Non-Verbal Communication and the Dramatic Text: an Analysis of the Didascalia in the Play *A Lost Letter* by I.L. Caragiale

Raluca LEVONIAN

The study of dramatic texts encounters difficulties arising from the specific features of their communication model. The theatrical performance is characterized by multiple media: the messages are meant to be transmitted by means of multiple codes, linguistic as well as non-linguistic. The multimedial character of the performance is obvious, but what is there to say about the written text, the playwright's work?

This dramatic text is conveyed only by the verbal code, but it cannot be conceived without taking account of its possible mise en scène. Moreover, the playwright has in mind an ideal, typical performance. This finality of each play, the performance, leads to the differences between dramatic texts and other text types. Dramatic texts have a particular structure, which consists in two kinds of discourses: the characters' lines and the didascalia.

Didascalia have been traditionally regarded as a less meaningful discourse compared to the dialogue, which formed "the core of the play" or "the main text". These stage directions usually have a negative definition: they are text fragments that cannot be verbalized during the performance. This broad definition includes some elements with a key role in the organization of the text: the title, the secondary title, the dramatis personae, the marking of acts, scenes and speakers, the stage directions that are connected to or replace the lines. Didascalia have, therefore, two functions: one – in the internal communication system of the play, in regard to the fictional utterance, the other one – in the external communication system, in regard to the scenic ennunciation[1]. Discussing Anne Ubersfeld's point of view, Sanda Golopenția asserts that, from the perspective of pragmatics, didascalia have an indexical function, connected to the verbal exchanges that form the play[2].

The multimedial character of the play is expressed by the importance of the non-verbal messages in the conversational events of the play. The lines and the didascalia should both include cues about the characters' conduct, such as, in real life, taking part in a discussion implies the simultaneous use of diverse codes and channels.

The attention paid by the playwright to the non-verbal constituents and to the stage movements is often revealed by the quantity of the didascalia and their dissemination throughout the text. The dramatic text needs a holistic approach, including data from various fields of study: history of literature, pragmatics, non-verbal communication, literary anthropology. The result would be a more accurate understanding of the author's

[1] Anne Ubersfeld, *Termenii cheie ai analizei teatrului*, Iaşi, Institutul European, 1999, p. 31.
[2] Sanda Golopenția, Monique Martinez-Thomas, *Voir les didascalies*, Paris, Ophrys, 1994, p. 23.

Philologica Jassyensia, An II, Nr. 2, 2006, p. 25-35

BDD-A781 © 2006 Institutul de Filologie Română „A. Philippide"
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.31 (2026-11-27 19:06:55 UTC)

manner to imagine the characters, their relationships, even the final performance. An analysis of the non-verbal messages included in the didascalia may tell whether the text is performable or not.

This study is based on the play *A Lost Letter*, chosen because of its abundant stage directions. Our aim will be the analysis of the non-verbal messages mentioned in the stage directions, paying attention to several types of non-verbal communication: *proxemics* – the study of the individuals' positions in space, *kinesics* – the study of gestures. Paralinguistic details and elements regarding facial expressions will also prove their significance for the understanding of the text.

Stage directions have a semantically varied content, which has lead us to operate a segmentation, in order to isolate units of content. We have named „infra-didascalic unit" the guideline inside of a stage direction that refers to a single non-verbal message (i.e. a single gesture, movement, touch, vocal cue a.s.o.). The meanings of infra-didascalic units will be related to the characters' lines and to the didascalia expressing emotional states.

The language humour is widely represented in Caragiale's play, but the non-verbal context is also important; the non-verbal communication is carefully designed in all of Caragiale's plays. Extra-linguistic responses substitute, complete or contradict the speech and can even serve a meta-communicative function, by offering a key for the correct interpretation of the dialogue. Behavior is a means for characterization and every main character of the play has some particular features.

In contrast to another famous Romanian playwright of the time, Vasile Alecsandri, Caragiale's main characters are not defined by a single gesture, a recurrent kinesic trait. They send instead series of concordant non-verbal messages and thus reveal their psychological life. There is no specific gesture, but gesturality regarding Tipătescu's body language: he is nervous, becomes quickly annoyed and has a disposition towards violent, brisk movements, that he can hardly ban. Caţavencu's portrait benefits from the various paralinguistic didascalia concerning the tone, the rhythm and speed of the speech, especially when he declaims his discourses. Trahanache is portrayed by means of slow, calm gestures. A kinesic leitmotif is more obviously used for secondary characters. Dandanache's amnesia is expressed by the „jingle bells" gesture. The Drunken Citizen's behavior is the expression of his drunkenness (hiccups and hesitations), but these responses are accompanied by the voting sign, a mark of his quality as a voter.

