal research was addressed. None of these studies have fully explored non-verbal performance, but their research demonstrates the significance of non-verbal performance to theatre performance. Therefore, this study can be said to be necessary and valuable for theatre studies.

Material and Method

3.1 Material

The material included in this study is divided into two parts: (1) literature on theatre studies, performance studies, theatre semiotics and non-verbal communication related to this study, especially Kowzan's literature on the semiotics of theatre, as well as the literature on "opsis (ὄψις)", "spectacle". (2) Data obtained through surveys.

3.2 Method

The methodological framework of the present study is the mixed approach, which was combined through analytical methods, including textual analysis and questionnaire survey. Scholarly sources focus on theatre performance studies, as well as theatre practice and theatre education; by analysing this literature, the authors seek to explore the characteristics, classifications, and roles of non-verbal performance. However, the questionnaire survey was designed to analyse the level of awareness of non-verbal performance among theatre audiences, theatre practitioners, academics and theatre students. The methodology was designed to ensure the reliability of the study.

The analyses in this study were carried out in two phases. Firstly, literature related to theatre

studies, performance studies and non-verbal communication was collected and analysed qualitatively. The qualitative analysis was conducted to provide a comprehensive discussion of the definitions, classifications and characteristics of non-verbal performance in theatre and to explain the place and role of non-verbal performance in theatre. Secondly, the questionnaire survey approach was employed. This research approach was used because it allowed for the characterisation of the population (Fraenkel & Wallen, 2008), i.e. to describe the extent to which theatre audiences, theatre practitioners, academics and theatre students are aware of non-verbal performance. The population eligible for this study is large, therefore, a certain number of samples (N=472) are selected for the study, and the samples are described and analysed. The sample for the present study utilised a snowball sampling method based on the geographical division of the five continents to ensure the breadth of sample coverage and diversity of information. Quantitative analyses were conducted using descriptive and correlational analyses to examine the level of perception of theatre audiences, theatre practitioners, academics and theatre students about non-verbal performance.

After completing the qualitative and quantitative analyses, the researcher started writing the research article.

Results and Discussion

4.1 What is non-verbal performance?

What is non-verbal performance? Scholars have not provided a clear definition. The exploration of the meaning and content of non-verbal performance should begin with an understanding of performance. The term performance is difficult to define and is inherently controversial. Typically, a performance is considered to be the act or process of an activity, including games, sports, music, rituals, performing arts, etc. From the performing arts perspective, a performance is a

special interaction between a performer and an observation in a particular space, whereby the actor presents a pre-rehearsed piece to the audience. The performance examined in this study is under the category of theatre. For theatre, performance refers to the actor or all the means on stage performing an action (Pavis, 2016, p. 157). In other words, a performance includes not only the behavioural activities of the actor but also all the dramatic means on the stage. These theatrical devices include (not limited to) sets, props, costumes, make-up, and masks.

Theatre and performance are semiotic and mediated. Influenced by sociological studies, theatre as mediated communication has been influenced by semiotics and is discussed in theatre and performance studies. Scholars transform elements in theatre into theatrical signs through semiotic principles, which are then analysed and studied in performances. Performance consists of verbal and non-verbal signs, and signs can be indexed whether they are verbal or not. Verbal signs are presented in performance through voice, and non-verbal signs are presented in the actual performance through visual codes, musical codes, props, etc. The presentation of these non-verbal symbols in a theatre performance constitutes a non-verbal performance.

