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The Tongue

by Bob Whipple, MBA, CPLP



The tongue is actually used a lot in body language. We often do not realize it, but that part of the body is highly visible and capable of sending all kinds of messages because it is easily manipulated.

Sticking out the tongue is an obvious signal. That is the most common gesture, and it normally is an insulting or mocking gesture.

Be a little careful here because sticking out the tongue can have several different meanings in itself and have various meanings in different cultures.

Neah Na Na Neah Neah

This is the classic tongue gesture intended to mock another person. Often you will see the tongue in a round configuration jutting out as far as the person can manage. A person will usually not have the tongue flat when making this kind of gesture, although sometimes you may see that done.

Awful taste

If someone bites into something spoiled or bitter that tastes horrible, then the tongue might come out flat like, "This tastes awful." The gesture usually is accompanied by a puckering of the entire face and tightly closed eyes.

Tongue curl

You may see a person stick out her tongue and then curl the tip of it upward. There are numerous interpretations of this gesture all the way from obscene suggestions to beckoning, or pleading.

Tongue in cheek

When a person thrusts his tongue into his cheek so it bulges out, the common interpretation is that what has just been said or done is a spoof. The same gesture can indicate puzzlement, like the person is trying to interpret what just happened.

The common expression for someone fabricating a story is that he was speaking “tongue in cheek.”

Clicking tongue

This gesture is rare, but you will encounter it at times. It is usually a way to draw attention to something significant that just happened. The audible clicking sound with no specific words is an indication to pay attention to something important.

The same gesture is also used by children as a way to get attention or just to annoy other people.

Licking lips

When the tongue is used to lick the lips, it is a signal of desire for something. It usually has to do with food, but it can also take on a social connotation of desire.

Concentration

Children will stick their tongue out of the side of their mouth and cover their upper lip when they are concentrating on an art project, puzzle or other challenging activity.

Lust

When the tongue is extended downward from the side of the mouth it is often a sign of extreme attraction or lust.

Making a straw

You can curl your tongue lengthwise forming a kind of tube. The concept here is wanting to drink in what is being discussed. It is also a facial expression used by children to make a funny face.

Biting the tongue

When a person bites his tongue, it usually is a negative sign. It may be a signal to shut up, or it may be a sign that what is going on is highly distasteful. The implication is that the person is inflicting self-pain in order to block the pain that is coming from what he has seen or heard.

Another interpretation of biting the tongue is to prevent a person from talking. You may hear the expression “bite your tongue,” which means “do not speak.”

Since we can manipulate our tongue in many ways that are perfectly visible to other people, it plays a huge role in body language. Be alert to the signals being sent to you by others with their tongue. See if you can spot some different meanings I have not covered in this article. It's kind of fun.

This is a part in a series of articles on "Body Language" by Bob Whipple "The Trust Ambassador."