It has already been mentioned Caragiale's preference for couples of heroes, one of whom brings to light the other one: Dumitrache – Ipingescu, Leonida – Efimiţa, Farfuridi – Brânzovenescu, Pampon – Crăcănel. In the comedy *A Lost Letter* we notice the joining of characters with different kinesic behavior during the same scene. This strategy underlines the particular traits of each character. Tipătescu and the policeman Pristanda form an asymmetrical couple, due to the status difference, clearly marked in the first didascalia of the first act. The policeman maintains a certain distance from his master – "*standing near the door, leaning on his sword* [3]". The subordination of the police to the political authority is thus obvious from the beginning, during the discussion about the flags bought by Pristanda. This sequence functions as a parenthesis and makes Pristanda delay his narration. The humour arises from the prefect's responses, that

[3] *"(...) în picioare, mai spre uşă, stă rezemat în sabie".*

BDD-A781 © 2006 Institutul de Filologie Română „A. Philippide"
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.31 (2026-11-27 19:06:55 UTC)

would have been unexpected in a real-life context: he smiles, then laughs, although he is perfectly aware of the policeman's theft. Pristanda is caught in this trap and for a brief moment he has the authentic reaction – "(*forgetting and laughing*): A real theft! (*immediately correcting himself, naive*) What do you mean by theft, sir...?[4]" He censors his conduct then and the verbal exchange goes on complementary. Pristanda brings forth arguments to prove his innocence by using two different strategies: firstly, he pretends to be not guilty, then he shifts to an "additive" strategy and speaks too much and too quickly, in order to avoid Tipătescu's intervention. The prefect's reproach – although mild – establishes the policeman's real position: he becomes "*humble and naive*" ("*umilit şi naiv*"), a mere servant.

The prefect has proved here his readiness to forgive, but during the play his impulsiveness becomes manifest, especially if he encounters locutors with a different temper. The scene when Trahanache reveals him Caţavencu's plot is based on the technique of intertextuality (very frequent in Caragiale's plays and consisting either in a narration inserted in the verbal exchange or in the loud reading of a newspaper article or letter). Caragiale's characters who read or tell a story have less kinesic didascalia than their listeners. There are no illustrators[5], kinetographs[6] or pictographs[7], no mimetic gestures that could have had a role in Trahanache's story, because the reader's attention is focused on Tipătescu. His utterances are brief most of the times and create an echo effect, since he repeats his partner's words.

> "Trahanache: ... Who was the letter from?
> Tipătescu: From?
> Trahanache: From the honourable gentleman Nae Caţavencu.
> Tipătescu: From Caţavencu?
> (...) Trahanache: ... Guess whose and addressed to whom?
> Tipătescu (*barely controlling his emotion*): Whose? Whose, uncle Zaharia?[8]"

These short utterances are counterbalanced by the hero's exaggerated mobility. His nervousness grows, his gestures become "excessive signals" and therefore harder to conceal. Tipătescu walks up and down the room, in a rage, fists clenched in an aggressive attitude that preceeds his words: "I'm going to shoot him! I'm going to burn him down!". Clenched fists are an "action-projector[9]" or an anticipatory kinetograph.

---

[4] "(*uitându-se pe sine şi râzând*): Curat condei! (*luându-şi numaidecât seama, naiv*): Adicăte, cum condei, coane Fănică?..."

[5] Gestures that have a meaning only if they are accompanied by a verbal explanation.

[6] A class of illustrator gestures that describe movements.

[7] Illustrator gestures that describe shapes and outlines.