4.1.1 Explore definition

The theatre is being staged, and what is presented on stage, what can be seen, and what can be heard belongs to the realm of performance. Performance refers not only to the acting (voice, speech, movement, acting) of the actors but also to the “opsis (ὄψις)” proposed by Aristotle and other philosophers before him, which is often translated as spectacle, i.e., all the non-verbal components of ancient theatre: masks, costumes, props, sets, songs, music, the theatrical space and its use, etc (Harrison et al., 2013). In addition, actors' performances also contain non-verbal components, and exactly what non-verbal components are included can be analysed from the perspective of non-verbal

communication. Non-verbal communication is generally understood as:

All modes of face-to-face communication between humans by means other than speech/words. Usually refers to the communicative functions of physical activity, gestures, posture, facial expressions, proxemics, touch and smell, as well as paralanguage that may be perceived in communication as unrelated to the referent of what is being said. (Danesi, 2022)

The behaviours contained in non-verbal communication are highly congruent with the behaviours of the actors when they are performing, and therefore the actors' body movements, gestures, facial expressions, postures, proxemics, paralanguage, etc. can be understood as non-verbal performances. From semiotics, both the non-verbal components of ancient theatre and the non-verbal components of actors' performances can be regarded as non-verbal signs in performance. These non-verbal symbols contain visual symbols and sound symbols (musical codes), which interact with verbal symbols (monologue, dialogue, narration) to present a complete performance.

From the above analysis, non-verbal performances can be considered as all the performance components in theatre performances except verbal performances (monologue, dialogue, voiceover), which cover the non-verbal acts of actors' performances, i.e. movement, gestures, facial expressions, postures, paralanguage, etc., and all non-verbal means of presentation and expression included in theatre.

4.1.2 Classification

This study will explore the classification of non-verbal performances based on theories of theatre semiotics and non-verbal communication. Firstly, the elements contained in theatre and performance are analysed from the perspective of theatre semiotics, and these elements are analysed and categorised. Secondly, non-verbal communication is investigated, analysing the behaviours and

means used in non-verbal communication, as well as the connection that exists between non-verbal behaviours in actors' performances and non-verbal communication. Finally, an attempt is made to categorise non-verbal performances.

All elements in a theatre performance are signs. A fake tree on the stage indicates that we are in the forest, and a beam of light on the stage represents this moonlight. A feathered ornament carried on the actor's head is a sign of the peacock's crown feathers, while the mock animals painted on the face and the costumes shaped like peacock feathers on the body are all peacock symbols. Finally, the soundtrack of peacock warbling is a symbol of peacocks frolicking or courtship. These symbols cover both auditory and visual.

Theatre performance is made up of the actor's spoken text and expression of the body, as well as the spectacle. According to the composition of

performances and semiotic principles, Kowzan proposed a system of theatrical signs, which consists of thirteen symbolic elements: word, tone, mime, gesture, movement, make-up, hairstyle, costume, props, decor, light, music, sound effects (see Table. 1). The categories of theatre performance symbols are delineated through methods based on the medium of performance, the sensory perception of the symbols, time and space, and the combination of the senses and the medium. After Kowzan, Fischer-Lichte (1992) modified and supplemented this signs system of theatre performance notation by adding proxemic signs, but did not substantially change it. This study will explore the classification of non-verbal performances with non-verbal communication theory, based on Kowzan's signs system for theatre performances, as well as the symbols added by Fischer-Lichte, in conjunction.

Table 1. The Signs System of Theatrical Performance (Kowzan, 1968).

Word	Spoken text	Actor	Auditive signs	Time	Auditive signs (actor)
Tone			Visual signs	Space and time	Visual signs (actor)
Mime	Space				
Gesture					
Movement					
Make-up	Actor's external appearance	Outside the actor		Space and time	Visual signs (outside the actor)
Hairstyle					
Costume					
Props	Appearance of the stage		Auditive signs	Time	auditive signs (outside the actor)
Decor					
Light	Inarticulate sounds				
Music					
Sound effects					

Under the knowledge of non-verbal communication and spectacle, this study first classified the signs of theatrical performance proposed by Kowzan and Fischer-Lichte into verbal and non-verbal signs, where the word (monologue, dialogue, voiceover) is a verbal symbol, and the other thirteen signs are categorised as non-verbal symbols. Secondly, a comprehensive categorisation of non-verbal symbols related to non-verbal communication, i.e., symbols related to the actor's body, and the other category is outside of the body (see Table.

