JFK Nonverbal Communication

(Institutional Affiliation)

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(Instructor Name)

(Course Number)

(Due Date)

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Communication is an essential part of understanding, dissecting, and subsequently acting on various processes and systems that run our daily lives. Generally, communication is the process of sending and receiving messages that allow others to understand common knowledge, skills, and attitude. Ruth Sherman defines nonverbal communication as the technique that allows all the things that we do that give our words meaning, voice, hand gestures, eyes, facial expressions” (RuthSherman, 2011, 00:00:10-00:00:18). Nonverbal communication plays a vital role in face-to-face communication as it demonstrates the subtle nonverbal cues that provide adequate meaning to the utterances we make. For this purpose, it is essential to identify the various signals in real life and identify them in relevant speeches and communication events. As such, the purpose of this paper is to evaluate John F. Kennedy’s Inaugural Address and identify the various verbal and nonverbal cues associated with it. Through it all, the importance of nonverbal communication is seemingly overlooked in situations of such magnitude as the Inaugural Address. However, it also paints a decisive picture of nonverbal communication’s palpability in getting across a specific message of direction.

John F Kennedy was in the midst of his most important speech as the newly elected President of the United States and recognized the magnitude of the situation at the onset. First, JFK demonstrates an aura of power. He stands well above the podium and displays a tall stature that coincides with authority, energy, and general comfortability in speaking. The most notable nonverbal communication occurs in hand gestures throughout the speech, more specifically, the index finger routinely bashing against the podium while speaking on essential points. Similarly, during the speech, JFK pauses for effect, which is effective in conveying the palpability of a particular message or as means of resonating with the respective crowd. It is also essential to place the speech in the historical context of which it was spoken. It was the emergence of the Cold War and represented a change in how America was going to partake in international affairs. This, in turn, was an element that JFK used profoundly, as he was capable of incorporating natural pauses, great vocal punctuations, and in the choice of words JFK elected to use (CBS, 2011). Another significant nonverbal factor and one often overlooked was JFK’s choice to speak in a professional suit even during the cold months. This decision, although minimal, was hugely impactful on the effectiveness of the speech because it showcased grit and tenacity.

Moreover, several instances in which the comparison to the time then and the age of technology would allow for differences in how the speech was written and subsequently delivered. In other words, JFK was forced to accompany his speech and his practice with the subtle pauses needed to reassess the notes and speech direction as there was not a teleprompter available. JFK would have to resort to his notes when a claim was made and did so in an effective, efficient, and precise way. Furthermore, in an age of technology, there would likely be a profound difference in how the speech is conveyed, considering the accessibility of the event on multiple technological mediums. Instead of focusing on sharing the message to the nearby audience and subsequently directing and practicing the speech in this way, JFK would have to incorporate different nonverbal mechanisms and processes to convey the message more effectively. One example could be an increase in outwards expression as most of the speech would not be listened to via radio but instead, through a lens capable of showcasing these expressions. In turn, this allowed the viewer to identify, in their way, the essence of the speech and what JFK is attempting to get across. Overall, small details will likely change from the direction of the address then, compared to now. But the most obvious lies in body language, gestures, eye contact, and intonation that nonverbal correspondence heavily depends on.

**References**

CBS. (2011, January 16). *President John F. Kennedy’s Inaugural Address*. YouTube. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PEC1C4p0k3E>

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