[8] "Trahanache: ...De la cine era răvăşelul?
Tipătescu: De la cine?
Trahanache: De la onorabilul d. Nae Caţavencu.
Tipătescu: De la Caţavencu?
(...) Trahanache: ... Ghici a cui şi către cine?
Tipătescu (de-abia stăpânindu-şi emoţia): A cui? A cui, nene Zahario?" (I,4)

[9] The name is proposed by Jürgen Streeck and Mark Knapp in their study *The Interaction of Visual and Verbal Features in Human Communication* (1992) and it refers to a gesture that expresses visually the action intended by the speaker. It occurs in the transition space between the utterances, before the speaker

BDD-A781 © 2006 Institutul de Filologie Română „A. Philippide"
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.31 (2026-11-27 19:06:55 UTC)

The character's efforts to control his reactions fail sometimes. The discussion involving Tipătescu and the two members of his party, Farfuridi and Brânzovenescu, starts with the former's fake signals, in order to achieve an introductory verbal exchange according to the etiquette code. This ritual sequence of greetings is undermined by the two characters' aside utterances and their contrasting opinions on Tipătescu's facial expression. The lack of an explanatory didascalia concerning his facial display maintains the uncertainty and increases the humour:

> "Tipătescu (*coming from the left, upset and struggling to look composed*): Welcome, welcome, honourable!
> Brânzovenescu (*aside*): He's pale!
> Farfuridi (*aside)*: How he has turned red![10]" (I,6)

Tipătescu tries to underrate the discussed topic and to treat it as being derisive ("*with a forced laugh*[11]"), but his non-verbal attitude is corrected by Brânzovenescu as improper for the serious problem they are facing. A competition goes on between Tipătescu and the couple Farfuridi – Brânzovenescu, at first only at a verbal level, then in a concrete but mild manner: they wrest the printed leaflet from each other. The news determine the prefect to end the discussion suddenly, without any corrective ritual exchange: „*he walks over to the table and rings the bell*[12]".

Confronted with Caţavencu, Tipătescu appears from the begining to be in an aggressive mood. His behavior represents the typical attitude for an individual preparing for a fight: he frowns, his fists are clenched, he does not move for some time, "*staring at Caţavencu*[13]". This behavior can be explained from an ethological point of view: animals that are ready to engage in a fight first take a good look at their enemy.

While their discussion is in progress, Tipătescu sends more and more aggressive signals. Caţavencu makes the opening movement by excusing himself for his arrival at his political opponent's home. Tipătescu's first two utterances are spoken aside: it is a tactic silence, in response to the locutor's attempt to tackle the problem. It shows both his dislike for this undesired guest and his struggle to control himself. At the same time, the silence means an overlooking of the social requirements that a host should meet the guests warmly. The silence is counterbalanced by gestures. Tipătescu "*has stamped his foot impatiently*[14]"; foot-signals are hard to conceal and thus they are a reliable sign of excessive nervousness. At the non-verbal level, Tipătescu fights against Caţavencu and tries to gain advantage. During the first part of their exchange, Tipătescu wins: he approaches slowly, threatening and forcing the other to sit down:

---

verbalizes his/her intentions. We have preferred the name „anticipatory kinetograph" in order to show its connection with the subclass of kinetographs described by Ekman and Friesen.

[10] "Tipătescu (*venind din stânga turburat şi dându-şi aer silit de degajare*): Salutare, salutare, stimabile!
Brânzovenescu (*aparte*): E galben!
Farfuridi (*aparte*): Ce roşu s-a făcut!" (I,6)

[11] *"Râde silit."*

[12] "*merge la masă şi trage clopoţelul*."

[13] "(...) *măsurând din ochi pe Caţavencu*" (II, 9)

[14] "*a tot bătut din călcâi cu impacienţă*" (II,9)

BDD-A781 © 2006 Institutul de Filologie Română „A. Philippide"
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.31 (2026-11-27 19:06:55 UTC)

"Caţavencu: (...) (*Tipătescu offers him a chair, he rejects it gently*.) Thank you!
Tipătescu (*the same*): Sit down, please, sit!
Caţavencu (*the same*): Thank you!
Tipătescu (*staring at Caţavencu and grumbling*): Well, sit down!...
Caţavencu (*who has retreated a little, finally gives up and sinks down on the chair rather unwillingly*): Thank you.[15]" (II,9)

Tipătescu thus succeeds in changing the spatial arrangement completely, as an individual who sits down is less menacing and his/her action area diminishes. This proxemic rearrangement favors the prefect, because Caţavencu retreats, Tipătescu sits down close to him and this unwanted closeness unnerves the enemy. Tipătescu has entered his locutor's intimate territory, instead of keeping a "near" or "neutral" distance. Tipătescu's discourse includes an unexpected movement in a blackmail situation: he admits that the letter is genuine and, in effect, his guilt. Caţavencu acknowledges this assertion with a vague movement – "(*gesture*): Oh![16]" The vague didascalia allows the interpretation of the movement as an expression of surprise, but also of contentedness. Tipătescu prefers to react ironically ("Forgive me for offending you..."). The next sequence is based on apparent behavior since both speakers feign their reactions. Tipătescu talks to his guest "very politely", Caţavencu pretends to be naive. Tipătescu breaks off twice, every time when Caţavencu starts delivering his usual pompous speech. His gestures show impulsiveness again ("*stamps his foot*"), but also a good knowledge of his oponent's hypocrisy and, in the end, of the political life.