2). mime, gesture and movement are related to the body, make-up, hairstyle and costume are related to the actor's external appearance, proxemic is related to the body and the stage, and tone/paralanguage is related to the spoken text. All of these non-verbal elements above relate to the actors and coincide with non-verbal behaviour in non-verbal communication. Props, decor and light relate to the appearance of the stage, and music and sound effects relate to Inarticulate sounds, which are non-verbal elements outside the actors.

Another way of classification is by human sensory perception, i.e. visual symbols and auditory symbols. Mime, gesture, movement, make-up, hairstyle, costume, props, decor, light

and proxemic belong to the category of visual symbols. Tone/paralanguage, music and sound effects belong to the category of auditory symbols.

Table 2. Classification of Non-verbal Performances

Mime	Expression of the body	Actor	Visual signs
Gesture			
Movement			
Make-up	Actor's external appearance		
Hairstyle			
Costume			
Props	Appearance of the stage	Outside the actor	
Decor			
Light			
Proxemic	Body and stage	Actor and stage	
Tone/Paralanguage	Spoken text	Actor	Auditive signs
Music	Inarticulate sounds	Outside the actor	
Sound effects			

The classification of non-verbal performance can be applied to the teaching and creation of theatre by looking for the place and role of different non-verbal performance elements in the characterisation of the actor in rehearsals.

4.1.3 Characteristic

The above analysis reveals that non-verbal performances are characterised by multi-channels, continuity, consciously or unconsciously and by the genre of the play.

When performing non-verbal performances, the way of communication to the audience is multi-channel. In terms of the senses, there are visual channels and auditory channels. From the point of view of the medium of performance, it can be divided into performances by actors: mime, gesture, movement and tone/paralanguage, and performances outside the actors, i.e. stage, space and Inarticulate sounds. These channels of non-verbal performance interact with each other and, in combination with the verbal performances, make up a complete performance. However, for dance theatre, pantomime and physical theatre, the interaction between non-verbal performances is central to their portrayal of characters and storytelling. For example, in the dance drama *Peacock*, the actors imitate the peacock with their movements, the

costumes combine with the dancers' movements to present the peacock opening its screen, and the sound effects as Inarticulate sounds express the peacock's joyful mood (see Fig. 1). These non-verbal performances show that they are multi-channel in nature.



Figure 1. The Peacock (Yang, 2022).

Non-verbal performances are continuous and variable in theatre performances. A verbal performance on stage has a definite beginning and end. However, non-verbal performance cannot be stopped. Even if an actor stops his pre-choreographed action and just stands on the stage, his posture, facial expression and appearance are still performing a non-verbal performance, intentionally or unintentionally

conveying information to the audience. In addition, the stage set, lighting, props, music, etc. are also always conveying messages and performing continuously.

Generally, verbal acting in theatre performance is a conscious act of the actor which unfolds according to the script. Non-verbal performance, on the other hand, contains both conscious and unconscious forms. Conscious non-verbal performances refer to the performances of actors according to pre-designed movements and postures, etc., or things designed and presented on stage by set designers, costume designers, sound designers, etc. according to the requirements of the script. These conscious non-verbal performances have the function of conveying certain information about the script. Unintentional non-verbal performance, on the other hand, does not consider or plan the information that the play wants to convey. It is a performance presented unconsciously by the actor or other stage elements. For example, an actor's paralanguage during a performance.

There are different ways and forms of performance in different types of theatre. For example, dance drama, pantomime and physical theatre use non-verbal performance as a means to complete the narrative of the play, but there are differences in non-verbal performance between them, including movement and posture. In addition, each type of theatre has different requirements for stage sets, costumes, props, etc., which are presented in different forms. All these factors are responsible for the differences that exist in their non-verbal performances, so it is said that non-verbal performances are limited by the theatre genres.