One gesture is used by both speakers, in turns. In the beginning, Caţavencu says: "[...] I like playing the game briefly, briefly. (*Cutting gesture*)[17]", which is exactly the opposite of what he intends to do, because he is fond of long, bombastic phrases. Tipătescu repeats this movement and it does not express sincerity either, but lack of patience: "(*nervous, stamping his foot*): I beg, honourable, once again... (*clearly*) what do you want from me in exchange for that letter? Briefly! Briefly! (*he repeats Caţavencu's cutting gesture*.)[18]"

In the internal communication system of the play, Caţavencu's behavior includes a series of "dispreferred marked seconds[19]": the successive rejections of Tipătescu's offers. The rejections are mildered by non-verbal means – "*smiling and gently*", "*the same*", "*Caţavencu smiles with a denial gesture[20]*". These responses surprise his partner, but they are "preferred unmarked seconds" for the reader. Caţavencu refuses

[15] "Caţavencu: (...) (*Tipătescu îi oferă jeţul, el îl respinge uşor*.) Mulţumesc!
Tipătescu (*acelaşi joc*): Ia poftim, mă rog, ia poftim!
Caţavencu (*acelaşi joc*): Mulţumesc!
Tipătescu (*privind ţintă la Caţavencu şi cu tonul mârâit*): Poftim de!...
Caţavencu (*care s-a cam retras puţin, cedează în sfârşit şi cade pe fotoliu cam fără voie*): Mulţumesc." (II,9)

[16] "(*gest*): A!"

[17] "(...) Mie-mi place să joc scurt, scurt. (*Gest de retezare*.)".

[18] "(*impacientat, bătând din călcâi*): Mă rog, onorabile, încă o dată... (*răspicat)* Ce-mi ceri d-ta în schimbul acelei scrisori? Scurt! Scurt! (*repetă gestul de retezare al lui Caţavencu*.)" (II,9).

[19] Liliana Ionescu-Ruxăndoiu, *Conversaţia – structuri şi strategii. Sugestii pentru o pragmatică a românei vorbite*, Bucureşti, All, 1999, p. 51.

[20] *„zâmbind cu bonomie", „asemenea", „Caţavencu surâde cu un gest de refuz*".

BDD-A781 © 2006 Institutul de Filologie Română „A. Philippide"
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.31 (2026-11-27 19:06:55 UTC)

minor benefits and continues the blackmail because he wants to be elected as a deputy. The display of a jovial attitude, of smile or laughter has an ethological reason: these facial expressions are meant to appease the enemy[21]. Tipătescu's interruption, caused by his losing of patience and expressed by his standing-up is related to the main part of their verbal exchange ("what do you want from me"). Caţavencu pretends to accept the challenge, but when Tipătescu is completely out of himself with anger, he "*rushes across to the window*", "(*trembling, he shouts outside the window*): Help! Come! The vampire's killing me! The murderer prefect! Help![22]" The two heroes' traits are clearly outlined during this scene: Tipătescu is too impulsive and tactless (as his friend, Trahanache, describes him) while Caţavencu is coward, hypocrite, but skillful in concealing and mastering his reactions. Caţavencu's rule of conduct is "The purpose excuses the means", as he justifies his actions in the preceding scene.

Caţavencu represents the demagogue, hypocrite politician also portrayed by Vasile Alecsandri. Caragiale's hero is better individualized mainly by means of varios paralinguistic infra-didascalic units. The vocal features are significant, because a politician needs talking skills, not necessarily any knowledge. Caragiale describes a world where only the form of the messages matters, instead of their content or meaning. The first didascalia concerning Caţavencu ("*in a sententious tone*"[23]) announces his portrait as a politician who talks only nonsense and uses clichés presented as general truth.

The entire play is actually a description of the long fight between members of two different political parties in order to achieve political power and electors. This fight takes a particular shape in the third act: it is focused on the problem of speaking, of uttering discourses. Caragiale's politicians strive for their right to speak, listeners always send turn-requesting cues, while speakers fight back to maintain their turn. These characters lack intellectual or moral instruction but that does not prevent them from requesting the right to speak, from overlapping and contradicting each other. Each politician struggles to prevent his opponent from speaking: a silent enemy does not represent a menace, since he loses the opportunity to persuade the voters.

Caţavencu's insincerity is revealed in his first scene by his easiness in changing his manner of speaking: he changes topics as well as displayed emotional states because he actually believes in nothing. Nevertheless, this trait is admired by the public and Pristanda's comment expresses approval: "What a great trickster! *(he exits, secretly looking with admiration at Caţavencu)*[24]" (II,7). The contrast between Caţavencu's non-verbal conduct and his words appears in his discussion with Tipătescu, when he makes the "cutting gesture": "I like to play the game briefly". This is exactly what he is not going to do because he begins a discourse about a politician's duties three times before he finally tackles the main topic, the blackmail. The "cutting gesture" is preferred, according to recent studies, by politicians because of its threatening expression: the speaker uses his/her hand as if it were a weapon[25].

[21] Konrad Lorenz, *Aşa-zisul rău. Despre istoria naturală a agresiunii*, Bucureşti, Humanitas, 2005, p. 209.

[22] "*se repede la fereastră*", "(*tremurând, strigă la fereastră în afară*): Ajutor! Săriţi! Mă omoară vampirul! Prefectul asasin! Ajutor!"

[23] "*sentenţios*" (II,7).

[24] "Mare pişicher! (*iese, aruncând priviri furişe de admiraţie către Caţavencu*.)" (II,7).

[25] Peter Collett, *Cartea gesturilor. Cum putem citi gândurile oamenilor din acţiunile lor*, Bucureşti, Ed. Trei, 2005, p. 126.

BDD-A781 © 2006 Institutul de Filologie Română „A. Philippide"
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.31 (2026-11-27 19:06:55 UTC)

The greatest number of kinesic, haptic and vocal didascalia can be found in the third act of the play. There are almost 122 vocal infra-didascalic units here, which means a half of their total sum. Vocal stage-directions are a tool for portraying two characters: Cațavencu and Farfuridi. The former is a victim of his passion for speaking, the latter – a victim of the breaks caused by his listeners.

The evolution of the political meeting, from its beginning to the end, is a humorous imitation of formal political reunions. The winner is the orator who shouts louder, therefore the most frequent didascalia for Cațavencu is "*shouting*". The didascalia for the other members of his party belong to the same semantic area: "*rumour*", "*protests*", "*with force*[26]". (The politicians' vocal exaggerations are subjected to irony, hence the newspapers' titles in Caragiale's plays: "The Roar of the Carpathians", "The National Patriot's Voice").

Words have lost their significance and gestures lose their meanings. Trahanache's gesture of ringing the bell is his mark, but it is a sign of authority that has no longer value. Not only that he cannot control the rumour and the interruptions, but he is himself interrupted, although he presides the meeting. The entire reunion does not go on according to objective, impersonal rules; Trahanache's actions regarding Farfuridi, the orator, are very emotional:

> "Trahanache (*to Farfuridi, sweetly, rising and leaning over his table towards the dais*): Honourable... I believe it won't be wrong to move on to 48..."
> "Trahanache (*rising and placing, over the table, his hands on Farfuridi's shoulders, softly*): If you love me, honourable, do me this favour, let's move on to the referendum... the assembly's wish!"
> "Trahanache (*even more imploring*): Let's move on to the referendum!.."[27]

The vocal guidelines are completed by forms of touching that should be suppressed in an official setting: placing his hands on the speaker's shoulders, making him turn from the dais. Besides the familiar note, these touches also have a control function: the president imposes upon the speaker how to organize his speech. Farfuridi's positions are improper for a true orator – "*turning his back to the assembly and his front to the president* [28]".