4.2 Understanding non-verbal performance

Non-verbal performance accompanies the emergence and development of theatre, and it interacts with verbal performance to present a complete and vivid theatrical performance. Non-verbal performances, as symbols that generate meaning, can influence the audience's understanding of the content of the play. In

addition, the design of non-verbal performances is crucial in the creation of theatre, which can further interpret verbal performances. This is because the same word in a speech act may have different meanings and additional non-verbal acts are needed to remove ambiguities and present the intention that the words are trying to convey (Rozik, 2007, p. 202). An actor's facial expression, intonation, body posture and gestures are considered to be the most reliable indicators of intention. In addition, non-verbal performances outside the actor's body are equally important in communicating meaning in theatre performances. The degree of awareness of non-verbal performance affects the presentation and depth of expression of theatre creators in their characterisation and storytelling, as well as the audience's understanding of theatre works. This study analyses and discusses the current situation of non-verbal performance in theatre understanding from the perspectives of theatre audiences and professionals respectively.

This study was based on people who had seen theatre performances and samples that had not seen theatre were treated as invalid in order to ensure the accuracy of the study. In addition, the study also whether or not they had studied theatre-related majors as an important indicator, therefore, samples that were unclear whether or not they had received theatre education and those that refused to answer were also treated as invalid. The final number of samples with research value was obtained as 456.

4.2.1 Research hypotheses

Hypothesis 1: People who have seen theatre have a low level of awareness of non-verbal performance.

In Hypothesis 1, people who have seen theatre do not necessarily know what a non-verbal performance is and a low percentage of those who consider themselves knowledgeable about non-verbal understand accurately non-verbal performances.

Hypothesis 2: Those with a theatre education consider themselves knowledgeable about non-verbal performance.

In Hypothesis 2, the presence or absence of theatre education showed a significant positive correlation with the person's perception of his/her understanding of non-verbal performance. That is, people who have received theatre education believe that they understand non-verbal performances. Drama education is the main way in which people learn about non-verbal performances; therefore, people who have received drama education believe that they know non-verbal performances.

Hypothesis 3: Individuals with theatre education have a higher level of knowledge about non-verbal performances than those without theatre education.

In Hypothesis 3, there is a significant positive correlation between having received theatre education or not and the level of understanding of non-verbal performance. That is, the more accurately those who have received theatre education understand the content of non-verbal performances. In a way, it also reflects that the role of theatre education in the understanding of theatre is worthwhile.

4.2.2 Level of understanding of non-verbal performance

Table 3 and Table 4 demonstrate the distribution of the main variables in this study. From them, it is possible to find out the level of knowledge about non-verbal performances

(NVP) among those who have watched theatre. Less than half of those who had watched the theatre considered themselves knowledgeable about non-verbal performance, suggesting that watching the theatre does not necessarily lead to an understanding of what non-verbal performance is. In addition, the study investigated whether those who considered themselves knowledgeable about nonverbal performance were able to accurately understand nonverbal performance. When analysing the data, the three values for not having a full understanding of non-verbal performances were transformed, with the final transformed values representing not being able to understand accurately and understanding accurately respectively. The mean value for the degree to which those who have seen the theatre understand non-verbal performances correctly is 1.56, indicating that a larger portion of the audience has a positive understanding of non-verbal performance, but is still some way from a correct understanding.

From the analysis of the above data, it can be seen that the public does not know much about non-verbal performance and the popularity is not high. Research on the comprehensive analysis of non-verbal performance is necessary, and the research can provide some references for theatre education and practice.

Table 3. Frequency of Relevant Variates.

Variate	N		Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Educated in theatre or not	456	No	50%	50%
		Yes	50%	100%
Know NVP or not	455	No	37.6%	37.6%
		Yes	47.7%	85.3%
		Unclear	14.7%	100%
Correctly understood NVP or not	217	Inaccuracy	40.1%	40.1%
		Accuracy	59.9%	100%

Table 4. Mean and Std. Deviation.