Farfuridi's discourse begins exactly with his request of being allowed to speak ("Allow me!" / "Dați-mi voie!") and with a self-adaptor (he drinks water), which becomes this hero's leitmotif. By the use of self-adaptors, he breaks his own stream of words, exactly when he should have gone on. He appears to prepare himself all the time for an important piece of oratory that is never uttered. Farfuridi tries to maintain his turn by adapting his rhythm of speech ("*slowly, as if he began telling a story* [29]"), but this manner of speaking does not suit the discussed topic and his oponents' paralinguistic features ("*All discussions and interruptions are done in a lawyer-like manner, very*

[26] "*strigând", "rumoare", "protestări", "cu putere*" (III, 1).

[27] "Trahanache (*către Farfuridi cu dulceață, ridicându-se peste masă către tribună*): Stimabile... eu gândesc că nu ar fi rău să sărim la 48...

(...) Trahanache (*sculându-se şi punând, peste masă, mâinile pe umerii lui Farfuridi, mângâietor*): Dacă mă iubeşti, stimabile, fă-mi hatârul... să trecem la plebicist... dorința adunării!...

(...) Trahanache (*şi mai rugător*): Să trecem la plebicist!..." (III, 1).

[28] "*întorcându-se cu spatele spre adunare şi cu fața la prezident*" (III,1).

[29] "*rar, ca şi cum ar începe o poveste*" (III,1).

BDD-A781 © 2006 Institutul de Filologie Română „A. Philippide"
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.31 (2026-11-27 19:06:55 UTC)

lively and in a pricking and voluble tone [30]"). Farfuridi lacks his enemy's versatility and slyness, thus his vocal features are ridiculized: "All (*in a chorus, in his tone*): Twenty-one precisely... (*rumour and protests*)[31]". The discourse is predictable and the listeners are already familiar with it. The members of Cațavencu's group repeat Farfuridi's words, conducted by Cațavencu. Farfuridi loses all those little battles and gives up to all of Trahanache's requirements, "resigned". Farfuridi cannot gain the audience's esteem and is forced to ask the president, who represents the authority, to his rescue.

The humour of these interruptions lies in their timing: the speaker is interrupted before he can express his opinion, exactly when he sends „intention signals", communicating his wish to talk: "*rushing", "strongly beginning the sentence* [32]". Cațavencu uses similar signals (he rises and shouts) so that he can cover the other orator's lines. Farfuridi's behavior contradicts visibly the laws of rhetoric, since an orator should control himself completely at the beginning of the speech and give way to emotions only in the end. Farfuridi is lead by emotions long before he manages to utter the final sequence of his speech. The repeated self-adaptor[33] (he wipes his face with a handkerchief) is the result of a physiological reaction that is usually allowed only when the speaker has finished.

The humorous effects of the play are not simple or merely connected to the bodily area and limited to the mismatch between the use of self-adaptors and the formal context. Farfuridi's reactions complement the lack of logic of his entire discourse and replace other gestures (as ideographs[34]) or signals that would have emphasized the most important parts of the speech. Not one ideograph is mentioned during his utterances as there are no coherent ideas that could be translated visually. On the contrary, this discourse is rich in pauses and "fumblings[35]" are commonplace. These elements either have an explanatory role, expressing the speaker's attempt to communicate a message ("That is I mean", "that is no exaggerations", "I mean" / "adică vreau să zic", "adică nu exagerațiuni", "vreau să zic") or are addressed to the listeners ("you understand", "allow me"/ "mă-nțelegi", "dați-mi voie"). Non-verbal fumblings may be considered the choking, the gulping, the gesture of wiping his face but these elements do not mark the logical units of the speech because there is no logic in it. Only one illustrator, a "baton" [36] appears, performed by Trahanache, not as a proof of authority but to show the rhythm of the speaker's flow of words.

Cațavencu's behavior is suggested by the didascalia "*with lively gestures*[37]". Liars usually tend to suppress their responses in order to avoid being caught, but Cațavencu is a special case. He must be the center of attention and therefore uses gestures to gain the audience's interest and to increase his persuasive ability. Another persuasive tool is his tone (he speaks in a "rhetorical" tone), an important turm-

[30] "(*Toate colochiile şi întreruperile se fac avocăţeşte, cu multă vioiciune şi cu tonul înţepat şi volubil*.)" (III,1).

[31] "Toți (*în cor, cu tonul lui*): Douăzeci-şi-unu fix... (*rumoare şi protestări*.)" (III,1).

[32] "*luând vânt*", "*cu tărie începând fraza*" (III,1).