Variate	N	Mean	Deviation
Educated in theatre or not	456	1.5	.501
Know NVP or not	388	1.56	.497
Correctly understood NVP or not	217	1.5991	.491

According to the correlation analysis between being educated in theatre and knowing NVP (see Table. 5), it can be seen that the correlation coefficient between being educated in theatre or not and knowing non-verbal or not is .240, $P < .001$, which is a significant positive correlation. In the null hypothesis, the probability of chance of occurrence is less than .001, which is significant. That is, the probability that the sample admits that those who believe that they have received theatre education feel

that they understand non-verbal performance is high. Furthermore, the correlation coefficient between the presence of theatre education and the ability to understand NVP correctly is 0.135, $P < .05$, which is a significant positive correlation. In the null hypothesis, the chance of the probability of occurrence is less than 0.05, which is significant. That is, people in the sample who have studied theatre are considered to have high accuracy in understanding knowledge of non-verbal performance.

Table 5. Correlation between education in theatre and knowledge about NVP.

Educated in theatre or not	Know NVP or not		Correctly understood NVP or not	
	Pearson correlation	.240**		.135*
	Sig. (2-tailed)	<.001		.047
	N	456		217

Note: Correlation is significant at the 0.05 *. level (2-tailed), Correlation is significant at the 0.01 **. level (2-tailed).

To sum up, the public's cognitive level of non-verbal performance in theatre is low, which shows that watching theatre performances does not have a great influence on the understanding of non-verbal performances. The relatively high level of understanding of non-verbal performance among those who have received theatre education suggests that learning about theatre may be an effective way to enhance cognition. In addition, the results of the analyses regarding the level of awareness of nonverbal performance are in line with the current state of theoretical research on nonverbal performance. The incomplete theoretical research on nonverbal performance may be one of the reasons for the low level of public awareness of nonverbal performance. How to improve the public's awareness level of nonverbal performance is an issue that we need to discuss urgently.

Conclusion

This study examines non-verbal performance elements in theatre performance. The analysis focuses on thirteen theatre performance symbols

and explores the connotations, classifications and characteristics of non-verbal performance. In addition, the level of audience awareness of non-verbal performance was analysed and the popularity of non-verbal performance was discussed. The findings of the study show that:

Non-verbal performance covers all non-verbal elements on stage, including mime, gesture, movement, make-up, hairstyle, costume, props, decor, light, proxemic, tone/paralanguage, music, and sound effects. These elements are analysed based on the semiotic system of theatre performance proposed by Kowzan and Fischer-Lichte, as well as the opsis proposed by Aristotle and the scholars before him.

As the study of non-verbal performance in theatre progresses, the theoretical aspects of non-verbal performance will become clearer. Non-verbal performance shapes the image of the characters, enriches the communication between the characters on the stage, and conveys the thoughts and emotions of the theatre works, which is of great significance in theatre performance. Because non-verbal performance can explain and extend verbal performance. Non-verbal performances can be classified

according to human sensory experience and the medium of performance. From sensory experience, non-verbal performances can be divided into two categories: visual symbols and auditory symbols. From the perspective of the medium of performance, it can be divided into actor-mediated and outside actor-mediated. Classifying non-verbal performances can provide theoretical references for theatre education and theatre creation. If the practical study of nonverbal performance can be promoted, it is possible to achieve an effective synthesis of theory and practice.

In addition, the study explored the level of awareness of non-verbal performance by analysing a sample of theatre audiences. The results showed that people who had seen theatre did not have a good understanding of the meaning of non-verbal performance either. Those who were educated in theatre had a relatively high level of understanding of non-verbal language. The low level of knowledge of nonverbal performance may be related to the

incomplete theoretical research on nonverbal performance. How to enhance the popularity of theoretical research on nonverbal performance and raise people's level of knowledge is an issue worth studying in the future. The author believes that the popularity of theatre knowledge is an optional and effective path.

This study's comprehensive exploration of nonverbal performance can be considered a new attempt in the field. It contributes to a better understanding of the connotations, classifications and characteristics of non-verbal performance in theatre, and provides some theoretical considerations for theatre educators, creators and audiences. Furthermore, this study reveals the lack of previous literature studies and notes the significance of non-verbal performance in theatre performance research and theatre communication.

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