[33] Gesture that helps the body adapt to a certain situation or that is connected to a physiological reaction.

[34] A subclass of the illustrators that are used while speaking in order to mark the flow of words.

[35] Liliana Ionescu-Ruxăndoiu, *op. cit*., p.77.

[36] A hand movement used to show the speaker's authority and to impress the listeners.

[37] "*gesticulând viu*" (III,1).

BDD-A781 © 2006 Institutul de Filologie Română „A. Philippide"
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.31 (2026-11-27 19:06:55 UTC)

maintaining cue that serves its function: "*people begin to notice that he perorates and little by little they gather around him...*[38]" Farfuridi tries to have his revenge and makes some replies but Cațavencu finally wins by interrupting him in a "barking" tone. While the discussion progresses, the hostility between the two groups that represent different political parties can no longer be concealed.

Cațavencu's speech proves his masterskill in displaying fake reactions: first he requests permission to speak "*modestly*" and Trahanache also displays here a false benevolent attitude. The orator prepares his presentation long before he actually begins talking, first of all by means of his long reply to Farfuridi from the previous scene. Now he is "*passing through the gathering with self-confidence*[39]". The kinesic description is very precise: he puts down his hat on the pulpit, drinks some water, takes out a pile of papers and newspapers, wipes his forehead. This is a strategy to gain the listeners' interest before the beginning of the utterance. His kinesic behavior functions as an incipit and only the verbal incipit is delayed while the visual performance, consisting of these movements, is already going on. Cațavencu knows how to insert an emotional blackmail among his utterances, how to feign an emotional state – "*he fights obviously against the emotion that seems to overcome him*[40]". This speech also contradicts rhetorical principles because of the improper facial expression: he cries before uttering a complete coherent sentence. His behavior and words complement each other. Cațavencu "chokes with tears" when he speaks about his country, although he is interested only in his personal benefits.

In contrast to Farfuridi, Cațavencu seems to enjoy the feedback of an ideal audience. The rhythm of his words is not marked by Trahanache, the president, but by the members of his group with their applause. Their approval is not a normal feedback for the speaker's ideas because it comes easily almost after every word. Cațavencu's hypocrisy is unveiled by his ability in changing quickly the emotions displayed ("*in a sudden, lively and barking tone*[41]") and by the technique used to unnerve his enemies. He speaks "(*briefly and very curtly*): Yes, yes, yes, three times yes![42]" in order to increase the effect of his words and to stop a possible reply coming from an oponent. He reinforces then the impression of self-confidence by measuring his success: he glances beamingly through the assembly.

The first part of his speech goes on without any arguments as the his fans' breaks do not mean a menace for Cațavencu. The Drunken Citizen's arrival represents the first time Cațavencu loses contact with the audience, he turns to the president and asks for support. The Drunken Citizen's coming back, with the help of Farfuridi's group, makes Cațavencu lose temper – he is "*roaring*". This reaction is repeated, even more violently, once the nominee's name is finally announced. Cațavencu passes from the previous relaxed appearance to frantic movements – "*jumping*", "*with a huge gesture*[43]", a deictical movement used to accuse the president himself. Being also nervous, Trahanache answers by using another uncontrolled gesture – "*flings the bell on*

[38] "*publicul începe să ia aminte că perorează şi se grupează încet-încet în jurul lui...*" (III,3).
[39] "*trece cu importanţă prin mulţime...*" (III,5).
[40] "*luptă ostentativ cu emoţia care pare a-l birui*" (III,5).
[41] "*cu tonul brusc, vioi şi lătrător*" (III,5).
[42] "(*scurt şi foarte retezat*): Da, da, da, de trei ori da!" (III,5).
[43] "*sărind în loc*", "*cu un gest colosal*" (III,7).

BDD-A781 © 2006 Institutul de Filologie Română „A. Philippide"
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.31 (2026-11-27 19:06:55 UTC)

the table extremely upset[44]". Caţavencu displays an aggressive attitude as if he were a cornered animal – "*raging, he rushes from the middle of his group to the platform*, *fists clenched and shouting restlessly*[45]". The fight that has been carried on only at a verbal and vocal level becomes physical. All the characters let their hostility become manifest and cease to behave according to etiquette rules.

Comedies distinguish from dramas, regarding the intensity of touch. A physical fight is only a minor event and the end brings back the joyful ambiance as it has already been noted that comic characters do not undergo spectacular changes. The humour of the play *A Lost Letter* arises also from the contrast ensued from the antipathy expressed during the play and the happy ending. Former political opponents become friends and perform touchings that communicate positive emotions and mutual bounds – "*They all kiss each other, moving around Caţavencu and Dandanache, who hug in the middle*[46]".

The plays written by Caragiale express the advancement of the Romanian playwriting in regard to the communicative potential of non-verbal messages. Romanian dramatic texts from the second half of the 19th century have little didascalia and most of the times they represent characters coming and going, the loud speaking of a line or aside utterances. Caragiale is conscious of the importance of non-verbal behavior for the humorous effects and his stage directions range from proxemic games to vocal cues that are specific for a character or for a certain context. The importance of the non-verbal messages is an innovation for that time and it proves the playwright's concern regarding the performability of the literary text.

Bibliography

Caragiale, I.L., *Teatru*, Bucureşti, Editura Tineretului, 1967.

Collet, Peter, *Cartea gesturilor. Cum putem citi gândurile altora din gesturile lor*, Bucureşti, Editura Trei, 2005.

Constantinescu, Ioan, *Caragiale şi începuturile teatrului european modern*, Bucureşti, Minerva, 1974.

De Vito, Joseph A., *The Interpersonal Communication Book*, New York, Harper & Row, 1986.

Dinu, Mihai, *Comunicarea – repere fundamentale*, Bucureşti, Editura Ştiinţifică, 1999.

Golopenţia, Sanda, Martinez-Thomas, Monique, *Voir les didascalies*, Paris, Ophrys, 1994.

Knapp, Mark, *Essentials of Nonverbal Communication*, New York, Holt, Rinehart & Winston, 1980.

Lorenz, Konrad, *Aşa-zisul rău. Despre istoria naturală a agresiunii*, Bucureşti, Humanitas.

Morris, Desmond, *L'uomo e i suoi gesti. La comunicazione non-verbale nella specie umana*, Milano, Armando Mondadori, 1987.

Ionescu-Ruxăndoiu, Liliana, *Conversaţia – structuri şi strategii. Sugestii pentru o pragmatică a românei vorbite*, Bucureşti, All, 1999.

Streeck, Jürgen, Knapp, Mark, *The Interaction of Visual and Verbal Features in Human Communication* în Fernando Poyatos (ed.), *Advances in Nonverbal Communication: Sociocultural, Clinical, Esthetic and Literary Perspectives*, Ed. John Benjamins, 1992.

Ubersfeld, Anne, *Termenii cheie ai analizei teatrului*, Iaşi, Institutul European, 1999.

[44] "*trântind clopoţelul pe masă în culmea indignării*" (III,7).

[45] "*spumând, se repede din mijlocul grupului său la tribună, cu pumnii încleştaţi şi zbierând febril*" (III,7).

[46] "*Toată lumea se sărută, gravitând în jurul lui Caţavencu şi lui Dandanache, care se strâng în braţe, în mijloc*" (IV,14).

BDD-A781 © 2006 Institutul de Filologie Română „A. Philippide"
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.31 (2026-11-27 19:06:55 UTC)

Nonverbale Kommunikation und der dramatische Text: eine Analyse der Didaskalien in der Komödie *Ein verlorener Brief* von Ion Luca Caragiale

Die nonverbalen Elemente sind ein wichtiger Teil eines dramatischen Textes auf Grund ihres Beitrags zum Kennzeichen der Gestalten. Unser Artikel analysiert die Bedeutung des Benehmens der Hauptgestalten in der Komödie *Ein verlorener Brief***.** Mehrere Kanäle der nonverbalen Kommunikation werden behandelt: Proxemik oder interpersonelle Distanz, Gestik, Mimik und stimmliche Merkmale. Wir benutzen den Namen „infra-didaskalische Einheit" für den Teil einer Regieanweisung, der ein einziges nonverbales Signal beschreibt. Die Analyse des Theaterstückes zeigt, wie die Komik aus der Interaktion der verbalen und nonverbalen Komponenten entsteht.

University of Bucharest
Romania

BDD-A781 © 2006 Institutul de Filologie Română „A. Philippide"
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.31 (2026-11-27 19:06:55 UTC)

BDD-A781 © 2006 Institutul de Filologie Română „A. Philippide”
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.31 (2026-11-27 19:06:55 UTC)